RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY Psychology Marketing

Envisioning a future purchase: The effects of consumption imagery perspective and identity on consumer motivation

Monica Soliman[1] | **Roger Buehler[2]** | **Johanna Peetz[1]**

[1]Carleton University

[2]Wilfrid Laurier University

Correspondence
Monica Soliman, Department of Psychology, Carleton University, 1125 Colonel By Drive, Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6, Canada.
Email: monica.elgamal@gmail.com

Abstract

When people visualize a potential purchase, they can adopt either a first-person or a third-person perspective. The present research examines whether the perspective adopted would affect consumer motivation, and whether this effect would depend on the extent to which the imagined purchase is connected to identity. In four studies, third-person imagery resulted in stronger consumer motivation than first-person imagery, but only for purchases that were tied closely to identity. Furthermore, the results suggest that the motivational effect of third-person imagery is not based on concerns about others' views of the self, but rather on the extent to which one feels that the imagined behavior is tied closely to identity.

KEYWORDS

consumer motivation, first-person, identity, imagery perspective, mental imagery, third-person

1 | INTRODUCTION

Imagining desired future actions and outcomes can influence people's motivation to pursue them, and emerging theory and research suggest that the motivational impact may depend greatly on the visual perspective adopted (Libby & Eibach, 2011). Effects of imagery perspective on motivation have been explored in a limited range of contexts (e.g., voting behavior, Libby, Schaeffer, Eibach, & Slemmer, 2007; academic motivation, Vasquez & Buehler, 2007; health behaviors, Uskul & Kikutani, 2014) and are not yet fully understood. The present research examines the influence of imagery perspective on consumers' motivation to make a purchase. An important purpose of the research was to extend the study of imagery perspective into the marketing domain, where effects of mental imagery have widespread practical application. A second objective was to explore the role of the connection between the imagined event and identity (i.e., whether the contemplated purchase is tied closely to the consumer's identity), which, according to theory, may moderate the impact of imagery perspective.

1.1 | Consumption imagery

When people contemplate a desired future purchase, they often form visual images of themselves buying and using the product (Argyriou, 2012; Keller & McGill, 1994; MacInnis & Price, 1987; Wyer, Hung, & Jiang, 2008), sometimes called consumption visions (Phillips, Olson, & Baumgartner, 1995; Walker & Olson, 1997) or consumption imagery (Petrova & Cialdini, 2005). They may picture themselves driving a shiny car off the lot, sporting a new handbag, or dining at a popular restaurant. Indeed, marketers often encourage consumers to form positive imagery involving themselves and a product (Babin & Burns, 1997; 1998; Escalas, 2004; Hung & Wyer, 2011) in order to strengthen their motivation to purchase the product.

Previous research indicates that consumption imagery can have substantial effects on consumer motivation and choice (Argyriou, 2012; MacInnis & Price, 1987; Phillips et al., 1995; Wyer et al., 2008). In a classic demonstration, people were much more likely to subscribe to a cable TV service if they imagined themselves enjoying the benefits than if they only heard about them (Gregory, Cialdini, & Carpenter, 1982). However, consumption imagery is not always motivating, and researchers have started identifying contextual factors and psychological processes that moderate its effects, including the ease of generating imagery (Dahl & Hoeffler, 2004; Keller & McGill, 1994; Petrova & Cialdini, 2005), the vividness of imagery (Shiv & Huber, 2000), whether imagery is focused on the process or outcomes of consumption (Escalas & Luce, 2004; Zhao, Hoeffler, & Zauberman, 2007, 2011), whether the product is novel (Bone & Ellen, 1992; Zhao, Hoeffler, & Dahl, 2009), the strategy used to evoke the imagery (Miller & Marks, 1997), and chronic individual differences in visualization (Wyer et al., 2008). The present research extends existing work by examining a phenomenological aspect of consumption imagery—the visual perspective adopted—that could alter its motivational potency.

1.2 | Imagery perspective

When people visualize events, such as the consumption of a product, they can adopt one of two perspectives (Libby & Eibach, 2011; Libby

et al., 2007; Pronin & Ross, 2006). From an actor's first-person perspective, people view events unfolding through their own eyes, seeing only those aspects that would be visible to them when the events transpire. From a third-person perspective, people view themselves within their surroundings, seeing everything that would be visible to an observer watching the events. How might these different vantage points in consumption visions influence the motivation to purchase a product?

On the one hand, adopting a third-person perspective can allow people to focus on the big picture, thus increasing the perceived meaning and significance of imagined behaviors and enhancing the motivation to pursue them. Indeed, past research shows that third-person imagery increased motivation and goal pursuit in political (Libby et al., 2007) and academic (Vasquez & Buehler, 2007) domains (e.g., voting in an upcoming election, succeeding on a school project) by enhancing the meaning and significance of these imagined events to the self. On the other hand, a third-person (vs. first-person) perspective could also make imagined events feel distant and disengaging (McIsaac & Eich, 2002; Pronin & Ross, 2006; Sanitioso, 2008). Hence, adopting a third-person perspective can reduce the motivational potency of imagery and lower the intent to pursue imagined events. Indeed, Rennie, Harris, and Webb (2014) found that imagining health-promoting behaviors from a third-person perspective reduced the motivation to pursue these behaviors compared to a first-person perspective. Taken together, these conflicting findings suggest that there may be unidentified moderators that determine how third-person imagery (vs. first-person imagery) influences motivation.

