

DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN

GENERAL MANAGEMENT

Ciclo XXVII

13/B2

SECS-P/08

Identity changes and consumer behavior

How becoming parents changes our consumption choices

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Abstract

This research aims at investigating the impact of the identity change on consumption. An identity change is defined as the acquisition of a new identity after a life change event. For instance after the birth of the first child the new identity as parent is acquired and a woman can define herself as a mother. Despite marketing research recognizes that individuals' identity is unstable and susceptible to change, the investigation of the identity change is still in its infancy. Furthermore, marketing research did not investigate the contextual effect of the new as well as the old identity on individuals' reaction toward identity-marketing. In other words, whether people show a more favorable reaction toward product related to their new or their old identities after an identity change is still unclear. In order to answer this question, five studies are conducted. Results show that when the new identity substitutes the old one, people show a more positive reaction toward new-identity related products, while when the new identity is added to the old ones, people show a more positive reaction toward old-identity related products. This is the case also when the new identity accounts for high levels of identification (study three) and when the old identity is squeezed by the new one (studies four and five). A new concept, the identity strain, is then introduced and discussed.

Key words: individuals' identity, consumer behavior, multiple identities, identity strain, identity conflict,

1. Introduction

*“Oggi ho messo la giacca dell’anno scorso,
così mi riconosco, ed esco”*

Altrove, 2006

Our identity changes during life. We have a new job, we get married, or we become parents. Sometimes we want to signal this changes. Accordingly we choose products communicating our new identity to others: we buy a new car, we buy a new dress, or we choose a new hairstyle. Sometimes we do not signal this change and we prefer to highlight our previous identity, choosing the same products of ever. Why? I argue that the answer lies in the identity change impact on choices.

Scholars and practitioners agree that people can use products to define and signal their identities (Belk, 1988; Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011; J E Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Oyserman, 2009; Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop, 2012; White & Dahl, 2007). For instance, people signal their social status choosing highly-priced products or brands (Berger & Ward, 2010) or using the same brand of their reference-groups (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Additionally, managers know that consumers have more positive attitudes toward products associated with their identities (Puntoni, Sweldens, & Tavassoli, 2011; Reed et al., 2012; Reed, 2004). For this reason, companies position, reposition or communicate their products embodying a particular identity, in order to gain a more positive response in terms of product acceptance and/or willingness to pay. Moreover, companies have extensive databases through which they identify many identity changes, such as the first childbirth, or new jobs acquisitions. Knowing in which conditions people are more likely to signal their new identities vs. their old ones is therefore crucial. For instance, proposing products referring to the marital identity can be

counterproductive when, soon after their wedding, women or men are more likely to communicate their prior single status.

Despite marketing research recognizes that individuals' identity changes over time, previous works are not able to explain if and how people want to signal their new identity rather than the old one and vice versa. Marketing studies on identity change consider it as a movement starting with a disengagement from the previous identity and ending with the engagement to the new one (Andreasen, 1984; Choi & Kang, 2011; McAlexander, Schouten, & Roberts, 1992, 1993; McAlexander & Schouten, 1989; Schouten, 1991). This means that the new identity substitutes the old one. The old identity does not longer exist, while the new one need to be built and reinforced. Thus, previous marketing researches on identity changes show: 1) when an identity has gone and belongs to the past, nostalgia affects individuals' choices, making people prefer products related to their old identity (Choi & Kang, 2011); 2) when people acquire a new identity they need to signal it using specific products, such as new clothes, supporting the transition (McAlexander et al., 1993; Schouten, 1991) or through the disposition of old possessions (Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000; Young, 1991).

In contrast to these works, I argue that some identity changes implies that the acquisition of the new identity does not turn into the abandon of the old ones. This is the case of the parental identity (Fischer & Gainer, 1993). When the parental identity is acquired, the other identities, such as the identity as a friend, or a wife, or the professional one, are still present into the self-concept. More specifically, I contend that in order to analyze the impact of identity changes on consumption, research has to adopt a multiple identities perspective, considering the simultaneous impact on choices of the old as well as the new identity. Furthermore, I argue that a tension between the old and the new identity (where the old identity results as squeezed by the new one) may explain the more positive reaction toward the product related to the old identity. Based on organizational behavior literature (Goode, 1960), I define this tension as the *identity strain*.

Five studies explore this topic. Starting from works on life changes and consumption (Andreasen, 1984; Wood, 2010), I run five experiments distinguishing between identity changes in which the new identity substitutes the old one (studies one and two), from identity changes where the new identity is added to the old ones still present into the self-concept (studies three, four, and five). Pilot studies one and two confirm previous results on identity changes and consumption, making individuals react more positively toward products related to the new identity. Study three, four and five demonstrated that the pattern is not the same when the effects of old and new identities are considered simultaneously. More specifically results demonstrate that individuals show a more positive reaction toward products related to their old identities (study three), and this is due to the perceived difficulty to managing both identities (studies four and five).

All together this results suggest the importance to distinguish between identity changes in which the new identity substitutes the old one and identity changes where the new identity is added to the old ones.

Furthermore, this work makes several contributions. First this is the first attempt to investigate the effect of the identity change, defined as the acquisition of a new identity, on identity-based marketing stimuli. Indeed, despite marketing research recognizes that our identity changes over time (Reed et al., 2012), its implications on individual's reaction to identity-marketing have been mostly neglected. Second, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first work considering multiple identities in the identity change context. Considering previous identities as belonging to the past (Andreasen, 1984; Choi & Kang, 2011; McAlexander et al., 1992, 1993; McAlexander & Schouten, 1989; Schouten, 1991), previous works were not able to examine the simultaneous effect of the new identity and the previous ones on consumer behavior. Third, I introduce a new concept, the identity strain, suggesting that a tension between the old and the new identity may arise after and identity change and this tension has to be investigated in order to deeper explore identity-based behavior. Four, this work has interesting managerial implications, suggesting that leveraging on the

new identity in order to position or communicate a product can be counterproductive, when a tension between identities is triggered.

The rest of the work is organized as follow: first I illustrate the relevant literature on identity and identity change, focusing on the impact of life changes and consumption as well as on multiple identities and consumer behavior. Second, I describe the studies realized, showing procedures and main results. Third, a general discussion is delineated together with conclusions and managerial implication. Finally, indications for future research are defined.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Identity as Social Roles or Group Belongingness*

Social Psychology deeply investigated the concept of individuals' identity. In simple words, the identity can be defined as the answer to the question "Who am I?".

More specifically, two theories developed the idea of identity as we have nowadays: the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, Billings, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Turner, 1975) and the Identity Theory (Stets & Burke, 2000; Styker & Burke, 2000). These theories offer two different perspectives on identity, considering two different origins for it: social groups vs. social roles, reflecting two different visions of society. Social Identity Theory views the society as a set of different social groups or categorizations while Identity Theory designs it as a set of predetermined roles that form a well structured organization.

Accordingly, two different identity formation processes are accounted as well as two different behaviors. Considering social groups as different social *categories*, Social Identity Theory terms the identity formation as a *self-categorization* process (i.e. I define myself putting me into different social categories, thus I apply social categories to define myself), while Identity Theory, considering social roles incorporated into the self, terms it *identification* (i.e. I identify to particular social roles that become part of me). More specifically, Social Identity Theory states that an individual forms her own identity from the acknowledgement to belong to specific social groups. The comparison between the in-group (everything belonged to the group) and the out-group (everything not belonged to the group) define what an individual is. Furthermore, since people belong to several groups and not only one, is the set of different belongingness that determines the uniqueness of each individual. On the other hand, Identity Theory looks at social roles as social defined positions in structured societies. People interact each other through social roles and social roles shape individuals' identity.

From a behavioral point of view, it is worth noticing here that two different mechanisms are accounted to explain individuals' guide of behavior. Social Identity Theory states that the in-group set of characteristics brings the different directions for individuals' behavior (Tajfel et al., 1971; Turner, 1975). This means that the in-group characteristics suggest the way in which individuals act, providing shared beliefs and values, behavioral norms and even "styles of speech" (Stets & Burke, 2000: 225). For Identity Theory, individuals incorporate into the self the meaning and the expected performance of the roles they have. An individual behaves according to her role and, at the same time, expects that the other behave according to their social role (Styker & Burke, 2000). This is the way in which a structures society works: everybody acts in the way that others expected. As Stets and Burke (2000) noticed, in that difference lies an important distinction between the ways in which the two identities (social identity vs. role identity) inform behavior: the group-based identity leads to *uniformity* among groups members while the role-based identity conducts to *uniqueness*. This is because the dynamic in-group/out-group lead people to behave as the members of their reference group and different from the members of their not-reference group, while the interaction among roles involves different social positions (i.e. professor vs. student, doctor vs. patient and so on...). In this case "the emphasis is not on the similarity with others in the same role, but on the individuality and interrelatedness with others in counter roles in the group or interaction context" (Stets & Burke, 2000: 227). Generally, identities like student or professor can be read from both perspectives. When interact together students and professors involve different roles while considered in a peer-group they can refer to in-group/out-group dynamics denoting social groups as well. However "not all roles are tied intimately to groups. For example, the roles of husband and wife within the family are accompanied by meanings and expectations, but the social categories of husband and wife only occasionally constitute an in-group/out-group pair" (Stets & Burke, 2000: 228).

2.2. Identity: the Consumer Behavior Perspective

Marketing perspective reconciles the two research streams. Although, it recognizes dissimilarities between them, marketing research highlights the idea that people behave consistently to the identities they have and this consistency is responsible for the impact of identity on consumer choices. Psychology and marketing scholars consider this consistency as the result of the identity-based motivation to act (Oyserman, 2009).

Accordingly, marketing research offers a parsimonious and comprehensive definition for identity, defining it as “any category label with which a consumer self-associate either by choice or endowment. The category label invokes a mental representation (i.e., a clear picture) of what that “kind” of person looks like, thinks, feels, and does” (Reed et al., 2012: 312). Thus, although recognizing the differences between social roles and group belongingness, marketing perspective consider as identity “any category label” extinguishing the need to discriminate role identities and social groups. In this line, marketing definition considers as equivalent different labels, such as mother, lawyer, American, or smart (Reed et al., 2012). As evident, social groups are part of individuals’ identities as well as social roles. Social roles include work or professional identities, such as being a professor or an employee, as well as non-work identities such as being a daughter or a fiancé (Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012; Reed et al., 2012). On the other hand social groups involve primarily the peer-formations such as college crews (Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012) or gender-based groups (Puntoni et al., 2011). Furthermore, marketing perspective accounts for identities linked to abstracted ideas, such as being an intellectual or a fashion-addicted, as well. In this line is it possible to account for cultural identity (I am an American), as well as Religious identity (I am Muslim), or personal identity (I am environmentalist) as well (Oyserman, 2009; Reed et al., 2012).

As anticipated, identities drive individuals’ behavior, invoking a mental representation of what a certain kind of person looks like, thinks, feels, and does (Reed et al., 2012). This means that identities induce people to engage in identity-congruent actions as well as to use “identity congruent

mindsets in making sense of the world” (Oyserman, 2009: 250). Thus, we start to behave consistently with being a member of a particular social groups, as we define ourselves as a member of that group (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Reed et al., 2012; Reed, 2004). Furthermore, we adopt a specific identity-related mind-set that informs subsequent choices. As we define ourselves as parent we observe the world consistently with this definition and this view turns into a consistent behavior.

