**UNIVERSITÄT TRIER**

**FACHBEREICH I - PSYCHOLOGIE**

# ANTECEDENTS, PROCESSES, AND MANIFESTATIONS OF UNIQUENESS-DRIVEN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

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Dissertation

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Trier, March 2011

**LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES ..... V**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ..... VIII**

**1. INTRODUCTION ..... 1**

1.1. PREFACE ..... 1

1.2. OVERALL OBJECTIVE AND CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS ..... 3

1.3. STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS ..... 8

**2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ..... 9**

2.1. CONSUMER NEED FOR UNIQUENESS (CNFU) ..... 9

2.1.1. Definition and Subfactors ..... 9

2.1.2. The CNFU Origins – The Need for Uniqueness Theory ..... 12

2.1.3. Inter- and Intra-Individual Differences in CNFU ..... 14

2.1.4. Behavioral Manifestations of CNFU ..... 15

2.1.5. Excursus: CNFU Related Concepts ..... 18

2.2. GENERAL UNIQUENESS PERCEPTION (GUP) ..... 20

2.2.1. Definition and Historic Background ..... 21

2.2.2. The Formation of GUP ..... 22

2.2.3. GUP as the Driver Behind CNFU ..... 25

2.3. MASS CUSTOMIZATION ..... 27

2.3.1. Definition ..... 27

2.3.2. Concept and Dimensions ..... 28

2.3.3. Benefits and Costs of Mass Customization ..... 29

2.3.4. Mass Customization and CNFU ..... 32

**3. EMPIRICAL STUDIES ..... 34**

3.0. STUDY OVERVIEW ..... 34

3.1. STUDY #1: THE INTERRELATION OF UNIQUENESS-DRIVEN CONCEPTS ..... 35

3.1.1. Study Objectives ..... 35

3.1.2. Introduction and Hypothesis ..... 36

3.1.3. Method ..... 39

3.1.4. Results ..... 44

3.1.5. Discussion ..... 52

3.2. STUDY #2: TATTOOING—AN EXTREME FORM OF UNIQUENESS-SEEKING ..... 57

3.2.1. Study Objectives ..... 57

3.2.2. Introduction and Hypotheses ..... 58

3.2.3. Method ..... 61

3.2.4. Results ..... 64

3.2.5. Discussion ..... 69

3.3. STUDY #3: CONSUMPTION OF CUSTOMIZED APPAREL PRODUCTS ..... 73

3.3.1. Study Objectives ..... 73

3.3.2. Introduction and Hypotheses ..... 74

3.3.3. Method ..... 78

3.3.4. Results ..... 81

3.3.5. Discussion ..... 88

3.4. STUDY #4: PASSIVE UNIQUENESS-SEEKING AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY ..... 93

3.4.1. Study Objectives ..... 93

3.4.2. Introduction and Hypotheses ..... 94

3.4.3. Method ..... 99

3.4.4. Results ..... 104

3.4.5. Discussion ..... 113

3.5. STUDY #5: MANIPULATION OF UNIQUENESS-DRIVEN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR 120

3.5.1. Study Objectives ..... 120

3.5.2. Introduction and Hypotheses ..... 121

3.5.3. Method ..... 127

3.5.4. Results ..... 135

3.5.5. Discussion ..... 137

**4. SUMMARY AND OVERALL DISCUSSION ..... 143**

4.1. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS ..... 143

4.1.1. Antecedents of Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior ..... 143

4.1.2. Processes Behind Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior..... 148

4.1.3. Manifestations of Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior..... 153

4.2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS ..... 154

4.2.1. Antecedents of Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior ..... 154

4.2.2. Processes Behind Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior..... 156

4.2.3. Manifestations of Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior..... 157

4.3. LIMITATIONS..... 158

4.4. OUTLOOK..... 159

**5. LITERATURE ..... 161**

**6. APPENDIX..... 172**

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

### Tables


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Table 1 | Study overview including description of sample, method, and study goals | 34 |
| Table 2 | Factor loadings of the consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) scales | 45 |
| Table 3 | Psychometric properties of uniqueness-related constructs used in study #1 | 46 |
| Table 4 | Correlation overview of uniqueness-related variables used in study #1 | 47 |
| Table 5 | Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for general uniqueness perception (GUP) predicting consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) | 48 |
| Table 6 | Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) predicting uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) | 51 |
| Table 7 | Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) predicting possession of individualized products (POIP) | 52 |
| Table 8 | Psychometric properties of measures used in study #2 | 64 |
| Table 9 | Descriptive statistics of the three measures of tattooing behavior | 65 |
| Table 10 | Correlation overview of variables used in study #2 | 65 |
| Table 11 | Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) predicting tattooing degree | 67 |
| Table 12 | Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) predicting tattoo cost | 67 |
| Table 13 | Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) predicting tattoo number | 67 |
| Table 14 | Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) predicting possession of individualized products (POIP) | 68 |
| Table 15 | Overview psychometric properties of scales used in study #3 | 81 |
| Table 16 | Correlation overview of variables used in study #3 | 82 |
| Table 17 | Overview comparison of consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) of individuals with high and low consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) levels | 83 |
| Table 18 | Overview of possession of individualized products (POIP) in study #3 comparing individuals with low and high levels of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) | 84 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Table 19 | Summary hierarchical regression analysis of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) predicting the number of customized apparel products bought in the last 6 months (COCAP / Number) | 86 |
| Table 20 | Summary hierarchical regression analysis of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) predicting the amount of Euros spent on customized apparel products in the last 6 months (COCAP / Euro) | 86 |
| Table 21 | Summary hierarchical regression analysis of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) predicting uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) | 87 |
| Table 22 | Description of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ uniqueness-seeking in the consumer context | 96 |
| Table 23 | Summary of factor analysis of uniqueness related constructs used in study #1 | 105 |
| Table 24 | Summary of factor analysis of uniqueness related constructs used in study #4 | 106 |
| Table 25 | Overview psychometric properties of need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) | 106 |
| Table 26 | Overview comparison customer characteristics between individuals with low and high need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) | 107 |
| Table 27 | Overview uniqueness related constructs used in study #1 and study #4 | 108 |
| Table 28 | Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for unique customer treatment (UCT) and need for unique customer treatment predicting share-of-wallet (SoW) | 110 |
| Table 29 | Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for unique customer treatment (UCT) and need for unique customer treatment predicting share-of-wallet (SoW) status | 110 |
| Table 30 | Overview Net Promoter Score (NPS) and Net Promoter Status across the four customer groups | 112 |

## Figures


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Figure 1 | Overview of the three central research questions | 3 |
| Figure 2 | Overview of concepts and variables employed in this thesis | 5 |
| Figure 3 | The three subfactors of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) | 10 |
| Figure 4 | Hypothesized behavioral reactions as a function of similarity information (taken from Snyder, 1992, p. 13) | 13 |
| Figure 5 | Overview of uniqueness-related variables employed in study #1 | 35 |
| Figure 6 | Overview participants of study #1—survey (t1) and survey (t2) | 40 |
| Figure 7 | Overview of uniqueness-related variables employed in study #2 | 57 |
| Figure 8 | Four participant examples of measuring the tattooing degree | 62 |
| Figure 9 | Overview of uniqueness-related variables employed in study #3 | 73 |
| Figure 10 | Overview of uniqueness-related variables employed in study #4 | 93 |
| Figure 11 | Overview Net Promoter Score (NPS) calculation | 102 |
| Figure 12 | Share-of-wallet (SoW) differences between the four customer groups | 111 |
| Figure 13 | Overview of uniqueness-related variables employed in study #5 | 120 |
| Figure 14 | Poster examples from the “pro-individualism” campaign | 129 |
| Figure 15 | Poster examples from the “pro-collectivism” campaign | 130 |
| Figure 16 | The two customization options to be evaluated by the participants | 131 |
| Figure 17 | Example of apparel product displayed for evaluation | 132 |
| Figure 18 | Willingness to pay for the “color option” and the “motif option” to customize apparel product under the “pro-individualism” and “pro-collectivism” condition | 135 |
| Figure 19 | Overview of the three central research questions | 143 |
| Figure 20 | Overview of concepts and variables employed in this thesis | 144 |

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Finishing my thesis I want to take the opportunity to thank the people who accompanied and supported me during this important time in my life. First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. Dr. Thomas Ellwart. He always listened to my ideas and challenges and with his knowledge as well as thoughtful advice provided essential support for this dissertation. Furthermore, he inspired me with his passion and professional attitude when times called for it.