Only one set of studies (Uskul & Kikutani, 2014) has explored potential moderators of the effect of third-person imagery. The studies focused on the role of the visual perspective adopted when imagining health behaviors (e.g., flossing), and found that the effect was moderated by face (i.e., the extent to which people worry about others' evaluations of themselves) and whether the imagined behavior was public or private. Imagery perspective only influenced motivation among those who have a high level of face: third-person imagery increased their motivation to pursue imagined public health behaviors, but decreased their motivation to pursue imagined private health behaviors. No effects were observed among those who have a low level of face.

The present research examines another potential moderator for the effects of imagery perspective on motivation. Specifically, the level of purchase motivation experienced when imagining purchasing and/or using a particular product may depend not only on the imagery perspective adopted, but also the degree to which the imagined event is tied to one's identity in the first place. This hypothesis is based on the theoretical framework developed by Libby and Eibach (2011), which posits that the primary function of imagery perspective is to determine how the event is cognitively represented. First-person imagery elicits bottom-up processing that focuses people on concrete aspects of the imagined event, whereas third-person imagery elicits top-down processing whereby the event is represented in terms of its broader relation to identity. Libby and Eibach's 2011 theorizing is in line with classic work on actor–observer differences (e.g., Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Storms, 1973), which posits that an observer tends to place the actor

as the focal point of the observed event and to understand the actor's behavior as a function of his/her dispositions rather than the situation. Similarly, adopting the vantage point of an observer when imagining the self-engaging in a particular behavior prompts people to ponder whether the imagined behavior is consistent with who they are. Consequently, the psychological implications of third-person imagery may depend on the extent to which the imagined event is in line with their self-concept and/or is connected to their own identity. Consistent with this proposition, researchers have found that imagining the experience of failure from a third-person perspective increased shame and negativity of accessible self-knowledge, but only among those for whom failure and negativity are congruent with the self-concept (Libby, Valenti, Pfent, & Eibach, 2011).

Drawing on Libby and Eibach's (2011) theoretical framework, the present research examines whether the effects of imagery perspective on consumers' purchase motivation will depend on the extent to which the imagined purchase fits with their identity. Many purchases are connected closely to identity (Belk, 1988; Kirmani, 2009; Oyserman, 2009; Richins, 1994). For example, consumers purchase products because they have personal meaning or significance, reflect their values, or enhance self-esteem. Indeed, a wealth of consumer research suggests that individuals seek out consumption choices congruent with their sense of identity, thereby helping to shape and define who they are (for reviews, see Kirmani, 2009; Oyserman, 2009). For these types of purchases, third-person imagery is expected to heighten consumers' focus on the identity implications of the purchase, and thereby enhance motivation. For purchases with weaker connections to identity, third-person imagery would not be expected to increase motivation.

1.3 | The present studies

The present research extends the study of imagery perspective and motivation to the consumer domain. It also contributes to a growing body of research on imagery perspective by testing the proposition that the extent to which the imagined event is connected to one's identity is an important moderator of the effects of third-person imagery. Four studies were conducted in which participants were instructed to imagine a consumption experience and their imagery perspective was measured (Study 1) or experimentally manipulated (Studies 2–4). The extent to which the purchase was tied to participants' identity was also manipulated (Studies 1–3) or measured (Study 4); and its potential moderating role was examined. Participation in any one of these studies was used as an exclusion criterion from the other subsequent studies. Consumers' motivation is expected to be influenced jointly by the connection of the purchase to identity and the imagery perspective adopted. Because third-person imagery heightens people's focus on the identity implications of the purchase, this should increase motivation, but only for purchases that are connected to identity. For purchases that are either tied less closely to identity or incongruent with identity, this pattern of effects would not be expected. Third-person imagery of identity-incongruent purchases may even highlight the inconsistency of the purchase with one's identity, and thus disengage the consumer and reduce the motivation to pursue the purchase.

2 | STUDY 1

The first study tested whether the visual perspective that people spontaneously adopt while imagining a future purchase is related to their subsequent purchase motivation. Stronger motivation was expected in response to third-person imagery than to first-person imagery, but only when the envisioned purchase was tied closely to identity.

2.1 | Method

2.1.1 | Participants

Participants were 57 psychology undergraduates (12 males, 45 females; $M_{age} = 18.35$, SD = 0.72) compensated with course credit.

2.1.2 | Procedure

Participants completed an online questionnaire that asked them to identify and describe a purchase they would like to make in the coming year. Participants randomly assigned to the identity condition were asked to nominate a purchase that would be meaningful or significant to them (e.g., something that would have personal significance, would reflect their own values or personal goals, would tell others who they are as a person, would make them feel good about themselves). Participants in the control condition nominated a purchase they would make purely for pleasure (e.g., something they would enjoy having, would make them feel happy or excited). Next, participants were instructed to "form a clear, visual image of actually buying and using the product" and to briefly describe this consumption imagery. To assess imagery perspective, participants were given brief descriptions of first-person (people see events unfolding through their own eyes, just as they would see them if they were actually occurring) and third-person perspectives (people see themselves and their surroundings, just as an observer would see them) and asked to choose the description that best characterized their imagery. Participants then completed two items assessing their purchase motivation. They rated the extent to which they currently felt motivated to purchase the product, and felt a strong urge or desire to have the product (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely).

