MOTIVATION FROM AN EXPERIENTIAL (VS. MATERIAL) PRODUCT FOCUS

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Despite increased spending on self-improvement goals, such as health and fitness, consumers often fail to achieve their goals. The current research examines an intervention aimed at increasing consumers' motivation by harnessing the purchases they have already made. We demonstrate that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a fitness-related product (e.g., Apple Watch; workout t-shirt) increases consumers' workout motivation (experiments 1A-1C). An experiential (vs. material) product focus is motivating because it increases the salience of consumers' goal relevant identity (e.g., fitness identity; experiment 2). Supporting this identity salience process, this effect is mitigated when the goal relevant identity is already situationally active (experiment 3) and for a goal that is more chronically central to consumers' identity (i.e., students' academic vs. fitness goal; experiment 4). This effect is of real consequence for consumers, as an experiential (vs. material) focus increases consumers' actual persistence in a multi-day fitness challenge (experiment 5). This research illustrates how and why different product focuses shape motivation, offering theoretical insights into the literature on experiential purchases, consumer identity, and goal pursuit.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sarah Lim completed her B.A. in Psychology and B.M. in Instrumental Music at Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea. She completed her M.A. in Psychology at Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea. She completed her Ph.D. in Management (Marketing) at Cornell University, Ithaca, U.S.A.

Dedicated to my parents for their unconditional love and support.

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Consumers often make purchases related to their self-improvement goals, such as buying fitness gear or healthy cookbooks. The self-improvement industry is expected to be worth $13 billion by 2022 (LaRosa 2018, Schroeder 2018), which reflects consumers' increasing investment in these goals. Yet, despite spending on self-improvement, consumers often fail to achieve these goals (Diamond 2013; Woolley and Fishbach 2017). Are consumers spending their money in the wrong places? Can they better harness their purchases to motivate themselves? The current research addresses these questions, examining whether the way consumers construe their goal-related purchases influences their motivation.

We draw on a distinction in the literature on experiential and material purchase type (Dai, Chan, and Mogilner 2020; Gilovich and Gallo 2020; Kumar, Killingworth, and Gilovich 2020; Tully, Hershfield, and Meyvis 2015; Van Boven, Campbell, and Gilovich 2010; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). In pursuit of their self-improvement goals (e.g., health, fitness), consumers can buy material goods, such as fitness gear, or make experiential purchases, such as a gym membership. At the same time, consumers can construe the same fitness product as more of an experience or as more of a material purchase depending on the aspects of the product they focus on. For example, a consumer will view her workout t-shirt as more of a material purchase if focusing on material aspects, such as the design and color, or as more of an experience if focusing on experiential aspects, such as how it feels to wear her t-shirt.

Prior research on the distinction between experiential and material purchases mainly examined consequences for happiness (Gilovich and Gallo 2020; Gilovich, Kumar, and Jampol 2015; Weingarten and Goodman 2020). However, it is unclear which focus, experiential or material, is better from a motivational perspective. One possibility is that focusing on the material aspects of a goal-related product is more motivating. Compared to experiences, material

goods are more tangible (Goodman, Malkoc, and Stephenson 2016) and longer lasting (Tully et al. 2015). By emphasizing product durability, a material focus could make consumers feel more committed to their goal. Indeed, products that are more (vs. less) material, such as physical (vs. digital) books, serve as an expression of commitment and self-verification (Leung et al. 2020).

On the other hand, given that an experiential (vs. material) focus does not change the objective physicality and durability of the product itself, we suggest that an experiential focus is likely to be more motivating. This prediction draws on research demonstrating that experiences form a core part of people's identity, as people's memories and self-narratives constitute who they are (Klein 2001; Swann and Bosson 2010). For this reason, consumers focusing on the experiential aspects of a new 3D TV (e.g., what it would be like to watch TV "in a whole new way") perceived the TV as more a part of their "essential self" compared with those focusing on the material aspects (e.g., how well the TV would fit with their other possessions; Carter and Gilovich 2012; study 4).

Given that experiences are more self-defining, we theorize that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product increases motivation by activating consumers' relevant goal-identity. That is, focusing on the experiential features of a goal-related product increases the salience of consumers' identity related to the particular goal. This prediction is consistent with the identity salience literature, which recognizes that consumers hold multiple identities, the salience of which can increase as a function of situational cues (Collins and Loftus 1975; Oyserman 2009). Identity salience refers to the activation of a particular identity within an individual's self-schema (i.e., in relation to other identities that the individual holds). For example, we propose that focusing on the experience of wearing (vs. material aspects of) a workout t-shirt will activate consumer's fitness identity, such that this

identity becomes more salient. Increasing goal-identity salience will in turn increase motivation, since consumers are motivated to pursue goals that they identify with (Markus and Wurf 1987; Touré-Tillery and Fishbach 2015).

Overall, this research makes three theoretical contributions. First, prior work has investigated how goals guide consumers' purchase decisions (Brendl, Markman, and Messner 2003; Salerno, Laran, and Janiszewski 2014; van Osselaer and Janiszewski 2012; Wilcox et al. 2009). We examine the opposite direction: how consumers can harness their past goal-related purchases to motivate their goal pursuit. Our research thus broadly contributes to research on how goal-related products affect motivation by serving as means to goal attainment (e.g., Etkin and Ratner 2012; Kopetz et al. 2012); specifically, we demonstrate an advantage of experiential (vs. material) means. Second, prior research on this experiential-material distinction has primarily focused on social and hedonic benefits of purchase type (Bastos and Brucks 2017; Carter and Gilovich 2012; Chan and Mogilner 2017; Gilovich and Gallo 2020; Nicolao et al. 2009; Van Boven et al. 2010; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). Advancing this research, we are the first to examine benefits of adopting an experiential (vs. material) product focus for *motivation*. We thus contribute to the literature on the experiential-material distinction, which has overlooked how and why purchase type influences motivation. Third, in examining identity salience as the mechanism underlying this proposed effect, we bridge research on experiential purchases and identity (Carter and Gilovich 2012; Gilovich and Kumar 2015) with research on identity and motivation (Oyserman 2009; Oyserman et al. 2017). In doing so, we provide theoretical insights into how product focus changes motivation by activating consumers' goal relevant identity.

Beyond these theoretical contributions, this research is also of practical importance. Consumers spend billions of dollars each year in pursuit of self-improvement (e.g., increased health and fitness), yet struggle to reach their goals. Beyond individual costs, consumers' failure to achieve these goals can incur societal costs in the long term (e.g., health care costs from obesity and other related problems; CDC 2019; Finkelstein et al. 2009). We identify an intervention that consumers can use to motivate themselves: focus on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their goal-related products.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Whereas prior research on the distinction between experiential and material purchases has focused on different *types* of purchases (e.g., vacations vs. jewelry; Gilovich and Gallo 2020; Gilovich et al. 2015), many purchases consumers make share both experiential and material qualities (Dai et al. 2020; Guevarra and Howell 2014). A laptop is a material object that can be kept in one's possession, but at the same time, offers a variety of experiences to consumers (e.g., taking online classes). Similarly, fitness headphones have some material elements (e.g., color, design) as well as experiential ones (e.g., audio quality). As such, the material-experiential perception of a product is largely dependent on an individual's focus, such that consumers can construe the same product as more of an experiential purchase or more of a material purchase (Carter and Gilovich 2012; Gilovich and Gallo 2020; Rosenzweig and Gilovich 2012).

Prior work has examined how this distinction between purchase type influences a range of judgments and behaviors. A major conclusion from this research is that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a purchase increases purchase satisfaction and happiness (Carter and Gilovich 2010; Kumar et al. 2020) and promotes social connectedness (Bastos and Brucks 2017; Chan and Mogilner 2017). Indeed, people are more likely to talk about their

experiences than about their possessions (Gilovich and Kumar, 2015), such that framing a material good as an experience makes people more likely to talk about it (Gallo, Townsend, and Alegre 2019).

Within the context of goal pursuit, however, there is limited research on how perceiving a goal-related product as more experiential or material affects motivation. Initial research has examined the opposite question, how certain goals, such as the desire for social connection (Bastos and Brucks 2017) or self-knowledge (Kim et al. 2016) influence preference for experiential (vs. material) purchases. More directly related to the current research question, other research at the intersection of motivation and purchase type has examined inferences people make about others' motives based on their purchase behavior (Van Boven et al. 2010). This research found that consumers perceive others' experiential (vs. material) purchases as driven more by intrinsic motives (e.g., goal for inherent enjoyment) than by extrinsic motives (e.g., goal to signal status and gain popularity).

The current research asks a different question—how focusing on the experiential versus material aspects of goal-related products affects consumers' *own* motivation. By their nature, goal-related products function as a means to a particular goal (e.g., consumers buy workout t-shirts as a means to achieve their fitness goal; Kopetz et al. 2012). We propose that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of such products increases motivation. We theorize that this effect occurs because an experiential focus increases the salience of consumers' goal-relevant identity.

Experiential (vs. Material) Focus Increases Goal-Identity Salience

Consumers' identities comprise multiple aspects of the self (e.g., beliefs, traits, relationships) that they use to define who they are. For example, a consumer can see herself as an environmentalist, professional, or mother. Such identities function as motivational drivers shaping consumers' thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors (Escalas and Bettman 2005; Forehand and Deshpandé 2001; White, Argo, and Sengupta 2012; Winterich, Mittal, and Ross 2009).

Products are closely tied to consumers' identities (Belk 1988; Chan, Van Boven, and Berger 2012; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Ward and Broniarczyk 2011). In particular, since consumers' identities are a function of their memories and experiences (Greenwald 1981; Kihlstrom, Beer, and Klein 2003), there is a close connection between experiential (vs. material) purchases and identity (Carter and Gilovich 2012; Guevarra and Howell 2012). As such, focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a purchase can lead consumers to feel that the purchase is more reflective of their true, essential self (Carter and Gilovich 2012; Gilovich and Kumar 2015).

Building on this research, we test how *goal-related products* (i.e., purchases made in pursuit of self-improvement) relate to consumers' identities. At a given time, consumers hold multiple identities, the salience of which is highly malleable and situation sensitive. Research on identity salience finds that contextual cues can momentarily activate a particular identity (Forehand, Deshpandé, Reed 2002; Oyserman 2009). When an identity is activated, the temporal accessibility of that identity increases, bringing to mind attitudes and behaviors consistent with the active identity (Mandel 2003; Puntoni, Sweldens, and Tavassoli 2011; Reed 2004; Zhang and Khare 2009). For example, priming Asian-American women with their Asian identity increased performance on math, whereas priming them with their female identity reduced math

performance (Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady 1999), as people behaved in ways consistent with the stereotype associated with the salient identity.

We propose that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product increases the salience of consumers' goal relevant identity. Specifically, adopting an experiential focus will lead consumers to reflect on their memories associated with the relevant goal, which will increase the accessibility of their goal relevant identity compared to adopting a material focus. For example, when a consumer with a fitness goal reflects on her experience of wearing a workout t-shirt, her fitness goal-related identity (e.g., identity as an athletic person or "exerciser") will become more salient compared to when she focuses on the material aspects of her workout t-shirt.

If an experiential (vs. material) focus activates consumers' goal-related identity, this should have consequences for motivation. People act in ways that are congruent with salient identities and are motivated to pursue goals that they identify with (Koestner et al. 2008, 2015; Verplanken and Holland 2002). In a longitudinal study, people who viewed their goals as more a part of their identity (e.g., exerciser, dieter) indicated greater goal persistence (Houser-Marko and Sheldon 2006). Research also suggests a causal link between identity and motivation. For example, people who were instructed to consider their healthy eating goal as part of their identity (i.e., seeing oneself as a "healthy eater") made healthier food choices compared with those who also thought about their healthy eating goal, but did not relate it to their identity (Dominick and Cole 2020). Likewise, describing a behavior in identity relevant language can increase motivation, such that asking people about the importance of "being a voter" (vs. "voting") increased voter turnout in an election (Bryan et al. 2011). Together, these results demonstrate that activating a goal-related identity increases goal-directed motivation.

In short, we propose that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product will increase the salience of consumers' relevant goal-identity and subsequently increase motivation to pursue the goal. To test this process, we first examined whether goal-identity salience mediates the effect of an experiential (vs. material) product focus on motivation. In addition, we address an alternative explanation for this effect, that focusing on the experiential aspects of a goal-related product increases motivation by increasing perceived instrumentality of the product (Ferguson and Bargh 2004; Fishbach, Eyal, and Finkelstein 2010). Because we hold the product itself constant, we suggest that regardless of product focus, a goal-related product will be perceived as similarly instrumental for the relevant goal, but that only an experiential focus will activate the goal-related identity.