Furthermore, I am grateful that Prof. Dr. Conny Antoni agreed to be my second supervisor and thankful for his early comments on this dissertation. I would also like to thank all the people who participated in the studies of this dissertation.

Further, I want to show my gratitude to my employer Bain & Company for giving me the opportunity, resources and time-off to do a dissertation in a subject of my interest. In addition I want to thank my colleagues at Bain who always provided professional advice.

I also want to thank my family for all their support, motivation, and love within the last two years. Finally, I would like to thank my loving girlfriend who shared the fascinating experiences of the last two years and was always supportive, understanding and encouraging.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. PREFACE

"The uniqueness of individuals is one of the most fundamental characteristics of life" (Tyler, 1965, p. 1). To get an idea about the extent of human uniqueness, think about the following: about 80 million people now live in Germany. Imagine that all of a sudden all 80 million individuals would be placed, along with you, together in one room. Do you think you would find one single person who is exactly like you? One single person who has exactly the same knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes or beliefs like you? One single person who is wearing exactly the same outfit like you? Probably not. The question that directly comes to mind is "why not?"

As pointed out above, various ways and dimensions to establish differentiation and pursue uniqueness exist (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980). Appearance alteration seems to be one of the most important. Already in ancient times individuals produced items that allowed differentiation as, for example, a recently found 70,000-year-old bracelet indicated. Thus, the human need for uniqueness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980) seems to be as old as modern man himself. Individuals, for example, always created clothes or accessory products that differentiated them from others. Nowadays, a tremendous amount of different appearance articles exists. Every product, be it, for example, shoes, trousers, jumpers, or t-shirts, is available in countless colors, shapes and motifs. Individuals use this great variety of products to develop a look that stands out from the crowd and thus creates a unique and distinct image. Hence, consumer goods and experiences are one of the main vehicles for uniqueness-seeking (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Tian & McKenzie, 2001).

The satisfaction of the uniqueness motive through the purchase, use, and disposition of consumer products (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001) is nothing new. New is the reaction of the industry in recent years: Consumers today are surrounded by images praising uniqueness

as attractive and desirable and by product offerings enabling differentiation. For example, lately mass customization (Piller & Müller, 2004) has become very popular among companies allowing production of customized products for almost every customer. Thus, consumers cannot only use online shops to individualize their t-shirts, jumpers or jeans, but also can customize their cars, computers, or breakfast cereals.

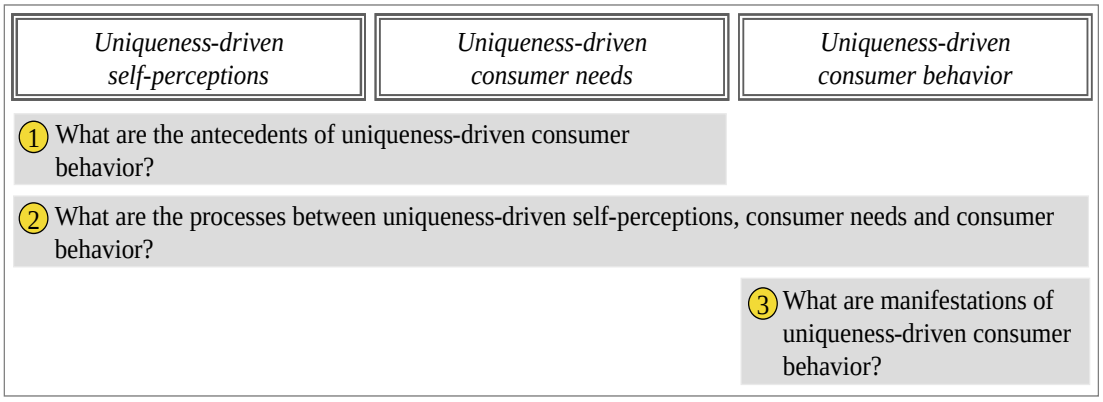
It seems evident that none of the 80 million people is wearing exactly the same outfit as you because limitless opportunities for differentiation exist. However, why are individuals interested to differentiate themselves from others in the first place, why do some individuals spend time and money to design t-shirts online, and, perhaps most importantly, getting back to our hypothetical crowded room, would really everybody find themselves to be truly unique? To answer these questions the different studies of this thesis investigate the psychological antecedents and processes behind uniqueness-driven consumer behavior as well as its different manifestations.

## 1.2. OVERALL OBJECTIVE AND CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall objective of this thesis is to gain a deeper understanding of the *antecedents*, *processes*, and *manifestations* of *uniqueness-driven consumer behavior*. Uniqueness-driven consumer behavior includes all behaviors where people spend money on products or services in order to seek differentiation from others. To achieve this goal, five studies have been conducted in Germany and Switzerland with a total of 1048 participants across different demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. The analyses performed in this thesis take place on a micro level—a traditional domain of psychology—which concerns individual persons and their perceptions, motivations, needs, and actions (Simon, 2004). Maslach (1974) raised the issue to separately investigate the perception, motivation and behavior related to human individuality or uniqueness. Therefore, three domains were used to structure the central research questions as well as the variables employed in the five studies: Uniqueness-driven self-perceptions (representing perception), uniqueness-driven consumer needs (representing motivation), and uniqueness-driven consumer behavior (representing behavior).

Three central research questions (see Figure 1) were used to pursue the overall objective and are briefly introduced next. A more detailed explanation of the employed concepts and the current research status will take place in theoretical background section.

*Figure 1*: Overview of the three central research questions



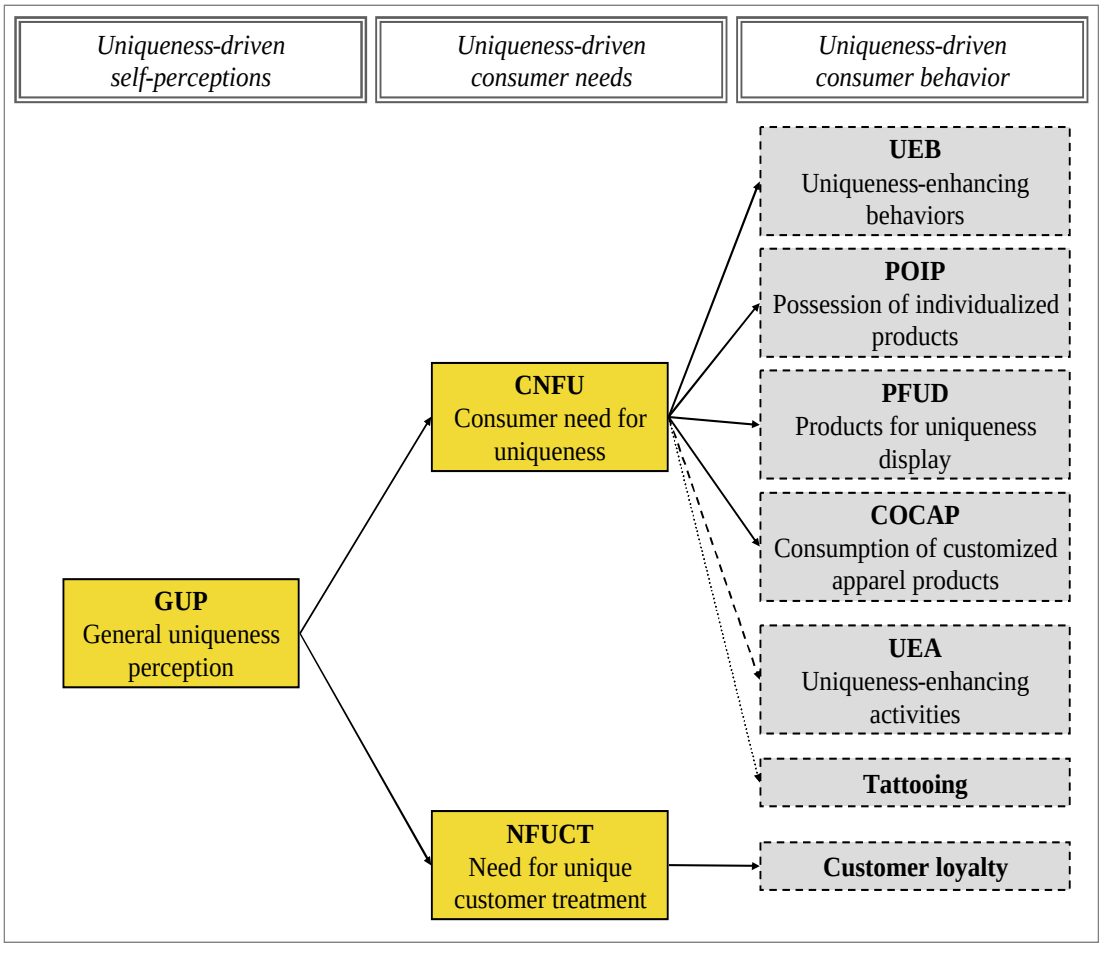
Human beings pursue uniqueness in various ways, such as attitudes, experiences, abilities, beliefs, knowledge domains, group memberships or material goods (Fromkin, 1970; Holt, 1995; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Maslach, 1974; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977; 1980; Tian et al., 2001). However, in Western societies consumer products and experiences represent one of the most common sources of uniqueness-seeking (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio, 2008; Tepper, 1997; Tian et al., 2001). And indeed, individuals pursue uniqueness in various consumer behaviors, for example, they purchase customized, rare, or novel products or they combine ordinary products in a special way to create an individual image. One concept that explains and predicts such consumer behavior is consumer need for uniqueness, in short CNFU (Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001) (see Chapter 2.1.). CNFU measures the individual need, and thus the motivation to acquire, use, and dispose consumer goods in order to develop a distinct image (Tian et al., 2001).