It is worth noticing here that we engage in identity-congruent consumption choices as we use product to define and express who we are (Belk, 1988; Berger & Heath, 2007; Berger & Ward, 2010; Chan, Berger, & Van Boven, 2012; Chernev et al., 2011; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Mehta & Belk, 1991; White & Dahl, 2007). From the pivotal work of Levy (1959) marketing scholars recognizes that products and brands are symbols to express identities: “People buy things not only for what they serve, but for what they mean” (Levy, 1959: 118). Products and brands mean belongingness and uniqueness, social distance and social memberships at the same time.

First, people use product to uniform (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Escalas & Bettman, 2003), signaling their belongingness to social groups. More specifically, individuals use products or brands used by their reference as well as aspirational groups (Reed, 2004). In such cases the logical path can be assimilated to an Aristotelian syllogism: “I am an intellectual, intellectual use Volvo, I use Volvo”. Thus, “Volvo car becomes a symbol of how intellectual I am” (Escalas & Bettman, 2005: 379). Thus, this is the case for personal as well as for social identities, such as peer-group belongingness. For instance in college crews, students share the same style in order to communicate their belongingness. More specifically, research demonstrated that students are able to infer the belongingness to their peers just looking at their pictures, observing the way in which they were dressed (Chan et al., 2012). Furthermore, people use product to express their status and their belongingness to a social class (Berger & Ward, 2010). Products and brands are symbols to social class or to aspirational social class providing very explicit signs (i.e. very visible logo or brands) to signal it. Moreover, recent marketing research demonstrated that less explicit markers are useful as

well, when people want to communicate their belongingness preventing others to imitate them at the same time. This is the case of high social class members using invisible logo or not easy recognizable brands to prevent middle class to use the same symbols (Berger & Ward, 2010). The use of this “subtle signal” is a way to communicate their elitist belongingness, protecting it at the same time. Finally, people use products to communicate the belongingness to aspirational groups (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Reed, 2004). This means that people use products or brand to communicate what they want to be in the future, incorporating into the present, a possible future self.

Second, people use products to distinguish themselves (Berger & Heath, 2007; Berger & Ward, 2010; Escalas & Bettman, 2003), communicating their uniqueness or their distance to those social groups they do not belong to. Berger and Heath (2007), starting from uniqueness literature (suggesting that people want to communicate there are different from the others), demonstrated that people want to communicate a unique identity, preferring less popular brands in product categories used to infer identity. This is driven by two separate identity concerns: the desire to signal a particular identity and the desire to avoid signaling that one is a conformist. At the same time, the preference of aforementioned subtle signals denotes the same desire for distinction from the mainstream. More specifically, while less explicit branding increases the likelihood of misidentification, people with desire for uniqueness prefer subtle signals because they provide differentiation from the mainstream (Berger & Ward, 2010). Not surprisingly, as in the Berger and Heath’ work (2007), these effects are stronger in the identity-relevant product domains and situations where consumption is more public. Finally, people diverge from other in order to communicate their distance from social groups they do not belong to (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Escalas & Bettman, 2003), avoiding products or brands used by the out-groups.

Third, people use product to combine this drives, communicating uniformity and distinctiveness at the same time (Chan et al., 2012). More specifically, it has been demonstrated that people use brands or products to communicate their belongingness to their reference-groups and, at

the same time, they use less popular product attributes (such as color or style) to communicate their uniqueness. The role of brand and product attributes depends on what it is used to infer belongingness and what it is used to infer uniqueness. For instance, when a particular brand is used to infer belongingness, people uniform the brand and differentiate the style (this is the case of Volvo car). While, when style is used to infer belongingness people uniform the style and choose a very unknown or peculiar brand to communicate there are unique (if the acid-green color is used by fashionistas during the summer 2015, I can buy acid-green pants from a special boutique in Paris).

Thus marketing research demonstrated that people are able to combine different needs in one purchasing occasion. More specifically, Chan et al' work takes into account the problem of multiple identities and their impact on consumption. They acknowledge people have different identities and show that some times people can manage them combining personal and social identities in a single purchasing occasion. In other words, in such cases people can express more than one identity (the social one and their personal one) in the same time. Most of the time, however, this is not possible. Generally, marketing research demonstrated that when more than one identity is considered, people behave consistently only with one of them, and in particular with that one temporarily activated: that is the most salient identity (that is according to the identity salience principle).

2.3. Multiple Identities and Behavior: The Identity Salience Principle

Before illustrating the identity salience principle, it is necessary to present the idea of multiple identities. As clear, an individual can define herself in several ways: as woman, as daughter, as an athlete, as a friend, as an employee. All these identities are taken together into the self-concept. The self-concept is defined as a theory about the self (Epstein, 1973; Neisser, 1988; Oyserman, 2009) and it is considered as the most powerful drive of behavior as “it provides the only perspective from which an individual’s behavior can be understood” (Epstein, 1973: 2).

In the current view, psychology tend to consider the self-concept as a not-integrated organization of identities, rather than an hierarchical and stable system (Oyserman, 2009). This

means that, although perceived as stable, identities are highly sensitive to the context (Oyserman, 2009). Identities may function integratively (e.g., a Italian man, a working woman) or separately (e.g., a woman, a worker), depending on what is relevant in a particular context. In the latter case, one identity can be activated over the other and this is the result of two factors: chronical accessibility and situational activation (Oyserman, 2009; Reed et al., 2012).

Thus, since identities have different action readiness and behavioral norms, activating one identity over the other has an impact on individuals' behavior. In more general terms, this means that individuals have numerous identities, all enclosed into the self-concept, but not all identities have an impact on individuals' behavior at the same time. First of all, in order to affect behavior, an identity has to be chronically accessible or in other words it has to be important for the individual. Second, the identity has to be temporally activated in a specific moment. In this line, marketing research identified three factors as precursors of the identity salience (Reed et al., 2012).

1) The strength of identification (i.e. the chronical accessibility) that indicates the enduring association between the identity and the self (Forehand, Deshpandé, & Reed, 2002; Reed, 2004). In other worlds, this indicates how strong is the identification with a particular identity, or the intensity of the identification (Deshpandè, Hoyer, & Donthu, 1986; Reed, 2004). In this line, it has been demonstrated that ethnic affiliation is a continuous variable rather than a dichotomous one. Once an individual states she belongs to an ethnic group, she defines also how strong she identified with her group. Thus, the enduring association with a specific identity is different form the salience of that identity, which is the temporarily activation of it (Reed, 2004). The strength of identification is almost stable during life and needs very long time to change.

2) The composition of individual environment (i.e. the social distinctiveness) (Forehand et al., 2002). More specifically, the more a trait is unusual or distinctive in the immediate environment, the more that trait become salient. For instance, if a woman is the only female member into a group, her identity as woman is more likely to become salient. For the same reason, psychological studies demonstrated that individuals' ethnicity is more likely to be salient when it is

distinctive in the immediate environment (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978; Stayman & Deshpandé, 1989). For instance McGuire et al. showed that when the interviews have a different vs. the same race-ethnicity of children, they spontaneously define themselves in terms of race rather than otherwise).

3) Contest-based stimulus cues, in which marketing stimuli are accounted. More specifically, identity salience increases in response to identity-related information, such as a identity-related texts (Reed, 2004), identity-related images, such as cultural symbols (i.e. American heroes or Chinese wall) (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martinez, 2006; Zou, Morris, & Benet-Martínez, 2008), and identity-related advertisements (Puntoni et al., 2011).

Once an identity is activated it is more likely to drive individuals' behavior and subsequent choices. More specifically, "The identity-salience principle asserts that increases in the salience of an identity within a person's self-concept increase the likelihood of subsequent identity-driven attitudes and behaviors" (Reed et al., 2012: 313). Thus, according to identity salient principle, people react to identity-based marketing stimuli consistent with the salient identity, judging products in a favorable way (Reed, 2004) or choosing product related to the salient identity (Forehand et al., 2002; Reed, 2004). In this line, people choose products consistently to the activated identity, cued by specific contexts or marketing stimuli, such as spokesperson ethnicity (Forehand & Deshpande, 2001) or explicit identity-based messages (i.e. "if you call yourself a sport fan, you gotta have DirectTV!") (Bhattacharjee, Berger, & Menon, 2014: 295).

2.4. Limitation to Identity Salience Principle: the Identity Conflict

Marketing research accounts for some limitations to the identity salience principle (Cheng et al., 2006; Puntoni et al., 2011; Zou et al., 2008). First, gender-based marketing can trigger a gender perceived vulnerability that makes people react to stimuli in a contrastive way. For instance, Puntoni et al (2011) demonstrated that gender-based advertisement for breast cancer triggers a

women reaction that inhibits the donation for cancer research. Thus, in such cases a neutral advertisement is more likely to encourage a favorable reaction toward marketing stimulus.

Second, people may react to marketing stimuli inconsistently to the identity salience principle when identities are conflicting (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Cheng et al., 2006; Zou et al., 2008). Two identities are conflicting when they are referring to conflicting behavioral norms (i.e. being an athlete and being an old man). In this line, cultural identities can be conflicting when referring to incompatible values or norms. For instance American and Asian cultural identities may conflict to the extent to which American cultural identity embodies an independent view of world (i.e. personal identity is prioritized) while Asian cultural identity leads to interdependent social norms (i.e. social identity is prioritized). Cheng et al (2006) analyzed bicultural individuals (people born in Asia and moved to USA) and show that some of them may easily integrate Asian and American identities (i.e. they may use sentences such as “I feel Asian-American” or “I fell like a mixture of Asian and American), while some people consider the two identities as separated and conflicting (using sentences such as “I am an Asian who happens to who live in the United States” or “I an simply an Asian in North American”) (Cheng et al., 2006: 746). Their studies demonstrated that people react according to the salient identity, only when the two identities are well-integrated. In case of conflict, participants react in a contrastive way, showing answers consistent with the non-activated identity, rather than the salient one.

2.5. Before the Identity Change: Life Changes Events

Previous marketing literature deeply investigated the impact of habits disruption, since such occasions offer companies the rare opportunity to enter individuals’ preferences, breaking their loyalty or inertia (Andreasen, 1984). More specifically, previous studies investigating the impact of life changes on consumption demonstrated that when individuals experience life changes they show a higher propensity toward unfamiliar and new products rather than familiar ones (Wood, 2010). This means that when people experience a life change, such as relocation, they are more solicitous

to change their consumption habits, choosing unfamiliar products, unknown or never chosen before. Furthermore, life changes disrupt routines, arising new priorities or a new life style, making people prefer new brands (Andreasen, 1984). More specifically, after a life change, such as having a baby, some new purchases are linked to new needs (parents acquire a pushchair because they need it), but other purchases are linked to new priorities or new life styles (such as going out more or less, have an more/less healthy nutrition and so one).

What happens to our identity after a life change? Does our identity change as well? If this is the case, can the identity change explain part of different consumption habits? Next paragraph introduces the concept of identity change and sheds light on these ideas.

2.6. Identity Change and Consumption

Since, as anticipated, the identity is a self-association to any category label considered as part of the self, we observe an identity change whenever an individual may use a new category label to define herself. As evident, many life changes imply a new definition for the self. When we have a new job we acquire a new professional identity (i.e. we can define ourselves with a new professional identity), when we get married we acquire a new marital identity (i.e. we can define our selves with the new label of husband or wife), when we have our first child we acquire a new parental identity (i.e. we can define our selves with the new label of parents) and so one.