In addition to examining mediation through goal identity salience, we also test for moderation by manipulating the accessibility of the relevant goal-identity, independent of product focus. If an experiential focus operates by increasing the accessibility of a particular goal-identity, then the effect of an experiential (vs. material) product focus should be mitigated when the identity is already situationally activated. For example, focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a fitness-related product will be less motivating when one's fitness identity is already active (i.e., after reflecting on one's fitness identity) compared to when one's fitness identity is less salient and accessible (i.e., after reflecting on one's social identity).

Beyond situationally manipulating the accessibility of a particular identity, we utilize a naturally occurring manipulation of the accessibility of a goal-relevant identity. Certain identities are more central to an individual's self-concept than others, such that some identities are more stable characteristics of how a person sees themself (Aquino et al. 2009; Deshpandé, Hoyer, and Donthu 1986). For example, academic goals are more central to students' identity than are fitness

goals (Gamlin and Labroo 2018; Markus and Nurius 1986; Markus and Wurf 1987; Touré-Tillery and Fishbach 2015). Prior research suggests that situational cues are less likely to influence the salience of chronically central identities (Aquino et al. 2009). If an experiential (vs. material) focus is motivating because it serves as a situational cue that activates a goal-relevant identity, the effect of product focus on motivation should be mitigated for an identity central goal. For example, students should be *more* motivated when focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a fitness-related product, but the effect of product focus on motivation should be mitigated for an academic-related product, as academic goals are more central to students' identity.

PRESENT RESEARCH

Nine studies tested the motivating effect of experiential (vs. material) product focus. We operationalize product focus based on consumers' product perceptions, as in prior research (Carter and Gilovich 2010, 2012; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). First, two pilot studies demonstrated that perceiving a goal-related product as more experiential (vs. material) positively predicted actual goal-persistence for fitness, academic, and healthy eating goals. Our main experiments then manipulated consumers' focus on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product, holding the product itself constant. We found that participants with a fitness goal were more motivated to work out when focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their Apple Watch, fitness earphones, and workout t-shirt (experiments 1A-1C).

Examining the proposed process, focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product increased the salience of consumers' goal-relevant identity, which mediated the effect of product focus on motivation (experiment 2). We further moderate this effect through

goal identity salience: we first used a situational cue to increase (vs. decrease) the accessibility of a goal-relevant identity (experiment 3) and then relied on a naturally occurring manipulation of chronic goal-identity accessibility (i.e., academic vs. fitness goal for students; experiment 4). Lastly, we examined real consequences of product focus for behavior; consumers persisted longer in a multi-day fitness challenge when focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a fitness product (experiment 5). We report all manipulations, cell sizes, and exclusions, if any (see appendix) and preregistered four experiments (experiments 1C, 2, 3, and 4). Table 1 summarizes our studies.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF STUDIES AND MAIN FINDINGS

Experiment [Sample]	**IV [Goal-related Product]**	**DV**	**Main Finding**
Pilot 1 [MTurk]	Perceived frequency of making experiential (vs. material) purchases	Weekly hours spent exercising	Greater frequency of buying experiential (vs. material) purchases predicted hours spent exercising.
Pilot 2 [Qualtrics Panel]	Perceiving recent, important purchases as more experiential (vs. material)	Successful goal pursuit	Perceiving recent purchases as more experiential (vs. material) predicted successful goal pursuit.
1A [Apple Watch users; MTurk]	Experiential (vs. material) focus [Apple Watch]	Workout motivation	Focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of an Apple Watch increased workout motivation.
1B [Students]	Experiential (vs. material) focus [Fitness earphones]	Workout motivation	Focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of fitness earphones increased workout motivation.
1C [MTurk] Preregistered	Experiential (vs. material) focus [Workout t-shirt]	Workout motivation	Focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a workout t-shirt increased workout motivation.
2 [Mturk] Preregistered	Experiential (vs. material) focus [Workout t-shirt]	1. Workout motivation 2. Goal-identity salience	Focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of workout t-shirt increased workout motivation, which was mediated by goal-identity salience.
3 [Mturk] Preregistered	Focus (experiential vs. material) × Salience of fitness identity (high vs. low) [Workout t-shirt]	Workout motivation	Interaction such that the positive effect of an experiential (vs. material) focus on motivation to work out attenuated when a fitness identity was more (vs. less) salient.
4 [Students; online pool] Preregistered	Focus (experiential vs. material; between) × Goal-identity centrality (high vs. low; within) [Workout t-shirt; laptop]	1. Academic motivation 2. Workout motivation	Interaction such that the positive effect of an experiential (vs. material) focus on motivation was mitigated for a goal that was more (vs. less) central to participants' identity.
5 [Students and staff]	Experiential (vs. material) focus [Fitness earphones]	1. Workout motivation 2. Time spent exercising during a fitness challenge 3. Fitness challenge completion	Focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of fitness earphones increased 1. workout motivation, 2. time spent exercising during a fitness challenge, and 3. percent of people completing the challenge.

PILOT STUDIES: PERCEIVING PURCHASES AS EXPERIENTIAL (VS. MATERIAL)

Two pilot studies first examined how perceiving a goal-related purchase as more experiential (vs. material) predicted consumers' actual goal pursuit. Pilot study 1 tested whether the perceived frequency of making experiential (vs. material) fitness-related purchases predicted hours spent working out. Pilot study 2 tested whether perceiving recent goal-related purchases as more experiential (vs. material) predicted pursuit of healthy eating, fitness, and educational goals.

Pilot Study 1: Frequency of Buying Experiential Products Predicts Exercise Behavior

Method. We recruited 201 participants from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). We excluded participants who reported not having a fitness goal and responses from duplicate worker IDs, leaving a sample of 160 participants (M_{age} = 37.74, 66 female).

Participants read the definition of material and experiential purchases (from Van Boven and Gilovich 2003): Material purchases: "those made with the primary intention of acquiring a material good (a tangible object that is kept in one's possession)." Experiential purchases: "those made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience (an event or series of events that one lives through)." We asked participants, "How often do you make [*material/experiential*] purchases that help you work toward your health/fitness goals" (1 = very rarely, 7 = very often). We calculated an experiential-material purchase ratio index (Escalas and Bettman 2005), such that higher scores indicate greater frequency of experiential (vs. material) purchases: [frequency of experiential–material purchases]/[frequency of experiential + material purchases]. To measure

actual goal persistence, we asked participants "In the past three months, how many hours in a typical week did you exercise?" (adapted from Woolley and Fishbach 2017).[1]

Results. We regressed goal persistence (average weekly workout hours) on the experiential-material purchase ratio. As predicted, there was a positive relationship between perceived frequency of making experiential (vs. material) fitness-related purchases and hours spent exercising (B = 3.52, $t(156)$ = 2.28, p = .024). People who felt they made relatively more experiential purchases (i.e., 1 SD above the mean) worked out 6.84 hours a week, whereas people who felt they made relatively more material purchases (i.e., 1 SD below the mean) worked out 4.72 hours a week. This suggests that participants who perceived making more experiential (vs. material) fitness-related purchases worked out two hours longer on average.

Pilot Study 2: Effect of Experiential (vs. Material) Purchases on Successful Goal Pursuit

Method. We recruited 1032 participants from a Qualtrics survey panel (M_{age} = 43.09, 704 female).[2] Participants completed a set of questions for three different goal domains: education [learning something new], fitness, and healthy eating (order randomized).

We first provided a brief description of the goal (e.g., we described educational goals as "learning something new and trying to acquire new skills"). We then asked, "Over the last TWO WEEKS, how successful have you been in working towards your educational goal?" (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Next, participants listed the most important purchases that they made in the past three months in pursuit of these goals (up to five purchases), including the purchase name, price, and date. Participants then read the definition of material and experiential purchases as in

[1] Following prior research (Woolley and Fishbach 2017), we excluded two participants with responses 3 SD above the mean on this weekly exercise measure (i.e., reporting exercising 71.28 hours per week or more).
[2] Mean age was calculated after excluding implausible responses for age (i.e., over 200 years old; n = 4).

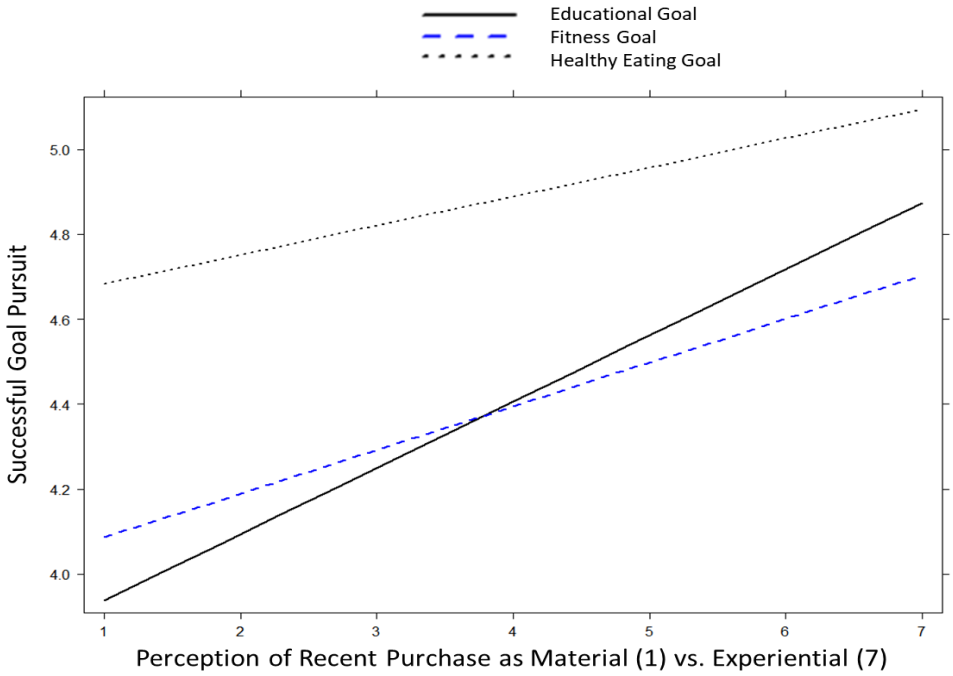
pilot study 1 and rated whether each goal-related purchase was more like a material purchase (1) or an experiential purchase (7). Participants completed these questions for one goal domain before moving on to the next goal domain (for educational, fitness, and healthy eating goals).

Results. A research assistant blind to hypothesis read through all purchase descriptions and flagged any non-sensible purchases (e.g., "very good"), goal-unrelated purchases (e.g., a car for a fitness goal), or non-purchases (i.e., free items), which we treated as missing data points. We averaged participants' ratings of whether their purchases were more experiential or more material to compute a bi-polar measure of experiential (vs. material) purchase perception.

To test our hypothesis, we conducted a linear mixed-effects model with successful goal pursuit as the dependent variable and average purchase perception, goal domain, and their interaction as fixed effects, with random intercepts for participants (to account for the repeated measures design). As predicted, perceiving recent purchases as more experiential (vs. material) predicted successful goal pursuit ($F(1, 1435) = 26.12$, $p < .001$), with no significant interaction involving goal domain ($F(2, 1088) = 1.74$, $p = .177$; figure 1). Those who perceived their recent goal-related purchases as more experiential (vs. material) reported greater success at pursuing their goals during the past two weeks, which held across all three goal domains. Indeed, purchase type positively predicted successful goal pursuit for education (B = .17, SE = .05, $p < .001$), fitness (B = .13, SE = .04, $p < .001$), and healthy eating goals (B = .10, SE = .03, $p < .001$). There was an effect of goal domain ($F(2, 1036) = 9.68$, $p < .001$), such that participants reported greater success pursuing a healthy eating goal compared to both an educational goal ($t(928) = 5.05$, $p < .001$) and a fitness goal ($t(930) = 5.63$, $p < .001$), with no significant difference between fitness and educational goals ($t(911) = .06$, $p = .948$). The effect of purchase perception on

successful goal pursuit remained significant after controlling for price and purchase timing (see appendix).