2.2 | Results and discussion

2.2.1 | Imagery perspective

Overall, 54.4% of participants adopted first-person imagery and 45.6% adopted third-person imagery. Although slightly more participants reported third-person imagery for identity-based than for control purchases (54.2% vs. 39.4%), this difference was not significant, χ^2 (df = 1, N = 57) = 1.22, $p = 0.269$, $d = 0.30$.

2.2.2 | Purchase motivation

The motivation index (Spearman-Brown coefficient = 0.78) was submitted to a 2(purchase type: identity vs. control) × 2(imagery perspective: first-person vs. third-person) ANOVA. Participants reported stronger motivation in the control condition (M = 5.73, SD = 0.96)

TABLE 1 Motivation as a function of imagery perspective and connection of the purchase to identity

Study	Purchase Type Condition		First-Person Imagery	Third-Person Imagery
Study 1	Identity	M	4.45a	5.62b
		SD	1.35	1.19
		n	11	13
	Control	M	5.78a	5.65a
		SD	0.94	1.03
		n	20	13
Study 2	Identity-private	M	4.78a	5.57b
		SD	1.05	0.99
		n	21	23
	Identity-public	M	5.51a	5.08a
		SD	1.27	1.16
		n	25	23
	Control	M	5.19a	4.92a
		SD	1.37	0.96
		N	28	20
Study 3	Identity	M	3.19a	4.37b
		SD	1.50	1.17
		N	45	40
	Control	M	2.00a	2.04a
		SD	1.38	1.34
		N	43	39
Study 4	Identity-high	M_{Est}	5.20	5.71
	Identity-low	M_{Est}	4.48	3.86

Note. Higher numbers indicate stronger purchase motivation and intentions. The means in Study 4 are estimated means based on the regression equation for high (+1SD) and low (−1SD) environmental identity. For each row, means that do not share a subscript letter differ significantly, $p < 0.05$.

than in the identity condition (M = 5.08, SD = 1.37), $F(1, 53) = 5.13$, $p = 0.028$. More importantly, the analysis revealed the hypothesized interaction between purchase type and perspective, $F(1, 53) = 4.57$, $p = 0.037$ (see Table 1 for means in each study). For identity purchases, participants were more motivated when they adopted third-person rather than first-person imagery, $t(53) = 3.95$, $p = 0.001$, $d = 0.93$. For control purchases, participants were equally motivated by first-person and third-person imagery, $t(53) = 0.44$, $p = 0.662$, $d = 0.13$.

The findings suggest that individuals differ in the visual perspective they spontaneously adopt while envisioning a future purchase—with nearly half reporting third-person imagery—and that perspective is related to purchase motivation in the hypothesized manner. In particular, for purchases that are tied closely to identity, participants who generated third-person imagery reported stronger motivation than those who generated first-person imagery. However, it is difficult to establish whether imagery perspective had a causal impact on motivation

because the study examined naturally occurring differences in imagery perspective.

3 | STUDY 2

The main objectives of Study 2 were to examine the causal impact of imagery perspective using an experimental manipulation and to further understand the aspect(s) of identity that drive the motivational effects of third-person imagery. Libby and Eibach (2011) propose that first-person imagery elicits a focus on people's own conceptual views of themselves, but conceivably, imagining buying and using the product from a third-person perspective may have focused participants on how *other people* would view them (Uskul & Kikutani, 2014). The definition of identity products employed in Study 1 included two examples that may have highlighted the expression of one's identity to others (would reflect your own values or personal goals, would tell others who you are as a person). Therefore, the manipulation of purchase type was modified in Study 2 to address the distinction between the implications of the purchase for one's personal self-views (the private self) and for others' views of the self (the public self). If the motivational effects of third-person imagery were driven (at least in part) by a focus on people's own conceptual views of themselves, one would expect to see stronger motivation in response to third-person imagery compared to first-person imagery in the identity-private condition. Similarly, if the motivational effects of third-person imagery were driven (at least in part) by a focus on others' views of the self, one would expect to see stronger motivation in response to third-person imagery compared to first-person imagery in the identity-public condition. No such effect is expected in the control condition (purchases that are made purely for pleasure). The study provides a direct comparison of the strength of the effect of imagery perspective on motivation across the three different purchase types. The study also included a larger set of items to assess purchase motivation, as well as one item that assessed participants' intentions to actually make the purchase.

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Participants

The final sample consisted of 140 psychology undergraduates (33 male, 105 female, 2 unspecified; $M_{age} = 18.77$, SD = 2.01) who completed the study online for course credit. Fifteen additional participants were excluded for nominating purchases that would cost over $10,000 as these did not seem comparable to the purchase items typically nominated by participants ($M_{cost} = \$1328.09$, SD = 2295.83).

3.1.2 | Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions in a 2 (imagery perspective: first-person vs. third-person) × 2 (purchase type: identity-private vs. identity-public vs. control) design. Participants began by nominating a purchase they wished to make in the coming year. The manipulation of purchase type used in the previous study was modified: In the identity-private condition, instructions focused

exclusively on personal meaning. Participants were asked to nominate a purchase that would be meaningful or significant to them personally (e.g., would have personal significance, would be consistent with their own values or personal goals, would make them feel good about themselves). In the identity-public condition, participants were asked to nominate a purchase they would make to express their identity to others (e.g., would tell others who they are as a person, would reflect their values or goals to other people). The control condition was the same as in Study 1.