Quite surprisingly, previous marketing literature does not provide a clear definition of the identity change concept. Previous marketing research recognizes that individuals' identity is unstable and susceptible to change (Oyserman, 2009; Reed et al., 2012). Some identities are more stable or temporally expansive, such as being a mother, being American, or being a woman. Other identities are more transitory or temporally specific, such as being a Republican or being a lawyer (Oyserman, 2009; Reed et al., 2012) (see table 1).

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However, despite these definitional attempts, little efforts have been put into further articulate the concept of the identity change. More specifically, as anticipated, no definitions in consumer behavior research have been provided and words like “identity transition”, “role transition”, and “identity transformation” are used interchangeably.

More specifically, previous research considered the identity change as a movement starting with a disengagement from a previous identity and ending with an engagement with a new one (Choi & Kang, 2011; Hopkins, Roster, & Wood, 2006; Kleine & Kleine, 2000; McAlexander et al., 1992, 1993; McAlexander & Schouten, 1989; Schouten, 1991; Young, 1991). This means that the old identity is abandoned, through an *identity exit* process, and the new identity is adopted through an *identity enter* process (Ashforth, 2001). Once the new identity is acquired, it enters the self-concept and individuals start to behave accordingly, in order to reinforce it, looking for internal as well as external feedback (Reed et al., 2012). For this reason, marketing research observing consumption after an identity change counted: 1) the disposition of old possessions in order to signal that the old identity is over (Young, 1991), 2) the acquisition of new products, new styles or new body shapes to signal that the new identity is acquired and/or to facilitate the passage (McAlexander & Schouten, 1989; Schouten, 1991). For instance, marketing research illustrated that teenagers signal their acquired adolescent status, opting for a new hairstyle, meaning their conquered independence from their parents. Furthermore, in a recent work, marketing scholars investigated the impact of past identities on consumer behavior (Choi & Kang, 2011). Choi and Kang (2011) demonstrated that brides who adopt their married name, loosing their maiden one, experience an “identity transformation”. They illustrate that, after the *transformation*, women’ old identity (i.e. being single) still affects their consumption, through nostalgia (Choi & Kang, 2011).

Indeed, in consumer behavior literature nostalgia is defined as a general preference for objects related to “a dear departed past” (Holbrook, 1993: 245), liked to something belongs to the past and no more present (Holbrook, 1993; Holbrook & Schindler, 2003; Schindler & Holbrook, 2003). In this line, an abandoned identity can have an impact on consumer choices because evokes a dear past not existing any more.

In contrast to these works, I argue that previous identities are not always abandoned after an identity change. In this line, they can have an impact on choices through a underlying path different form nostalgia. Thus, before introducing the impact of previous identities on consumption, the introduction of a new definition of identity change is needed.

2.7. A New Definition of the Identity Change

Psychological studies illustrated that the acquisition of a new identity does not always result in a disengagement from the old identity. For instance the acquisition of the new identity as a mother does not imply the loss of the professional identity, but rather women “seek to add an additional role to their repertoire” (Fischer & Gainer, 1993: 324). In order to account for the acquisition of the new identity (Thoits, 1983), in this work I introduce a new definition of the identity change. More specifically, I define the identity change is “the acquisition of a new identity following a life change event, entering the individual self-concept”. This definition removes the idea of the disengagement from the previous identity and implies that the new identity enters the self-concept together with previous identities still present there. Indeed, even if some changes result in a replacement of a previous role (for example from student to worker) the new role has to be enacted together with the old ones (being a friend), still present in our sense of us.

2.8. Not conflicting identities: The Introduction of the Identity Strain Concept

Furthermore, as clear, the new definition of the identity change implies the consideration of multiple identities affecting (consumption) choices. This perspective is quite new since, to the

best of my knowledge, marketing research did not consider the simultaneous impact of the new and the old identities to explain consumer behavior after an identity change.

As anticipated, the identity salience principle and the identity conflict may explain individuals' choices in a multiple identities context. However, I argue that, after an identity change the new and the old identity can arise a particular tension, without be conflicting. More specifically, I argue that, after an identity change, people may experience some difficulties in enacting one or more identities, even when the two identities are not conflicting. As anticipated, conflicting identities are related to conflicting behavioral norms. However, being a father and being a worker are not always suggesting conflicting norms. More often a young father may experience some difficulties in enacting both identities (the parental and the professional one), because of the disruption in daily time and organizations. For instance, when women and men have their first baby, their daily routines are dramatically changed, as well as when we start a new job our routines are disrupted. The identity enactment approach states that habitual activities, rooted in specific temporal and spatial routines, help people to construct and reinforce their identities (Giddens, 1991). Thus, I argue that when people enact their new identity they may disrupt their routines in different degrees, threatening the enactment of the old identities, experiencing different level of difficulties in managing them. As clear, this kind of tension is quite different from the identity conflict, and I defined it as a *strain* between the identities.

More specifically, in this work, I define the *identity strain* as “the perceived difficulty to express one or more identities an individual has, triggered by an identity change”. I borrow this definition from the concept of the *role strain* by Goode (Goode, 1960), expressed in terms of difficulties in fulfilling role demands. The idea of role strain is rooted in the consideration of individual's resources, such as time, as finite and scarce by nature (Goode, 1960; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). As people have to choose how to allocate their time, the more roles they have the more strain they experience. Thus a certain level of role strain is “normal” and it is related to the multiplicity of held roles and the scarcity of individuals' resources to enact them. However I argue

that the identity strain is not a normal condition, but it is triggered by an identity change. Indeed, more recent works demonstrated the relationship between multiple roles and individuals' well-being (Thoits, 1983; Verbrugge, 1986), suggesting the idea that multiple roles are associated with individual's health and a role strain is experienced only when individuals face some sort of disorder. More specifically, I argue that the identity change triggers a change in the habitual routines, pillars to construct and reinforce individuals' identities (Brocklehurst, 2001; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006), generating a difficulty in enacting one or more identities. Thus, in a stable condition (without any identity change) people are able to manage time and daily activities to express and enact more than one identity properly. In contrast, the acquisition of a new identity triggers a disruption in temporal and spatial activities, arising the identity strain.

As anticipated, the identity strain is different from the identity conflict (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Cheng et al., 2006; Zou et al., 2008), as the former is a broader construct containing the latter. More specifically, as clear, the identity conflict arises when two identities refer to conflicting behavioral norms (i.e. being an old man and being an athlete) (Reed et al., 2012) while the identity strain implies a disruption in daily routines rather than conflicting values or norms. More specifically two identities can be not conflicting (referring to not conflicting behavioral norms) but competing for individuals' routines or daily organizations. When the new identity disrupts individual's routines it may threat the enactment of the old identities Thus the new identity may results as hyper-enacted over the old identity, while the old identity may result as hypo-enacted.

3. Studies

3.1. *Studies overview*

Five studies investigated the impact of the identity change on consumption, analyzing individuals' reaction toward different products. More specifically, in order to study the impact on individuals' identity on people reactions toward identity-marketing, products must be linked to different identities, rather than simply be familiar or unfamiliar, as in previous studies. For this reason, I investigated the individuals' reaction toward products related to different identities. More specifically I contrasted 1) the current vs. the new identity in the exploratory study one; 2) the new vs. the neutral identity in the exploratory study two; and 3) the new vs. the old identity in studies three-five. Furthermore, as argued, I distinguished between identity changes in which the new identity substitutes the old one (studies one and two), from identity changes where the new identity is added to the old ones still present into the self (studies three, four, and five).

The first study wanted to replicate previous studies on life changes (Wood, 2010) in the identity change framework, exploring the individuals' reaction toward different products investigating the transition from high school to college. Analyses confirm previous works, showing that participants show a more positive reaction toward products related to their new identity rather their current identity when they experience higher changes. However, pilot study one may had fail to trigger a proper identity change (that is the acquisition of a new identity) since the participants are not experiencing a change in their social role as students. For this reason, pilot study two wanted to replicate results from study one considering the acquisition of a new social role: the professional one (i.e. being a worker). Results indicate a similar pattern from the pilot study one. Again, participants show a more positive reaction toward products related to their new identity rather then their current one when they experience a higher change.

However, as anticipated, some identity changes do not imply a substitution of the previous identity (Fischer & Gainer, 1993). Rather the new identity is added to the self-concept

together with the previous ones. Thus, study three, four and five wanted to investigate individuals' reaction toward product related to different identities, when the new identity is added to the old ones, considering the simultaneous effect of the new vs. the old identities. Study three considered the acquisition of the new identity as mother, involving only female respondents recently having a baby. In contrast with studies one and two, results from study three reveal that participants show a more positive reaction toward products related to their old identity, disconfirming previous results.

Study four aimed at replicating results from study three, investigating the hypothesized underlying process. As anticipated, I argue that a tension between the old vs. the new identity (where the old identity results as squeezed by the new one), may explain the more positive reaction toward the product related to the old identity. As above-mentioned, I define this tension as the *identity strain*. In study four, I manipulate the identity strain allocating a finite amount of resources to enact two identities in a balance vs. unbalance way in three experimental conditions: the identity as wife as hyper-enacted, the identity as friend as hyper-enacted, equilibrium between the two identities. Results show that within the identity as wife as the hyper-enacted identity, participants show a higher likelihood to recommend the product related to their identity as friend, confirming my hypothesis.

However, it can be argued that is not the unbalanced allocation of finite resources *per se* that explains the results, but it is the perceived difficulty in managing both identities properly. In other words, the tension between the new and the old identities does not depend on the amount of time or energies dedicated to one identity rather than the other, but rather on the perceived difficulty in managing them. For this reason, study five investigates the effect of the perceived difficulty in managing both identity on the individuals' reaction toward products related to the old vs. the new identity. Results show that when participants experience some difficulties in enacting one identity because of the other, they show a more favorable reaction toward the product related to the hypo-enacted identity, supporting the hypothesized underlying process (and replicating results from study four).

3.2. Exploratory study 1: Identity change as a substitution of the previous identity

From high school to college

Exploratory study one aimed at investigating the impact of identity change on consumption. As a first preliminary study, I started from works on life changes (Wood, 2010) to verify whether is it possible to obtain the same results considering an identity change as well. As anticipated, life changes make people more likely to choose new and unfamiliar products. More specifically, Wood's (2010) work demonstrated that when people experience a full of changes period they are more likely to choose new products. This is because changes induct a change-related mind-set that influences subsequent choice. More in details, a mind-set influences behavior making salient some characteristics in the mind of individuals. Thus, people choose options with similar, if not the same, characteristics. In simple words, when people experience newness, a newness-related mind-set is formed making them choose new options. In her work, Wood (2010) analyzed life changes or turmoil, without considering modifications in individual's identity. Thus, does identity change makes people choose new things as life changes do?

Method. One hundred high school students were recruited in the study (M_{age} : 18.54 years, SD : .521; 32% male and 68% female). Students participated voluntarily in the study during their last week of school. They were all attending their last year. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions in a 2 (magnitude of transition: high vs. low) X 2 (product relatedness: high school vs. college) between subjects design.

