

## **JCR MANUSCRIPT REVIEW HISTORY 001-2 (REVISION NOTES FROM AUTHORS)**

Thank you for the detailed and helpful feedback regarding our paper, “Where People Diverge” (formerly titled; “Where Do People Diverge From Others: Domains of Divergence, Identity-Signaling, and Consumer Choice”). The time and effort that went into the reviews is greatly appreciated and the manuscript is significantly stronger as a result. We have completed a major revision that incorporates the issues raised in the review, and strengthens the theoretical contribution of the paper.

Your letter suggested that there was consensus on many of the important issues regarding the manuscript and we have followed the reviewers’ suggestions on these issues.

1. Based on the suggestions, we have substantially tightened the manuscript, cut repetition, and attempted to reduce its length (at least slightly) through better organization. The introduction has been greatly revised and we now go into greater depth about the divergence process and how it relates to other phenomena of interest (e.g., uniqueness, p. 5-6; convergence, p. 7-8; and nonconformity, p. 8). We have worked to better situate our perspective among other related research (p. 6-7, including Wernerfelt’s) and have also tightened the title.
2. Your point that identity and function are not mutually exclusive is well taken and we have clarified our perspective. In conjunction with prior research that has examined the question of where people express and infer identity, we were merely proposing that functionality may be an additional factor that influences where people are likely to infer others’ identity. We did not mean to suggest that people cannot express identity in functional domains, and indeed purchasing high end products or knowledge of fine distinctions may be a good way of signaling that one’s identity is closely tied to a particular domain. However, especially since the focus of the paper (and indeed our data) is to examine whether identity-signaling may drive divergence, we have sharpened the focus on this issue by moving the discussion of why certain domains may be used to express or infer identity to the general discussion (p. 32-33). This is an important and interesting question that deserves further research.

You also noted that there were some differences between reviewers on certain smaller issues so we have followed your guidelines closely while revising the paper. Specifically:

1. As you requested, we retained the prior four studies, and while we conducted the additional empirical work suggested by one of the reviewers, we did not include it in the manuscript and instead were able to (slightly) shorten the paper. (The results of the study can be found briefly under the response to the Associate Editor and in greater detail in the response to Reviewer B.) In particular, we focused on deepening the concept of divergence and providing a better description of the process and how it is tested in the current manuscript.

2. We have followed the suggestion made by you and Reviewer B to get to the data quickly. The result is a shorter introduction that provides greater depth regarding the concepts we discuss.

In the pages that follow, we explain in greater detail how we addressed the concerns raised by the Associate Editor and the reviewers.

### **Response to the Associate Editor's Comments**

---

We appreciate your guidance regarding the manuscript and your suggestions have greatly improved the work. In particular, based on your comments we have (1) changed the positioning to focus more on divergence itself and how it complements prior research on uniqueness, (2) deepened the conceptual development, and (3) more explicitly addressed the informational account that could explain some of our results. We also want to particularly thank you for your positive and supportive comments regarding this area of research.

Positioning: In line with your (and the other reviewers') comments, we agree that the prior positioning in opposition to uniqueness was unnecessary. In response to your suggestions we have restructured the introduction to reflect a more complementary positioning and have also added more language discussing how these research areas fit together (p. 10, 32-33). There are many cases where people both want to signal identity but also feel unique. As noted in the manuscript, similar individuals may diverge from members of other social groups in the style of jacket or car they buy to ensure their identity is signaled effectively. But at the same time, they may also buy different colors of the jacket or car to allow themselves to feel unique.

Conceptual development: In response to your suggestions we have totally overhauled the introduction to provide a deeper discussion of, as Reviewer A described it, the "what and why" of divergence. Briefly, people often make divergent choices from others to ensure they communicate desired signals of identity. They select tastes that distinguish them from members of other social group and abandon tastes when members of other social groups adopt them. People diverge to ensure that others make desired identity inferences about them.

We had shied away from such a discussion in the previous draft because we were concerned that the data in this paper did not allow us to fully test all aspects of the proposed model. However, we agree that a deeper discussion of divergence helps integrate the findings and connects them to other relevant areas of interest, so we have provided greater detail. We have also tried to explicitly position the paper as testing an aspect of the model, rather than the entire thing, and we hope that this positioning is sufficient.