A relationship between CNFU and various forms of uniqueness-increasing consumer behaviors has already been revealed (Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Tepper, 1997; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Although the majority of studies were conducted in the United States (Ruvio, Shoham, & Brencic, 2008), CNFU was established as a psychological *antecedent* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. CNFU originated from the need for uniqueness (NFU) theory (Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980), and represents an application of NFU in the consumer context (Ruvio, 2008). Both NFU and CNFU measure the need for uniqueness, and thus a motivational component.

However, so far no empirical research has identified the driver behind this need. What psychological *antecedents* and *processes* influence CNFU and the subsequent consumer behavior? This thesis aims to overcome this shortcoming. Snyder & Fromkin (1980) only speculated that individuals' self-perceptions influence their uniqueness motivations (Bauer, Huber, Hett, & Neumann, 2007; Lynn & Snyder, 2002). Therefore, general uniqueness

perception, in short GUP, a concept adapted from the two-component theory of individuality (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon) is used for the first time to investigate a potential factor forming and activating CNFU. GUP measures the mere self-perception of uniqueness on a global level (see Chapter 2.2.). The introduction of GUP in study #1 simultaneously closes the missing link between CNFU-based consumer research and temporary social psychological research. The later provides additional insights, concepts and theories on human uniqueness-seeking. Thus, GUP expands the established CNFU and consumer behavior relationship by providing an explanatory factor behind the need and the behavior (see Figure 2). GUP and CNFU—both representing behavioral *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior—are employed in all five empirical studies.

*Figure 2*: Overview of concepts and variables employed in this thesis



The second central research question investigates the *processes* between uniqueness-driven self-perceptions (GUP), consumer needs (CNFU), and consumer behavior, and thus is closely related to the first question. Again, no empirical data exists about this interrelation, but the examination of the *processes* involved in uniqueness-driven consumer behavior promises valuable insights with both practical and theoretical implications.

The third central research question targets different *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. CNFU is said to predict a very broad range of uniqueness-related consumer behaviors (Bauer et al., 2007; Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001). This thesis explores this assumption. One main focus is the purchase of customized products, because mass customization is on its way to become the standard of the century (Davis, 1996; Piller, 2007; Piller & Müller, 2004) (see Chapter 2.3.). First evidence for the relationship between CNFU and the use of customized products was found in previous studies (Bauer et al., 2007; Fiore, Lee, & Kunz, 2004; Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Franke & Schreier, 2008), but are customers with high CNFU levels also willing to pay a price premium for customization options and do they actually spend more money on them? Study #3 investigates these questions and thus contributes to the requested direct managerial implications of CNFU research (Bauer et al., 2007). Furthermore, the possibilities and limitations of CNFU have not been systematically tested. Can CNFU, for example, predict an extreme consumer behavior such as tattooing, which is active, but not product-based (see study #2)? Or is CNFU related to uniqueness-enhancing activities, such as exotic travels or extreme sports as Snyder (1992) already speculated (see study #3)?

Additionally, most CNFU research is centered on *manifestations* of 'active' uniqueness-seeking, based on the use of specific consumer products in order to establish a unique image. In contrast, 'passive' uniqueness-seeking is not primarily based on products. Instead, it focuses on the unique and special treatment customers receive, for example, in the

form of customer service. Surprisingly, so far nobody has investigated the ‘passive’ side of uniqueness-seeking. A concept developed especially for this thesis—need for unique customer treatment, in short NFUCT—is introduced in study #4 to shed light on this ‘passive’ side. Hence, NFUCT potentially represents a new *antecedent* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior besides the well known CNFU, which would lead to a theoretical expansion of uniqueness-driven consumer needs (see Figure 2).

Furthermore, the psychological *antecedents*—such as GUP, CNFU, or NFUCT—might not be the only influencing factors behind uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Snyder & Fromkin (1980, p. 77) already stated that “the striving for uniqueness appears to be influenced by situational factors”. Is it possible to externally influence or activate GUP or CNFU? If so, would people, as a result, spend more money on customized products? The practical implications are obvious. At the same time such an external manipulation provides new theoretical insights in the changeability of GUP and CNFU, which so far are conceptualized as rather stable personality constructs (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001; Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). An experiment conducted in study #5 gives answers to this problem.

In sum, the five empirical studies lead to a deeper understanding of the *antecedents*, *processes*, and *manifestations* of *uniqueness-driven consumer behavior*. Thus, they deliver new theoretical as well as practical insights on the research area of uniqueness-seeking.

## 1.3. STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS

*1. Introduction:* This section introduces the overall objective, the central research questions and the structure of this thesis.

*2. Theoretical Background:* This section contains the theoretical background and is divided into three chapters: consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU); general uniqueness perception (GUP); and mass customization. The relevant theories and concepts are explained in greater detail as well as discussed in relation to the three central research questions.

*3. Empirical Studies:* This section includes the five empirical studies and begins with a brief study overview. Afterwards, all five studies are presented. Each part starts by placing the study in the context of the whole thesis by discussing its impact on the three central research questions. This is done in study objectives. Next, the relevant theories and concepts supporting the research hypothesis in focus are briefly discussed; thereby some repetitions of the theoretical background section will occur. In the respective method sections, sample, procedure, measures, and analysis are described. Finally, the results are presented, followed by a discussion. Each study is a separate entity with separate results. However, the studies were conducted sequentially and thus hypotheses successively build on each other.

*4. Summary and Overall Discussion:* This section contains a summary and the overall discussion where the results of all studies are discussed together in regard to the three central research questions. Furthermore, practical as well as theoretical implications are highlighted and a brief outlook for further research is given.

*5. Literature:* This section contains the complete list of literature. No literature lists are given at the end of each study.

*6. Appendix:* This section includes an overview of all uniqueness-related constructs employed in the studies including the items as well as a declaration of originality.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The theoretical background section is guided by two aims. First, introduce those concepts that were employed in the majority of studies—consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU), general uniqueness perception (GUP), and mass customization—in order to provide a deeper understanding. These concepts will not be explained again in such detail in the empirical studies section (see Section 3.). Second, stress the relevance of the overall objective and the three central research questions. Therefore, the psychological as well as economic perspective is highlighted in order to derive theoretical and practical implications.

