



JCR MANUSCRIPT REVIEW HISTORY 001-2 (REVIEWS)

Thank you for submitting your revision “Where People Diverge”. I am pleased to say that the manuscript is conditionally accepted. There was some disagreement between Reviewers A and B on one hand and C on the other, but I believe the associate editor has done a skillful job in proposing a compromise, and I hope that you will follow the suggestions in that report. I ran the report by Reviewer C and the compromise is acceptable. So if you like the associate editor’s guidance, then regard that report as specifying the conditions that must be met for publication and I will send the revision to that reader only. If you want to go in another direction, we may need to have more people read the revision.

Congratulations on a nice job. As you prepare the revision, bear in mind that JCR’s publisher has a website and is willing to serve supplementary materials into perpetuity, so if you want to embed a url into the text and link to web-based material, then that is an option.

Sincerely,



John Deighton

AE comments to the authors

You have done a very good job with the revision, having satisfactorily addressed the concerns of reviewers A and B. I am also quite pleased with how you addressed the information account in this version. Reviewer C, however, continues to voice serious concerns about the relationship between this work and prior work on NFU. So, let me break my report into two parts, the first of which discusses the small “tidying” up issues remaining for reviewers A and B. I will then try to explain the key issue raised by reviewer C and how I think it could be handled.

Tidying up:

Reviewer A raises four question and comment areas that you should address. These changes will require simple editing for the most part. Also, add another typo the list, this one on page 11, sixth line from the end.

Delving a bit deeper into these four areas...under “design clarification,” the reviewer explains that your treatment of the information account was hard to follow. I think the confusion results from two main sources. Some of the sentences are just a bit awkward (top of page 15) but also because your arguments are so highly abstracted (likely due to the goal of keeping the paper short) that sections may make sense only for those readers who have already spent a lot time thinking about this account. A round of editing in which you are more explanatory would help.

I also had some thoughts on your treatment of the information account that may be better suited for later work but mention here in case they help with the clarity revisions. First, lurking just below the surface in some of your arguments is the distinction between the costs and benefits of divergence. Confusion might arise because you shift from talking about benefits to talking about costs without fully acknowledging the change. For example, your main arguments on identity signaling focus on the benefits of divergence and how they differ across product categories. Your discussion of identity signaling (especially page 21) picks up more on differences in costs, for example, the cost of stepping away from the best alternative in the category (when tastes are homogeneous). So, perhaps you could clarify some of the murkier sections identified by reviewer A by being more explicit about the notion of costs versus benefits of divergence. Don't take this suggestion as a requirement; I am just trying to diagnose where confusion might arise and to propose ways to fix it. You may have better ideas. (Other costs of divergence, which you have identified but not in those terms exactly, result from having to buy expensive items in a category in which mid-level items would function just as well or from having to be inconsistent in one's purchases, which could look flaky or could cause one to spend extra time researching the product or integrating it with other products one already owns. I suspect that the reason some categories are good for identity signaling is related to the costs associated with being divergent in these categories—and why we opt to diverge in different ways as we get older, more affluent, but more concerned about appearing flaky (haircuts give way to kitchens). In any case, later work might integrate costs and benefits of divergence more formally.)

Second, I am not convinced that your design for study 3 actually rules out the information account. Your argument according to an information account is that people should pick option A in identity related domains when the listed group is similar (because A is preferred by the largest number of similar others). This argument is predicated on an assumption that participants can figure that out. Figuring it out though requires participants to think clearly about conditional relationships and people are terrible at that. That is, your argument is that participants will think about (preference/group) and so would pick product A if they were using others' choices for information purposes. I think it is very likely that people will instead get confused and think about (group/preference), which is a baitingly high .9. That is, if people confuse the direction of the conditional, the information account predicts the same pattern as your account. This concern is a bit of a fine point so I don't think you need to address it in this paper but I think the information account will ultimately need to be more fully tested against identity signaling. That can wait because I think each account could be refined and then integrated with each other to some extent first.

Reviewer B suggests including the little study on personal importance in the GD. I see the merits in this argument but don't see the addition as necessary. Also, I think you will need the space to address the concerns raised by reviewer C.

Reviewer B also suggests a different title that uses the term "consumer." Good idea. I also think it would help attract interested readers and be more informative if you mentioned "identity signaling." How about something like "Identity Signaling and Consumer Divergence"?