We have also discussed how divergence differs from other types of nonconformity (p. 8, as suggested by Reviewer C). Divergence can be seen as a type of nonconformity because people are not acting in congruence with the behavior of others. It is different from existing forms, however, because people are not just distancing themselves from out-group others (similar to anticonformity) but are also simultaneously converging with in-group others. Thus people don't want to just be different from others in any way possible (idiosyncratic divergence) but rather want to be different from other social groups and similar to their own group so that their tastes convey meaning to others. Per your, and Reviewers A's, suggestion we have also considered prior work on reference groups (p. 22) and diffusion (p. 34). While space constraints did not allow us to fully discuss how our work relates to other literature on diffusion and the decline of social trends, we have directed readers to other work in which we address these issues in greater detail.

Distinction Identity Signaling and Personal Importance: You requested we make a sharper distinction between identity signaling and personal importance and we have done so in the introduction (p. 6 and 10) and throughout the manuscript (e.g., p. 32-33). In short, different individuals may find particular domains personally important and should be likely to diverge in these domains. Coin-collectors and bottle-cap collectors, for instance, both care more about being unique in their own particular personally important hobby domains. Identity-signaling, however, adds to this perspective because it suggests that in addition to the domains each person happens to find personally important, they also have to consider the signals they send in the socially coordinated domains that people use to infer identity. Even though sports and theater and cooking enthusiasts may not find hairstyles and music the most personally important, they are more likely to diverge in these domains because those are domains that other people will use to infer identity.

We also conducted the requested test pitting these two explanations against each other. This study is reviewed at length in the response to reviewer B, but in brief, participants completed the choice task used in study 1 while also rating the personal importance of each domain. We then examined their choice in each domain as a function of their own personal importance and how much people use that domain to infer others identity. The two constructs were correlated ( $r = .37$ ) but the results found that in addition to an effect of identity inference making, there was also an interactive effect. Personal importance influenced choice (leading people to prefer options held by fewer others), but only in domains that others were not as likely to use to infer identity.

These findings are interesting, but we have omitted the study from the revised manuscript because it places the two processes in opposition which did not seem to fit with the revised positioning. We agree with the your (and the other reviewers') point that identity signaling complements rather than opposes literature on uniqueness, and consequently, a test that pits personal importance against identity signaling did not seem to be the best fit for the revised manuscript. Space constraints also required that we reduce the length of the paper. If you and the editor would like this study included, however, we would be willing to do so.

Treatment of the Domain Construct: This paper uses domains as a way of testing whether divergence is driven by identity-signaling, showing that people are more likely to diverge in domains where others infer identity. Consequently, we are not as interested in the particular domains themselves, as much as we are interested in examining whether people diverge more in the same domains that others use to infer identity. In testing our hypothesis we build on prior work on attitude function (and others) that suggests that certain domains may be more symbolic of identity (p. 32-33). To get a precise measure of which domains people see as identity-related, we also get participants to rate which domains they use to infer the identity of others.

We agree that the organization of the prior draft muddled its focus, and we have attempted to sharpen its concentration on testing whether divergence is driven by identity signaling. Towards this goal, we more explicitly set-up the direction of the paper and created a section where we review prior work suggesting that people may be more likely to use certain domains to make identity inferences about others (p. 8-9). We further agree that functionality is only one of the many possible characteristics of domains that may influence whether or not they are used in identity inference making and have clarified this by moving the discussion of afunctionality to the general discussion and including it with other work that has addressed why certain domains may be used to infer identity (p. 32-33).

While it is an interesting observation that some of the functional domains we selected relate to health (indeed we had not realized this previously), further analyses and data from subsequent experiments suggest that the health related domains are not driving the results. If we delete the health related items from Study 1, the analysis yields identical effects to what was found previously. Your broader point that people have similar needs in many of these functional domains is important, and we address it below.

Information and the Distribution of Tastes: Your suggestion regarding informational influence and beliefs about the distribution of preferences is definitely an important issue and we have addressed it more thoroughly in the revised manuscript (e.g., introduction to studies 1 and 2). We agree that if people believe that needs are more homogeneous in functional domains, then they may be more likely to converge (due to informational influence) in these domains because others tastes provide more information about what option will work best for them. But for such an account to explain our results, one would also have to assume that most people think their preferences are quite different from most others in identity relevant domains (i.e. your point about heterogeneity). We agree that it is a plausible alternative for the results of study 1.