FIGURE 1: EXPERIENTIAL (VS. MATERIAL) PURCHASE PERCEPTION PREDICTED SUCCESSFUL GOAL PURSUIT ACROSS THREE GOAL DOMAINS (PILOT STUDY 2)



Discussion of Pilot Studies

These two pilot studies found that perceiving goal-related purchases as relatively more experiential (vs. material) positively predicted actual goal pursuit behavior. Frequent experiential (vs. material) fitness-related purchases predicted weekly hours spent exercising (pilot study 1), and recent experiential (vs. material) goal-related purchases predicted success in pursuing fitness, healthy eating, and educational goals (pilot study 2).

Although these studies provide initial support for our prediction that the experiential (vs. material) perception of goal-related purchases can motivate goal pursuit, they are not without limitations. For instance, causality may run in the opposite direction, such that consumers who

are more motivated to pursue their goals tend to perceive their goal-related purchases as more experiential (vs. material). Second, one could argue that the results are driven by differences in the *nature* of purchases that are readily construed as experiential (vs. material). For example, consumers may perceive purchases bounded in time, such as gym classes that need to be taken by a certain date, as more experiential, which could promote more goal-directed behavior. At the same time, however, making experiential purchases, such as buying gym memberships, does not always necessitate that consumers actually go to the gym (DellaVigna and Malmedier 2006). Thus, it is unclear whether a consumer would indeed be more likely to go to a fitness class than to use fitness gear at home to work out. Still, to address this concern that the observed effect is due to systematic differences between experiential and material purchases, our main experiments held the goal-related purchase constant and manipulated focus on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of the product.

EXPERIMENT 1A: EXPERIENTIAL FOCUS ON AN APPLE WATCH

Experiment 1A provided a causal test of our hypothesis that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product increases motivation. We recruited participants who owned and used an Apple Watch when exercising. We instructed participants to focus on either the experiential aspects (e.g., feeling of wearing it) or the material aspects (e.g., color, size) of their watch. We predicted that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their Apple Watch would increase consumers' motivation to exercise.

Method

We recruited 201 participants from MTurk who reported owning an Apple Watch and having a fitness goal. We confirmed Apple Watch ownership by asking participants to identify

the name of an icon in the Apple Watch app. We excluded responses from duplicate worker IDs, leaving a sample of 151 participants (M_{age} = 34.95, 65 female).

Participants read that "Apple Watches have many features related to people's health and fitness goals. In this survey, we are interested in how you perceive the connection between your Apple Watch and your fitness goals." We then randomly assigned participants to condition (product focus: experiential vs. material) in a between-subjects design. In the *Experiential* condition, we described an Apple Watch as something that people use over time; in the *Material* condition, we described an Apple Watch as a product that people keep over time. Participants then wrote about why their Apple Watch was primarily an experiential or material purchase.

Specifically, participants in the *Experiential* condition wrote about the experiential aspects of their Apple Watch (e.g., frequently used features, convenience of use, how it affects their life, how it feels to use). Participants in the *Material* condition wrote about the physical attributes of their Apple Watch (e.g., color, size, durability, version of their Apple Watch, type and color of a band). For example, a participant in the *Experiential* condition wrote "I like how it tracks my steps and heart rate. It's convenient to use," whereas a participant in the *Material* condition wrote "My watch color is white. I [have] a normal version and [the] size is 40mm. It is the sports type of band and it tracks health activity, communicates with friends and runs a wide range of apps. I like this watch very much. It is very useful to my health activity."[3]

We then measured participants' workout motivation using a four-item scale (α = .91; adapted from Etkin and Ratner 2012): 1. "As you were writing about your Apple Watch, how motivated were you to work out today?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 7 = much more motivated than usual), 2. "As you were writing about your Apple Watch, how motivated were

[3] We analyzed participants' open responses to our manipulation prompt in an exploratory text analysis reported before the General Discussion.

you to work out this week?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 7 = much more motivated than usual), 3. "As you were writing about your Apple Watch, how committed did you feel to your fitness goal?" (1 = no more than usual, 7 = much more than usual), and 4. "As you were writing about your Apple Watch, how did you feel about your progress toward your fitness goal?" (1 = I felt that I have made no progress, 7 = I felt that I have made a lot of progress).

As a manipulation check, participants read the definition of material and experiential purchases from the pilot studies and rated how they viewed their Apple Watch (1 = much more like a material purchase, 7 = much more like an experiential purchase). We also confirmed that participants used their Apple Watch to pursue their fitness goal (1 = I rarely use it when working out, 7 = I always use it when working out; the mean value [$M = 6.05$] was significantly higher than the scale midpoint, $t(150) = 18.22$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.48$, confirming participants frequently used their Apple Watch to pursue their fitness goal). We included a series of questions about participants' specific Apple Watch (e.g., model, purchased vs. gifted; general usage frequency outside of workouts), which did not differ by condition (see appendix). After assessing our key dependent measure of motivation, we gave participants a choice between two YouTube videos to receive a link to and between two lotteries they could enter as part of their compensation.

Results

Manipulation check. We confirmed that our manipulation significantly affected participants' perception of their Apple Watch; those in the *Experiential* condition perceived their watch as more of an experiential purchase ($M_{\text{experiential}} = 5.69$, SD = 1.56) than those in the *Material* condition ($M_{\text{material}} = 3.66$, SD = 2.14; $t(149) = 6.71$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.10$).

Motivation. As predicted, focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their Apple Watch increased participants' motivation to work out ($M_{experiential}$ = 5.37, SD = 1.20; $M_{material}$ = 4.87, SD = 1.41; $t(149) = 2.37$, $p = .019$, $d = .39$).

Discussion

Experiment 1A provided causal evidence for the results of our pilot studies. Focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their Apple Watch, a product that participants frequently use to pursue their fitness goals, increased workout motivation. This finding provides the first causal evidence that consumers can increase their motivation by adopting an experiential (vs. material) product focus.

EXPERIMENT 1B: EXPERIENTIAL FOCUS ON FITNESS EARPHONES

Experiment 1B extended the prior experiment by using a different sample (students) and a different goal-related product (fitness earphones). We examined whether focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their fitness earphones would increase students' motivation to work out. Unlike an Apple Watch, earphones are less interactive, cheaper, and arguably a more material product. As such, this experiment tested the generalizability of our effect.

Method

We recruited 240 undergraduate and graduate students during a two-week period. We excluded participants who did not have a fitness goal, leaving a final sample of 215 participants (M_{age} = 22.11, 108 females). Participants completed a Qualtrics survey on computers located in a campus lab or outside a campus gym in exchange for a $25 lottery. In addition to this, lab participants received course credit, and gym participants received a granola bar for participating.

We first instructed participants to think about the fitness earphones that they use when they exercise and to select which brand of earphones they owned. We then randomly assigned participants to condition (product focus: experiential vs. material) in a between-subjects design.

In the *Experiential* condition, participants wrote about why their fitness earphones were primarily an experiential purchase and described their experiences with their earphones (e.g., the experience of using their earphones, comfortableness of using their earphones, feeling of using their earphones, and favorite part of using their earphones). In the *Material* condition, participants wrote about why their fitness earphones were primarily a material purchase and described their physical attributes (e.g., color, general features, whether they have a brand logo, how flashy/attention grabbing they were). For example, in the *Experiential* condition, one participant wrote "They work well for what I need them for; I can listen to music and hear it," whereas in the *Material* condition, one participant wrote "White; Extremely light. Stay in my ear without falling out during exercise. No earhooks or neckband."

We measured participants' motivation to work out using a three-item scale similar to experiment 1A ($\alpha = .83$): 1. "How motivated are you for your next workout?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 7 = much more motivated than usual), 2. "How much effort will you put into your upcoming workout?" (1 = no more than usual, 7 = much more than usual), and 3. "How long do you plan to work out for during your next workout?" (1 = no longer than usual, 7 = much longer than usual). As a part of their compensation, participants were entered into a lottery for a chance to receive their choice of gift card and music playlist. Participants then completed the experiential/material manipulation check from experiment 1A (anchors were counterbalanced and re-coded such that 1 = much more like a material purchase, 7 = much more like an experiential purchase) and reported how many hours they work out in a typical week. For those

participating in the lab, we measured if they had an active fitness goal; for those recruited at the campus gym, we measured if they had worked out already (i.e., if they were entering or exiting the gym).

Results

Manipulation check. Confirming our manipulation, an ANOVA of product focus × recruitment location revealed that participants focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their fitness earphones viewed their earphones as more of an experiential (vs. material) purchase ($M_{experiential}$ = 4.32, SD = 2.22; $M_{material}$ = 3.78, SD = 2.39; $F(1, 211) = 3.45$, $p = .065$, $\mu_p^2 = .02$), with no significant effect or interaction with location (Fs $\leq$ 1.06, ps $\geq$ .305).

Motivation. An ANOVA of product focus × recruitment location on motivation revealed a significant effect of product focus. Conceptually replicating experiment 1A, participants focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their fitness earphones were more motivated to work out ($M_{experiential}$ = 4.28, SD = 1.34; $M_{material}$ = 3.86, SD = 1.59; $F(1, 211) = 5.99$, $p = .015$, $\mu_p^2 = .03$). There was no significant main effect or interaction with location (Fs $\leq$ 1.63, ps $\geq$ .203).

Discussion

Experiment 1B provided additional evidence for the causal effect of an experiential (vs. material) focus on motivation, using a different product category (fitness earphones) and sample (students). Students with a fitness goal reported greater motivation to work out when focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their fitness earphones.

EXPERIMENT 1C: MOTIVATION FROM EXPERIENTIAL FOCUS ON WORKOUT T-SHIRT

Experiment 1C had two aims. We first aimed to extend our prior findings in a preregistered experiment using another product category commonly used by consumers with a fitness goal – a workout t-shirt. We recruited participants with a fitness goal who owned a workout t-shirt and directed participants to focus on either the experiential or material aspects of their workout t-shirt. We predicted that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of one's workout t-shirt would increase motivation to work out.

Second, beyond testing the effect of product focus on motivation, we examined two alternative explanations for this effect – that adopting an experiential (vs. material) focus increases either perceived goal relevance of the product or positive emotion. One possibility is that our experiential focus manipulation, which instructed participants to think about *wearing* the product (i.e., workout t-shirt), could make the product feel more relevant to the goal, thus increasing motivation. Against this account, we expect the product to be perceived as goal relevant regardless of whether people adopt an experiential or material focus. Second, an experiential (vs. material) focus could potentially increase motivation by inducing a positive mood. Making experiential (vs. material) purchases increases happiness (Carter and Gilovich 2012), and positive mood increases motivation (Tice et al. 2007). However, we expect our effect, which occurs when holding the product itself constant, to be independent of mood. We accordingly measured goal relevance of the product and participants' mood as alternative explanations in this experiment, predicting a main effect of product focus only for motivation.

Method

We preregistered this experiment and recruited 351 participants from MTurk. Participants needed to have a fitness goal and a workout t-shirt to participate. As preregistered, we excluded

responses from duplicate worker IDs, leaving a sample of 301 participants (M_{age} = 35.92, 154 female).

We instructed participants to think about a workout t-shirt they owned and select the brand. We then randomly assigned participants to condition (product focus: experiential vs. material) in a between-subjects design. In the *Experiential* condition, participants wrote about why their workout t-shirt was primarily an experiential purchase and described the experiential aspects of their workout t-shirt (e.g., their experience of wearing the workout t-shirt, favorite part of wearing it, how they feel about wearing it, and how comfortable their workout t-shirt is to wear). In the *Material* condition, participants wrote about the physical attributes of their workout t-shirt (e.g., color/size, general features, how different it is from their other [non-fitness] clothes, and whether/where it has a brand logo). For example, a participant in the *Experiential* condition wrote "I have no issues with this t-shirt. It is a good t-shirt to exercise in. I can get very hot when working out and this t-shirt helps me to cool off. I feel good wearing this t-shirt. It suits my needs. It is a very comfortable t-shirt to wear," whereas a participant in the *Material* condition wrote "The color of the workout t-shirt is blue, and it is medium size. The t-shirt is a Nike product (Dri-FIT men's training t-shirt). It comes in different sizes based on your height. It has short sleeves. It is quite different. The material allows for easy motion in any direction without the fear of tears; the logo is around the chest."

We assessed fitness motivation using the four-item scale from experiment 1A (α = .89). As a manipulation check, participants read the definition of material and experiential purchases from prior experiments (anchors were counterbalanced and re-coded such that 1 = much more like a material purchase, 7 = much more like an experiential purchase). Lastly, we measured product goal relevance, "To what extent do you think your workout t-shirt is related to the

pursuit of your fitness goal?" (1 = not at all related, 7 = very much related) and participants' mood (1 = very negative, 7 = very positive). Additional items preregistered as exploratory are reported in the appendix.