Participants were then instructed to form a visual image of the purchase and consumption of the product. To manipulate imagery perspective, participants were instructed to adopt either the first-person perspective (You see events unfolding through your own eyes, just as you would see them if they were actually occurring. That is, you are looking out at your surroundings and seeing only what would be visible to you as the events take place.), or the third-person perspective (You see yourself as well as your surroundings, just as if you were an observer. That is, you are looking at yourself and seeing what an observer would see as the events take place.). Similar instructional manipulations have been effective in previous research (Libby & Eibach, 2011). Participants then described their consumption imagery. As a manipulation check, participants rated the extent to which they viewed their product consumption through their own eyes or the eyes of an observer (1 = completely through my own eyes, 7 = completely as an observer would see it). Participants then completed four items assessing the strength of their purchase motivation. In addition to the two items used in Study 1, participants rated the extent to which: they considered the purchase to be a high priority, and they would be motivated to make the purchase if they were certain they could afford it (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely). As a measure of behavioral intentions, participants rated the extent to which they felt it was likely they would actually purchase the product in the coming year (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely).

3.2 | Results and discussion

3.2.1 | Imagery perspective

Participants reported more third-person imagery in the third-person (M = 3.85, SD = 1.76) than in the first-person condition (M = 3.29, SD = 1.56), $F(1, 132) = 3.57$, $p = 0.061$, $d = 0.34$.

3.2.2 | Purchase motivation and intentions

The four-item motivation index ($\alpha = 0.79$) was strongly correlated with the item measuring behavioral intentions, $r(138) = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, they were combined into one index ($\alpha = 0.83$). A 2 (imagery perspective) × 3 (purchase type) ANOVA performed on this index revealed a significant interaction, $F(2, 134) = 3.73$, $p = 0.027$. In the identity-private condition, motivation was stronger in the third-person than in the first-person condition, $t(134) = 1.97$, $p = 0.025$, $d = 0.78$. In both the identity-public and the control conditions, motivation was slightly but nonsignificantly stronger in the first-person than in the third-person condition ($t[134] = 1.30$, $p = 0.195$, $d = 0.35$ and $t[134] = 0.81$, $p = 0.427$, $d = 0.22$, respectively).

These results replicate the interaction pattern in Study 1, and suggest that the motivational effect of third-person perspective stems from the personal meaning of the imagined purchase to identity rather than the impression it makes on others. A noteworthy aspect of the research paradigm in the first two studies is that participants were free to select various products within each condition. This idiographic approach was used to increase the likelihood that participants would have some interest in the imagined purchase (i.e., that it is something they would consider buying). However, the approach can result in relatively high within-condition variability that may obscure effects of the manipulations. Another potential concern is that the purchases may have differed systematically on dimensions other than those specified in the instructions. Studies 3 and 4 address these issues and extend the research by examining effects of imagery perspective and identity using a standard target purchase for all participants.

4 | STUDY 3

Study 2 provided preliminary evidence that the effect of third-person perspective on motivation is related to the focus on private rather than public aspects of the self. Specifically, with a purchase that was meaningful to participants' own self-concept, third-person imagery resulted in stronger motivation than first-person imagery. However, with a purchase that signaled participants' identity to others, such an effect was not observed. To complement this finding, Study 3 was designed to test whether third-person imagery can be motivating in the absence of concerns about how one is viewed by others, using a standard consumption scenario. Specifically, participants were asked to mentally simulate the usage of a particular product (an item of clothing) in a private context where no one else was present. Along with the manipulation of imagery perspective, the extent to which the clothing item was connected to identity was experimentally manipulated: In the identity condition, the product had the logo of the participants' own university, whereas in the control condition the product had the logo of another local university. If the effects of third-person imagery are driven by participants' focus on private aspects of identity, then the pattern of results for this private usage context should be similar to those in previous studies—that is, third-person imagery should increase motivation but only when the product is closely connected to identity. However, if the effects are primarily driven by a focus on others' views of the self, then they should not emerge in this study.

Moreover, an attention check was added for screening participants. Employing attention checks is an increasingly common practice in the social sciences because not all research participants pay attention to instructions in internet-based studies (Berinsky, Margolis, & Sances, 2014; Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009).

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants

The final sample consisted of 167 undergraduate students (22 male, 145 female; $M_{age} = 19.43$, SD = 3.50) who completed the study online for course credit. Fourteen additional participants were excluded for failing to provide the correct answer on an attention check.

4.1.2 | Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2(purchase type: identity vs. control) × 2(imagery perspective: first-person vs. third-person) between-participants design. They viewed an image of a clothing item (a hoodie) that either had the logo of their own university (identity condition) or another local university (control condition). As a manipulation check, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with two statements: "This product reflects who I am" and "I can personally identify with this product" (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Participants were then instructed to imagine holding this hoodie, putting it on, and spending a day at home *on their own* wearing it from either a first-person or a third-person perspective. After that, participants described their imagery and completed the motivation and intention items from Study 2. Then, participants completed an attention check; they were asked "Which of the following perspectives were you *instructed* to take during the imagination exercise?" (a first-person perspective [i.e., imagining the event through my own eyes], a third-person perspective [i.e., imagining the event as an observer would see it]). Finally, they completed the perspective manipulation check used in previous studies.