### 2.1. CONSUMER NEED FOR UNIQUENESS (CNFU)

The relevance to investigate uniqueness-driven consumer behavior becomes obvious by looking into the current market environment where images praising uniqueness and products enabling differentiation can be found almost everywhere. Products such as customized cars, bikes and suits, smart-phones configured with individual applications (“apps”), individualized breakfast cereals, or personalized vitamins treatments. The internet is full of shops offering the opportunity to design individual T-shirts, sweaters or the like. And thus, individuals customize all sorts of products, combine clothes and accessories into a distinct outfit, or use products in a way others normally would not. The question is: What is the motivating force behind these behaviors? The answer is CNFU.

#### 2.1.1. Definition and Subfactors

**Definition**

CNFU is defined as “the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and

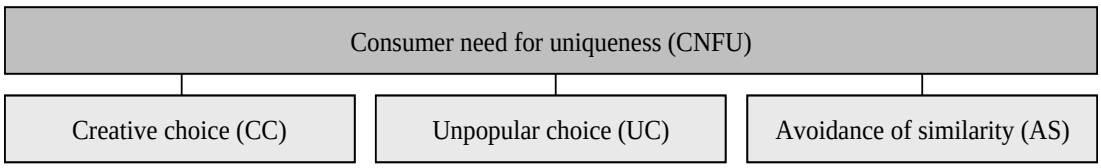
enhancing one's self-image and social image. Consumer goods used for satisfying counter-conformity motivation refer to product categories, brands, and versions or styles" (Tian et al., 2001, p. 52). Counter-conformity motivation is a need that arises when individuals perceive that they are too similar to others and consequently feel a threat to their identity (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Nail, 1986). As a result, individuals purchase, use, and dispose consumer goods to overcome their perceived similarity and to enhance differentiation from others.

CNFU has adequate internal consistency as well as test-retest reliability, the factor structure generalizes across student and non-student samples, and it predicts a wide range of uniqueness-related consumption decisions (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio, 2008; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Hence, CNFU is a valid, reliable, and broad measure of the need to seek uniqueness through consumption. Therefore, CNFU is used in this thesis in order to gain a deeper understanding of the *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. In the following an in-depth explanation of the CNFU concept is given.

**Three subfactors of CNFU**

Tian et al. (2001) conceptualized CNFU as subsuming three behavioral dimensions—creative choice, unpopular choice, and avoidance of similarity—based on NFU theory, nonconformity research, and the consumer behavior literature.

*Figure 3*: The three subfactors of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU)



***Creative choice***. The first subfactor refers to a person's ability to create a personal style through material possessions (Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Tian et al., 2001). Persons with high levels of CNFU-creative choice, for example, purchase unusual products or brands. Similarly, they combine products or brands in a new way in order to create a distinct personal image. According to Tian et al. (2001, p. 52) "creative choice counter-conformity reflects that the customer seeks social differentness from most others but that this consumer makes elections that are likely to be considered good choices by these others." Thus, by making creative choices a person establishes a unique personal image associated with a positive social evaluation (Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Example items for CNFU-creative choice (Ruvio et al., 2008, p. 52) are:

> I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image that cannot be duplicated.
> I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands.

***Unpopular choice.*** Unpopular choice counter-conformity—the second subfactor of CNFU—refers to a consumer's purchase or use of products or brands that does not entirely match social group norms (Tian et al., 2001). Breaking rules and social norms as well as challenging the average taste is one way to set oneself apart and create a distinct image. However, this behavior is potentially accompanied by social sanctions or disapproval. In this respect, Ruvio (2008) suggested that especially people with strong characters take the risk of social disapproval in order to enhance their uniqueness. Contrasting this view, Ziller (1964) argued that particularly individuals who cannot see another way to differentiate themselves in a socially accepted manner tend to prefer acts that might cause negative effects. Both authors have valid arguments. However, it is important to mention that it is easier to stand out from

the masses by denying social norms and rules than by following it. Example items for CNFU-unpopular choice (Ruvio et al., 2008, p. 53) are:

> I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own.
> I enjoy challenging the prevailing taste of people I know by buying something they would not seem to accept.

***Avoidance of similarity.*** Avoidance of similarity is the third sub-factor. Individuals with high levels of CNFU-avoidance of similarity avoid buying products or brands that are bought by everyone, because such products have no value for differentiation. In addition, they stop using brands or products that are commonly used. Creating a distinct self-image or social image by using material possessions is often short-lived, because followers adopt new and special styles in order to develop their own distinctiveness (Fisher & Price, 1992). In the same way, initially unpopular choices often become commonly accepted over time (Heckert, 1989). In order to continuously stand out, individuals then decrease using products and brands that become popular among the general population. Example items for CNFU-avoidance of similarity (Ruvio et al., 2008, p. 53) are:

> When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less.
> As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone.

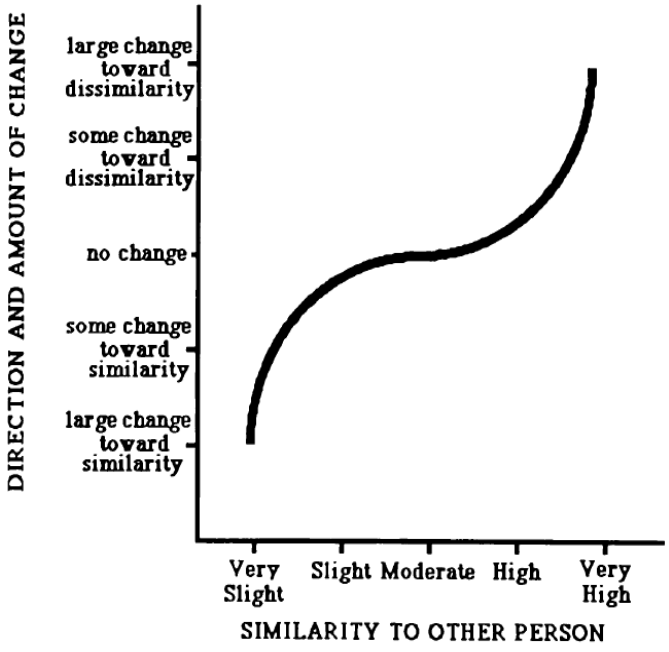
### 2.1.2. The CNFU Origins – The Need for Uniqueness Theory

The CNFU concept evolved from the need for uniqueness (NFU) theory and represents “an application of NFU in the consumer behavior context” (Ruvio, 2008, p. 445). NFU is based on a positive psychology concept that regards abnormality or being different from others as something positive (Fromkin, 1968, 1970, 1972; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980). Therefore, NFU theory is centered on the human pursuit of

uniqueness. The main focus is the individual's perception of similarity to others and the behavioral reactions.

NFU theory also postulated that people strive for a moderate level of uniqueness. Early research on uniqueness motivation revealed that high levels of similarity or dissimilarity lead to unpleasant emotional states and reduce self-esteem (Fromkin, 1970, 1972). Individuals constantly evaluate the degree of similarity to others and behave accordingly. Hence, if individuals perceive themselves as too similar to others they involve in behaviors that enhances their uniqueness. In contrast, persons who perceive themselves as too unique engage in behaviors to reduce differentiation (see Figure 4).

*Figure 4*: Hypothesized behavioral reactions as a function of similarity information (taken from Snyder, 1992, p. 13)




However, not everybody has the same perception of what a moderate level of uniqueness is. Individuals are different. Therefore, they also differ in their NFU levels: Persons with high NFU levels desire to be as unique and distinct as possible while persons with low NFU levels want to be just like everybody else (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980).

Hence, “across situations there are some persons who are relatively low, some who are intermediate, and some who are very high in their need for uniqueness” (Snyder, 1992, p. 14).