Results

Manipulation check. We first confirmed that our manipulation significantly affected participants' perception of their workout t-shirt; participants in the experiential (vs. material) condition perceived their t-shirt as more of an experiential purchase ($M_{experiential}$ = 4.28, SD = 2.04; $M_{material}$ = 3.46, SD = 2.04; $t(299) = 3.51$, $p < .001$, $d = .40$).

Motivation. As predicted, we found a significant effect of product focus on motivation; focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a workout t-shirt increased participants' motivation to work out ($M_{experiential}$ = 5.09, SD = 1.38; $M_{material}$ = 4.72, SD = 1.50; $t(299) = 2.26$, $p = .025$, $d = .26$).

Alternative explanations. Examining the effect of condition on perceived goal relevance of the product revealed a non-significant effect of product focus ($M_{experiential}$ = 5.01, SD = 1.54; $M_{material}$ = 5.12, SD = 1.41; $t(299) = .65$, $p = .516$, $d = .07$). In both the experiential and material conditions, participants rated the product as significantly related to their fitness goal (i.e., greater than the scale midpoint of 4; ts ≥ 8.17, ps $< .001$). Additionally, there was no significant effect of product focus on participants' mood ($M_{experiential}$ = 5.74, SD = 1.27; $M_{material}$ = 5.69, SD = 1.18; $t(299) = .38$, $p = .704$, $d = .04$).

Discussion

Consistent with our previous experiments, experiment 1C revealed that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a workout t-shirt increased consumers' motivation to work out. We also addressed two potential alternative explanations for this effect, that an experiential

focus increases perceived goal relevance of the product or that focusing on experiential (vs. material) elements is motivating because it improves participants' mood. An experiential focus increased motivation to work out independent of goal relevance or mood.

So far, we found that adopting an experiential (vs. material) focus increases motivation when thinking about a variety of fitness products (i.e., Apple Watch, fitness earphones, and a workout t-shirt). Our next set of experiments examined the process underlying this effect, testing whether goal-identity salience drives the effect of product focus on motivation.

EXPERIMENT 2: MEDIATION THROUGH GOAL-IDENTITY SALIENCE

Experiment 2 examined our proposed mechanism, such that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product increases motivation through goal-identity salience. Identity is comprised of one's experiences (Swann and Bosson 2010), such that consumers incorporate products more into their self-concept when adopting an experiential (vs. material) focus (Carter and Gilovich 2012). We accordingly predicted that focusing on the experience of wearing (vs. material functionality of) a fitness product would increase the salience of consumers' fitness identity, such that their fitness identity would be more accessible (e.g., their identity as an "exerciser" is top of mind). Then, because consumers are motivated to behave in line with activated identities (Mandel 2003; Puntoni et al. 2011; Zhang and Khare 2009), by increasing identity salience, an experiential focus would increase motivation to pursue a fitness goal. In this experiment, we manipulated product focus as in experiments 1A-1C and measured the salience of consumers' fitness identity. We predicted that goal-identity salience would mediate the positive effect of an experiential (vs. material) product focus on motivation.

In addition, we aimed to address another potential explanation for our effect beyond those tested in experiment 1C. One possibility in our prior experiments is that focusing on the experiential aspects of a goal-related product increases motivation by increasing the perceived goal *instrumentality* of the product (Ferguson and Bargh 2004; Fishbach et al. 2010). That is, focusing on the experience of wearing (vs. look and feel) of a fitness product might lead consumers to perceive the product as actually more effective for achieving their goal. However, because an experiential (vs. material) focus does not change the objective features of the product, we expected participants to perceive the product as similarly instrumental for goal pursuit across conditions. To test this, we measured perceived instrumentality, anticipating that the effect of product focus on motivation is mediated by goal-identity salience, independent of perceived instrumentality of the product for the goal.

Method

We preregistered this experiment and recruited a total of 292 participants from MTurk. Participants needed to have a fitness goal and a workout t-shirt to participate. As preregistered, we excluded responses from duplicate worker IDs, leaving a final sample of 279 participants (M_{age} = 38.21, 112 female). This experiment was a conceptual replication of an earlier preregistered experiment (supplemental experiment 1) reported in the appendix.

Participants first recalled a workout t-shirt and indicated the t-shirt's brand. We then randomly assigned participants to condition (product focus: experiential vs. material) in a between-subjects design. Participants wrote about either the experiential or material aspects of their workout t-shirt as in experiment 1C. We measured workout motivation using a single item scale: "As you were writing about your workout t-shirt, how motivated were you to work out?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 7 = much more motivated than usual). We next measured our

key mediator, fitness identity salience, "When writing about your workout t-shirt, to what extent did you identify as an athletic person?" (1 = not at all, 7 = very much; adjusted from Montreuil and Bourhis 2001). We randomized the presentation order of these two items.

Lastly, we measured participants' perception of goal instrumentality of the workout t-shirt using a two-item scale (r = .83; Touré-Tillery and Fishbach 2018): "How effective do you think your workout t-shirt is in working toward your fitness goal?" and "How useful do you think your workout t-shirt is in working toward your fitness goal?" (1 = not effective/useful at all, 7 = very effective/useful).

Results

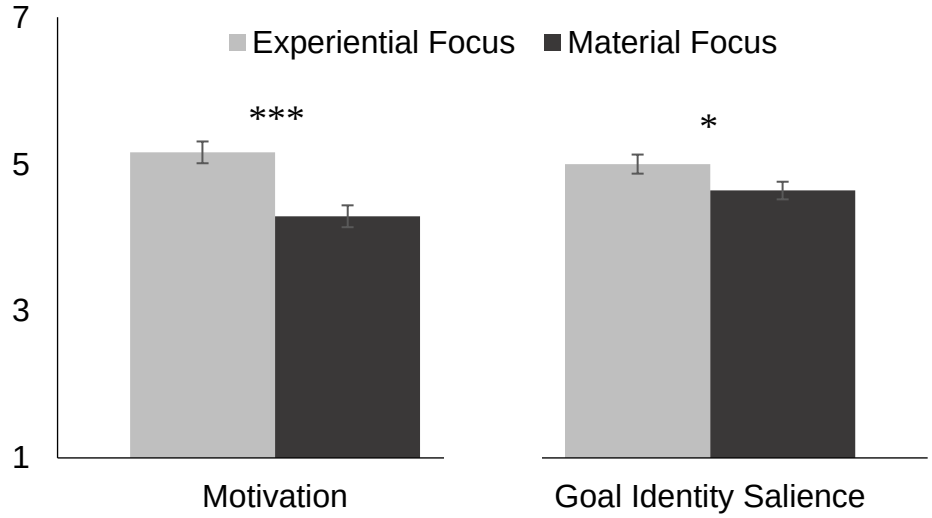
An experiential (vs. material) focus significantly increased participants' motivation to work out ($M_{experiential}$ = 5.16, SD = 1.72; $M_{material}$ = 4.29, SD = 1.79; $t(277) = 4.14$, $p < .001$, d = .50) and increased the salience of consumers' fitness identity ($M_{experiential}$ = 5.00, SD = 1.48; $M_{material}$ = 4.64, SD = 1.45; $t(277) = 2.06$, $p = .040$, d = .25; figure 2). As predicted, there was no significant effect of product focus on perceived instrumentality of the workout t-shirt ($M_{experiential}$ = 5.28, SD = 1.37; $M_{material}$ = 5.03, SD = 1.50; $t(277) = 1.43$, $p = .154$, d = .17).

A preregistered mediation analysis revealed a significant indirect effect in line with our proposed hypothesis; increased fitness identity salience significantly mediated the effect of product focus on motivation ($B_{indirect}$ = .13, SE = .06, $CI_{95\%}$ = [.01, .26]; PROCESS model 4; Hayes 2013; 5,000 bootstrap samples). We also conducted an exploratory (non-preregistered) analysis, demonstrating that perceived goal instrumentality of the workout t-shirt did not mediate the effect of product focus on motivation ($B_{indirect}$ = .08, SE = .06, 95% CI = [-.03, .20]).

Discussion

Experiment 2 replicated our previous results, demonstrating that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product increases motivation. Furthermore, this experiment ruled out an alternative account based on perceived product instrumentality. Irrespective of whether participants focused on the experiential or material aspects of their workout t-shirt, they perceived their t-shirt as similarly instrumental in pursuing their fitness goal.

FIGURE 2: EFFECT OF PRODUCT FOCUS ON MOTIVATION AND GOAL-IDENTITY SALIENCE (EXPERIMENT 2)



Note. * $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$. Bars indicate ± 1 SEM.

In addition to ruling out this alternative account, this experiment supports our proposed process. Focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a workout t-shirt increased motivation by increasing the salience of consumers' fitness identity. As another test of this process, we report a preregistered conceptual replication of these results (supplemental experiment 1 reported in the appendix). This supplemental experiment again demonstrated mediation through goal-identity salience with a new measure of identity salience. In our next two experiments, we provide evidence for this process through moderation.

EXPERIMENT 3: MODERATION BY GOAL-IDENTITY SALIENCE

Experiment 2 demonstrated that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product increases motivation by increasing the salience of consumers' goal-relevant identity. To further test this identity salience mechanism, experiment 3 examined moderation by goal-identity salience. We theorized that if an experiential (vs. material) product focus increases motivation by increasing the salience of a particular goal-identity, this effect should be mitigated when the relevant goal-identity has already been activated by another situational cue.

To test this, experiment 3 manipulated the *momentary salience* of consumers' fitness goal-identity by instructing participants to reflect on their fitness goal-identity or on their social goal-identity. We expected that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a workout-t shirt would increase workout motivation when one's fitness identity is less salient, replicating our prior results, but, that this effect would be mitigated when one's fitness identity is already salient.

Method

We preregistered this experiment and recruited 909 participants from MTurk. As preregistered, we excluded participants who did not have both a fitness and relationship goal. We also excluded responses from duplicate worker IDs, leaving a sample of 650 participants (M_{age} = 38.30, 353 female).

Participants were randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (product focus: experiential vs. material) × 2 (fitness identity salience: high vs. low) between-subjects design. We asked participants to write about either the experiential or material aspects of their workout t-shirt as in experiments 1C and 2.

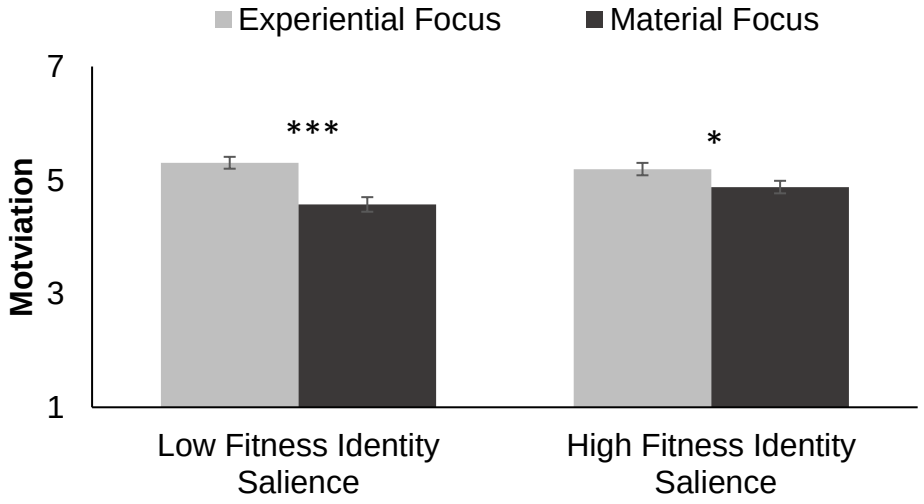
We next manipulated the salience of participants' fitness-related identity (adjusted from Summers, Smith, and Reczek 2016). Specifically, in the *High fitness-identity salience* condition, we increased the salience of consumers' fitness identity by asking them "How does exercise, fitness, and/or athleticism relate to your identity? What does it mean to you to be a fit person or to be someone who exercises? In what situations do you most feel that you are a "fit" or "athletic" person? Concentrate on your identity in relation to your fitness goals and write a few sentences below." In the *Low fitness-identity salience* condition, we decreased the salience of consumers' fitness identity by activating their identity related to their social relationships. Specifically, we asked participants in this condition, "How does social connection, relationships, friendships, and/or love relate to your identity? What does it mean to you to be a good friend/family member or to be someone who has good relationships with others? In what situations do you most feel that you are a good friend/family member? Concentrate on your identity in relation to your relationship goals and write a few sentences below." We then measured participants' motivation to work out: "How motivated are you to work out?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 7 = much more motivated than usual).