4.2 | Results and discussion

4.2.1 | Manipulation checks

Participants reported greater personal identification with the product (Spearman-Brown coefficient = 0.85) when it had the logo of their own university ($M = 4.31$, SD = 1.37) rather than the logo of another local university ($M = 2.00$, SD = 1.48), $F(1,160) = 113.65$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.62$. Participants formed more third-person imagery in the third-person ($M = 4.70$, SD = 1.56) than in the first-person condition ($M = 3.11$, SD = 1.56), $F(1,160) = 42.82$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.02$.

4.2.2 | Purchase motivation and intention

Again, the four-item index of motivation ($\alpha = 0.94$) was strongly correlated with the item measuring behavioral intentions, $r(164) = 0.85$, $p < 0.001$. Hence, one index was computed representing purchase motivation and intentions ($\alpha = 0.95$). Not surprisingly, participants were more motivated to purchase the product that carried the logo of their own university (vs. another local university), $F(1,162) = 69.23$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.21$. Purchase motivation was also higher after imagining their day from a third-person (vs. first-person) perspective, $F(1,162) = 8.33$, $p = 0.004$, $d = 0.38$. This effect was qualified by an imagery perspective × purchase type interaction, $F(2,162) = 7.10$, $p = 0.008$. In the identity condition, purchase motivation was higher after engaging in third-person imagery ($M = 4.37$, SD = 1.17) than in first-person imagery ($M = 3.19$, SD = 1.50), $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.87$. In the control condition, purchase motivation was similar with third-person ($M = 2.04$, SD = 1.34) and first-person ($M = 2.00$, SD = 1.38) imagery, $p = 0.877$, $d = 0.20$.

The findings of this study indicate that the connection of the product to identity moderated the effects of imagery perspective even in a

private usage context. Together with the results of Study 2, this supports the proposition that third-person imagery motivates the purchase of identity-congruent products because it elicits a focus on private aspects of identity, rather than because it focuses people on how external observers may view them.

5 | STUDY 4

The results of the first three studies suggest that imagery perspective has different effects on purchase motivation depending on whether or not the purchase is connected to participants' identity. Study 4 is an attempt to replicate this pattern of effects by asking participants to contemplate a standard target purchase (an environmentally responsible purchase) that would be closely connected to identity for some participants, but not for others. For those high on environmental identity, environmentally responsible consumption is likely closely tied to identity; thus, their motivation to pursue the imagined consumption experience should be stronger in response to third-person imagery than to first-person imagery, as in the previous studies. For those low on environmental identity, environmentally responsible consumption is likely less closely tied to identity; thus, their motivation should not be strengthened by third-person imagery. The interaction pattern would provide convergent evidence that effects of imagery perspective on consumer motivation are moderated by the connection of the contemplated purchase to identity.

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Participants

The final sample consisted of 154 undergraduate students (39 male, 114 female, 1 other; $M_{age} = 19.08$, SD = 2.52) who completed the study online for course credit. Twenty-seven participants were excluded for failing an attention check.

5.1.2 | Procedure

At the beginning of the academic semester, participants completed a mass-testing questionnaire that included a measure of environmental identity: Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with each of seven statements such as "Caring about the environment is central to who I am" and "Caring about the environment is an important part of my self-worth" (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Several weeks later, participants were recruited for a study of imagination and motivation, and completed the study procedures online. Participants were not aware of the connection between the study and the earlier measure of environmental identity, as both were administered in separate contexts.

Participants were first asked to imagine a scenario in which they make an environmentally responsible purchase (purchasing and using either a reusable bag instead of disposable plastic bags, or a reusable water bottle instead of disposable water bottles) from either a first-person or a third-person perspective. The specific product (bag vs. bottle) was varied randomly across participants to enhance the

generalizability of findings; results were the same for the two products and are presented collapsed across this variable. The imagery perspective instructions were identical to those used in previous studies. Participants then completed the attention check used in Study 3 and the manipulation check used in Studies 2 and 3. Then, they reported their motivation to use reusable products ("Right now, how motivated do you feel to make use of reusable products when possible [e.g., a reusable bag or water bottle]?", "How strong is your current urge or desire to make use of reusable products?", and "Right now, do you consider making use of reusable products to be a high priority for you?") and their behavioral intentions ("How likely is it that you will actually purchase or use a reusable product (i.e., a reusable alternative for disposable products) in the coming month?") on Likert scales (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely).

5.2 | Results and discussion

5.2.1 | Imagery perspective

The manipulation check confirmed that participants formed more third-person imagery in the third-person (M = 5.25, SD = 1.60) than in the first-person condition (M = 3.06, SD = 1.84), $t(151) = -7.81$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.27$.