### 2.1.3. Inter- and Intra-Individual Differences in CNFU

**Inter-individual differences**

Like NFU, CNFU is also conceptualized and validated as an individual differences variable (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Tian et al., 2001). Other individuality- and uniqueness-related theories confirm the notion that people differ in their uniqueness-driven self-perceptions, motivations, and behaviors (see Brewer, 1991; Kampmeier, 2001; Maslach, 1974). One example is individuation (Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Maslach, 1997; Maslach, 1974). According to Maslach (1974, p. 413) individuation is “a state in which a person feels differentiated, to a greater or lesser degree, from other people and objects”. Whitney, Sagrestano, and Maslach (1994, p .1141) stated in regard to the individuation concept that “individuals differ in their willingness to engage in behaviors that would publicly differentiate themselves from others in their social environment”. Another example is given by Kampmeiers’ (2001) two-component theory of individuality (see Chapter 2.2.).

**Intra-individual differences**

Tian et al. (2001) conceptualized CNFU as a stable trait predicting consumer behavior. However, Snyder & Fromkin (1980) already argued that situational factors also influence uniqueness-driven behavior. Different studies revealed that individuals change their behavior if their sense of uniqueness is experimentally influenced (Brewer, 1991; Brewer, Manzi, & Shaw, 1993; Maslach, 1974; Simon, 2004; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). However, these studies did not reveal if only the behavior changes or if CNFU itself, for example, changes too. Would CNFU change if the social appropriateness or acceptance of

uniqueness-seeking is altered (e.g. by telling study participants that uniqueness is socially desired)? Would the consumer behavior change under such a condition? The experiment conducted in study #5 gives answers to these questions. Thus, study #5 promises valuable insights about intra-individual changes in the psychological *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior.

### 2.1.4. Behavioral Manifestations of CNFU

**Uniqueness attributes**

Not all individuals "satisfy their uniqueness motivation through consumer behaviors and possessions" (Tian et al., 2001, p. 52). Hence, consumer behavior and material possessions (Belk, 1985, 1988) are only one way to pursue uniqueness. Other ways—not in focus of this thesis—include, for example, style of interpersonal action (Maslach, Stapp, & Santee, 1985), knowledge or expertise domains (Holt, 1995), or beliefs (Snyder, 1992). Hence, different uniqueness attributes exist that provide vehicles for fulfilling the need for uniqueness. Uniqueness attributes include physical, material, informational, or experiential characteristics (Fromkin 1968; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). In general, individuals tend to pursue uniqueness on those domains that are central to their self-theory or identity (Berger & Heath, 2007). However, "two sources of a sense of uniqueness—group identifications and consumer products and experiences—have received the most research attention" (Lynn & Snyder, 2002, p. 398) because they are central to most people. Uniqueness-driven consumer behavior was also chosen as a focus of this thesis. One reason are the potential practical implications (highlighted in Chapter 2.3.). Another, rather scientific reason is that consumption is a special way to seek uniqueness.

**Consumption – A special way to seek uniqueness**

Snyder and Fromkin (1980) postulated that individuals strive for a moderate level of uniqueness. Hence, individuals engage in behaviors that allow differentiation and uniqueness pursuit, but that are still socially accepted and do not cause social isolation or disapproval (Lynn & Harris, 1997a, 1997b; Ruvio, 2008; Synder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Thus, human beings always carry two different motivations—the motivation to be different and the motivation to belong somewhere.

This assumption is taken further and explained in detail by the optimum distinctiveness theory (ODT) (see Brewer, 1991, 1993). ODT recognizes two distinct forces—the need for assimilation and the need for differentiation—which simultaneously influence a person's behavior (Pickett & Brewer, 2000; Pickett, Silver, and Brewer, 2002). The motivating force behind it is the threat to an individual's sense of security and self-worth. "Being highly individuated leaves one vulnerable to isolation and stigmatization (even excelling on positively valued dimensions creates social distance and potential rejection). However, total deindividuation provides no basis for comparative appraisal or self-definition" (Brewer, 1991, p. 478). Therefore, individuals strive for an optimal distinctiveness or in other words, equilibrium between assimilation and differentiation (Pickett et al., 2002).

Consumer behavior is special in the universe of uniqueness-seeking behaviors because using products or commodities is a socially safe way to pursue uniqueness (Ruvio, 2008; Snyder, 1992; Tepper, 1997; Tian et al., 2001). Thus, "CNFU enables individuals to fulfill their needs for assimilation and differentiation simultaneously" (Ruvio, 2008, p. 448). Lynn and Harris (1997b, p. 611) argue that "people need to fit in and belong as well as to be distinctive and unique. Apparently, people who satisfy one of these needs through consumer products also use consumer products to satisfy the other need".

Through the consumption of consumer goods it is easy to develop a distinct image but difficult to encounter social disapproval. A sweater with a self-designed print normally does not cause social outcry. Individuals have to go to extremes to put together an outfit that results in social neglect. Schiffman and Kanuk (1994) argue that expressions of uniqueness only come to action when people do not think about others' criticisms. Uniqueness-driven consumer behavior is to a great degree free of criticism and sanctions, and thus a comfortable way to pursue uniqueness.

**Possibilities and limitations of CNFU**

CNFU predicts a broad range of consumer behaviors such as a desire for customized, vintage, novelty, antique, handcrafted, or rare goods; a preference for unique, unconventional, or less popular shopping venues; generation of word-of-mouth; use of innovative products and brands; and a liking to combine ordinary products in a new and individual way (Bloch, 1995, Burns & Warren, 1995; Cheema & Kaikati, 2008; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio et al., 2008; Simonson & Nowlis, 2000; Tepper, 1997; Tian et al., 2001). Most of these consumer behaviors include the purchase, usage, and disposition of consumer goods, which reflects the definition of CNFU (Tian et al., 2001). However, not all *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behaviors are based on products. Activities like sky diving, ice climbing, visiting a Bjork concert in Iceland, driving the Mille Miglia, following the famous Route 66, riding the Trans-Siberian Railway, or wreck diving in Vanuatu certainly cost money and satisfy the uniqueness motive, but do not include use of specific products. Snyder (1992, p. 16) already stated that, for example, "vacations to exotic locations throughout the world" contribute to individuals' sense of uniqueness. Lynn and Harris (1997a) already demanded research on risky activities in relation to the uniqueness motive. However, so far no empirical studies have shown whether or not CNFU can predict

such behaviors. Therefore, study #3 examines if CNFU also is related to these *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. In the same way study #2 explores the possibilities and limitations of the CNFU concept by examining an extreme form of uniqueness-seeking: tattooing. Tattoos cost considerable amounts of money and help to establish a unique image (Forbes, 2001; Tiggemann & Golder, 2006). Therefore, it is assumed that CNFU is related to tattooing behavior. Furthermore, most CNFU research is centered on *manifestations* of 'active' uniqueness-seeking. Study #4 investigates the 'passive' side of the uniqueness motive. Does unique customer treatment, for example in the form of customer service, influence individuals' uniqueness perception, need, or behavior? And if so, does CNFU capture these behaviors or do other psychological *antecedents* exist?

### 2.1.5. Excursus: CNFU Related Concepts

Lynn and Harris (1997a, 1997b) introduced the *desire for unique consumer products* into the research around uniqueness-seeking behaviors—a concept similar to CNFU. In contrast to CNFU, desire for unique consumer products focuses only on the motivation to purchase unique consumer products. Example items of the eight item scale are: "I am very attracted to rare objects", "I am more likely to buy a product if it is scarce", "I like to try new products and services before others do", or "I tend to be a fashion leader rather than a fashion follower" (Lynn & Harris, 1997b, p. 608). A statement by Tian and McKenzie (2001, p. 186)—the researchers behind the CNFU concept—explains why two similar concepts exist: During "the time we collected data for our longitudinal studies, Lynn and Harris (…) develop the desire for unique consumer products scale (…)".