Such an account, however, has more difficulty explaining the results of the other studies. Information should play the greatest role when preferences are uncertain. But Study 2 finds a similar pattern of domain results in a case where uncertainty should be relatively low: people are choosing between familiar items and have already expressed a preference. Further, in Study 3, an informational account might suggest that the people in the in-group condition should select the Option A in less functional domains because it is held by the largest number of people from their group. Consistent with an identity-

signaling account, however, people in this condition tend to choose the option that is the best signal of their group identity (Option C).

We agree that this account deserves greater attention and have discussed it in various points of the manuscript (e.g. discussion of studies 2 and 3).

Other issues: We also followed your suggestions on a number of the other issues:

- We reduced the redundancy in the introduction and cut its length by a page
- We also attempted to deepen the conceptual development while slightly shortening the paper's length
- We provided more details where requested
- While we agreed with points made by both Reviewer A and Reviewer B, we ended up following Reviewer B's suggestion of cutting to the data even faster
- We elected to keep Study 4 based on its strong fit with the repositioned front end of the paper. Identity signaling suggests people will be more likely to diverge when they see a domain as relevant to identity, consequently framing the same domain as more or less related to identity provides an important test of the theory. It also allows for a test of the informational hypothesis because the amount of information provide by others preferences shouldn't change depending on how the domain is framed.

### **Response to Reviewer A's Comments**

---

Thanks so much for your helpful comments. We particularly appreciate your suggestion to deepen the theoretical framework and connect it with other findings as well as other phenomena of interest. We had originally shied away from a deeper discussion of divergence because we were concerned that the data presented in this paper only addressed part of the process. However, we agree that more insight into the broader question helps to frame the discussion and we have also included citations to other work in which we discuss the overall question of divergence in greater depth. Below we respond to your specific comments.

Theoretical framework: You made several suggestions in regards to the framework, each of which we followed.

While we reduced the overall length of the introduction, as you suggested we spent more time addressing the basic effect of divergence. We defined the phenomena, discussed the behaviors that mark it, and described how it links to shifts in tastes or fashion. Briefly, divergence is when people select tastes that distinguish them from members of other social groups or abandon tastes once members of other social groups adopt them. People diverge to ensure desired identities are communicated effectively. Tastes can signal identity (e.g. social types) and gain meaning through associations with groups of similar individuals. But if tastes are held by multiple social groups, they may lose their value in distinguishing between groups. When tastes are adopted by outsider they may also come

to signal undesired identities. Thus people may diverge to avoid others making undesired identity inferences about them.

Importantly, as you alluded to in your review, signaling identity involves both processes of divergence and of convergence. Tastes gain meaning as signals when a number of individuals who are similar on some dimension share the taste. If someone is the only person with a certain hairstyle, it may signal that they care about being unique, but it would be hard for others to decipher that signal or infer that they hold a particular social identity. But if a number of similar individuals (e.g. people who like surfing) have the same hairstyle, then someone who sees a person with that hairstyle can make identity inferences about them.

As you requested, we also added some discussion regarding what the options in Study 1 were selected to represent (p. 10). We used a three option design because we wanted to make the task more complex than a simple majority vs. minority decision. Research suggests that people do not like to think of themselves as conformists, and if the decision was framed merely as conform or not, everyone might choose the minority option. Thus the three option set allowed us to tease apart a desire to send a clearer identity signal from a mere desire not to conform. We also discussed more systematically why public visibility may have lead to increased choice of Option B (p. 14).

Other Approaches: We also appreciate your suggestion of incorporating other approaches that deal with social trends and diffusion and have included some cites and discussion of some of this work in the revised manuscript. We also refer readers to some of our other work in which we discuss the relationship between divergence and other research on diffusion (e.g., Rogers, Bass, and others). Why people become connoisseurs of mundane products is definitely an interesting question and we agree with your interpretation that it signals discerning taste to be able to distinguish between basically equivalent options. The fact that most people don't use a domain to signal may also make it easier for a person to differentiate themselves in that domain, though they would have to make sure that others could interpret their signal. We appreciate the suggestion of including Solomon and Englis' work and have done so (p. 7).