5.2.2 | Proenvironmental motivation and intentions

Again, the items measuring motivation ($\alpha = 0.92$) and intentions were strongly correlated, $r(148) = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$, and were thus combined into one index ($\alpha = 0.91$). This index was regressed on mean-centered environmental identity ($\alpha = 0.94$), imagery perspective (0 = first-person, 1 = third-person), and the identity × perspective interaction. Environmental identity predicted motivation ($\beta = 0.26$, $t(149) = 2.77$, $p = 0.006$) but imagery perspective did not ($\beta = -0.02$, $t(149) = -0.28$, $p = 0.779$). Importantly, the analysis revealed the hypothesized identity × perspective interaction ($\beta = 0.25$, $t(149) = 2.71$, $p = 0.008$). For participants high on environmental identity (i.e., scoring one SD above the mean), third-person imagery resulted in higher motivation than first-person imagery ($\beta = 0.18$, $t(149) = 1.76$, $p = 0.081$). For those low on environmental identity (i.e., scoring one SD below the mean), third-person imagery resulted in lower motivation than first-person imagery ($\beta = -0.22$, $t(149) = -2.12$, $p = 0.036$).

The study offers convergent evidence, using a standard purchase scenario, for the role of identity in moderating effects of imagery perspective on consumer motivation. For those high on environmental identity, third-person imagery (vs. first person imagery) increased proenvironmental motivation. This is conceptually similar to the results of the previous studies, where participants' motivation was enhanced by third-person imagery when contemplating identity products. For those low on environmental identity, third-person imagery decreased motivation, compared to first-person imagery. It is possible that for this group of individuals, making an effort to choose an environmentally responsible consumption option (e.g., purchasing and using a reusable bag instead of disposable plastic bags) was not just weakly connected to identity, but was rather *incongruent* with who they

are. Because third-person imagery should lead people to construe the imagined purchase in terms of its relation to identity, it may have highlighted the incongruence between the imagined behavior and the self-concept, leading to a decrease in motivation.

6 | META-ANALYSIS

It is important not to interpret the results (and effect sizes) of each study in isolation. Therefore, meta-analytic effect sizes were examined across all studies using random effect models in the program Comprehensive Meta-Analysis (Version 2; Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2005). For Study 2, only the identity-private and control conditions were included in the meta-analysis; the identity-public condition was not included because it focused people on how others viewed them and was thus conceptually different from the identity conditions in other studies. For Study 4, a median-split of environmental identity was used to facilitate comparisons with the two groups reflecting the identity manipulation in the other studies. First, the meta-analysis examined whether there was an overall effect of imagery perspective on motivation (i.e., was one of the perspectives generally more motivating?). The results indicated that there was no overall effect of imagery perspective on motivation, Cohen's $d = 0.20$ (95% CI [−0.15, 0.55]), $z = 1.12$, $p = 0.264$. This highlights the need for investigating moderators, such as the connection of the imagined event to identity. Indeed, consistent with the hypotheses, for purchases that were closely connected to identity, third-person (vs. first-person) imagery increased motivation, Cohen's $d = 0.71$ (95% CI [0.44, 0.97]), $z = 5.17$, $p < 0.001$. For purchases that were less closely tied to identity, third-person (vs. first-person) imagery did not have a significant effect on motivation, Cohen's $d = −0.18$ (95% CI [−0.43, 0.08]), $z = −1.36$, $p = 0.176$.

7 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

People can envision their future consumption of a product from either a first-person or third-person perspective, and four experiments found that the perspective people adopt can influence their subsequent purchase motivation and intentions. Importantly, the impact of imagery perspective depended on whether the imagined purchase was connected to identity, which was manipulated (Studies 1–3) or measured (Study 4) in a number of different ways. Across all studies, the results supported the hypothesized pattern: For purchases that are closely connected to identity, third-person imagery resulted in stronger motivation and intentions than first-person imagery. For purchases that were tied less closely to identity, third-person imagery resulted in similar (Studies 1, 2, and 3) or weaker (Study 4) motivation and intentions than first-person imagery. Additionally, Studies 2 and 3 suggested that third-person imagery increases the motivation to purchase products that are strongly connected to identity, because of a focus on private -rather than public- aspects of the self.

7.1 | Implications

The studies contribute to several existing theories. First, they extend previous work on consumption imagery (e.g., MacInnis & Price, 1987; Petrova & Cialdini, 2005; Wyer et al., 2008) by examining an aspect of imagery that has not been previously explored. Study 1 suggests that both first-person and third-person imagery tend to be spontaneously adopted by consumers when forming consumption visions. Holding other factors that might affect the persuasive impact of imagery constant, the four studies showed that visual perspective and the connection of the product to identity matter. Second, the studies contribute to a body of work highlighting the importance of identity-based motivation (Kirmani, 2009; Oyserman, 2009). The present findings offer further evidence that consumers can desire products because of their connection to important aspects of identity, and suggest that such motivation is enhanced by imagery that draws attention toward these defining aspects of the self. Given that advertisers commonly encourage people to imagine themselves interacting with a product (Babin & Burns, 1997; 1998; Escalas, 2004), these findings have considerable applied value. They highlight the potential benefits of persuasion strategies that encourage a particular visual perspective, and suggest the need to tailor these strategies to the degree to which target consumer segments identify with the advertised product. Advertisers can encourage consumers to form imagery from a particular visual perspective by using verbal instructions. For example, to encourage consumers to engage in third-person imagery, a car company may prompt the consumer to imagine himself/herself driving a shiny car off the lot with a narrative that focuses the consumer's attention on aspects that only an observer to the situation would see. Advertisers can also use visual cues to encourage consumers to form imagery of a particular type. Indeed, there is research showing that using photographs that depict actions in third-person versus first-person perspective can be an effective way of manipulating imagery perspective and triggering the downstream psychological processes that are associated with each of these perspectives (Libby, Schaeffer, & Eibach, 2009). Thus, one recommendation for marketers is to be mindful of the visual perspective depicted in various media and communications and its implications on the consumer's cognitive representation of interactions with the product or service. Likewise, designers in a number of industries—such as video gaming and media production—should understand the psychological implications of imagery perspective as it can have a dramatic impact on user experiences.