In the following it will be highlighted why CNFU was chosen for the research in this thesis. The advantage of CNFU is based on two main factors. First, the CNFU conceptualization is broader. Consumers' desire for unique products is more specific than

CNFU (Franke & Schreier, 2008). Central research question three asks about different *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Therefore, a broad concept is needed. CNFU, for example, also includes the combination of products and the use of common products in an uncommon way, and furthermore it reflects avoidance of similarity (Tian et al., 2001). Second, CNFU solely measures consumers' need for uniqueness. In contrast, multiple reasons for the desire for unique consumer products exist such as desire for excitement, economic motivations, or mental stimulation (Brock, 1968; Lynn & Harris, 1997b; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Scarcity has been found to enhance the attractiveness of records, the desirability of leather boots and wine, or the tastes of cookies, dormitory food, and soft drinks, the later certainly not being related to the uniqueness motive (Lynn, 1991; Lynn & Harris, 1997b, Ringold, 1988). According to commodity theory, scarce products are generally of higher value and attractiveness. However, the overall objective of this thesis is to gain deeper understanding of behavior driven by uniqueness, not driven by economic or other reasons.

## 2.2. GENERAL UNIQUENESS PERCEPTION (GUP)

Research so far has primarily focused on the interrelation between CNFU and consumer behavior (Franke & Schreier, 2008; Michel, Kreuzer, Stringfellow, & Schumann, 2009; Ruvio, 2008; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). No empirical studies have investigated underlying drivers behind this particular consumer need. CNFU evolved from NFU theory (Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001). However, both CNFU and NFU are defined as human needs and measure the motivation to engage in uniqueness-related behaviors. Hence, NFU does not represent a driver behind CNFU. CNFU rather embodies the application of NFU in the consumer context, developed as a stronger predictor of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior compared to the more general NFU (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Tian et al., 2001). Thus, the question about the causes of CNFU (as well as NFU) remains open. Several authors argue that the need for uniqueness arises from the perception of similarity or dissimilarity to other people (Fromkin, 1970; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Nail, 1986; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Therefore, individual uniqueness perception could be the force behind CNFU.

Different psychological theories about human individuality or uniqueness exist, for example, optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), individuation (Maslach, 1974), or the two-component theory of individuality (Kampmeier, 2001). Optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) is mainly centered on behavior in the group context (see Brewer, 1991, 1993; Kampmeier, 2001). The individuation concept represents “a broader and more integrative framework for (…) various aspects of differentiveness” such as independence, salience, or uniqueness (Whitney et al., 1994, p. 1141). However, the two-component theory of individuality (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001) provides a concept that not only is applicable to investigate individual consumer behavior (instead of group behavior),

but also measures mere self-perception of uniqueness (instead of various aspects of individuality).

### 2.2.1. Definition and Historic Background

**Definition**

General uniqueness perception (GUP) represents a global and direct measure of perceived distinctiveness of a person. GUP is adapted from the two-component theory of individuality (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001; Simon, 2004). In general two independent components of individuality can be distinguished: Identity as an independent individual (the independence or self-determination component), and identity as a distinct individual (the differentiation or uniqueness component).

Kampmeier (2001) initially developed the two-component theory of individuality to overcome the imbalance in social psychology literature between group formation and individualization. Four representative items with sufficient psychometric qualities were selected from an initial pool of 90 individuality related items to measure each of the two individuality components (Kampmeier & Simon, 2001). Thus, four items were finally identified that measure the self-perception of the differentiation component: “I am unusual”, “I am different from others”, “I am unique”, “I have rare characteristics” (Kampmeier & Simon, 2001, p. 451). This scale represents a plain and direct measure of self ascribed uniqueness perception. The psychometric properties of the scale have been tested and found satisfactory (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001). For the purpose of this thesis the scale was adapted and renamed into general uniqueness perception (GUP) in order to enhance comprehension.

**Historic background**

The two-component conception of individuality was first introduced almost 100 years ago by Georg Simmel (Schimank 1996; Simon 2004). "According to Simmel, individuality as self-determination is predicated on people's freedom from restrictions or constrains imposed by their group" (Simon, 2004, p. 51). This independence component can be historically "traced back to the era of the Enlightenment and the economic liberalism of the 18th century (i.e. free enterprise)" (Kampmeier & Simon, 2001, p. 449). Hence, the independent component emerged from the idea that all people are universally equal, everybody possesses the same rights, and is somehow independent from social constrains.

According to Simmel, the distinctiveness component is a consequence of the first component (Kampmeier, 2001). If people are independent and therefore free in their thoughts, feelings and actions, they can and will unfold their individual characteristics. This in turn makes them to unique individuals. Therefore, the differentiation component emerged from the universal inequality of individuals. This component of individuality developed in the early 19th century in Europe and has its origins in the works of authors such as Humbold, Schlegel, or Novalis, and in ideas of Romanticism (Kampmeier, 2001).

### 2.2.2. The Formation of GUP

**Causes of uniqueness perception**

As aforementioned, "the uniqueness of individuals is one of the most fundamental characteristics of life" (Tyler, 1965, p. 1). Three main factors appear to cause the differences between individuals. First, every individual possesses a unique genotype (Dobzhansky, 1956). Thus "each human being is composed of a highly idiosyncratic physical makeup" (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980, p. 19). Second, environmental factors further amplify these tremendous genetic differences (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Socialization processes cause

differences or similarities between individuals in their knowledge, beliefs, skills, abilities, and so on. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss the full impact of environment on behavior, it is worth mentioning that uniqueness is encouraged in Western cultures (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Kampmeier, 2001). Society rewards individuals that are different, but not too different (Snyder, 1992). Competition is one major area where such acceptable differences play a role. Rewards are given to those individuals who do better than other competitors. Furthermore, society rewards individuals with new ideas, insights or inventions. Third, an inherent, elementary human force to differentiate from others seems to exist (Bauer et al., 2007; Snyder, 1992; Vignoles, Chryssochoou, and Breakwell, 2000). Snyder states (1992, p. 11): “It is assumed that there is some intrinsic satisfaction to be derived from the perception that one is separable from the masses.” People still pursue some sense of specialness even if no extrinsic rewards are given to such behaviors (Snyder, 1992). Empirical study results mirror this notion. For example, individuals better memorize information distinguishing them from others (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Rogies, 1997). Furthermore, individuals tend to describe themselves as less similar to others than they are in reality (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976).

Thus, genetic, social and cultural factors contribute to the fact that individuals are indeed to some degree different from each other (Bauer et al., 2007). In a social environment human beings recognize these differences and learn to perceive themselves as unique individuals (Lynn & Snyder, 2002). Thereby, individuals rely on an external and internal audience (Snyder, 1992). Individuals need an external audience like other persons who notice inter-individual differences and who praise, for example, the unique outfit, believes, vacations or other things that make people feel special. “Being different (…) necessitates the use of a reference group” (Maslach, 1974, p. 422). That is particularly important for the internal audience. According to Snyder “it is in the privacy of the person’s phenomenology

where the self-theory is constructed, maintained, and enhanced" (1992, p. 15). Thus, it is the internal audience that mainly contributes to our uniqueness perception.

**The self-aspect model of identity (SAMI)**

The self-aspect model of identity (SAMI), which serves as the theoretical basis of the two-component theory of individuality, delivers an elaborated explanation of how individuals create a unique self-perception and will be briefly described here (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001; Simon, 2004). The model assumes that individuals actively engage in self-interpretation, which "refers to the social-cognitive process whereby people give coherence and meaning to their own experiences, including their relation with the physical and social environment" (Simon, 2004, p. 45). The central idea is that self-interpretation includes different self-aspects. Self-aspects are, for example, traits (e.g. extroverted), roles (e.g. husband), physical features (e.g. tall), abilities (e.g. mathematical genius), tastes (e.g. pasta fanatic), attitudes (e.g. vegan), or behaviors (e.g. I exercise a lot) (see Simon, 2004). As a consequence, "individual identity is constructed whenever self-interpretation is based on a more comprehensive set or configuration of different, non-redundant self aspects (Simon, 2004, p. 50). For example: I am a man, a loving boyfriend, tall and like Vietnamese cuisine.