Convergence: The suggestion to discuss convergence in greater detail was also quite helpful and while we previously mentioned this briefly at the end of the general discussion, we have added a much more in depth discussion of this point in the introduction to Study 2 (as well as the introduction to study 1). We definitely agree that in the absence of other information, people may converge to the preferences of others in less identity related domains because others' preferences provide information that reduces risk. While we do not believe this perspective can account for the results of all the studies, we acknowledge its role in the process and have added language in studies 2 and 3 that tease our predictions apart from this theory.

Issues with Specific Parts of the Manuscript: We have also clarified a number of issues you raised with specific parts of the manuscript:

- We apologize for the confusion regarding the recruitment for Study 1. In response to your question, it's not clear how to measure the response rate; people opted into an internet study so the response rate was 100% for people that chose to participate, but we have no idea how many people saw the announcement and didn't choose to participate in a study on that day. We have clarified this in the methods of Study 1.
- P. 15: The correlation (pg. 12) between ratings of domains used to express identity and domains used to infer identity ( $r = .95$ ) shows that participants exhibited strong agreement about which domains were identity-related.
- P. 21, top. We have clarified that this is a pilot sample (p. 16).
- P. 22: Thank you for your complement on Study 2 and for pointing out the clarity issues with the results. We have now clarified our prediction that NFU will not moderate the Domain x Condition interaction (p. 19) and tried to present more clearly the results of the 2 x 2 interaction (p. 20). We have also clarified what was previously listed as an alternative explanation in the text (p. 21).
- In regards to Study 3, only 25% of group Z members chose option C, but it is the most diagnostic of that group and thus should be considered the best signal of Group Z identity. We set the experiment up this way to test the alternative informational account. If people were just conforming to their group due to information, they should choose Option A because that is what most of people in group Z choose. Instead, however, we find that people selected Option C, supporting an identity-signaling account. We had noted this alternative in footnote 6, but based on your suggestion have moved it to the text to make the reasons for our design more clear (p. 23).
- We also clarified the confusion regarding the data at the bottom of page 26.
- In accordance with your suggestions, we have reduced the repetition in the introduction and attempted to develop and deepen the theoretical domain.
- We deleted unnecessary footnotes

We also appreciate your additional suggestions of directions to take the research. Bearden and Etzel have talked some about the product versus brand distinction in terms of social influence, but it would definitely be interesting to further examine this distinction in regards to signal value. Your suggestion of placing people in a context that enhances signaling needs is also a great one, and we have begun to examine the effect of making choice more public.

### **Response to Reviewer B's Comments**

Thanks so much for your helpful review and for your great enthusiasm for the topic. We also find fluctuations in fads and fashion quite fascinating and questions regarding why fads fade originally helped to motivate this stream of research. This topic seems ripe for marketing's interdisciplinary focus, and we hope that this paper will encourage further in the area. Your suggestions also greatly improved the positioning of the manuscript, especially in relation to prior research. Below we respond to your specific comments.

Prior Theory: As highlighted in the response to the Associate Editor, based on your comments (and those of the other reviewers) we have moderated our critique of prior theory and instead worked to show how the two theories complement each other

Consistent with your suggestions, we have also tried to be explicit in how our theory makes different predictions than work based on personal importance (p. 6, 10, and 32-33). Personal importance suggests that coin collector and bottle cap enthusiasts might each care more about being unique in their own personal hobby domains. However, in addition to the idiosyncratic differentiation that occurs for each individual based on the particular idiosyncratic domains they find personally important, identity signaling suggests that across individuals, people should also show more divergence in the domains that are consensually used to infer others' identity.

Introduction: Your suggestions on how to structure the introduction were quite helpful and we have followed them to a great degree in the revised manuscript. We now get to the data even more quickly than before and have followed your suggestions on how to structure the introductory paragraph.

Test of Personal Importance vs. Identity Signaling: Based on your suggestion, we ran a new study that provides a "competitive theory test" of personal importance vs. identity signaling.