Results

We conducted an ANOVA of product focus × fitness identity salience on motivation, which revealed the predicted interaction ($F(1, 646) = 3.34$, $p = .068$, $\mu_p^2 = .01$; figure 3). Replicating our prior results, an experiential (vs. material) focus increased participants' motivation to work out when their fitness-related identity was less salient ($M_{experiential} = 5.31$, SD = 1.30; $M_{material} = 4.57$, SD = 1.67; $F(1, 646) = 20.47$, $p < .001$, $\mu_p^2 = .03$). However, this effect was mitigated when participants' fitness-related identity was more salient ($M_{experiential} = 5.19$, SD = 1.41; $M_{material} = 4.88$, SD = 1.41; $F(1, 646) = 3.89$, $p = .049$, $\mu_p^2 = .01$).

Decomposing the interaction another way, participants were marginally more motivated to work out in the *Material* condition when their fitness identity was more (vs. less) salient (M_{high} = 4.88, SD = 1.41; M_{low} = 4.57, SD = 1.67; $F(1, 646) = 3.66$, $p = .056$, $\mu_p^2 = .01$). However, this effect was mitigated in the *Experiential* condition, such that participants were similarly motivated to work out regardless of whether they had been prompted to focus on their fitness identity (M_{high} = 5.19, SD = 1.41) or relationship identity (M_{low} = 5.31, SD = 1.30; $F(1, 646)$ = .47, $p = .495$, $\mu_p^2 < .01$). This result further corroborates our theory that an experiential focus functions as a situational cue that activates people' goal relevant identity; when one's identity related to fitness is already activate, these is no subsequent effect of product focus on motivation.

FIGURE 3: INTERACTION BETWEEN PRODUCT FOCUS AND IDENTITY SALIENCE (EXPERIMENT 3)



Note. *$p < .05$, ***$p < .001$. Bars indicate ± 1 SEM.

Discussion

Experiment 3 provided additional evidence for our underlying process by examining moderation by temporal salience of consumers' goal relevant identity. Manipulating the salience of people's fitness identity by instructing them to focus on their fitness (vs. relationship) identity moderated the effect of product focus on motivation. Specifically, an experiential (vs. material)

product focus was motivating for those whose fitness identity was less salient; however, the effect of product focus on workout motivation attenuated for those whose fitness identity was already salient.

EXPERIMENT 4: MODERATION BY GOAL-IDENTITY CENTRALITY

Beyond examining moderation by manipulating the temporal salience of a goal-identity as in experiment 3, experiment 4 examined moderation by chronic centrality of a goal-identity. Highly central goals have a stable and enduring association with one's identity (Deshpandé et al. 1986), and therefore situational cues are less likely to influence identity salience for such goals (Aquino et al. 2009). We accordingly reasoned that an experiential focus, which operates by activating a relevant goal-identity, would be less likely to increase motivation for a more identity central goal.

To test this prediction, we utilized a naturally occurring manipulation of goal-identity centrality: academic versus fitness goals for students (Gamlin and Labroo 2018; Markus and Nurius 1986; Markus and Wurf 1987; Touré-Tillery and Fishbach 2015). We confirmed that students from our sample with both an academic goal and a fitness goal felt that their academic goal was more central to their identity ($M_{\text{academic}} = 5.67$, SD = 1.01 vs. $M_{\text{fitness}} = 4.59$, SD = 1.40; $t(205) = 9.76$, $p < .001$, $d = .68$; see supplemental experiment 2 in appendix). We assigned participants to either an experiential or material condition and measured their motivation to pursue their fitness (*academic*) goals in a within-subjects design after they focused on a fitness (*academic*) related product. We predicted that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a fitness product would increase workout motivation, given that a fitness goal is less central to students' identity. However, we predicted that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects

of an academic product would have a weaker effect on academic motivation, given that an academic identity is already a core component of students' sense of self in our sample.

Method

We preregistered this experiment and recruited 205 undergraduate and graduate students from an online participant pool at a Northeastern university during one week. As preregistered, we excluded participants who did not hold an academic and fitness goal, leaving 175 participants (M_{age} = 21.89, 126 female). This experiment was a preregistered replication of supplemental experiment 2 (see appendix).

We randomly assigned participants to condition in a 2 (product focus: experiential vs. material; between-subjects) × 2 (goal-identity centrality: high [academic goal] vs. low [fitness goal]; within-subject) mixed model design. We relied on a naturally occurring manipulation of goal-identity centrality by using two different goal domains: an academic goal, which we confirmed was chronically central to students' identity, and a fitness goal, which was relatively less central to students' identity.

We randomly assigned participants to focus on either the experiential or material aspects of two different goal-related products, with the goal domains counterbalanced. In the first stage, participants wrote about the experiential (vs. material) features of an academic [*fitness*] related product and answered questions about their motivation to pursue their academic [*fitness*] goal. In the second stage, they wrote about the experiential (vs. material) features of a fitness [*academic*] related product and answered questions about their motivation to pursue their fitness [*academic*] goal (there was no effect of counterbalancing the order of academic vs. fitness goal).

For an academic goal-related product, we instructed participants to think about their laptop. We selected this as an academic product based on discussions with undergraduate

students from the target population who indicated viewing their laptop as an academic-related product. We confirmed this in a pre-test, asking students from the same sample "To what extent is your laptop related to your academic goals?" (1 = not at all, 7 = very much), in which students indicated perceiving their laptop as highly related to their academic goals (M = 6.12, SD = 1.42, which significantly differed from scale midpoint [4]; $t(48) = 10.44$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.49$).

In the *Experiential* condition, participants read that "A laptop is a product that you can use over time to pursue your academic goals." Participants in the *Experiential* condition explained why their laptop was primarily an experiential purchase (i.e., general features of their laptop, comfortableness of using their laptop, what they most like about using their laptop, their experience of using the laptop). In the *Material* condition, participants read that "A laptop is a product that you can keep over time to pursue your academic goals." Participants in the *Material* condition explained why their laptop was primarily a material purchase (e.g., the general appearance of their laptop, how flashy/attention grabbing their laptop is, what they most like about owning their laptop, other material purchases made in conjunction with their laptop). After completing the product focus manipulation for an academic-related product, we measured academic motivation: "As you were writing about your laptop, how motivated were you to pursue your academic goals?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 7 = much more motivated than usual).

Participants then completed the same product focus manipulation (i.e., *Experiential* vs. *Material* focus) for a fitness-related product (i.e., workout t-shirt). Depending on condition, participants wrote about either the experiential or material aspects of their workout t-shirt as in prior experiments. Specifically, participants in the *Experiential* condition explained why their workout t-shirt was primarily an experiential purchase (e.g., experience of wearing their workout

t-shirt, favorite part of wearing it, how they feel about wearing it, and how comfortable their workout t-shirt is to wear); participants in the *Material* condition explained why their workout t-shirt was primarily a material purchase (e.g., color/size, general features, how different it is from their other [non-fitness] clothes, and whether/where it has a brand logo). We measured fitness motivation: "As you were writing about your workout t-shirt, how motivated were you to pursue your fitness goals?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 7 = much more motivated than usual).

Results

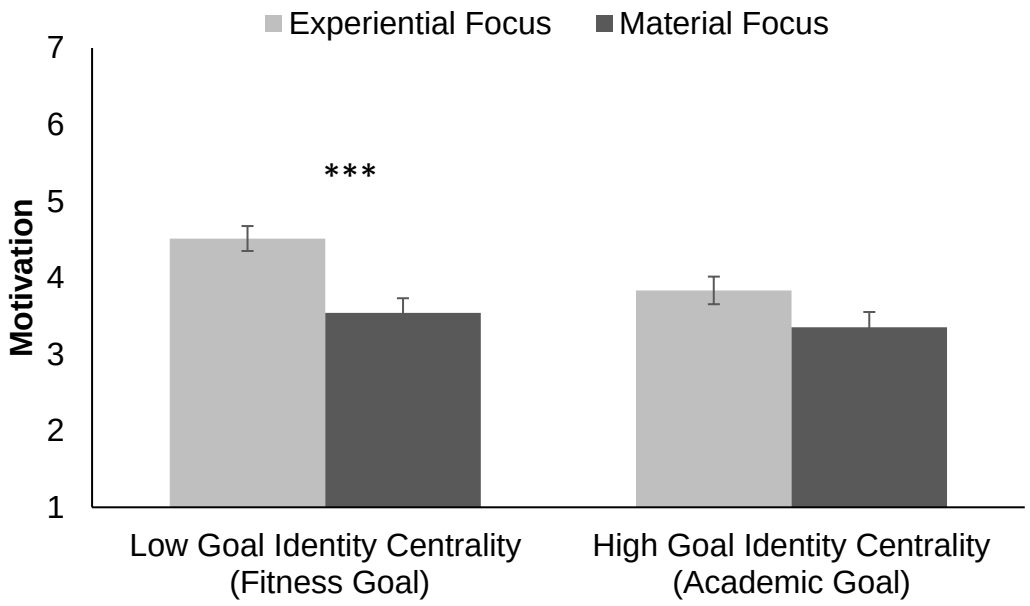
We conducted a repeated measures ANOVA to examine the interaction between product focus and goal-identity centrality on motivation ($F(1, 173) = 3.63$, $p = .058$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$; figure 4). As predicted, an experiential (vs. material) focus increased participants' motivation to pursue a fitness goal ($M_{experiential} = 4.51$, SD = 1.55; $M_{material} = 3.54$, SD = 1.75; $F(1, 173) = 15.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$), with a marginal effect of product focus on motivation to pursue an academic goal ($M_{experiential} = 3.83$, SD = 1.71; $M_{material} = 3.35$, SD = 1.83; $F(1, 173) = 3.22$, $p = .074$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$).[4] Thus, in line with our theory that product focus operates by increasing the salience of a goal-relevant identity, the effect of product focus was mitigated for a goal that is chronically accessible and an enduring part of people's identity.

This analysis further revealed a significant main effect of product focus ($M_{experiential} = 4.17$; $M_{material} = 3.45$; $F(1, 173) = 10.44$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$) and goal-identity centrality ($M_{fitness} = 4.04$, SD = 1.71; $M_{academic} = 3.60$, SD = 1.78; $F(1, 173) = 11.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$). This main effect of goal-identity centrality may seem surprising given that people are motivated to pursue goals that they identify more with (Koestner et al. 2008, 2015; Verplanken and Holland 2002).

[4] We replicated these results in an earlier experiment (supplemental experiment 2) reported in the appendix. This supplemental experiment revealed a significant interaction between product focus and goal-identity centrality ($F(1, 204) = 4.14$, $p = .043$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). Replicating experiment 4, an experiential (vs. material) focus increased baseline motivation to pursue a fitness goal ($M_{experiential} = 4.10$, SD = 2.04; $M_{material} = 3.44$, SD = 1.84; $F(1, 204) = 5.90$, $p = .016$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$), which significantly was mitigated for an academic goal ($M_{experiential} = 3.50$, SD = 1.95; $M_{material} = 3.29$, SD = 1.99; $F(1, 204) = .54$, $p = .463$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$).

However, note that we measured motivation relative to baseline (i.e., the extent to which participants were *more motivated than usual*). Students' reference point for baseline academic motivation is likely to be higher than their baseline for fitness motivation, yet our scale does not capture what this baseline motivation is; we instead capture whether motivation increases relative to the baseline reference point. Central to our theory, we found a significant interaction effect such that the effect of experiential (vs. material) focus was stronger for a goal that is less (vs. more) central to one's identity. In combination with experiments 2-3, this finding suggests that an experiential focus operates in part by activating a goal relevant identity.

FIGURE 4: INTERACTION BETWEEN PRODUCT FOCUS AND GOAL-IDENTITY CENTRALITY (EXPERIMENT 4)



Note. *** $p < .001$. Bars indicate ± 1 SEM.

Discussion

Experiment 4 demonstrated that the effect of product focus on motivation was stronger for a goal that is less chronically associated with people's identity. Specifically, an experiential (vs. material) focus significantly increased students' motivation to pursue a fitness goal, a goal

that is less central to student's identity; however, this effect was mitigated when the goal was highly central to students' identity (i.e., academic goal). Thus, in line with our theory, when a goal is a stable and accessible part of one's identity, adopting an experiential (vs. material) focus is less likely to shift the accessibility of the goal-identity to increase motivation. Coupled with experiments 2-3, these results provide support for our prediction that motivation from an experiential (vs. material) product focus is driven by identity salience.