Procedure. Participants were first asked to read a scenario, illustrating two different possible identity change conditions. In the first condition, the identity change was manipulated in order to appear as smaller as possible, while in the second condition the identity change was

manipulated in order to appear as bigger as possible. Furthermore, I manipulate the magnitude of the identity change in terms of relationships and activities that define an identity (Serpe, 1987). More specifically, psychology literature suggests that any identity is defined by specific activities as well as specific relationships. For instance, the identity as professor is defined by the relationships with colleagues and students as well, and at the same time by activities such reading papers, having lessons, attending conferences and so on. Thus, I argue that an identity change may be bigger when implies a full change in relationships and activities and smaller when allows to maintain a certain amount of relationships and activities linked to the previous identity. Thus, the first and the second conditions provided the following scenarios:

“Imagine you have just finished high school and you go to college. The college you have chosen is close to you home, actually in the same city. Even if you meet new people, you are going to continue to stay with your friends. Furthermore, you are able to practice your hobbies, doing what you love. Of course, life is offering you new experiences, but the relationships you care will be always there for you and you are going to stay with your friends and relatives. You are going to live in a new house with your friends of ever.”

“Imagine you have just finished high school and you go to college. The college you have chosen is 600 km far from you home. Your friends remain in your hometown and you have not strong established relationships in the new city. Furthermore you still have to organize your activities and your hobbies. You are going to live in a new house with new flat mates. Up to now, you shared a good feeling, but your friendship is still superficial. Your intimate relationships are still there, but they are not inserted in your daily life. Probably, you are going to come back home every two months to visit friends and relatives”.

At the end of scenario task, I checked participants' engagement in the task through an attention check question: “If you are reading the text, please circle the third word in this page”.

After the scenario description, participants were asked to look at an advertisement for sunglasses. I manipulated the product relatedness in two experimental conditions: product related to

high school students vs. product related to college students. More specifically, I manipulated the product relatedness, according to previous studies, using different pictures (see figures 1.1 and 1.2). Thus, the only differences between the two conditions were the images surrounding the product (students from high school vs. students from college) (Forehand, Perkins, & Reed, 2011). A manipulation check at the end of the questionnaire, verified whether the images I used were perceived as related to high school students vs. college students (5 points Likert scale where 1= definitely related to university and 5 = definitely related to high school and 3= neutral).

INSERT FIGURES 1.1 AND 1.2 ABOUT HERE

Thus, participants were asked to evaluate the product using a five items (design, color, sex appeal, style and fashion, Cronbach Alpha = .846) seven-point scale (How do you evaluate the smartphone you have just seen? 1 = very bad; 7 = very good).

Results. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) show there is not a significant effect on gender on product evaluation ($F(1, 98) = 1.532, p = .222, M_{\text{male}} = 4.33, M_{\text{female}} = 3.87$).

Furthermore, manipulation check analysis shows a significant effect of displayed images on product relatedness manipulation ($F(1, 98) = 66.162, p = .172, M_{\text{high school}} = 4.00, M_{\text{college}} = 1.68$).

A 2 (magnitude of identity change: high vs. low) X 2 (product relatedness: high school vs. college) analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a marginally significant main effect of product relatedness on products evaluation ($F(1, 98) = 3.133, p = 0.083, M_{\text{high school}} = 4.33, M_{\text{college}} = 3.79$). Furthermore, results reveal that the magnitude of transition has not a significant effect on product evaluation ($F(1, 98) = .000, p = 0.999, M_{\text{low magnitude}} = 3.98, M_{\text{high magnitude}} = 4.07$). Finally results

indicate a positive significant interaction between product relatedness and magnitude of identity change on products evaluation ($F(2, 97) = 5.635, p = .020$). More specifically, students in the low magnitude condition show a higher product evaluation for product related to high school than for product related to college ($F(1, 98) = 8.260, p = .006, M_{\text{high school}} = 4.72, M_{\text{college}} = 3.40$). Furthermore students in the high magnitude condition show a marginally higher product evaluation for the product related to college than for product related to high school ($F(1, 98) = 3.184, p = .081, M_{\text{high school}} = 3.96, M_{\text{college}} = 4.16$) (see figure 1.3).

INSERT FIGURE 1.3 ABOUT HERE

Discussion. Analyses show that participants indicate a more positive reaction toward products related to their new identity when they experience higher changes. Thus, results confirm previous work on life changes impact on consumer choices demonstrated that when people experience a high in magnitude identity change (i.e. they experience a big change) they prefer product related to the new identity (i.e. new product) while when they experience a low in magnitude identity change (i.e. they experience a small change) they prefer product related to the current identity (i.e. the familiar one). This suggests the idea that the identity change has the same impact of life changes: the more they involve turmoil the more people are likely to select new product.

However, pilot study one may fail to trigger a proper identity change (that is the acquisition of a new identity), since the participants are not experiencing a change in their social role as students. If this is the case, study one triggered only a life change event and this explains the replication of previous results. Furthermore, the manipulation I used is very similar to that one used by Wood (2010) and without verifying the actual change in the participants' identity I am not able to rule out this alternative explanation. Furthermore, exploratory study one fails at measuring the

level of identification with the new identity. Since without identification it is not possible to see the effect of an identity on individuals' choices (Reed, 2004) the found effect could be explained by a lack of identification or low levels of it. Pilot study two wants to replicate results from study one overcoming its limitations, triggering a change in individual's identity and measuring participants' identification with the new identity.

3.3. Exploratory study 2: Identity change as a role change

From college to work

Exploratory study 1 offers a preliminary investigation on the effect of identity change on consumption, confirming results from works on life changes and consumer choices. However, involving the transition from high school students to college students, study one considers an identity change in which the role of participants remains the same: being a student. In this line, it can be argued that study one triggered a change in life rather than a change in the self-definition, because basically, participants could still define themselves as students. For this reason, I want to verify whether the results from study one are due to the manipulation I used, that triggered a life change rather than an identity change, or whether the identity change shows similar effects of life changes on consumption choices. More specifically, in study two I considered an identity change implying the acquisition of a new role as well. Furthermore, I still adopt the main framework of study one, seeing the new identity as a substitute to the previous one. Accordingly, I chose the identity change from being students to being workers and I involved students from the last year of their master studies. I used the same scenario from study one, asking participants to imagine to start to work. Again, I manipulated the magnitude of identity changes in terms of relationships and activities.

Method. One hundred fifty-four college students participated voluntarily in the study ($M_{\text{age}} = 22.41$ years, $SD = 2.93$, 43% male; 57% female). Participants were assigned to one of the four experimental conditions in a 3 (magnitude of identity change: high vs. low vs. no change) X 2 (product relatedness: neutral vs. professional identity) between subjects design.

Procedure. As in the exploratory study one, participants were first asked to read a scenario, illustrating two different possible identity change conditions. Again, in the first condition, the identity change was manipulated in order to appear as smaller as possible while the second condition manipulated the identity changes as bigger as possible. Differently from exploratory study one, I added a neutral condition in which any scenario was presented before the advertisement exposition. Thus, the first and the second conditions illustrated the following scenarios:

“Imagine you graduated and start a new job. The job you have found is close to you home, actually it is in the same city. Even if you meet new people, you are going to continue to stay with your friends. Furthermore, you are able to continue your hobbies, doing what you love. Of course, life is offering you new experiences, but the relationship you care will be always there for you and you are going to stay with your friends and relatives. You are going to live in a new house with your friends of ever.”

“Imagine you graduated and start a new job. The job you have found is 600 km far from you home. Your friends remain in your hometown and you have not strong established relationships in the new city. Furthermore you still have to organize your activities and your hobbies. You are going to live in a new house with new flat mates. Up to now there is with them a good feeling, but your friendship is still superficial. Your intimate relationships are still there, but they are not inserted in your daily life. Probably, you are going to come back home every two months to visit friends and relatives”.

At the end of scenario task, I checked participants' engagement in the task through an attention check questions: “If you are reading the text, please circle the third word in this page”.

After the scenario description, participants were asked to look at an advertisement for a smartphone. As in the exploratory study one, I manipulated the product relatedness in two experimental conditions: product related to worker vs. product not related to any specific identity (i.e. neutral product). Again, I manipulated the product relatedness, according to previous studies (Forehand, Perkins, & Reed, 2011), using different pictures (see figures 2.1 and 2.2). Thus, the only differences between the two conditions were the images surrounding the product (students from high school vs. students from college)

INSERT FIGURES 2.1 AND 2.2 ABOUT HERE

Participants were asked to evaluate the product using a five items (design, color, sex appeal, style and fashion, Cronbach Alpha = .850) seven-point scale (How do you evaluate the smartphone you have just seen? 1 = very bad; 7 = very good). Furthermore, participants were asked to indicate their likelihood to recommend the product using a seven-point Likert scale: (How likely are you to recommend the smartphone to your friends? Please use the following scale where 1 = no, definitely not, and 7 = yes, definitely).

Then participants are asked to indicate their level of identification with their future professional identity using a seven-points Likert scale (I identify with the identity as worker i.e. professional identity, where 1 = not at all, and 7 = very much).

Furthermore, participants were asked to indicate to what extent the product they have seen was able to activate the identity as worker (i.e. work-identity activation) (Please indicate to what

extent the product you have seen made you think about your identity as a worker, where 1 = not at all, and 7 = very much).

Finally participants were asked to indicate how big was the perceived magnitude of the identity change from college to the labor market (How big do you think is the change from being a college student to being a worker? where 1 = not big at all; 7 = very big).

Results. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a marginally significant main effect of the scenario on the perceived magnitude of the identity change from college to work ($F(1, 134) = 1.914, p = .058, M_{\text{small}} = 2.45, M_{\text{high}} = 2.98$).

Furthermore, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a main effect of product relatedness on work-identity activation ($F(1, 132) = 5.116, p = .025, M_{\text{phone work}} = 3.09, M_{\text{phone neutral}} = 2.45$).

A 3 (magnitude of identity change: high vs. low vs no change) X 2 (product relatedness: work vs. neutral) analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a not significant main effect of product relatedness on products evaluation ($F(1, 125) = .319, p = .573, M_{\text{work}} = 4.82, M_{\text{neutral}} = 4.94$), as well as a not significant main effect of the magnitude of identity change on product evaluation ($F(2, 125) = .799, p = .452, M_{\text{low magnitude}} = 4.81, M_{\text{high magnitude}} = 4.75$). Finally results show a not significant interaction between product relatedness and magnitude of identity change on products evaluation ($F(2, 125) = .676, p = .510$).

Furthermore, a 3 (magnitude of identity change: high vs. low vs no change) X 2 (product relatedness: work vs. neutral) analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a not significant main effect of product relatedness on the likelihood to recommend the product ($F(1, 128) = 1.644, p = .202, M_{\text{work}} = 3.63, M_{\text{neutral}} = 3.27$), but a marginally significant main effect of the magnitude of transition on product evaluation ($F(2, 120) = 2.807, p = .064, M_{\text{low magnitude}} = 3.25, M_{\text{high magnitude}} = 3.16, M_{\text{nochange}} = 3.87$). Finally results show a not significant interaction between product relatedness and magnitude of identity change on products evaluation ($F(2, 158) = .763, p = .468$).