The findings also contribute to an emerging literature in social psychology that explores the effects of imagery perspective on motivation (Libby et al., 2007; Rennie et al., 2014; Uskul & Kikutani, 2014; Vasquez & Buehler, 2007). Mixed findings in this area suggest the need for examining potential moderating variables for the effects of imagery perspective on motivation, but only one set of studies (Uskul & Kikutani, 2014) examined potential moderators. The present research is the first to examine the moderating role of the connection between the imagined behavior and identity. The results of the four studies and the meta-analysis provided converging evidence that third-person imagery can increase motivation (compared to first-person imagery) but only when the imagined event is connected to one's identity. The

findings support an integrative theoretical model (Libby & Eibach, 2011), which asserts that third-person imagery highlights the relationship between imagined events and conceptual aspects of the self. These studies are the first to demonstrate the value of this framework for understanding effects of imagery perspective on consumer motivation.

The present research also addresses a possible alternative explanation for the motivational impact of third-person imagery. Specifically, Studies 2 and 3 addressed the possibility that third-person perspective may influence motivation by drawing people's attention to how others would view them (Uskul & Kikutami, 2014). The results of both studies did not lend support to this explanation: Study 2 showed that third-person imagery increased purchase motivation for products that were personally meaningful to participants, but not for products that expressed who they are to others. Complementing this finding, Study 3 showed that third-person imagery increased the motivation to purchase a product that was connected to identity in a private usage context, where concerns about how one is viewed by others should be less pertinent. These findings are consistent with the theorizing of Libby and Eibach (2011), who argue that third-person imagery elicits a focus on personal meaning of the imagined event to the self, which is distinct from concerns about how one is viewed by others. Nevertheless, research on health behaviors (Uskul & Kikutami, 2014) showed that there may be instances where adopting a third-person perspective relates to concerns about others' views of the self. Future research should identify contexts in which such concerns would be relevant to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of imagery perspective.

7.2 | Limitations and future directions

The present research showed that the connection between the imagined event and identity is an important moderator to consider when examining the effects of imagery perspective on motivation. A challenge for future research is to identify and explore other potential moderators of these effects. Imagery perspective may also be crossed with other factors known to moderate imagery effects such as individual differences in visualization (Wyer et al., 2008), ease of imagery generation (Keller & McGill, 1994), and vividness (Babin & Burns, 1998) in order to test for additive or interactive effects. It would also be informative to introduce additional control conditions, including a condition where imagery perspective is unspecified (to locate the effects of specified perspectives more precisely) and a condition where no imagery is elicited (to assess the impact of generating imagery from either perspective).

One noteworthy limitation of the current studies is that they did not measure actual purchase behavior. Nevertheless, they assessed motivation and behavioral intentions, which tend to be reasonable predictors of actual behavior, particularly in situations where people feel that they have some control (Ajzen, 1985; 2012). Future research should examine whether the obtained effects would carry through to actual purchase decisions, as this would be of paramount interest to marketers. Future research can also examine whether imagery perspective and the fit of the product with the consumer's identity would

influence the amount of money that the consumer would be willing to spend on particular products. Exploring these directions would provide a more complete understanding of the impact of imagery on motivation and behavior, and would offer valuable practical insights to marketing practitioners.

REFERENCES

Ajzen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: A theory of planned behavior. In J. Kuhl & J. Beckmann (Eds.), *Action-control: From cognition to behavior* (pp. 11–39). Heidelberg: Springer.

Ajzen, I. (2012). The theory of planned behavior. In P. A. M. Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. *1*, pp. 438–459). London: Sage.

Argyriou, E. (2012). Consumer intentions to revisit online retailers: A mental imagery account. *Psychology and Marketing*, *29*(1), 25–35.

Babin, L. A., & Burns, A. C. (1997). Effects of print ad pictures and copy containing instruction to imagine on mental imagery that mediates attitudes. *Journal of Advertising*, *26*, 33–44.

Babin, L. A., & Burns, A. C. (1998). A modified scale for the measurement of communication-evoked mental imagery. *Psychology and Marketing*, *15*(3), 261–278.

Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *15*(2), 139–168.

Berinsky, A. J., Margolis, M. F., & Sances, M. W. (2014). Separating the shirkers from the workers? Making sure respondents pay attention on self-administered surveys. *American Journal of Political Science*, *58*(3), 739–753.

Bone, P. F., & Ellen, P. S. (1992). The generation and consequences of communication-evoked imagery. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *19*, 93–104.

Borenstein, M., Hedges, L., Higgins, J., & Rothstein, H. (2005). *Comprehensive meta-analysis version 2*. Englewood, NJ: Biostat.