Relationship to NFU

Reviewer C has much deeper concerns related to your characterization of the need for uniqueness. You characterize NFU as a trait level individual difference. Reviewer B says, no, NFU is not strictly a trait but also takes into account social situations that evoke the desire for uniqueness. In this light, the present studies which focus on differences in the usefulness of product categories for signaling social identity could be seen as mere replications of prior work on uniqueness; here product category is the social category triggering the desire for uniqueness. That is technically correct although NFU has been treated (and understood as, I think) a trait level variable in most work in consumer behavior. This creates a problem in terms of assessing contribution. For most readers, this paper will likely add something special to our understanding of when people choose with or against the majority. For some others, however, this paper could be seen as providing no real contribution or, more accurately, as deriving a sham contribution because it is based on an overly simple and inaccurate understanding of the base literature on NFU.

In this light, Reviewer C would like to send you back to that base literature with the goal of rethinking the main conceptual contribution of the paper. My concern with going that route is that the paper may become too complex as it strives to achieve two goals. That

is, the new paper would need to advance the field's understanding of NFU *and* show us how the more complex version works in terms of identity signaling, which takes us away from the clear, simple important point in this paper. Also, the present paper does center on an aspect of consumer behavior that is distinctive relative to work on uniqueness per se: the consumers' desire to signal a specific identity, not just an unusual one.

So, I think you need to handle this issue in how you define the construct of uniqueness in the introduction and then in the GD. In the introduction when you talk about how identity signaling differs from expressing uniqueness take care not to characterize NFU in its full nature as strictly about trait differences. That is, don't make NFU more narrow, more of a straw man, than it is. Look to reviewer C for guidance here. Instead, explain that you are setting your work in contrast to that specific aspect of NFU that is a trait level difference. You can then move through the paper pretty much as is, taking care to ensure that later sections don't mischaracterize the full definition of NFU. In the GD, you can then go back to the broader definition of NFU, the one that allows differences in expression depending on the circumstances, and explain the relationship between your findings and that broader view. Take a good paragraph to do that and, to keep length the same, cut some other aspects of the GD. (Reviewer B did find it to be too long and as going beyond the data so there is indeed room to cut.)

Reviewer C also raises some other very important questions, for example, about the target of the expression—to whom is one signaling identity. These questions are important and exciting but I think can be deferred to later work on this topic.

You or John may identify other routes for resolving the disagreement among the reviewers about the stage of readiness of this paper and its contribution than I have suggested. In any case, I think resolution is possible and I congratulate on a very good paper. One of its strengths is that it is generally clear about what it does and doesn't show, which sets the stage beautifully for later work in the area. I found the paper very engaging (and could not resist tossing in my two-cents about some possibilities for later research) and I suspect others in the field will react similarly, citing and building on this work. Good luck with the editing.

Reviewer A
Comments to Authors

Your manuscript addresses the conditions under which people tend to choose options that diverge from the choices of others. The paper argues that identity signaling drives divergence. It demonstrates across four studies that identity-signaling potential varies as a function of product domain. Although previous research has addressed this domain-relevance of identity signaling, the novelty in your research is in demonstrating convincingly the implications for taste abandonment and divergence. As such, I think the work provides a significant contribution to the literature that will spur future studies in the area.

You have made substantial improvements in presentation and clarity since the previous round. The paper reads better and many points are clearer. For instance, you did a nice job of incorporating treatment of both convergence and divergence processes to support your underlying theoretical framework (e.g., on page 8). It is shaping up to be an interesting paper that I plan to cite in my own research.

I have only a few remaining comments and questions, and these can readily be addressed in rewriting.

1. *Empirical information and clarifications:* What do the alphas on p. 12 refer to? From the description of the domain ratings, it sounded like these were all single-item measures. If they are multi-item scales, then give more information on these items so that future researchers can use your measures. On page 16, give the wording of the pre-test instructions (e.g., how was “people outside their social type” defined for respondents?). On page 21, the separate liking ratings for the various choices were helpful. However, you need to provide N, means, statistical tests to back up your interpretation of these results.

When you name a dependent variable at one point (e.g., *Identity Index*, p. 12), use the same term to refer to it at all future points (not, e.g., “identity dimension” or “identity relatedness”; also use either “public preferences” or “public visibility,” but not both, to refer to this variable), especially when describing analyses. It was sometimes hard to tell what your DVs were because the terms were changing. Relatedly, on page 12-13, spell out what variable was regressed on what other variable.

2. *Design clarification:* On page 15 and 21, it was not clear to me how your design ruled out the information account, despite reading the explanations several times. Part of the problem is in the writing itself – points are asserted but not necessarily justified, and the writing is vague (top of p. 15).