It is worth noticing here, that these results change when I consider only participants highly identifying with the professional identity (identification ≥ 6). A 3 (magnitude of identity change: high vs. low vs. no change) X 2 (product relatedness: work vs. neutral) analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a not significant main effect of product relatedness on the likelihood to recommend the product ($F(1, 28) = .159, p = .694, M_{\text{work}} = 3.42, M_{\text{neutral}} = 3.32$), as well as a non significant main effect of the magnitude of transition on product evaluation ($F(2, 28) = 1.550, p = .230, M_{\text{low magnitude}} = 2.83, M_{\text{high magnitude}} = 2.90, M_{\text{nochange}} = 4.25$). Most importantly, results show a significant interaction between product relatedness and magnitude of identity change on products evaluation ($F(2, 28) = 5.101, p = .013$). More specifically, participants in the high magnitude condition indicated a higher likelihood to recommend the product when observing product related to work rather than the neutral one ($M_{\text{work}} = 4.25, M_{\text{neutral}} = 2.00, p = .023$) while participants without an identity change scenario (i.e. the control condition) indicated a higher likelihood to recommend the product observing the neutral one ($M_{\text{work}} = 3.00, M_{\text{neutral}} = 4.88, p = .044$). Interestingly, participant in the low magnitude condition indicated the same likelihood to recommends the product for both the product related to work and the neutral one ($M_{\text{work}} = 3.00, M_{\text{neutral}} = 2.75, p = .781$) (see figure 2.3)

INSERT FIGURE 2.3 ABOUT HERE

Discussion. Results from exploratory study two indicate a similar pattern of results from the exploratory study two. More specifically, participants show a more positive reaction toward products related to their new identity when they experience a higher change.

It is worth noticing here that we can see the same patterns only considering participants highly identifying with the identity as a worker. This confirms previous results on the importance of the strength of the identification in order to generate a identity-based impact on consumer behavior (Forehand et al., 2002; Oyserman, 2009; Reed, 2004). Since, in study two I evoked a future identity through scenario, instead considering a new identity already established into the self-concept, a check for the identification was needed. Furthermore, results on identification suggest considering in next studies new identities already entered the self-concept, in order to have a higher likelihood to find highly identifying participants.

Taking together, results from exploratory studies one and two suggest that, when the new identity substitutes the previous one, people are more likely to show a positive reaction toward new-identity related products as the new identity is very far from the previous one in terms of actives and relationships. In other words, the more the new identity is new, the more people show a preference for new-identity related products. This is an indirect confirmation of previous studies on identity change. More specifically, although they considered only one identity (the new one) omitting the previous one, they predicted an instrumental use of new-identity related products in order to signal it or to reinforce it.

However, some identity changes do not imply that the new identity substitutes the old one. In such cases identity changes imply that the acquisition of the new identity does not turn the in the abandon of the old identities. As anticipated this is the case of the parental identity and many others. For instance, when the parental identity is acquired, the individual' identity as a friend, or a wife, or her professional one, are still present into her self-concept. Since no research explored individuals' reaction toward marketing stimuli considering the new vs. and the old identities still presents in the self-concept, next studies want to investigate these cases. More specifically, study three, four and five investigate individuals' reaction toward product related to different identities, when the new identity is added to the old ones, considering the simultaneous effect of the new vs. the old identities. Study three considered the acquisition of the new identity as mother. Study four

investigated the acquisition of the new identity as wife, while study five analyzed the acquisition of the new identity as father, involving only male respondents.

3.4. Study 3: identity change and multiple identities

Mothers vs. friends

Can the identity change prevent a consumer's reaction toward identity-based stimuli consistent with the new identity? In other words, can the identity change trigger consumers' preference for products related to the old identity? If this is the case, as our identity is continuously changing during the lifespan, identity-marketing should redefine its strategies, carefully choosing the right identity to communicate or position products. In order to verify this hypothesis, we examined consumers' evaluation of products related to a new vs. old identity still present into the self-concept.

Method. One hundred and eighty-eight women participated voluntarily in the study ($M_{\text{age}} = 33$ years, $SD = 6.54$). They were randomly assigned to condition within a 3 (product relatedness: mothers vs. friends, vs. neutral) between-subjects design.

Procedure. As in previous studies, participants were asked to look at an advertisement for a smartphone. As seen before, the only differences between the three conditions were the user imagery (a mother vs. three friends. vs none) (Forehand et al., 2011). Differently from previous studies, I added a product description as well to reinforce the link between the product and the identity elicited ("perfect for sharing the important moments of your baby", "perfect for sharing your life with your friends", no description) (Reed, 2004) (see fig. 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3)

INSERT FIGURES 3.1, 3.2 and 3.2 ABOUT HERE

Participants then were asked to evaluate the product using a five items (design, color, sex appeal, style and fashion, Cronbach Alpha = .983) seven-point scale (How do you evaluate the smartphone you have just seen? 1 = very bad; 7 = very good). Following previous work (Reed, 2004), we also measured participants' identification with the identity as mother, through a short version of the "Twenty Statements Test" (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954; White, Argo, & Sengupta, 2012). Participants were asked to describe themselves filling five sentences each of which began with the phrase "I am...". Participants were coded as 1) identifying with the mother identity when they described themselves as mothers ("I am a mum", "I am a mother"), and 2) as not identifying with the mother identity when described themselves otherwise ("I am a woman", "I am an employee"...).

Results. We excluded data from seven participants because they failed to evaluate the product. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a significant main effect of product relatedness ($F(2, 178) = 3.598, p = .029$). Planned contrasts provide support to my hypothesis: women evaluating smartphone-for-friends expressed a higher product evaluation than women evaluating smartphone-for-mothers ($M_{\text{friends}} = 4.72$ vs. $M_{\text{mother}} = 4.09; t(178) = -2.69, p = .009$). However, the difference between the evaluation of smartphone-for-friends and the neutral one as well as between the smartphone-for-mother and the neutral one were not statistically significant ($M_{\text{friends}} = 4.72$ vs. $M_{\text{neutral}} = 4.28, n.s.$; $M_{\text{mother}} = 4.09$ vs. $M_{\text{neutral}} = 4.28, n.s.$).

Identification. According to previous literature, a lack of identification with the identity as mother could explain why people evaluated the smartphone-for-friends more positively than the

smartphone-for-mothers (Reed, 2004). In order to exclude this alternative explanation, we examined the data by identification, distinguishing between women identified vs. women not identified with the identity as mother. A 3 (products relatedness) X 2 (identification: yes vs. not) ANOVA on product evaluation confirms a main effect of product relatedness ($F(2,175) = 3.144, p = .046$). A planned contrast analysis confirms previous results. Among participants identified with the identity as mother, women indicated a higher evaluation for smartphone-for-friends than for smartphone-for-mothers ($M_{\text{friends}} = 4.93$ vs. $M_{\text{mother}} = 4.27, p = .025$) as well as for the smartphone not related to any identity ($M_{\text{friends}} = 4.93$ vs. $M_{\text{neutral}} = 4.07, p = .014$). Crucially the difference between the evaluation for the smartphone-for-mother and the neutral one is not statistically significant ($M_{\text{mother}} = 4.27$ vs. $M_{\text{neutral}} = 4.07, p = .56$). It is worth noticing here that among participants not identifying with the identity as mother the evaluation for three type of smartphone are not statistically different ($F(2, 175) = 1.948, p = .146, M_{\text{friends}} = 4.33, M_{\text{mother}} = 3.79, M_{\text{neutral}} = 4.53$) (see Figure 1). Finally, the interaction between product relatedness and identification is not significant ($F(2, 175) = 2.209, p = .113$) (see fig. 3.4).

INSERT FIGURE 3.4 ABOUT HERE

Discussion. Although the identity as mother was new, providing high levels of identification, participants' evaluation for the product related to the old identity (the identity as friend) was higher than the evaluation for the product related to the new identity (the identity as mother). This is inconsistent with previous results and suggests and that an individual's reaction against the new identity can arise after an identity change. More specifically, when experiencing an identity change, individuals react to identity-based marketing stimuli in contrast with literature suggestions, preferring products related to the old identity rather than the new one. This implies

that, proposing product making salient the identity consumers have just acquired can be counterproductive. Furthermore, study three also shows that this is the case even for individuals strongly identifying with this identity, demonstrating that the identity change is able to unsettle the identification mechanisms that guides the identity-based behavior (Oyserman, 2009; Reed, 2004).

I also acknowledge for some limitation. First, I measured the identification for the identity as mother, without measuring the identification for the identity as a friend. Second, I did not check for the underlying path. For instance I did not measure the level of the enactment of both identities as well as the perceived difficulties in enacting all identities. Next studies will shed light on this, overcoming these limitations.

3.5. Study 4: identity strain as unbalance allocation of finite resources

Wives vs. friends

Study three confirms that an identity change may prevent a positive individuals' reaction toward product related to the new identity. This is a new result, since no previous studies assessed the positive influence of the old identity on individuals' choices. As above explained, previous marketing research demonstrated the impact of the old identity when it belong to the past (i.e. the nostalgia effect). However this effect is different from nostalgia, because the old identity belongs to the present, as individuals may still use that identity to define themselves.

However, study three does not offer an explanation for the impact of the old identity on consumption. Basing on the idea of the role strain (Goode, 1960), I argue that a unbalanced allocation of enacting opportunities may explain a preference for old-identity related products. More specifically, upsetting habitual routines, the new identity may make difficult the enactment of the old identity that results as hypo-enacted. Preferring product related to the old identity, consumption choices offer the opportunity to re-balance the enactment of both identities.

Study four aims at confirming the preference for old-identity related products, at the same time verifying the underlying process.

Method. Two hundred and twenty-nine women participated in the study ($M_{\text{age}} = 31.88$ years, $SD = 8.14$) through Amazon Mechanical Turk. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions into a 3 (identity enactment: wife vs. friend vs both) X 2 (product relatedness: wife vs. friend) between-subjects design.

Procedure. First participants were asked to recall and write down the things they are usual to do with their husbands and their friends. In order to trigger an unbalanced enactment between the two identities, participants were asked to use an unbalanced number of sentences for each identity. More specifically, in the first condition, in order to make the wife identity as hyper-enacted, participant were told to use ten sentences to describe the way in which they spend their free time. They were forced to use eight sentences to write down what they were used to do with their husbands and only two sentences to write down what they were used to do with their friends:

“This part of the study is focused on your free time. More specifically, the research aims to investigate the ways in which young women describe themselves in their daily life (terms, words, expressions). For this reason, use the following ten sentences to describe your life. Please use the simplest way to describe yourself. Please, use the following eight sentences to describe the time you share with your husband. You can list the things you do together or describe some particular events. Also, write down how you demonstrate your love to him. It is very important that you use all eight sentences.[...]Please, use the following two sentences to describe the time you share with your friends. You can list the things you do together or describe some particular events. Also, write down how you demonstrate your friendship to them. It is very important that you use all two sentences”.

In the second condition, in order to make the friend identity as hyper-enacted, participants were told to use ten sentences to describe the way in which they spend their free time, as in the first condition. But, now they were forced to use eight sentences to write down what they were used to do with their friends and only two sentences to write down what they were used to do with their husbands:

“This part of the study is focused on your free time. More specifically, the research aims to investigate the ways in which young women describe themselves in their daily life (terms, words, expressions). For this reason, use the following ten sentences to describe your life. Please use the simplest way to describe yourself. Please, use the following eight sentences to describe the time you share with your friends. You can list the things you do together or describe some particular events. Also, write down how you demonstrate your friendship to them. It is very important that you use all eight sentences. [...] Please, use the following two sentences to describe the time you share with your husband. You can list the things you do together or describe some particular events. Also, write down how you demonstrate your love to him. It is very important that you use all two sentences”.

In the third condition, in order to trigger a balanced enactment of both identities the sentences were homogeneously distributed between them. Thus participant were forced to use five sentences to write down what they were used to do with their friends and five sentences to write down what they were used to do with their husbands.