The complexity of the configuration of self-aspects influences an individual's independence and uniqueness perception. The more complex the configuration the less likely one single-aspect dominates thoughts and actions. Therefore, multiple self-aspects support variability, flexibility and thus independence (Kampmeier, 2001; Simon, 2004). For example, a person who possesses only one self-aspect, e.g. membership in a soccer team, might experience greater pressure and dependence on the attitudes of the other soccer team members, compared to a person who possesses more self-aspects, e.g. family or work, which

are alternative sources of positive self-evaluation. Consequently, the exemplary soccer player potentially faces more unwanted obligations and thus higher dependence. Hence, a higher complexity of self-aspects is functional and desirable. Furthermore, the more complex the configuration of self-aspects the less likely it is that anybody else possesses the same, finally leading to the perception of uniqueness.

### 2.2.3. GUP as the Driver Behind CNFU

Snyder & Fromkin (1980) already speculated about the origins of the need for uniqueness, and stated that the perception of similarity and dissimilarity is the driving factor. Snyder (1992) used the concept of self-theory to deliver an explanation. Self-theory is based on two motives: the consistency process and the ego-enhancement process (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder, 1992). Consistency process means that individuals attempt to maintain the structural integrity of the self. Ego-enhancement process connotes that individuals strive to enhance the own self-theory on the dimensions of the self they consider important. In short, individuals are motivated to at a minimum preserve their theory about themselves, but if possible, they try to enhance the current conceptualization of their self-theory.

As explained earlier, genetic, social, and cultural factors cause differentiation between individuals (Bauer et al., 2007). The ego-enhancement process—similar to the already described inherent, elementary human force for differentiation—might lead to further differentiation as individuals, for example, advance in certain skills, abilities or knowledge domains. As a result, individuals learn to perceive themselves as (more or less) different from others. This perception is part of their self-concept (Snyder, 1992). According to the consistency process, individuals develop a behavioral motivation to keep the perceived self-concept stable. Thus, individuals perceiving themselves as highly unique should also have a high motivation to maintain that perception.

As aforementioned, consumption is one central way to achieve differentiation from others (Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001). Hence, a positive relationship between the self-perception of uniqueness (represented by GUP) and the motivation to engage in uniqueness-enhancing consumer behavior (represented by CNFU) should exist. However, this assumption has not yet been empirically tested. Therefore, the studies conducted in this thesis break new terrain and potentially deliver valuable insights about the *antecedents* as well as *processes* behind CNFU and uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. However, not only theoretical implications can be derived, but also practical implications as is highlighted in the next chapter.

## 2.3. MASS CUSTOMIZATION

Nowadays companies are confronted with an ongoing trend towards individualization. This trend affects all areas of life (Piller, 2006; Piller & Müller, 2004). Hence, an exploding interest for customized products and services from customers as well as from companies is observed in the market (Piller, 2007). Examples are countless: MyMuesli (create own cereal), Mini Cooper (design the roof with own graphic), Condé Nast's TasteBook (produce cookbook with own recipes), Dell (customize your personal computer), Blends for Friends (develop individual tea blend), Mi Adidas (determine the color, comfort, and functionality of sport shoes), Lego (craft own products), Spreadshirt (design individual t-shirts), Tommy Hilfiger (customize own pair of jeans), or Hallmark (customize greeting cards) (Duray & Milligan, 1999; Kamali & Loker, 2002; Michel et al., 2009; Piller, 2007; Piller, Moeslein, & Stotko, 2004; Salvador, de Holan, & Piller, 2009).

"Individuality becomes the standard" (Piller, 2007, p. 631). These examples show that companies have already developed production methods that allow manufacturing of small numbers of particular product units, down to units of one (Cox & Alm, 1999). The production method behind this is called mass customization, which appears to be a paradox as it combines mass production with customization.

### 2.3.1. Definition

According to Davis (1996, p.177), "mass-customization of markets means that the same large number of customers can be reached as in the mass-market of the industrial economy, and simultaneously they can be treated individually as in the customized markets of the pre-industrial economies (…) The ultimate logic of ever-finer differentiation of the markets is markets of one, that is, meeting the tailored needs of individual customers and

doing so on a mass-basis". Piller (2007, p. 631) put it this way: "the term mass customization denotes to an offering that meets the demands of each individual customer, but that can still be produced with mass production efficiency".

### 2.3.2. Concept and Dimensions

The interactive character of the internet made the stark increase of mass customization possible in the first place (Kamali & Loker, 2002). As a result the customer becomes an integral part of the value creation process during product configuration, specification and co-design (Piller et al., 2004). The customer takes action in activities and process that normally belong to the domain of the company. Thus, the consumer becomes a 'co-producer' or 'prosumer' (Bardakci & Whitelock, 2004; Piller et al., 2004; Toffler, 1970). Mass customization goes beyond traditional approaches to involve the customer, such as McDonalds, where customers bring their food to their table, or Ikea, where customers assemble the furniture at home (Piller et al., 2004). Still, mass customization is not craft customization (Piller et al, 2004). Craft customization often leads to such intense price changes that a change of customer segments follows. In mass customization the former customer segments are retained, because mass production methods still allow relatively low prices.

Mass customization emerges in different forms. The degree of customization, for example, is determined by the point of initial customer involvement (Duray & Miligan, 1999). Four different points of customer involvement are identified: design, fabrication, assembly, and post production (for details see Duray 1997; Duray & Miligan, 1999). The earlier a customer is involved in the value chain the higher the customization of the final product.

Furthermore, mass customization is characterized by a fixed solution space. In the apparel goods segment, for example, customization can be carried out on three different

levels: style, fit and comfort, and functionality (Piller & Müller, 2004). On the style level modification options influence the sensual and optical senses of the customer. Selections of colors, styles, or cuts are typical options. Individuals' uniqueness perception is typically influenced on this style level. On the fit and comfort level, customization is based on the adjustment of the product to the physical dimensions of the customer. Products are, for example, tailored to the body measurements of the recipient. On the functional level customization options aim at the functionality of a product, for example, in the shoe industry customers can select the insole or cushioning of their shoes matching their running technique (Piller & Müller, 2004).

### 2.3.3. Benefits and Costs of Mass Customization

**Benefits and costs for the company**

Why do companies implement mass customization? The answer is simple. Companies expect increased revenues, for example, by charging premium prices (Franke & Piller, 2004; Piller, 2006; Piller & Müller, 2004; Schreier, 2006). And indeed, customized options cost more than the standardized equivalent across different industries and products (Franke, Keinz, & Steger, 2009; Wilson, 2007). A survey in the European shoe market, for example, revealed that customers accept a price premium of 10-30 percent for the customization option (Piller & Müller, 2004). However, it always depends on the degree of customization. Adidas, for example, can charge up to a 50% price increase for their customized shoe because they offer customization options in regard to style, fit and comfort, and functionality. Nike, which only offers style options, can only ask for premiums of up to 10% (Piller & Müller, 2004).

However, price is not the only benefit. A new set of cost savings potential arises from the 'economies of integration' postulated by Piller et al. (2004). Three different sources to reduce costs exist. First, some activities can be postponed until after the order is placed. This,

for example, leads to a reduction of inventory of finished products. Second, valuable customer knowledge and access to sticky customer information is gained. Traditional market research techniques, such as surveys, focus groups, and customer interviews, often "do not capture the complete picture of customer preferences" (Duray & Milligan, 1999, p. 60). Third, customer integration leads to customer loyalty. Companies do not have further acquisition costs because a relationship has already been developed and the customer has high switching costs, for example, time spent in learning how to use configuration tools (Piller et al., 2004).

However, mass customization is not a business panacea. There have been several high profile failures such as Levis Strauss and their attempt to manufacture customized jeans (Salvador et al., 2009) or Mattel's "My Design Barbie" (Franke et al., 2009). The reason is the costs associated with mass customization. There are, for example, additional costs for the sales department such as investments in information processing systems, customer service centers, qualified staff, or promotion costs (Piller et al., 2004). Higher manufacturing costs result form set-up costs, higher complexity in production control and planning, increased quality control, additional machinery costs, higher inventory of components, specialized equipment needed, and higher qualified labor (Piller et al., 2004; Piller & Müller, 2004). Furthermore, mass customization is not easy to implement. Mass customization "requires nothing less than a transformation of the business" (Pine, Victor, & Boynton, 1993, p. 111).