Participants (N = 76) from across the United States were recruited through an internet study database and completed the same survey used in Study 1. For each of 19 domains, they chose either the option preferred by 65% of others, the option preferred by 25%, or the option preferred by 10%. After making their choices, they also rated how personally important each domain was to them: "Please rate the importance of your preference in each of the choice domains below to your self-concept (i.e., how you see or define yourself)?" (1 = Not at all important, 7 = Extremely important, adapted from Kernis, 1984). We then used a hierarchical linear regression to examine a given participants choice in a certain domain based on a) how personally important they found that domain and b) other participants ratings on how much they use that domain to infer others' identity (from Study 1).

First we examined just the effect of personal importance on choice. Consistent with prior research, people were more likely to choose options held by fewer others (i.e. 25% or 10% vs. 65%) in domains they found personally important. Next we added both identity inference making, and the interaction of personal importance and inference making, to the regression. The results indicated that people were more likely to choose options held by fewer others in domains other use to infer identity, but the effect of personal importance was muted and became non-significant. There was, however, a significant personal importance x identity inference making interaction. The interaction can be illustrated by conducting a median split on both personal importance and identity inference making. In less identity relevant domains (e.g., stereo), people choose options held by fewer others 61% of the time if the domain was more personally important, but only 53% of the time when the domain was less personally important. In domains that

others use to infer identity (e.g., music or hairstyle), however, there was no effect of personal importance and people tended to choose options held by fewer others around 76% of the time, regardless of personal importance of the domain.

This interaction provides insight into the relationship between personal importance and identity signaling. People chose more unique options in personally important domains (consistent with prior literature), but only if those domains were not used by the population at large to infer identity. In domains that everyone sees as identity related, everyone (regardless of personal importance) must diverge to ensure they communicate their identity effectively.

These findings are interesting, but we have omitted the study from the revised manuscript because it places the two processes in opposition which did not seem to fit with the revised positioning. Identity signaling complements rather than opposes literature on uniqueness, and consequently, a test that pits personal importance against identity signaling did not seem to be the best fit. Space constraints also required that we reduce the length of the paper.

We also addressed a number of the suggestions you labeled as minor:

- While we agree that a certain group of people may find umbrellas personally important to their identity (and thus, be more likely to diverge in this domain), most people don't infer things about others based on their umbrellas, so we suggest most people should be less likely to diverge in this domain. However, in accordance with your wishes we have changed the example. We also appreciate your data on how people in Shanghai relate to their air-conditioners and have changed that example as well.
  - You noted a concern that the number of options in a given domain might predict divergence, but in fact this is not the case (though we can see how this issue may have been confusing from the flow of the prior draft). While the number of options in a domain may predict which domains are used in identity inference making, it does not in fact predict divergence. When number of perceived options is included in the regression (along with identity inference making and publicness) predicting divergence, number of perceived options is not significant ( $p > .10$ ), but identity inference making remains significant. Publicness, however drops to insignificance ( $p > .10$ ). We agree, however, that the proximity of results regarding divergence and identity-signaling domains may confuse the reader. Thus we have moved the discussion of why people use certain domains to infer identity to the general discussion to sharpen the focus of the paper on divergence.
  - Your suggestion of providing more motivation and background for the studies was quite helpful and we have followed all your suggestion. In the introduction to Study 3, we have included a discussion research on the influence of reference groups.
  - Consistent with your suggestion, we have also shortened the conceptual parts of the abstract and spent more time discussing the findings of the studies.
  - We have also shortened the title.
- 
-

## **Response to Reviewer C's Comments**

---

Thanks so much for your thoughtful and helpful review. Your comments were particularly helpful in relating our work to prior research in the area and below we respond to your specific comments.

Relation to Literature on Need for Uniqueness: As noted in the response to the Associate Editor we agree that our prior positioning in opposition to the uniqueness literature was incorrect and unnecessary. As you mention, the literature on uniqueness posits a process and need for uniqueness proposes an individual difference that moderates this process. Rather than being in opposition to this process our work is indeed compatible. Divergence to signal identity is a separate process that involves both convergence and differentiation, but with the overall goal of signaling identity to others.