After the writing task, participants were asked to look at an advertisement for a smartphone. As in previous studies, the only differences between the two conditions were the user imagery (a couple vs. three friends) (Forehand et al., 2011) and the product description (Reed, 2004) (“The smartphone you see has been designed to make you share the most important moments of your life with your husband.”, “The smartphone you see has been designed to make you share the most important moments of your life with your friends.”) (see figure 4.1 and 4.2).

INSERT FIGURES 4.1 AND 4.2 ABOUT HERE

Participants then were asked to evaluate the product using a five items (design, color, sex appeal, style and fashion, Cronbach Alpha = .924) seven-point scale (How do you evaluate the smartphone you have just seen? 1 = very bad; 7 = very good). Furthermore, participants were asked to indicate their likelihood to recommend the product using a seven-point Likert scale: (How likely are you to recommend the smartphone to your friends? Please use the following scale where 1 = no, definitely not, and 7 = yes, definitely).

Thus, participants were asked to indicate their level of identification with their marital identity as well as their identity as friends, indicating the overlap they perceived between their self-concept and the two identities (1 = far apart, 8 = complete overlap; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000) (see Appendix).

Finally, participants were asked to indicate to what extent the products they have seen is related to the identity as wife vs. the identity as friends (Referring again to the smartphone you've seen, how well do you think it lets you share your life with your husband?; Referring again to the smartphone you've seen, how well do you think it lets you share your life with your friends? where 1 = not at all and 7 = very much).

Results. A 3 (identity enactment: wife vs. friend vs both) X 2 (product relatedness: wife vs. friend) analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a not significant main effect of product relatedness on product evaluation ($F(1, 288) = 2.396, p. = .123, M_{\text{wife}} = 4.84, M_{\text{friend}} = 5.06$) as well as a not

significant main effect of the identity enactment on product evaluation ($F(2, 288) = 1.179, p = .312, M_{\text{wife as hyper-enacted}} = 4.94, M_{\text{friend as hyper-enacted}} = 5.09, M_{\text{both}} = 4.83$). Finally results show a not significant interaction between product relatedness and magnitude of identity change on products evaluation ($F(2, 288) = 1.353, p = .260$). However, it is worth noticing here that, within the wife enactment condition, participant show a more positive product evaluation for the product related to the identity as friend, than for the product related to the identity as wife ($F(1, 288) = 4.113, p = .260, M_{\text{wife}} = 4.70, M_{\text{friend}} = 5.16, p. 043$).

Analysis shows basically same results on the likelihood of recommendation. A 3 (identity enactment: wife vs. friend vs both) X 2 (product relatedness: wife vs. friend) analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a significant main effect of product relatedness on the likelihood of recommendation ($F(1, 288) = 4.012, p = .046, M_{\text{wife}} = 3.64, M_{\text{friend}} = 4.08$) as well as a marginally significant main effect of the identity enactment on product evaluation ($F(2, 288) = 2.546, p = .080, M_{\text{wife as hyper-enacted}} = 3.69, M_{\text{friend as hyper-enacted}} = 4.21, M_{\text{both}} = 3.69$). Finally results show a not significant interaction between product relatedness and magnitude of identity change on products evaluation ($F(2, 288) = 1.353, p = .260$). Again, it is worth noticing here that, within the wife enactment condition, participant show a more positive product evaluation (albeit marginally significant) for the product related to the identity as friend, than for the product related to the identity as wife ($F(1, 288) = 2.807, p. .043, M_{\text{wife}} = 3.37, M_{\text{friend}} = 3.98$) (see figure 4.3 and 4.4).

INSERT FIGURES 4.3 AND 4.4 ABOUT HERE

Furthermore, I examined whether the effect of product relatedness on product evaluation was moderated by the level of identification with the identity as wife. The results confirm the outcome from study three. More specifically, I found a significant interaction of the level of

identification with the identity as wife and product relatedness on product evaluation ($b = 1.608$; $p = .047$). This indicates that the effect of product relatedness varies across different level of identification with the new identity. Next, I conducted a spotlight analysis to decompose the interaction term and examine product evaluation at different level of identification with the identity as wife. First, the effect of product related to the identity as friend was positive and significant for those scoring above the average ($+1\text{ SD} = 7.8950$) on the identification with the identity as wife ($b = 4.955$, $p = .00979$) and marginally significant for those scoring average (6.2730) ($b = 2.359$, $p = .0736$). Thus, people scoring high or average level of identification with the identity as wife show a more positive evaluation for product related to the identity as friend. The effect was not significant for those scoring low on the identification with the identity as wife (4.6511) ($b = .8885$; $p = .0260$). This result replicated those from study three, where when the identification with the new identity was high, the evaluation for the product related to the old identity was significantly higher than the evaluation for the product related to the new identity.

Discussion. Results from study four confirm the previous ones. More specifically, once again participants show a more positive reaction toward product related to their old identity rather than their new one. This is the case when their new identity results as hyper-enacted.

Furthermore, once again, this is not due by a lack of the identification with the new identity. On the contrary, when participants are more identifying with their new identity, they show a more positive reaction for the product related to their old identity, and as the identification increases, the positive reaction becomes more significant.

Finally, it is worth noticing here, that these results disconfirm the identity salience principle as well. More specifically, it can be argued that the writing task made salient one identity over the others. However, the results show an opposite path. When the identity as wife results as hyper-enacted (i.e. more salient) participants show a more positive reaction toward product related to the identity as friend (the hypo-enacted identity or the less salient one). This makes these results

even more interesting because they suggest that identity change may prevent a identity salient reaction like other constructs already investigated, such as gender vulnerability (Puntoni et al., 2011) and identity conflict (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Cheng et al., 2006; Zou et al., 2008). Thus, the identity change can be accounted among the preventers of the identity salience principle.

3.6. Study 5: identity strain as perceived difficulty

Fathers vs. workers

Results from study three confirms the general idea that after an identity change consumers may prefer product related to their old identity instead to their new one. As anticipated, this is in contrast with previous research suggesting that after an identity change people prefer product related to the new identity, and highlights the need to consider both, the new and the old identity in order to understand consumer behavior. However, it can be argued that is not the unbalanced allocation of finite resources *per se* that explains the results, but it is the perceived difficulty in managing both identities properly. In other words, the tension between the new and the old identities does not depend on the amount of time or energies dedicated to one identity rather than the other, but rather on the perceived difficulty in managing them. For this reason, study five investigates the effect of the *perceive* difficulty in managing both identity on the individuals' reaction toward products related to the old vs. the new identity. As anticipated, I argue that the difficulty in managing one or more identities can affect consumers' answer to identity-based marketing stimuli. More in details, I contend that when people experience some difficulties in expressing one or more identities (i.e. when the identity strain is high), people prefer products related to the overhung identity (that is the old one), while when people do not experience any difficulties in expressing one or more identities (i.e. when the identity strain is low), people prefer products related to their new identity. After an identity change, old identities can be overhung by

the new identity entered the self-concept. This is the case, for instance, of professional identity. After the birth of a baby, women or men can experience some difficulties in managing their professional identities because of the birth of their child. If this is the case, the identity as professional women/men results as hypo-enacted. Thus, in the study five I considered the parental and the professional identity.

Pre test.

In order to verify the idea that professional and parental identities generate a strain, I run a pretest. Forty-one parents participated in the study (46% male, $M_{age}=33.1$ years, $SD\ 8.02$; 54% female; $M_{age}, 29.86$ years, $SD=7.1$).

Procedure. After reading the description of identity and of the identity strain, participants were asked to rank five identities from the most in strain to the least in strain with their parental identity, choosing among: professional identity, religious identity, their identity as a son/daughter, a friend, an athlete:

“The following questions are focused on our identity. The identity is defined as the answer to the question “Who am I?”. We all are parents, professional women and men, friends, sons, partners, athletes... In our daily life, we are able to express all these parts properly. However, sometimes we experience some difficulties in expressing completely who we are. In such cases, we feel a sort of strain between our identities, like one identity overhangs the other ones. If this is your case, in the following questions we asked you to indicate the degree of difficulty you experience. More in details we are interested in your identity as parent, and we would like to know if you experience a friction between this identity and the other ones. Thus, we want to know how much is difficult for you to express your identity as parent and another one together. Please indicate how much strong is the friction between your identity as parent and the following ones, ranking the pairs of identities from 1= the most in strain 7= the least in strain”.

After ranking the identities, participants were asked to indicate their level of identification with their parental identity and with the first ranked identity, indicating the overlap they perceived between their self-concept and the two identities (1 = Far apart, 8 = Complete overlap; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000) (see Appendix).

Results. Eighteen participants indicated the professional identity is the most in strain with their identity as parent. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows that the effect of gender is not significant ($F(1, 40) = .494, p = .486$). However, it is worth noticing here that the level of identification with the professional identity is higher of men than for women ($ID_{men} = 5.14$ vs. $ID_{women} = 2.9, F(1, 16) = 8.177, p = .011$).

Discussion. Results from pre-test confirm that individuals experience high level of identity strain between their parental and their professional identities. However, the low level of identification for women suggests involving only man in the main study. More specifically, since the identification is *the condition sine qua non* an identity can affect behavior (Reed, 2004), using a female population does not allow me to investigate the effect of the professional identity on consumer preferences.

Study 5.

According to results from the pretest, I run study five involving man recently acquired their parental identity. More specifically, I recruited only working men having had a child less than three years ago. As I wanted to investigate the specific situation in which the new identity interferes with the old one, I manipulated the identity strain making the parental identity as hyper-enacted over the professional identity (Adams, King, & King, 1996).

Method. I recruited one hundred eighty-eight fathers ($M_{\text{age}} = 32.13$ years; $SD = 7.98$) through Amazon Mechanical Turk. They were randomly assigned to one condition in a 2 (product relatedness: parental identity vs. professional identity) X 2 (identity strain: yes vs. not) between-subjects design.

Procedure. Participants were asked to complete a writing task. In the strain condition they were asked to think about them as professional men and fathers at the same time. Then they were asked to write down an episode in which they experienced some difficulties in doing their job because of their child:

"In this first part of the study we will ask you to think about you as a father and a professional man as well. Managing both identities (being a father and being a worker) can be difficult. For instance, John, a colleague of ours, said: "After the birth of my first child, I faced my job with anxiety, I had no time enough and I was always late". Think about you. Please write down a particular event (or a period of time) in which enacting your professional identity was very difficult because of your identity as a father. "

In the no strain condition they were asked to think on and write down an episode in which they could do their job properly, without experiencing any difficulties in managing both their identities (the parental and the professional one):

"In this first part of the study we will ask you to think about you as a father and a professional man as well. Generally, men can manage both identities (being a father and being a worker) easily. For instance, John, a colleague of ours, said: "After the birth of my child I became more organized, I can find time for my baby as well as for doing my job properly" Think about you. Please write down an event (or a period of time) in which you felt managing both identities (being a father and being a worker) was easy".

After completing the writing task, as in previous studies, participants were asked to look at an advertisement for a smartphone. Consistently with previous studies (Forehand et al., 2011; Reed,

2004), we used the same smartphone across the two conditions (Samsung Galaxy Note) showing different pictures (see figures 5.1 and 5.2) and different product descriptions. In the smartphone-for-father condition the product was presented as a useful tool for sharing time with children, while in the smartphone-for-job condition it was presented as a working support:

“This smartphone brings you closer and captures funny moments when you are with your child. Each feature is designed to simplify and enrich your lives”.

“This smartphone provides you the tools to manage complicated schedules in an easy and intuitive way. Working has never been so easy”.