3. *Framing of contribution:* By and large the framing is fine, but I would be a bit circumspect in suggesting (as on page 32) that your contribution is showing that certain domains are more identity-relevant than others. That much is known, but showing the implications for taste divergence is a valuable contribution.

Not a big point, but I do not think Deborah Prentice looked specifically at product distinctions in symbolic/instrumental value (p. 9).

4. *Editing issues:* Some sections are awkwardly worded or structured. For instance, the first lines on pages 10, 27, 28. There are also several typos or grammar problems that a careful editing will fix (pages 9, 10, 18, 20, 27, 28, 29, 34).

That's it. Congratulations on a fine revision, and best of luck on your future work in this area.

Reviewer B

Comments to Authors

The authors have prepared a competent revision in short time. I feel my concerns and those of the other reviewers have been addressed. My comments are meant to further improve an already strong paper.

In the prior round, I had raised three major issues. First, I requested a tighter positioning and framework that clarifies the relation of the present research to prior research on personal importance and uniqueness. This point was echoed by the other reviewers, the Associate Editor, and the Editor. I feel it has been addressed conceptually in a satisfactory manner in the front end and back end of the revision.

Second, I made several suggestions about the order of the studies and which studies should stay and which one(s) should go. Moreover, I suggested to get fast to the data. I am happy to see that you have chosen to get to the data fast, and in my view it works well. Regarding the order of other studies and whether to drop one or two, I understand that you did not make any major change because the remainder of the reviewing team did not want to see any studies dropped.

Finally, I requested a new study that provides a competitive theory test of personal importance vs. personal identity. This point was picked up by the Associate Editor. You have conducted such a study – sort of -- and have reported it in the revision notes. I generally like your study. While it is not a full-fledged experiment of the sort I suggested, it provides a nice first step in extending the research presented in the paper and connecting it empirically, and not just conceptually, to the perspective offered in prior research, focusing on personal importance. You offer to include the new data in the paper but I can see that you are in a bind. After all, the Editor did not set new empirical work as a requirement; John asked for “conceptual crispness, not exhaustive empirical testing of alternative processes.”

My view is since the study is done, why waste it? Or why see it published elsewhere? Moreover, I feel there is an ideal place for it in this *JCR* article and that would make your paper a symmetrical work of art. I suggest you put a short version of the data in the Discussion section -- not as another study, but right in there in the middle of your discussion where you already compare identity and personal importance, e.g., page 33. This format has been used in many psychology papers and at times in marketing and consumer behavior articles. The data in the Discussion section will parallel the data in the introduction section (see the symmetry?). More importantly, it will make your Discussion section richer and more interesting. Currently, the discussion section is too long, too unfocused and toward the end goes way beyond the data (pp. 34-35 are intriguing and should be kept but shortened). Plus, in my view, the discussion really begs the question: So, which one (personal importance or social identity) is more important; or do they interact?

I would like to add that the addition of the new data in the Discussion section does not need to make the paper longer; you should be able to keep the same length by cutting here and there in the Discussion section. I also do not see your data as indicating, as you say in the revision note, that the two processes are in opposition, and thus not fitting the new positioning. Your interaction effect precisely indicates the complementarity of the two processes. Thus, the data provide a clear direction for further research and provides the first snippets of it. (As an aside, following up on my private comments during the last review, after reviewing the new data I now know why I avoid the Italian crowd-pleaser operas these days and go for again-hip-and-trendy Händel instead, although that choice does not signal much about my social identity. And it explains why my next car purchase will be a Mercedes sports coupe although I couldn't care less about cars.)

Finally, the title ("Where People Diverge"). It is shorter, as I and others requested, but somehow strange. I would change it to "Why Consumers Diverge." You do provide an explanation for the divergence phenomenon, and the journal is a consumer research journal. But clearly, the final title is your choice!

Reviewer C
Comments to Authors

My perspective on contribution resides in whether the pattern found in the data lends itself to an explanation in terms of the posited theory, and not also some other competing theory. Thus, method design becomes critical as it plays a role in setting up the demonstration that your posited theory and not some other theory explains the data pattern. Studies 1, 2, and 3 do not meet this standard, as each has not been designed to test for a pattern of findings that would lend itself to a unique explanation in terms of signaling theory. The identified pattern in each study is explicable in terms of other theories, most often the need for uniqueness theory which you position as being in opposition to signaling theory.