EXPERIMENT 5: PERSISTENCE IN A MULTI-DAY FITNESS CHALLENGE

Our final experiment examined how focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product affects actual persistence. To test this, we recruited participants for a multi-day fitness challenge. We instructed participants to focus on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their fitness related products each day of their fitness challenge and measured actual workout behavior and time spent exercising. We expected that participants encouraged to adopt an experiential (vs. material) focus would 1) report greater motivation to pursue their fitness goals as in our previous studies, 2) spend more time working out during the fitness challenge, and 3) be more likely to complete the fitness challenge.

Method

We posted this survey to an online participant pool at a Northeastern university. A total of 153 participants responded to our survey. We excluded participants who did not have a fitness goal, leaving a sample of 95 participants (M_{age} = 23.43; 75 female).

We asked participants to think about their fitness earphones and to select the brand that they owned. We then randomly assigned participants to condition (product focus: experiential vs. material) in a between-subjects design. We instructed participants to focus on and write about

either the experiential or material aspects of their fitness earphones as in experiment 1B. We then measured, "How motivated are you to work out?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 9 = much more motivated than usual).

Participants then learned that we were piloting a fitness challenge they could sign up for in which they would receive fitness tips to motivate themselves to exercise. We aimed to model this challenge after other fitness challenges conducted by a health and wellness organization at this university. We informed participants that the fitness challenge would last a maximum of nine days and measured how many days of the challenge participants wanted to sign up for (range: 0 to 9 days). We described the challenge as a curated set of fitness tips, workouts, and playlists that would be customized to participants' interests and ability. As part of this cover story, we measured participants' preference for recommended workouts (1 = maintain my current workout intensity, 9 = greatly increase my workout intensity) and for curated playlists (1 = 110 beats per minute [BPM] Playlist, 9 = 190 BPM Playlist).

We confirmed that participants had a fitness goal and collected contact information in order to send them daily emails during the challenge. Across conditions, participants signed up for a similar number of days ($M_{\text{experiential}}$ = 6.22, SD = 3.15; M_{material} = 5.76, SD = 3.08; $t(93)$ = .72, p = .471, d = .15), likely because the nine-day challenge served as an anchor (indeed, the modal response was to sign up for the full nine days of the challenge). Importantly, because participants received emails each day of the challenge they signed up for, this result confirms that participants received a similar number of emails about the challenge across conditions.

During the fitness challenge, we emailed participants fitness tips each day. Depending on condition, this email reminded participants to focus on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their workout gear, such as their fitness earphones, to maintain their workout motivation. For

each day of the challenge that participants signed up for, we asked 1) whether they worked out (yes/no) and 2) how long they worked out for (in minutes). These measures correspond to our two key variables of interest: successful completion of the fitness challenge (i.e., whether participants exercised for the full number of days of the challenge they planned to complete) and average minutes spent working out during the challenge (i.e., a repeated measure).[5] We note that these two measures tap different consequences that could result from increased motivation to work out. Successful completion of the fitness challenge captures whether participants worked out for the number of days they pre-committed to; average minutes spent exercising during the challenge captures how long participants persisted in their workout on days they exercised.

Results

Motivation. Consistent with previous experiments, participants focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their fitness earphones reported greater motivation to work out ($M_{\text{experiential}}$ = 6.44, SD = 2.13; M_{material} = 5.18, SD = 2.35; $t(93) = 2.75$, $p = .007$, $d = .56$).

Persistence in fitness challenge. We examined participants' actual workout behavior during the fitness challenge using two measures: average time spent working out each day of the challenge and successful completion of the fitness challenge (i.e., whether participants exercised for the full number of days of the challenge they planned to complete).

We first examined the average minutes that participants spent working out during the fitness challenge. As predicted, participants focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their fitness related products spent more time working out during the fitness challenge. We report raw and log-transformed mean values by condition ($M_{\text{experiential}}$ = 43.06 minutes, SD = 25.32;

[5] We include a repeated measure variable as one of the main variables of interest given that we expected to have some attrition in the fitness survey. Indeed, out of the participants who provided contact information for the fitness challenge (n = 77), 57% responded to our daily fitness challenge questions at least once (attrition rates did not differ by condition; $\chi^2(1, N = 77) = .44$, $p = .510$).

$M_{material}$ = 27.45 minutes, SD = 19.18; $t(42) = 2.30$, $p = .026$, $d = .69$; log-transformed: $M_{experiential}$ = 3.63, SD = .58; $M_{material}$ = 2.91, SD = 1.28; $t(42) = 2.43$, $p = .019$, $d = .73$).

We next analyzed successful completion of the fitness challenge, that is, the percent of participants who worked out for the number of days they pre-committed to. This analysis revealed that significantly more participants successfully completed the fitness challenge in the *Experiential* condition (45.5%) compared with the *Material* condition (9.1%; $\chi^2(1, N = 44) = 7.33$, $p = .007$, $\phi = .41$). That is, about three times more participants in the *Experiential* (vs. *Material*) condition worked out for the full number of days that they had signed up for.

Discussion

Experiment 5 replicated our previous findings, demonstrating that consumers with a fitness goal who focused on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their fitness products were more motivated to work out. More importantly, an experiential focus affected actual persistence in a fitness challenge. Those focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their fitness products during a multi-day challenge spent about twice as much time working out and were about three times more likely to complete the challenge successfully. In combination with our pilot studies, experiment 5 demonstrates that adopting an experiential (vs. material) focus has real consequences for consumers' behavior, increasing their actual goal pursuit.

EXPLORATORY TEXT-ANALYSIS

We propose that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product is motivating because it activates consumers' goal-relevant identity. In line with this prediction, we reasoned that participants adopting an experiential (vs. material) focus may use more self-referencing language (i.e., first-person singular pronouns) when responding to our

manipulation prompt, as the use of first-person pronouns reflects a focus on the self and one's identity (Barasch and Berger 2014; Davis and Brock 1978).

To explore this possibility, we conducted a text-based content analysis of participants' open responses to our writing prompt manipulation using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count program (LIWC; Pennebaker et al. 2015). Specifically, we tested whether the proportion of first-person singular pronouns (e.g., "I, my, mine") varied by product focus manipulation (experiential vs. material). We used participants' open responses to our experiential (vs. material) product focus prompt in experiments 1A-5 and supplemental experiments 1-2 for the conditions in which we expected product focus to increase motivation.[6] In line with our prediction, across all experiments, we found that participants who adopted an experiential (vs. material) focus used a significantly greater percentage of first-person pronouns (table 2).

TABLE 2. PROPORTION OF FIRST-PERSON PRONOUN USAGE ACROSS EXPERIMENTS

Experiment	% of "first person" pronouns		*t*-test	Correlation with motivation
	Experiential	Material		
1A	10.22%	4.76%	$t(149) = 5.47$, $p < .001$, $d = .89$	.04
1B	6.80%	1.06%	$t(213) = 8.77$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.20$	.15*
1C	9.45%	1.89%	$t(299) = 14.50$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.67$	.06
2	10.02%	1.92%	$t(277) = 15.95$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.91$	.18**
3	10.25%	2.19%	$t(320) = 19.42$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.17$	.12*
4	7.91%	1.93%	$t(173) = 9.49$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.44$	.18*
5	9.96%	1.04%	$t(93) = 9.22$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.89$	.25*
Supp Exp 1	9.01%	1.86%	$t(398) = 15.74$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.57$	.18***
Supp Exp 2	8.03%	1.79%	$t(204) = 11.24$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.57$	.10

NOTE. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Supp Exp1= supplemental experiment 1, Supp Exp2 = supplemental experiment 2

We further examined whether the increased use of first-person pronouns predicted greater motivation to pursue the relevant goal. If first-person pronouns serve as a proxy for goal-identity salience, we reasoned they may also predict motivation, similar to our identity salience measure in experiment 2. Indeed, across all experiments, the use of first-person pronouns was positively

[6] For experiments assessing moderation (i.e., experiments 3, 4, and supplemental experiment 2), we included conditions in which we predicted a significant simple effect of product focus on motivation.

correlated with motivation, which reached statistical significance in six of out of our nine experiments (table 2). This finding suggests that those who included more first-person pronouns in their description of a goal-related product were more motivated to work out.

To examine the relationship between our product focus manipulation, participants' use of first-person pronouns in their responses to our manipulation prompt, and their motivation to work out, we conducted a mediation analysis. We found that the usage of first-person pronouns significantly mediated the effect of experiential (vs. material) product focus on motivation across experiments ($B_{\text{indirect}} = .08$, SE = .03, $CI_{95\%} = [.02, .13]$). These results provide additional support for our proposed process that an experiential (vs. material) focus increases motivation through goal-identity salience.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research is the first to document an experiential advantage in goal pursuit. Perceiving one's fitness-related purchases as more experiential (vs. material) positively predicted actual hours spent exercising (pilot study 1), and perceiving goal-related products as more experiential (vs. material) increased success in pursuing relevant fitness, educational, and healthy eating goal (pilot study 2). Moving to controlled experiments that held the goal-related product constant, we found that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product increased motivation (experiments 1A-5). This effect replicated across different product categories ranging in price and interactivity (i.e., Apple Watch, fitness earphones, workout t-shirt).

Beyond documenting the motivating effect of focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of goal-related products, we also examined the psychological mechanism underlying this effect: goal-identity salience. An experiential (vs. material) focus increased motivation by

activating consumers' relevant goal-identity. For example, focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their workout t-shirt increased the salience of consumers' fitness identity, which increased their workout motivation (experiment 2). Consistent with this identity salience account, increasing the salience of the relevant identity, independent of product focus, moderated the effect of product focus on motivation (experiment 3). Specifically, focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a fitness product increased motivation to work out among those whose fitness identity was currently less salient, with a weaker effect among those whose fitness identity was currently more salient. Moreover, the effect of product focus on motivation was moderated by centrality of a goal to one's identity (experiment 4). Adopting an experiential (vs. material) focus was more effective at motivating pursuit of a goal that was less central to people's identity (i.e., a fitness goal for students) than pursuit of a goal that was more central to people's identity (i.e., an academic goal for students).

Furthermore, we tested for several alternative explanations for this effect. First, one could argue that an experiential (vs. material) focus is more motivating because it makes people happier (Carter and Gilovich 2012). Against this account, we found no effect of product focus on mood (experiment 1C). Second, an experiential (vs. material) focus did not influence perceived goal relevance of the product (experiment 1C) or perceived instrumentality of the product (experiment 2), suggesting that this effect does not operate by making the goal-related product seem more useful or effective for achieving the goal.

Lastly, our research demonstrates consequences of an experiential (vs. material) focus for actual behavior (experiment 5). Focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of fitness-related products led people to work out longer during a multi-day fitness challenge as well as be more likely to successfully complete the full challenge. In combination with our pilot studies

suggesting that perceiving one's purchases as more experiential (vs. material) is associated with increased goal-directed behavior, we demonstrate real motivational benefits of our findings for consumers.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this research advances the literature on consumer goal pursuit. Consumer behavior is goal-directed, and prior research has demonstrated how goal activation affects consumers' choices (e.g., van Osselaer and Janiszewski 2012; Salerno et al. 2014). Thus, one contribution of the current research is to build out the opposite causal direction, identifying how purchases themselves shape consumers' goal pursuit, in line with other research demonstrating that goal-related products affect motivation by serving as means to goal attainment (Etkin and Ratner 2012; Kopetz et al. 2012). Our research suggests that means are more motivating when they are perceived as more experiential (vs. material).

Second, we advance research on the distinction between material versus experiential purchases (Carter and Gilovich 2010, 2012; Gilovich and Gallo 2020; Gilovich et al. 2015; Nicolao et al. 2009; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003). Prior work has documented negative consequences of materialism for well-being and social connection (Pieters 2013) as well as positive consequences of experiential (vs. material) purchases for happiness (Carter and Gilovich 2012), well-being (Carter and Gilovich 2010; Van Boven and Gilovich 2003), and reduced regret (Rosenzweig and Gilovich 2012). We advance this literature by identifying a novel benefit of an experiential (vs. material) focus for goal directed behavior. Whereas prior research examined how goals affect preference for experiential (vs. material) purchases (Bastos and Brucks 2017; Kim et al. 2016; Tully et al. 2015), or how people make inferences about others' motives based

on their prior purchases (Van Boven et al. 2010), we are the first to demonstrate that the experiential-material purchase distinction matters for motivation.