Instead of placing these processes in opposition, the revised manuscript attempts to provide greater understanding of the divergence process itself, and also how it may complement prior notions of differentiation. As noted in the general discussion, the motivation to signal identity and the motivation to feel somewhat differentiated often act in concert. People often diverge from members of other social groups and converge with similar others to imbue signals with meaning. But they also choose in ways that allow them to differentiate themselves from others in their in-group. People who want to signal their wealth may all buy BMWs, but they buy different colors to allow themselves to also feel unique. Thus processes of uniqueness and identity signaling often occur concurrently.

Relation to Other Existing Research: Based on your suggestions, we have revised the manuscript to clarify how our work relates to existing concepts. The introduction now provides a discussion of how our work differs from prior notions of nonconformity (p. 8). Divergence can be seen as a type of nonconformity because people are not acting in congruence with the behavior of others. It is different from existing forms, however, because people are not just distancing themselves from out-group others (similar to anticonformity) but are also simultaneously converging with in-group others. Thus people don't want to just be different from others in any way possible (idiosyncratic divergence) but rather want to be different from other social groups and similar to their own group so that their tastes convey meaning to others. We also appreciate your suggestion to discuss the reference group literature in greater detail and have inserted a discussion of that literature at the beginning of Study 3. As you suggested, we have also omitted the use of the phrase idiosyncratic differentiation.

We have kept the term "cultural tastes" for two reasons. First, it links this work to other work in sociology and psychology that discusses the spread of culture and has used the terms "tastes" to describe aspects of culture. Second, this term is the best we can come up with that encompasses the set of things that we'd like to study. People adopt and abandon products, catchphrases, behaviors, attitudes, fashion, possessions, and many other things. While we agree that tastes may not be a perfect label, we feel it best encompasses this set.

Functional Goods and Self-Expression: We like your observation that people sometime diverge in their selection of functional goods and agree that this area deserves further study. The focus of the current manuscript was to examine why people seem to diverge in certain domains and to see whether the pattern of divergence was consistent with an identity signaling account, but we agree that there are some exceptions. This paper suggests that people tend to diverge more in domains that others use to infer identity, but consistent research on personal importance, individuals should also be more likely to diverge in whichever idiosyncratic domains they find personally important. These identity signals are probably less likely to be picked up by the population at large, but they may be helpful in coordinating with other in-group members. Buying a very high end stove, for instance, may not be a good way of signaling identity to most people because most people don't tend to look to this domain for identity signals. But such a purchase may be a good way to signal to other kitchenophiles. In addition, extremes, whether they be extreme knowledge, purchasing an extremely costly item, or attending to fine details may be a good signal of identity because it separates a person from the general population. We now discuss these issues further in the general discussion.

Health Domains: Your observation that some of the domains used related to health is an interesting one and one that we had not realized previously. But while some of the domains are health relevant, further analyses and data from subsequent experiments lead us to doubt that the health related domains are driving the results. If we delete the health related items from Study 1, the analysis yields identical effects to what was found previously. Your observation is an interesting one though and in subsequent work we have been examining how process of identity signaling can be used to increase positive health behaviors.

Further, the broader point that people have use others choices to provide information and reduce risk is quite important. This does not suggest why people would diverge from majorities (or members of other social groups) in identity related domains, but it does suggest that people might converge in more functional domains to reduce risk. We have included a broader discussion of these issues in the introduction to studies 1 and 2.

Minor Points: While space constraints did not allow us to fully report the items used to rate functionality and public visibility in the text, we are more than happy to provide them here.

- **Functionality** - Rate each of the preference domains below in terms of how much it is based in function--i.e. people use the item / have the preference because it provides functional utility.
- **Public Visibility** - Rate each of the preference domains below in terms of how public/private it is --i.e. how widely known or seen it is. A very public item would be something that is seen by everyone or widely known, while a very private item is one that is seen or known by very few people.

As you requested, we also include the average ratings of public visibility below.

Actor	4.38
Backpack	6.00
Bike light	4.60
Car brand	6.56
Car Model	6.22
Favorite CD	4.00
Detergent	4.44
Dish Soap	4.69
DVD player	4.53
Restaurant entrée	4.97
Hairstyle	6.09
Jacket	6.06
Music Artist	4.67
Music Genre	5.10
Power Tools	4.75
Sitcom	4.26
Sofa	4.81
Stereo	4.63
Sunglasses	6.16
Toothpaste	4.22