Participants were asked to evaluate the product using a five items (design, color, sex appeal, style and fashion, Cronbach Alpha = .909) seven-point scale (“How do you evaluate the smartphone you have just seen?” 1 = very bad; 7 = very good). Furthermore, they were asked to indicate their willingness to pay for the smartphone (“How much are you willing to pay for the smartphone?”).

Then, participants were asked to indicate their identification with their parental and professional identity, indicating the overlap they perceived between their self-concept and the two identities (1 = Far apart, 8 = Complete overlap; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000) (see Appendix).

Finally, in order to verify that our manipulation elicits different levels of perceived difficulty in enacting one or more identities, we asked participants to indicate the degree of difficulty they perceive in managing their parental and their professional identity in their life (“How difficult do you think is managing both identities (being a father and being a worker) in your life?, from 1 = not at all to 7 = very much).

Results. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a significant main effect of the writing task on the perceived difficulty in enacting parental and professional identities ($F(1, 173) = 34.277, p = .000$) ($M_{\text{strain}} = 4.40; M_{\text{no-strain}} = 2.99$). This confirms that the manipulation successfully elicited different level of identity strain.

A 2 (product relatedness: father vs. worker) X 2 (identity strain: yes vs. not) analysis of variance (ANOVA) shows a significant main effect of the product relatedness on willingness to pay ($F(1, 184) = 4.707; p = .031$) ($M_{\text{father}} = \171.8 vs. $M_{\text{worker}} = \$215.9$), while the effect of identity strain on the willingness to pay is not significant ($F(1, 184) = 1.557; p = .214$) ($M_{\text{strain}} = \203.5 vs. $M_{\text{no-strain}} = \$182.5$). Furthermore, the interaction between the identity strain and product relatedness is significant, albeit marginally ($F(2, 184) = 3.322; p = .070$), supporting our hypothesis (fig. 5.3 and 5.4).

INSERT FIGURES 5.3 and 5.4 ABOUT HERE

Within the strain condition, the willingness to pay for the smartphone-for-worker is higher than for the smartphone-for-fathers ($F(1, 184) = 7.817, p = .006$) as well as in the smartphone-for-workers condition the willingness to pay is higher for father in the strain condition, than in the no-strain condition. ($F(1, 184) = 4.509, p = .035$)

Discussion. Results from study five confirm previous studies and the underlying path as well. First, study five replicates results from study four, showing a more positive reaction for product related to the old identity. Second, study five confirms the underlying process, showing the effect of identity strain. More specifically, when the identity strain is high the individuals' reaction for the product related to the old identity is more positive than for products related to the new identity. This means that, when the old identity is overhung by the new identity, people are more likely to react in a positive way toward products related the old identity instead to the new one.

I acknowledge for some limitations. First, results from study five do not confirm the effect of identity strain as well as of product relatedness on product evaluation. I argue that this

could be due to the specific items I used. Asking participants to evaluate five technical aspects of the smartphone could have nullified the effect of the identity on consumer behavior. Future studies can overcome this limit, measuring consumers' overall attitude instead of products evaluation. Second, the interaction between product relatedness and identity strain on willingness to pay is only marginal significant. As I allowed participants to indicate an amount of money without any starting point, the level of variance in values is high and this could make our effect lower.

4. General Discussion

Five studies investigated individuals' reaction toward product related to their new vs. their old identity, after an identity change (i.e. the acquisition of a new identity). According to previous marketing works, studies one and two analyzed individuals' reaction toward identity marketing, considering the new identity as a substitute of the previous one. In other words, studies one and two considered the process of the disengagement from the previous identity and the engagement in the new one. In contrast, studies three, four and five considered the new identity as a further identity entering the self-concept together with the previous ones. This means that the acquisition of the identity as father, for instance, does not cancel the identity as a worker, as a husband or as a friend.

Results from the first two studies show a more positive individuals' reaction toward product related to the new identity, confirming the instrumental use of new products already demonstrated by marketing studies (Andreasen, 1984; Schouten, 1991). This means that when a new identity is acquired substituting an old one, people show a more favorable reaction to new-identity based marketing stimuli, because the new identity needs to be built and reinforced. Products and possessions are instruments to signal the new identity as well as to facilitate the passage from the old self to the new one.

However, I contend that some identity changes do not imply the abandon of the previous identity. Since no marketing studies investigated such cases, it is not clear what kind of reaction individuals may show. Thus, first I wanted to verify whether a positive reactions toward old-identity-based marketing is possible and, if this is the case, I wanted to verify the hypothesis that these reactions are due to a tension between the identities (i.e. that I call the identity strain) that makes people act in favor the overhung identity (i.e. the old one).

Analyses from study three confirm the general idea that after an identity change consumers may prefer product related to their old identity instead to their new one. This result highlights the need to consider both, the new and the old identity in order to understand consumer behavior. Study

four and five confirm the idea that when people experience a strain between identities they show a more favorable reaction toward the overhung identity (i.e. the old one).

Marketing research recognizes that period of changes are particularly strategic for product and brands because they offer the rare opportunities to break individuals' inertia or consumers' loyalty to brand (Andreasen, 1984; Wood, 2010). At the same time, marketing attention to individuals' identity is increasing during the last decades because of their incredible power in guiding behaviors. Furthermore, literature recognize that our identity continuously changes during the life span and it should be considered malleable and instable rather than fixed and constant (Oyserman, 2009; Reed et al., 2012). Despite these evidences, studies on identity changes are still in its infancy.

Acknowledging for this gap, this work makes several theoretical contributions. First, this works demonstrated the importance to adopt a new, comprehensive definition of the identity change (i.e. the acquisition of a new identity) in which the old identity is not only substituting the previous ones but also added to them into the self-concept. More specifically, I demonstrated that two different identity-marketing reactions arise when the new identity substitutes vs. is added to the old ones.

Second, I demonstrated the importance to adopt a multiple identity framework to investigate the identity changes. Despite marketing research recognizes the importance to consider multiple identities to study the identity-based motivation to act, previous works did not consider multiple identities in the identity change context. Furthermore, without considering the role of old identities, previous marketing studies failed to discover the individuals' preference for the old-identity related products. In other words, after a change in identity, basing on previous results, marketing studies suggest to leverage the new identity in order to communicate or to position products successfully. However, I demonstrated that this could not be always the case.

Third, this work depicts the identity change as a possible preventer of individuals' reaction consistent with the identity salience principle. Previous studies show that other constructs may

prevent people to react consistently with the most salient identity. Puntoni et al (2011), for instance, demonstrated that women may react against a breast cancer campaign when they perceive themselves as more vulnerable because there are female. This gender vulnerability makes them donate less than when the same breast cancer campaign does not make salient their female identity. Cheng et al (2006) demonstrated that the identity conflict may prevent people reaction consistent with the most salient identity as well. More specifically, they showed that bicultural individuals react consistent with the most salient identity only when they perceive their cultural identities as integrated. In the present work, I demonstrated that people may react to identity-marketing consistently to the least salient identity if this identity is perceived as overhung (study 4). As in the identity conflict, people may react against the most salient identity, favoring the least salient, in order to balance the enactment of both identities.

Four, this work shows that a new kind of tension between identity can be investigated: the identity strain. Defined as the perceived difficulty in managing one or more identities, the identity strain is able to explain tensions between even not conflicting identities. As explained above, two identities may not be related to conflicting behaviors or norms, but can result in an unbalanced enactment. More specifically, I contend that the identity strain is triggered by the identity change, since the new identity upset individuals' routines making the enactment of old identities problematic.

Five, I considered different kinds of identity changes demonstrating the effect across different life stages. More specifically, in studies one and two I considered the college identity acquisition and the professional identity acquisition. In studies three, four and five, I investigated three different identity changes as well as three different contrasts between identities: the identity as mother, the identity as wife and the identity as father as the new acquired identities, contrasted with the identity as friend (study three and four) and the professional identity (study five). Furthermore, considering women as well as man, I demonstrated that the effect is consistent across gender.

This work has interesting managerial implications as well. Acknowledging the impact of identities in driving behaviors, companies communicate and position their products linking them to specific identities. Making salient the identity as mother vs. the identity as an athlete, companies are able to gain a more favorable response in term of product attitude or willingness to pay, when the identity as mother vs. the identity as athlete are included into consumer's self-concept. However, marketing research is starting to recognize that identity-marketing can backfire too (Bhattacharjee et al., 2014). This means that eliciting the wrong identity or doing it in the wrong way make people to react in a less favorable way. Furthermore, companies has extensive database through which they can observe or even forecast individuals' changes in identities (like the birth of the first child). Companies know that the new identity is particularly strong in driving behavior and they generally use the new identity in order to sell products. This is the case for instance of insurance companies starting offering you family insurance packs immediately after learning you have had a baby. In contrast, this work demonstrated that after an identity change, people may react to new identity-related product in a contrastive way. Knowing which identity companies should leverage in order to successfully position they products can be strategic in order to gain the market success.

5. Limitations and future research

I acknowledge for some limitations as well. First, studies one-five do not show an individuals' reaction consistent across dependent variables. Study one and study three showed a more positive reaction toward respectively the new-identity related product and the old-identity related products in terms of product evaluation, while study two found a significant difference on likelihood to recommend. Study four showed both effects on product evaluation as well as on the likelihood to recommend the product, while study five indicated the more positive reaction in term of willingness to pay (disconfirming a significant difference between products in terms of product evaluation). Differences between studies one and two can be ascribed to the different product used: sunglasses vs. smartphone. Furthermore, the instable effect on product evaluation can be due to the

measurement I used. Asking the evaluation of five specific product attributes (color, style, attractiveness, fashion, and design) may prevent the less conscious effect of identity on choices (Oyserman, 2009). Measuring individuals' attitudes toward the product may solve this limit.

Second, although I considered different identity changes, I used only two products (sunglasses and smartphone). Future researches may investigate other products, verifying the results across different product categories.

Finally, studies four and five investigated different kinds of tension between identities: related to individual's resources vs. a perceived one. Although both indicated the same path of results, future research can deeper investigate the concept of the identity strain, distinguish between psychological vs. material tensions among identities.