Dahl, D. W., & Hoeffler, S. (2004). Visualizing the self: Exploring the potential benefits and drawbacks for new product evaluation. *Journal of Product Innovation Management 21*(4), 259–267.

Escalas, J. E. (2004). Imagine yourself in the product: Mental simulation, narrative transportation, and persuasion. *Journal of Advertising*, *33*, 37–48.

Escalas, J. E., & Luce, M. F. (2004). Understanding the effects of process-focused versus outcome-focused thought in response to advertising. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *31*(2), 274–285.

Gregory, W. L., Cialdini, R. B., & Carpenter, K. M. (1982). Self-relevant scenarios as moderators of likelihood estimates and compliance: Does imagining make it so? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *43*, 89–99.

Hung, I. W., & Wyer, R. S. (2011). Shaping consumer imaginations: The role of self-focused attention in product evaluations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *48*(2), 381–392.

Jones, E. E., & Nisbett, R. E. (1971). The actor and the observer: Divergent perceptions of the causes of behavior. In E. E. Jones, H. H. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins, & B. Weiner (Eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior* (pp. 79–94). New York: General Learning Press.

Keller, P. A., & McGill, P. L. (1994). Differences in the relative influence of product attributes under alternative processing conditions: Attribute importance versus attribute ease of imagability. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *3*(1), 29–49.

Kirmani, A. (2009). The self and the brand. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *19*(3), 271–275.

Libby, L. K. & Eibach, R. P. (2011). Visual perspective in mental imagery: A representational tool that functions in judgment, emotion, and self-insight. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *44*, 185–245.

Libby, L. K., Schaeffer, E. M., Eibach, R. P., & Slemmer, J. A. (2007). Picture yourself at the polls: Visual perspective in mental imagery affects self-perception and behavior. *Psychological Science*, *18*, 199-203.

Libby, L. K., Shaeffer, E. M., & Eibach, R. P. (2009). Seeing meaning in action: A bidirectional link between visual perspective and action identification level. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, *138*, 503–516.

Libby, L. K., Valenti, G., Pfent, A., & Eibach, R. P. (2011). Seeing failure in your life: Imagery perspective determines whether self-esteem shapes reactions to recalled and imagined failure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *101*, 1157–1173.

MacInnis, D. J., & Price, L. L. (1987). The role of imagery in information processing: Review and extensions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *13*, 473–491.

McIsaac, H. K., & Eich, E. (2002). Vantage point in episodic memory. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, *9*, 146–150.

Miller, D. W., & Marks, L. J. (1997). The effects of imagery-evoking radio advertising strategies on affective responses. *Psychology and Marketing*, *14*(4), 337–360.

Oppenheimer, D. M., Meyvis, T., & Davidenko, N. (2009). Instructional manipulation checks: Detecting satisficing to increase statistical power. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *45*(4), 867–872.

Oyserman, D. (2009). Identity-based motivation: Implications for action readiness, procedural-readiness, and consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *19*(3), 250–260.

Petrova, P. K., & Cialdini, R. B. (2005). Fluency of consumption imagery and the backfire effects of imagery appeals. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *32*(3), 442–452.

Phillips, D. M, Olson, J. C., & Baumgartner, H. (1995). Consumption visions in consumer decision-making. In F. Kardes & M. Sujan (Eds.), *Advances in consumer research* (Vol. *22*, pp. 280–284). Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.

Pronin, E., & Ross, L. (2006). Temporal differences in trait self-ascription: When the self is seen as an other. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *90*, 197–209.

Rennie, L. J., Harris, P. R., & Webb, T. L. (2014). The impact of perspective in visualizing health-related behaviors: First-person perspective increases motivation to adopt health-related behaviors. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *44*(12), 806–812.

Richins, M. L. (1994). Special possessions and the expression of material values. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *19*, 303–316.

Sanitioso, R. B. (2008). Motivated self and recall: Visual perspectives in remembering past behaviors. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *38*(3), 566–575.

Shiv, B., & Huber, J. (2000). The impact of anticipating satisfaction on consumer choice. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *27*, 202–216.

Storms, M. D. (1973). Videotape and the attribution process: Reversing actors' and observers' points of view. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *27*, 65–175.

Uskul, A. K., & Kikutani, M. (2014). Concerns about losing face moderate the effect of visual perspective on health-related intentions and behaviors. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *55*, 201–209.

Vasquez, N., & Buehler, R. (2007). Seeing future success: Does imagery perspective influence achievement motivation? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *33*, 1392–1405.

Walker, B., & Olson, J. C. (1997). The activated self in consumer behavior: A cognitive structure perspective. *Research in Consumer Behavior*, *8*, 135–171.

Wyer, R. S., Hung, I. W., & Jiang, Y. (2008). Visual and verbal processing strategies in comprehension and judgment. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *18*(4), 244–257.

Zhao, M., Hoeffler, S., & Dahl, D. (2009). The role of imagination-focused visualization on new product evaluation. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *46*, 46–55.

Zhao, M., Hoeffler, S., & Zauberman, G. (2007). Mental simulation and preference consistency over time: The role of process- versus outcome-focused thoughts. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *44*, 379–388.

Zhao, M., Hoeffler, S., & Zauberman, G. (2011). Mental simulation and product evaluation: The affective and cognitive dimensions of process versus outcome simulation. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *48*, 827–839.