In my opinion, and as stated in my last review, your oppositional positioning to need for uniqueness theory undercuts the contribution that might be made by your empirical work. This oppositional positioning seems misguided by a view that need for uniqueness theory is a trait theory. It is not exclusively so, but rather also encompasses social situations that are posited to evoke the state of desire for uniqueness. The desire operates through a social monitoring of the environment (as detailed in Snyder and Fromkin's 1980 book that you reference). Thus, it might be more advantageous to align your work as complementary rather than oppositional with need for uniqueness, and then attempt to identify how you extend or further specify this theory.

Prior to detailing the specific issues and rival explanations for your pattern of data in the first three studies, I outline the conceptual issues that if dealt with, I believe would help in better informing your method designs.

Conceptual Issues

What is needed here is a clear articulation of the theory being tested in terms of its consumer relevant processes, demonstration of how this theory suggests key theoretical concepts, presentation of clear conceptual definitions for key concepts, and throughout, how signaling theory and concepts are distinct from existing identity theories in ways that contribute to knowledge. These should be inclusive of need for uniqueness, collective individuation theory, and reference group theory. Following from this, you should clearly articulate how your method design (either considered individually, or as a stacked collection) has been devised to demonstrate the contribution you claim.

1. Signaling theory is not clearly explained in a way that distinguishes it from need for uniqueness theory. Importantly, the intent of the consumer to make a choice that he believes will differentiate him from others, to make a choice that he believes others will notice, and to abandon choices that become popular are not unique aspects of signaling theory, but are also basic propositions of uniqueness theory. That these operate for “identity relevant” products versus “functional products” reflects, consistent with need for uniqueness theory, that people seek distinction in areas they believe are more likely to render them socially distinguished from others (see Snyder and Fromkin’s 1980 book that you reference).
 - Early on it would be helpful if you would clearly state the process(es) posited by signaling theory, highlighting what its unique contribution is to understanding identity processes. Questions left unanswered include “For whom is the signaling of the person who diverges intended? Is it any imagined other? Is it for those present in the consumption environment? Is it for members of a desired reference group? Is it for members of the outgroup so that they will not seek interactions? May not a given choice be divergent from one group but conforming to another, such that the consumption context is relevant? If so, how is signaling different from processes posited by reference group theory or the theory of collective individuation? If signaling is any imagined others, how is this unlike processes of need for uniqueness? Does signaling theory only speak to the meaning of a divergent choice? Is it not possible to signal desired identities through a conforming choice? If so, how is this distinct from reference group theory?”
 - Pitching signaling theory as distinct from need for uniqueness theory on the basis that the former theory uniquely posits a social process leading to divergence is not compelling. Need for uniqueness theory likewise posits a socially driven process that culminates in a nonconforming choice. As you suggest, the uniqueness motivation activates emotions which propel action. However, it is through social monitoring of the environment that individuals choose when and how to differentiate themselves from others. This is articulated in the need for uniqueness literature that you sight, as well as others (see a host of works by Michael Lynn). Indeed, many of the manipulations of the need for uniqueness motivation (state as well as trait) involve manipulating the social environment, particularly the percentage in the population that adopts the same choice. In forcing a distinction that’s not

driven by a clear articulation and informed understanding of both theories, a number of erroneous or exaggerated claims are made.

- In contrast to your claim (p. 5) that NFU theory has “less to say about *where* people diverge” there is considerable conceptual and empirical work suggesting that the “where” is, in a relative sense, located in: 1) public versus private contexts, 2) product domains of great variety in style versus those with lesser variety, and 3) consumer domains which are less risky than say deviant/illegal behavior. Much of this is noted in the research you cite.
 - Also on page 5, “Most uniqueness research has focused on individual differences,” this is an overstatement, as there is considerable work dealing with social situations that evoke the state (as opposed to trait) motivation for uniqueness.
2. “Divergence,” as a construct, is not explained in a way that differentiates it from existing constructs of nonconformity. The fact that it is not a trait variable does not preclude it from being synonymous with nonconformity *behavior*. A clear conceptual definition is needed that distinguishes it from the latter construct. Then, the points of distinction in your definition will inform how you operationalize “divergence” in your design of the methods, so that it is in fact a distinct concept. (Presently, as measured, it reflects nonconformity behavior). Your definition and operationalization of “divergence” should assist in testing signaling theory in a way in which a measure of nonconformity behavior cannot. Alternatively, if theoretical propositions derived from signaling theory can be tested with an outcome measure of nonconformity behavior, then use it and call it what it is.
 3. I think there would be much more clarity in your presentation, if in the course of articulating signaling theory and your concept of divergence you would clearly address the issue of the referent for divergence.
 - What is the referent? Divergence relative to what group? Does the referent vary as a function of context, if so elaborate.
 - The current presentation 1) never specifies the referent, nor is explicit that it is independent of a specific of a referent and 2) waffles back and forth, both in illustrations and in the design of empirical work between divergence from mass culture choices, divergence from mass culture but shaped by the desire for collective individuation, and divergence from outgroups. I think clear explication of the role of referents in your theory and the conception of its focal constructs would help to focus the framing of your paper, or otherwise set the reader up for referents that are differently specified across your studies.
 - There is a shift in moving from your introduction (introductory paragraph), and the material at the top of page 8 and your hypotheses. Whereas your introduction is set up largely in terms of group membership motivating divergence from general population, your first hypothesis are