Third, in establishing our causal mechanism for why an experiential (vs. material) focus increases motivation, we contribute to the literature on identity and goal pursuit. Specifically, we connect research on purchase type and identity (Carter and Gilovich 2012) with research on identity and motivation (Oyserman 2009; Oyserman et al. 2017), demonstrating how focusing on the different aspects of a goal-related product can influence consumers' self-perception, identity, and motivation. We demonstrate that focusing on the experiential aspects of a goal-related product increases the salience of consumers' goal-relevant identity, using explicit measures of identity salience (i.e., scale measures), as well as implicit measures that serve as a proxy for identity (i.e., use of self-referencing language). We thus contribute to the literature on consumer identity, which examined how activating consumer's identity can influence, among other things, purchase decisions (Reed 2004) and decisions involving risk (Mandel 2003; Puntoni et al. 2011), as well as how identity threat shapes purchase decisions (White et al. 2012). We demonstrate that product focus can activate goal relevant identities to increase goal-directed motivation.

Managerial Implications

Practically, the current research offers substantive implications for both consumers and managers. Despite consumers' growing investment in self-improvement goals (LaRosa 2018; Schroeder 2018), consumers often struggle to attain their goals. Our findings propose a simple intervention that consumers can leverage to increase their motivation with no cost: attending to the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their goal-related purchases.

Our findings are particularly informative for consumers, given that many consumers seem unaware of the motivational benefit of perceiving their goal-related products as

experiential. For example, in a pilot study, we examined consumers' intuitions for what type of purchase they would make to motivate themselves. Participants were significantly more likely to indicate making a purchase they perceived as more material (68.9%) than one they perceived as more experiential (28.9%; $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 27.24$, $p < .001$), with 2.2% indicating the purchase they were considering did not fall into either category (see appendix for full details). It is noteworthy that about two times as many participants perceived a material purchase as more motivating than an experiential one, especially given our findings that focusing on the experiential aspects of goal-related products is actually more motivating. This highlights a gap between consumers' intuitions for what will motivate them and what is actually more motivating. Interestingly, in this pilot study, some participants wrote making similar purchases to motivate themselves (e.g., buy a wearable fitness devices), but perceived these purchases differently (i.e., as experiential vs. material). This pattern underscores the fact that the same product can be perceived as experiential or material, suggesting the broad applicability of our intervention: Consumers can readily adopt an experiential focus for many goal-related products, as these products often share both experiential and material qualities.

Lastly, managers who market products related to goals may benefit from our findings. Marketing messages that highlight the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product may help consumers maintain motivation for their goals and possibly invoke frequent usage of the product. This could potentially spill over to a stronger endorsement of the product and/or brand as well. The experiential positioning of a goal-related product may be particularly useful for companies that offer goal-related products based on a subscription model; an experiential (vs. material) positioning may help these companies maintain customers' engagement with their products and minimize customer churn.

Avenues for Future Research

This research is the first to examine how an experiential focus affects goal pursuit, opening several promising areas for additional research on the intersection of product focus, motivation, and identity. First, additional research can further explore factors affecting the effect of an experiential focus on motivation. Whereas we moderated the effect of product focus on motivation by manipulating goal-identity salience and goal centrality, factors related to the product itself, or to the experience the product evokes when adopting an experiential focus, could strengthen or weaken this effect. Some purchases, such as memorabilia, are seen as "collectable experiences" (Belk 1995; Keinan and Kivetz 2010). Souvenirs and memorabilia may serve to increase motivation regardless of an experiential or material focus, given that these purchases make experiences more tangible. Indeed, we found some evidence for this in an initial study of participants who had completed a fitness event in which they received a race finisher's souvenir t-shirt. We found a significant interaction between product focus (experiential vs. material) and product type (general workout t-shirt vs. souvenir workout t-shirt; $F(1, 443) = 5.35$, $p = .021$, $\mu_p^2 = .01$) such that participants were more motivated when focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of their general workout t-shirt ($M_{experiential} = 5.56$, SD = 1.26; $M_{material} = 4.81$, SD = 1.84; $F(1, 443) = 12.43$, $p < .001$, $\mu_p^2 = .03$), which attenuated for their souvenir workout t-shirt ($F(1, 443) = .04$, $p = .834$, $\mu_p^2 < .001$). Thus, goal-related products that inherently serve as a reminder for one's experiences, such as collectibles and souvenirs, may be motivating regardless of product focus. Additionally, it is possible that an experiential focus will be demotivating when such a focus evokes a negative experience (e.g., experiences with a malfunctioning fitness product). Indeed, research demonstrates that a focus on the experience can be motivating only when it is positive (Woolley and Fishbach 2016).

Beyond moderators related to the product or experience, future research can examine whether individual differences moderate the relationship between product focus and motivation. For example, whereas most people report greater happiness when focusing on experiential (vs. material) product features (Carter and Gilovich 2010), those high on materialism may actually feel happier when focusing on material product features (Howell et al. 2020). Those who perceive a stronger association between their identity and material features of a product (i.e., those with high materialistic value) may be more motivated by a material (vs. experiential) focus.

Relatedly, we note that research on dematerialism highlights situations in which material goods can serve as signals of identity. Rather than examining the effect of experiential (vs. material) focus on a physical product, as we test, research on dematerialism compares physical versus digital products, such as print books versus e-books (Atasoy and Morewedge 2018; Belk 2013; Leung et al. 2020). This research suggests that physical (vs. digital) goods are more connected to consumers' identity, as they elicit greater feelings of ownership (Atasoy and Morewedge 2018) and serve as a signal of self-verification (Leung et al. 2020). For this reason, those who identified more strongly as a "gamer" exhibited greater preference for physical (vs. digital) products related to gaming (Leung et al. 2020). Thus, one possibility is that purchasing physical (vs. digital) goods could increase motivation through the identity salience process we identify.

Conclusion

In short, the current research is the first to identify motivational benefits of an experiential focus. Focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product is motivating because it increases the salience of consumers' goal-related identity. Thus, the takeaway is clear, to motivate yourself, think about goal-related products in experiential terms.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Cell Counts and Exclusion Criteria for Experiments 1A-5
Appendix B: Pilot Study 2: Exploratory Measures and Analyses
Appendix C: Experiment 1A: Exploratory Measures and Analyses
Appendix D: Experiment 1C: Preregistered Exploratory Analyses
Appendix E: Supplemental Experiment 1 – Conceptual Replication of Experiment 2
Appendix F: Supplemental Experiment 2 – Replication of Experiment 4
Appendix G: Details for Pilot Study Reported in General Discussion

APPENDIX A

CELL COUNTS AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR EXPERIMENTS 1A-5

Our research examines how focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product affects motivation by increasing goal-identity salience. To test this prediction, we aimed to recruit participants who held the relevant goal we were assessing motivation for. Specifically, in experiments 1A, 1C, and 2, before random assignment, we filtered out participants who did not have a fitness goal. However, in some experiments, we were unable to filter our participants in advance (e.g., experiments with student samples); thus, we excluded participants who did not hold the relevant goal after random assignment. For MTurk experiments, we also excluded responses from participants who took the survey multiple times (i.e., duplicate worker IDs). We summarize exclusion criteria and cell size in table S1 below. For experiments 1C, 2, 3, and 4, we preregistered exclusion criteria at aspredicted.com.

Table S1. Cell Counts and Exclusion Criteria for Experiments 1A-5.

Experiment	Final Sample (Exclusions)	Exclusion Criteria	Condition Cell Size
Pilot 1	158 (43)	• No fitness goal (n = 37) • Duplicate MTurk worker IDs (n = 4) • Implausible responses (i.e., 3SD above the mean) for weekly workout hours (n = 2)	
Pilot 2	1032 (0)		
1A	151 (50)	• Duplicate MTurk worker IDs	• Experiential: n = 83 • Material: n = 68
1B	215 (25)	• No fitness goal	• Experiential: n = 116 • Material: n = 99
1C*	301 (50)	• Duplicate MTurk worker IDs	• Experiential: n = 156 • Material: n = 145
2*	279 (13)	• Duplicate MTurk worker IDs	• Experiential: n = 135 • Material: n = 144
3*	650 (259)	• No fitness/relationship goal (n = 248) • Duplicate MTurk worker IDs (n = 11)	High fitness identity salience: • Experiential: n = 165 • Material: n = 163 Low fitness identity salience: • Experiential: n = 154 • Material: n = 168
4*	175 (30)	• Not students (i.e., school staff; n = 1) • No fitness and/or academic goal (n = 29)	• Experiential: n = 90 • Material: n = 85
5	95 (58)	• No fitness goal	• Experiential: n = 50 • Material: n = 45
Supp S1	400 (0)		• Experiential: n = 201 • Material: n = 199
Supp S2	206 (49)	• No academic/fitness goal	• Experiential: n = 107 • Material: n = 99

Note. * Refers to a preregistered experiment.

APPENDIX B

PILOT STUDY 2: EXPLORATORY MEASURES AND ANALYSES

Pilot study 2 recorded additional purchase related measures (i.e., purchase price and general date of purchase). We accordingly examined the relationship between purchase perception (i.e., degree to which purchases were more experiential vs. material) and successful goal pursuit when controlling for purchase price (log-transformed) and controlling for purchase timing (log-transformed). Replicating the results in the main text, we again found that perceiving a purchase as more experiential (vs. material) was associated with more success goal pursuit ($F(1, 1308) = 17.43$, $p < .001$; table S2).

Table S2. Pilot Study 2: Association between Purchase Perception and Successful Goal Pursuit, Controlling for Timing and Price of Purchase.

Variables	Numerator df	Denominator df	F	Sig.
Intercept	1	1325	540.56	< .001
Goal Domain	2	939	8.88	< .001
Purchase Perception	1	1308	17.43	<.001
Goal Domain × Purchase Perception	2	980	1.23	.293
Purchase Timing (log transformed)	1	1321	5.95	.015
Price (log transformed)	1	1284	20.60	< .001

NOTE. Goal domain refers to educational, healthy eating, and fitness goals. Purchase perception refers to the average rating of whether each of their purchases was more material (1) to more experiential (7). Purchase timing refers to approximate date of purchase.

APPENDIX C

EXPERIMENT 1A: EXPLORATORY MEASURES AND ANALYSES

The following items were assessed at the end of the experiment and did not differ as a function of product focus manipulation:

1. "Which Apple Watch do you have?" (with options to select: series 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). Apple Watch version did not differ by condition ($\chi^2(5, N = 151) = 3.35$, $p = .646$).
2. "Did you purchase your Apple Watch?" (purchased vs. received as a gift). Acquisition mode did not differ by condition ($\chi^2(1, N = 151) = 1.15$, $p = .284$).
3. "How long have you had your Apple Watch?" (Less than a month, 1 month to less than 3 months, 6 months to less than 1 year, 1 year to less than 2 years, 2 years or more). Ownership duration did not differ by condition ($\chi^2(5, N = 151) = 6.87$, $p = .230$).
4. How often have you used your Apple Watch in the past three months?" (1 = I have rarely used it, 7 = I have used it almost every day). General usage frequency did not differ by condition ($M_{\text{experiential}} = 6.20$, SD = 1.24; $M_{\text{material}} = 5.93$, SD = 1.23; $t(149) = 1.38$, $p = .169$, $d = .23$).
5. "How often do you use your Apple Watch when you are working out?" (1 = I rarely use it when working out, 7 = I always use it when working out). Workout usage frequency did not differ by condition ($M_{\text{experiential}} = 6.13$, SD = 1.35; $M_{\text{material}} = 5.96$, SD = 1.43; $t(149) = .78$, $p = .437$, $d = .13$).

APPENDIX D

EXPERIMENT 1C: PREREGISTERED EXPLORATORY ANALYSES

Our preregistration specified several variables that we collected for exploratory purposes to examine whether these variables moderated the effect of product focus on motivation. We report two of these in the main text (i.e., perceived goal relevance of the product – table S3; participants' mood – table S4) and the remaining variables here: product price (table S5), ownership duration ("How long have you had your workout t-shirt" table S6), perceived product quality ("How cheap versus expensive would you say your workout t-shirt?" table S 7), and product condition ("What do you think about the condition of your workout t-shirt?" table S 8). There was no significant interaction between product focus and any of these covariates on motivation. The effect of product focus on motivation remained significant when controlling for these variables in our analysis.

Table S3. Experiment 1C: Predicting motivation from product focus, goal relevance of the product, and their interaction.