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Table 1 - Stable Transitory Identities

Examples from marketing literature:	
Stable and temporally expansive (Reed et al 2012; Oyserman 2009)	father
	daughter
	friends
	African-American
Transitory and temporally specific (Reed et al 2012; Oyserman 2009)	Republicans
	athlete
	lawyer
	Mac-user

STUDY 1 - exploratory study 1

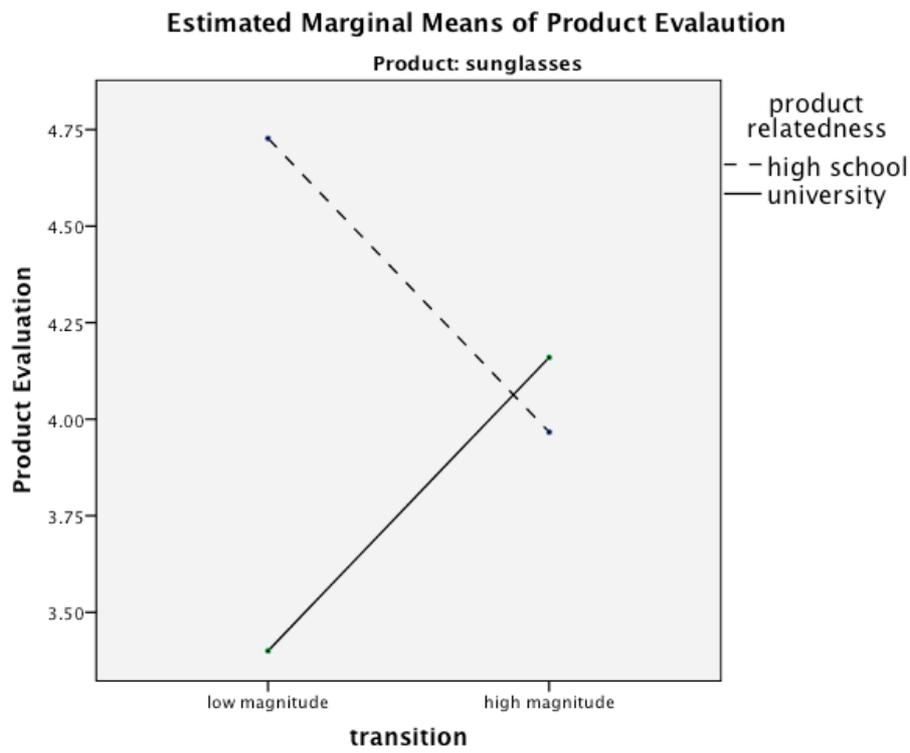
FIGURE 1.1 Sunglasses for high school students



FIGURE 1.2 Sunglasses for college students



FIGURE 1.3 Product relatedness and magnitude of identity change on product evaluation



STUDY 2 - exploratory study 2

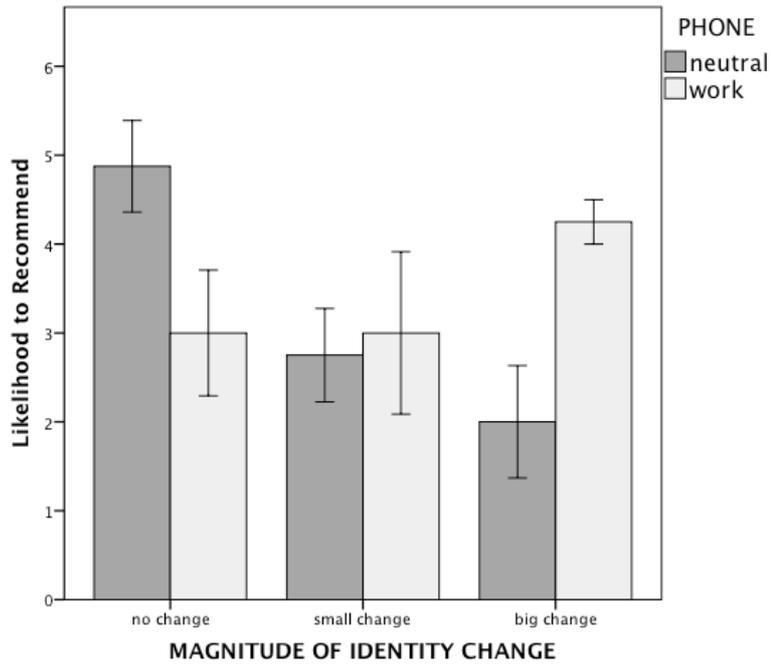
FIGURE 2.1 Smartphone for workers



FIGURE 2.2 Smartphone neutral



FIGURE 2.3 Product relatedness and magnitude of identity change on recommendation



STUDY 3

FIGURE 3.1 Smartphone for mothers



FIGURE 3.2 Smartphone for friends

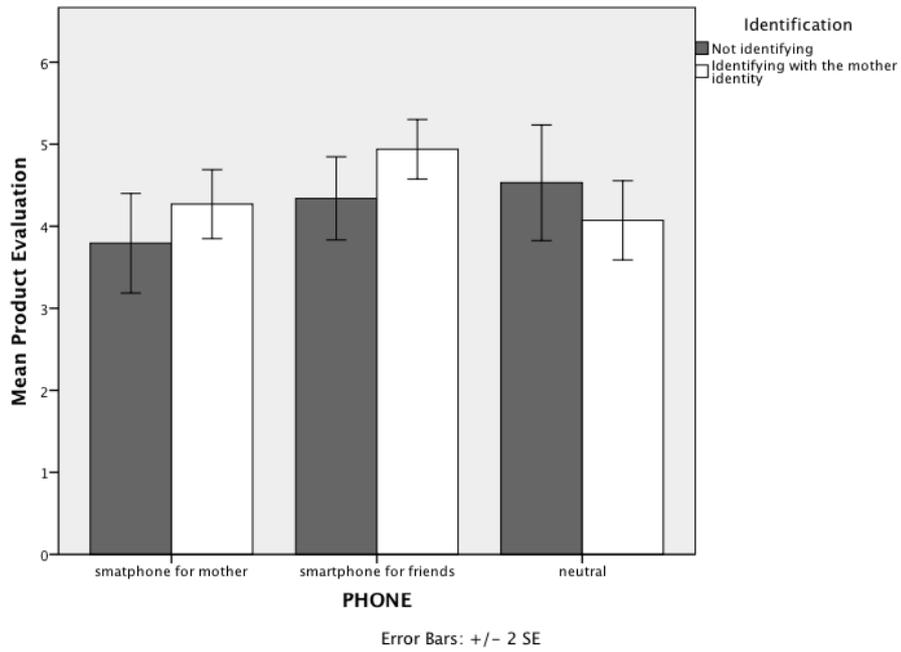


FIGURE 3.3 Neutral Smartphone



STUDY 3

FIGURE 3.4 MOTHERS REACT AGAINST PRODUCT RELATEDNESS



STUDY 4

FIGURE 4.1 Smartphone for wife



FIGURE 4.2 Smartphone for friends



Figure 4.3 Product relatedness and Identity enactment on product evaluation

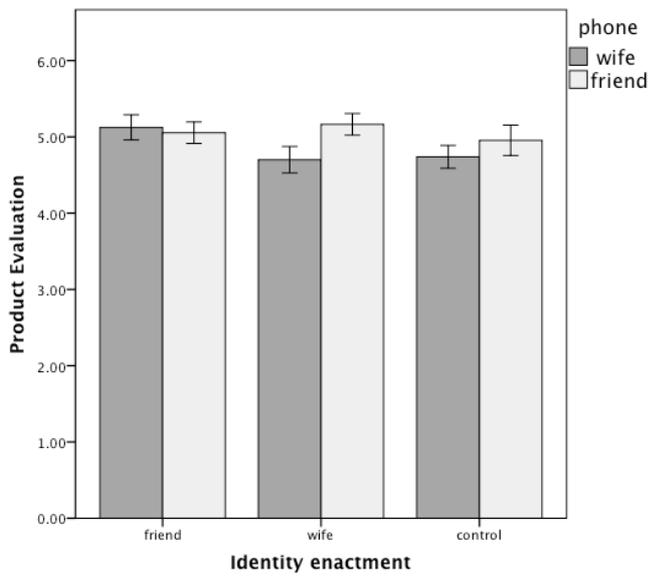
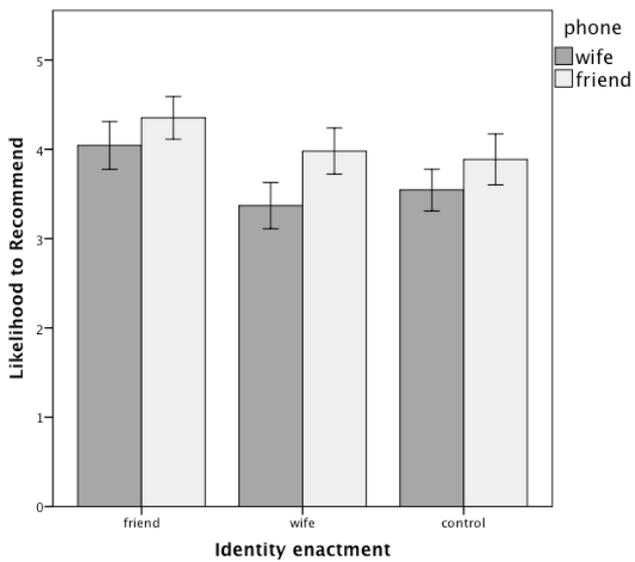


Figure 4.4 Product relatedness and Identity enactment on product evaluation



STUDY 5

FIGURE 5.1 Smartphone for fathers



FIGURE 5.1 Smartphone for workers



STUDY 5

FIGURE 5.3. WTP BY PRODUCT RELATEDNESS AND IDENTITY STRAIN

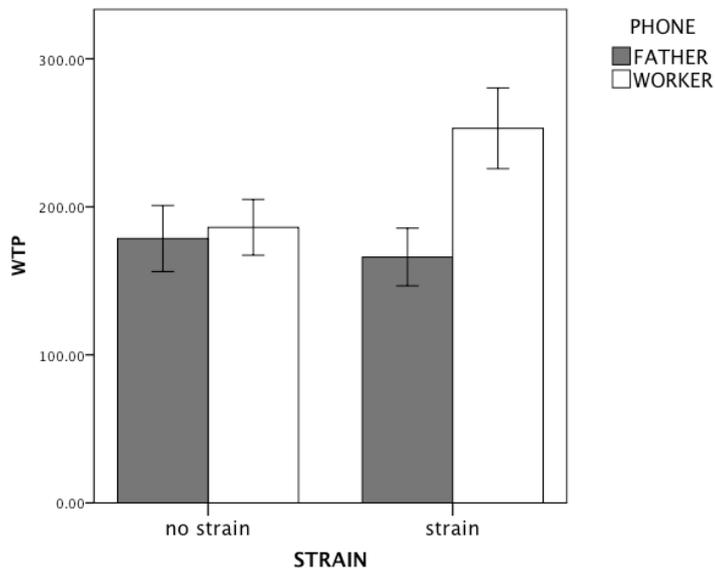
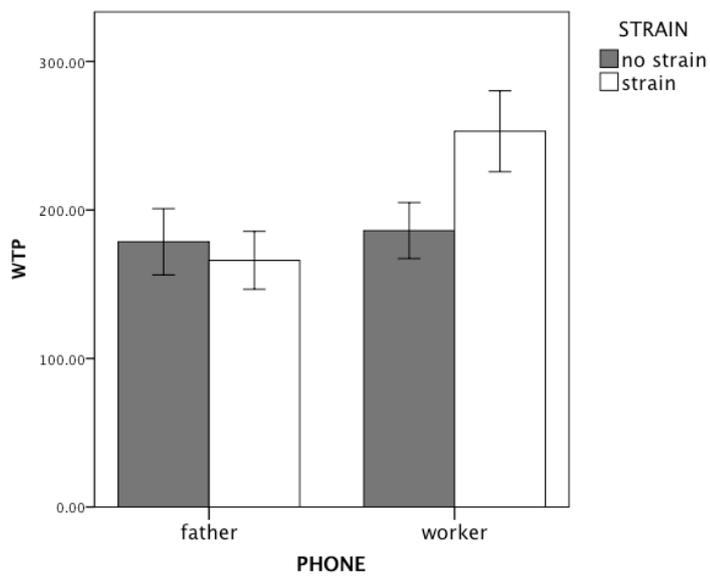


FIGURE 5.4 WTP BY PRODUCT RELATEDNESS AND IDENTITY STRAIN



Appendix

Identification scale (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000)

A		Far apart
B		Close Together but separate
C		Very small overlap
D		Small overlap
E		Moderate Overlap
F		Large overlap
G		Very large overlap
H		Complete overlap