In Study 1, the hypothesized pattern is the same as that which would be predicted by NFU theory as well as reference group theory. That is, all three theories would suggest that people assert identity in domains rated by themselves and others to be more expressive (hair styles and music) versus those rated to be less expressive (dish soap and bike light). And findings of divergence in expressive vs. nonexpressive goods would also be consistent with all three theories. In reference group theory, divergence with respect to the expressive goods would be sought as divergence in order to express in-group membership that distinguishes them from a broader population (i.e., a process of collective individuation). In NFU theory, divergence would be sought in expressive categories because these better assert distinctiveness. All three theories involve monitoring of the social environment. Thus, compatibility between others' ratings of expressive products and individuals choice of these products as a context for diverging is not an exclusive domain of signaling theory.

In Study 2, the hypothesized pattern is what would be hypothesized by NFU theory –“people will abandon tastes they once preferred when they learn that a majority shares them.” And, NFU theory (contrary to your assertions on p. 16) would suggest that people are more likely to abandon where the threat to identity is greatest – for identity related products. (That you do not find this may reflect your choice of a poor measure for need for uniqueness- see below). The manipulation of the “state” motivation of NFU (as opposed to the trait) has most often in the literature been the very type of manipulation of similarity feedback that you set up. A three-way interaction would have been the pattern suggested by NFU theory: People high in NFU are most likely to diverge when the product category is expressive (vs. non expressive) and when similarity feedback is high (vs. not received).

The NFU scale used in your method design is a choice that biases the outcome in favor of your asserted hypothesis. In particular the Snyder and Fromkin's NFU scale confounds counterformity with independence, and related to this lacks structural validity, has demonstrated inconsistent predictive validity, and finally does not perform well in consumer context (all noted in the works you reference, but also in Tepper and Hoyle 1996, *Multivariate Behavior Research*). The confounding inclusion of the “independence” content domain (“independence” referring to a tendency to adhere to one's internal preference) biases the measure against “abandonment” – the criterion upon which your Study 2 is based. This undesirable confounding with independence led to the development of the CNFU scale (the 2001 article you cite), as a cleaner measure of counterconformity, that has been empirically demonstrated to predict “abandonment” of preferences following similarity feedback.

In Study 3, the pattern of findings that you uncover seem the same pattern that would be predicted by reference group theory, as well as a formulation of this represented by Maslach's (1974) theory of collective individuation, which is incorporated and tested in the need for uniqueness consumer research that you reference. Maslach's work would hold that one way people seek uniqueness is through being part of a group that is distinct within larger society. Similarity to other group members is sought, dissimilarity to those outside the group is sought.

As a final note, problems with the outcome measure noted in the set of first round reviews have not been addressed, and are related to the integrity of interpretations of all three studies.

The Discussion Section

Your pattern of findings leads you to suggest that signaling theory may explain fashion cycles. Notably, this same contribution is one claimed by need for uniqueness theory, as discussed in terms of the "catch 22" noted in Synder and Fromkin's (1980) book.

Promising Paths of Inquiry

Again, I think abandoning the positioning of your work as oppositional to need for uniqueness theory would open paths to other contributions this work might make. In particular, the area of collective individuation would seem promising with a focus on signaling as a means of navigating similarity to an in-group, but uniqueness from an outgroup. I think your Study 4 is a good entrée to inquiry along this path. Perhaps Studies 1, 2, and 3 could be repositioned (and largely truncated) as demonstrating basic compatibility with need for uniqueness propositions. While not novel, if stacked with Study 4 and perhaps additional empirical work, these could collectively be of value. Again, this depends on deepening your knowledge of the theoretical and conceptual domains in which you are working.