Variables	Coefficient	SE	*t*	*p*-value
Intercept	4.90	.08	62.55	< .001
Product focus	.21	.08	2.62	.01
Goal relevance (mean centered)	.33	.05	6.18	< .001
Product focus × Goal relevance	-.02	.05	.32	.75

Table S4. Experiment 1C: Predicting motivation from product focus, mood, and their interaction.

Variables	Coefficient	SE	*t*	*p*-value
Intercept	4.91	.08	63.95	< .001
Product focus	.17	.08	2.28	.024
Mood (mean centered)	.45	.06	7.23	< .001
Product focus × Mood	-.08	.06	1.27	.20

Table S5. Experiment 1C: Predicting motivation from product focus, product price, and their interaction.

Variables	Coefficient	SE	*t*	*p*-value
Intercept	4.90	.08	60.01	< .001
Product focus	.19	.08	2.30	.02
Price (log-transformed; mean centered)	.31	.11	2.97	< .01
Product focus × Price	.07	.11	.65	.52

Table S6. Experiment 1C: Predicting motivation from product focus, product ownership duration, and their interaction.

Variables	Coefficient	SE	*t*	*p*-value
Intercept	4.90	.08	58.98	< .001
Product focus	.19	.08	2.25	.03
Ownership duration (mean centered)	.03	.05	.65	.52
Product focus × Ownership duration	.01	.05	.14	.89

Table S7. Experiment 1C: Predicting motivation from product focus, product quality, and their interaction.

Variables	Coefficient	SE	*t*	*p*-value
Intercept	4.90	.08	60.81	< .001
Product focus	.18	.08	2.29	.02
Product quality (mean centered)	.24	.06	4.31	< .001
Product focus × Product quality	-.03	.06	.53	.60

Table S8. Experiment 1C: Predicting motivation from product focus, product condition, and their interaction.

Variables	Coefficient	SE	*t*	*p*-value
Intercept	4.90	.08	58.90	< .001
Product focus	.19	.08	2.25	.03
Product condition (mean centered)	-.01	.09	.08	.94
Product focus × Product condition	.03	.09	.31	.76

APPENDIX E

SUPPLEMENTAL EXPERIMENT 1 – CONCEPTUAL REPLICATION OF EXPERIMENT 2

Before conducting experiment 2, we conducted a similar, preregistered experiment (supplemental experiment 1). In this supplemental experiment, we instructed participants to focus on the experiential versus material aspects of their workout clothing and measured workout motivation and goal-identity salience. We predicted that focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product would increase goal-identity salience, which would mediate the effect of product focus on motivation.

Method

This study proceeded in two steps. We first recruited 2,000 Prolific participants for a pre-screening survey that assessed whether participants had a fitness goal and had purchased workout clothing (e.g., shirt or pants) in the past year. We then preregistered this supplemental experiment and recruited 400 participants from those who passed our pre-screener (M_{age} = 35.14, 198 female).

Similar to experiment 2, participants recalled one piece of workout clothing and indicated their workout clothing brand. We then randomly assigned participants to condition (product focus: experiential vs. material) in a between-subjects design. Participants first wrote about either the experiential or material aspects of their workout shirt or pants. We then measured workout motivation using a single item scale: "As you were writing about your workout clothing, how motivated were you to work out?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 7 = much more motivated than usual).

We next measured our key mediator, goal-identity salience, using two items that we averaged together. Participants viewed two images and indicated which image they currently identified more with, an image representing an unathletic person (i.e., a "couch potato" relaxing and looking at a smartphone) or an image representing an athletic person (i.e., a "fit potato" working out) on a 100-point slider scale anchored at "unathletic identity" and "athletic identity." Participants also answered, "When writing about your workout clothing, to what extent did you identify as an athletic person?" on a 100-point slider scale (0 = not at all, 100 = very much; adopted from Montreuil and Bourhis 2001; see ss figure S1 for item details). As preregistered, we combined these items into an index of goal-identity salience (r = .58).

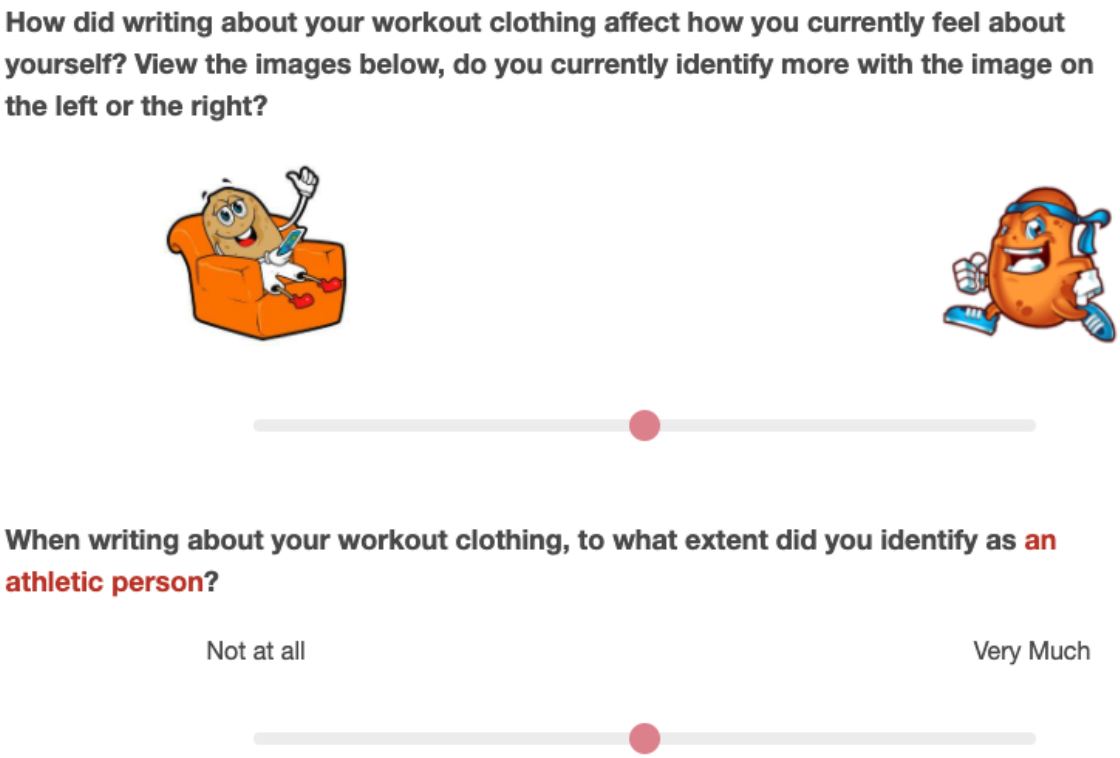
Results and Discussion

Consistent with our previous findings, an experiential (vs. material) focus significantly increased participants' motivation to work out ($M_{experiential}$ = 4.82, SD = 1.66; $M_{material}$ = 4.15, SD = 1.86; $t(398) = 3.77$, $p < .001$, $d = .38$).

In line with our proposed process, an experiential (vs. material) focus also increased the salience of consumers' fitness identity ($M_{experiential}$ = 67.96, SD = 21.21; $M_{material}$ = 63.10, SD = 22.85; $t(398) = 2.21$, $p = .028$, $d = .22$). As preregistered, we conducted a mediation analysis and found a significant indirect effect supporting our proposed hypothesis; increased salience of a fitness identity significantly mediated the effect of product focus on motivation ($B_{indirect}$ = .10, SE = .04, 95% CI = [.01, .18]; PROCESS model 4; Hayes 2013; 5,000 bootstrap samples). In combination with experiment 2, supplemental experiment 1 provides converging evidence that

focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a goal-related product increases motivation through goal-identity salience.

Figure S1. Goal-identity Salience Measures (Supplementary Experiment 1)



APPENDIX F

SUPPLEMENTAL EXPERIMENT 2 – REPLICATION OF EXPERIMENT 4

Experiment 4 was a preregistered replication of the current supplemental experiment. In this experiment, we manipulated goal-identity centrality by asking students to think about two goals: an academic goal, which is more central to students' identity, and a fitness goal, which is less central to students' identity (e.g., Ferguson 2008). We expected that the effect of product focus on motivation would change as a function of goal-identity centrality. That is, focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of a fitness product would motivate exercising more than focusing on the experiential (vs. material) aspects of an academic product would motivate studying.

Method

We recruited undergraduate and graduate students from an online participant pool at a Northeastern university. To qualify, students needed to have both a fitness and academic goal. A total of 206 qualifying participants took part in this study (M_{age} = 21.74, 145 female).

This experiment employed a 2 (product focus: experiential vs. material; between-subjects) × 2 (centrality of goal-identity: high [academic goal] vs. low [fitness goal]; within-subject) mixed model design. The procedure of this study was similar to experiment 4. In the first stage, participants wrote about the experiential or material features of an academic [*fitness*] related product and answered questions about their motivation to pursue their academic [*fitness*] goal. In the second stage, they wrote about the experiential or material features of a fitness [*academic*] related product and answered questions about their motivation to pursue their fitness [*academic*] goal (goal order counterbalanced with no effect of counterbalancing).

After completing the product focus manipulation for their academic-related product, participants indicated their motivation to pursue their academic goal: "As you were writing about your laptop, how motivated were you to pursue your academic goals?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 7 = much more motivated than usual). Participants then completed the same product focus manipulation (i.e., material vs. experiential focus) for a fitness-related product and indicated: "As you were writing about your workout t-shirt, how motivated were you to pursue your fitness goals?" (1 = no more motivated than usual, 7 = much more motivated than usual).

To confirm that an academic (vs. fitness) goal was more central to students' identity, we measured goal-identity centrality using four items adopted from Sellers et al. (1997): 1. "In general, being an academic [*athletic*] person is an important part of my self-image," 2. "Being an academic [*athletic*] person is an important reflection of who I am," 3. "Overall, being an academic [*athletic*] person has very little to do with how I feel about myself," and 4. "Being an academic [*athletic*] person is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am" ($\alpha_{academic}$ = .85; $\alpha_{fitness}$ = .91). Lastly, we assessed students' GPA and the number of hours they work out in a typical week.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation check. Confirming our manipulation of goal-identity centrality, participants indicated that an academic (vs. fitness) goal was more central to their identity ($M_{academic}$ = 5.67, SD = 1.01; $M_{fitness}$ = 4.59, SD = 1.40; $t(205) = 9.76$, $p < .001$, $d = .68$).

Motivation. Replicating experiment 4, a repeated measures ANOVA on motivation revealed the predicted interaction ($F(1, 204) = 4.14$, $p = .043$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$). An experiential (vs. material) focus significantly increased motivation to pursue a fitness goal ($M_{experiential} = 4.10$, SD = 2.04; $M_{material} = 3.44$, SD = 1.84; $F(1, 204) = 5.90$, $p = .016$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$). However, this effect significantly attenuated when analyzing motivation to pursue an academic goal ($M_{experiential} = 3.50$, SD = 1.95; $M_{material} = 3.29$, SD = 1.99; $F(1, 204) = .54$, $p = .463$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$).

Together with experiment 4, supplemental experiment 2 provides evidence for the underlying process using moderation. We found that an experiential focus motivates pursuit of a goal that is less central to consumers' identity, an effect which attenuates for a goal that is more identity central. This result reveals the underlying role of identity salience in driving the effect of an experiential (vs. material) focus on motivation, as this effect is stronger for a goal that is less (vs. more) chronically active and accessible.

APPENDIX G:

DETAILS FOR PILOT STUDY REPORTED IN GENERAL DISCUSSION

Method. We recruited 100 MTurk workers with a workout goal. We excluded participants with duplicate MTurk worker IDs (n = 10), leaving 90 participants (M_{age} = 33.66, 43 female).

Participants were first asked to describe a purchase that they would make to motivate themselves to pursue their workout goal. Next, participants were presented with the definition of material and experiential purchases. Following Van Boven and Gilovich (2003), material purchases were described as "those made with the primary intention of acquiring a material good," whereas experiential purchases were described as "those made with the primary intention of acquiring a life experience." After reading this definition, participants categorized the purchase they listed as either a material purchase, an experiential purchase, or neither. Examples of experiential purchases included "FitBit" and "Gym membership" Examples of material purchases include "Kettlebells" and "New running shoes." We also measured approximate price of the purchase.

Results. Participants were significantly more likely to make a material purchase to motivate themselves (68.9%) compared with an experiential purchase (28.9%; $\chi^2(1, N = 90) = 27.24$, $p < .001$), with 2.2% indicating neither

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