In conclusion, for business companies it is crucial to examine all factors that affect the success of mass customization. Therefore, understanding the customer is essential (Franke et al., 2009; Simonson, 2005; von Hippel, 2005). Before discussing why GUP and CNFU help to understand the customer, the benefits and costs for customers in general are highlighted.

**Benefits and costs for the customer**

The fundamental assumption behind mass customization is that it delivers superior customer value (Duray & Milligan, 1999; Franke & Schreier, 2008; Piller, 2004; Pine 1993). Customized products are beneficial for customers because they help to overcome the disadvantages associated with standard products and they satisfy the consumers' need for uniqueness. Major disadvantages of standard products are for example missing sizes (e.g. length of jeans), undesirable style (e.g. color of t-shirt), or unsatisfactory functionality (e.g. computer without extra large disk space). A study by Michel et al. (2009, p. 2) showed that "the more a customer perceives customized products to overcome negative product attributes, the higher his or her willingness to pay a price premium for these products".

However, the purchase, use, and disposition of a customized product in order to create a distinct self- and social-image might be even more beneficial than just overcoming fit, functionality and style disadvantages. Franke and Schreier (2008), for example, found that the desire for unique products contributed independently to the willingness to pay besides mere aesthetic and functional fit. The consumption of material goods is one of the most common ways to express uniqueness (Snyder, 1992; Tepper, 1997; Tian et al., 2001). Thus, individuals benefit from mass customized products as these products help to establish and maintain a unique image.

However, customers also face some potential costs associated with customized products. Bardakci and Whitlock (2004) first introduced the question about the readiness for mass customization. They identified three major inconveniences that customers face in regard to mass customization. First, mass customized products normally come to a higher price (Moffat, 1990; Piller & Müller, 2004). Second, customized products cannot be delivered right after the purchase. Thus, customers have to wait for the product (Davis, 1996; McKenna,

1995). Third, customers must be willing to invest time in designing the product (Pine, Peppers, & Rogers, 1995).

Another drawback emerges from the 'paradox of choice'. The cost of testing and evaluating all potential choices can outweigh the benefits of having options (Salvador et al., 2009). Customers can be confused by a too broad range of choices (Pine et al., 1993). Finally, customers cannot feel, see, try or experience the product before the purchase (Kamali & Loker, 2002).

### 2.3.4. Mass Customization and CNFU

Mass customization is not totally new. The concept has been around in the market for over 20 years, but now appears to become the standard of the century (Davis, 1996; Piller, 2007; Pine, 1993). The demand for customized products is anticipated to continue to grow with double digit growth rates. Overall the scientific attention for mass customization has increased in recent years (Dellaert & Stremersch, 2005; Gilmore & Pine, 1997; Kamali & Loker, 2002; Piller, 2004). However, although the customer plays a crucial role, most of the research is directed to the economic side of mass customization; the customer side is still underrepresented (Franke et al., 2009; Simonson, 2005; von Hippel, 2001).

Customer characteristics, such as customer preferences, readiness for mass customization, or evaluation of customized products, represent important mass customization success factors (Bardakci & Whitlock, 2004, 2005; Davis, 1996; Franke et al., 2009; Simonson, 2005). Franke et al. (2009, p. 32), for example, showed that customer characteristics such as "level of insight into (…) own preferences, (…) ability to express such preferences, and (…) product involvement" influence the benefits customers gain from customization. Surprisingly, only a few studies investigated the influence of uniqueness as a driver for action. The study by Michel et al. (2009) investigated two of the three components

of consumer need for uniqueness as an antecedent of the desire for unique products. Hence, they proposed the uniqueness motive of individuals as one motivator to buy customized products. Franke & Schreier (2008) showed a moderating effect of the desire for unique products regarding the link between perceived uniqueness of a product and willingness to pay for the product.

In sum, it is argued that customers are an important factor for the success of mass customization and that one of the main reasons to purchase customized products is the satisfaction of the uniqueness motive (Franke et al., 2009; Michel et al., 2009; Piller & Müller, 2004). Yet, empirical data is rare. This thesis aims to prove that the consumption of mass customized products is a *manifestation* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Furthermore, it will be examined if GUP and CNFU as psychological *antecedents* not only predict the possession of customized apparel products, but also the amount of money spent on them and the price premium paid. Additionally, the experiment conducted in study #5 reveals if situational factors influence the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). As a result, business companies could use the GUP and CNFU measures in customer surveys or customer segmentation processes in order to improve business operations. Thus, this thesis answers to the request for more managerial implications of the need for uniqueness research (Bauer et al., 2007).

# 3. EMPIRICAL STUDIES

## 3.0. STUDY OVERVIEW

Five studies across different demographic backgrounds were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the *antecedents*, *processes*, and *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Table 1 provides an overview of the empirical studies.

*Table 1:* Study overview including descriptions of sample, method, and study goals

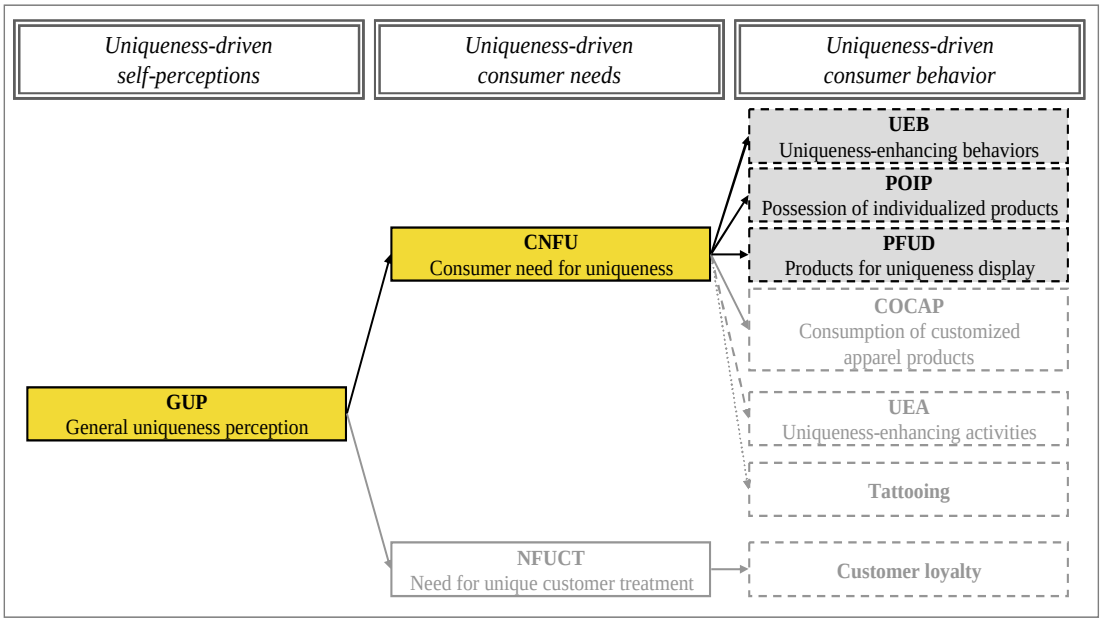
| Study Number | Study name | Sample & method | Main study goals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Study #1 | The interrelation of uniqueness-driven concepts | • *n* = 217<br>• Online survey<br>• Longit.& cross-sectional<br>• Swiss students | • Investigate *antecedents* and *processes* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior<br>• Investigate the influence of GUP on CNFU, and of CNFU on consumer behavior |
| Study #2 | Tattooing—an extreme form of uniqueness-seeking | • *n* = 151<br>• Paper & pencil survey<br>• Cross-sectional<br>• German adults | • Investigate *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior and replicate main results of study #1<br>• Investigate an extreme form of uniqueness-enhancing behavior: tattooing<br>• Explore the possibilities and limitations of the GUP and CNFU concepts |
| Study #3 | Consumption of customized apparel products | • *n* = 397<br>• Online survey<br>• Cross-sectional<br>• German students | • Investigate *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior<br>• Investigate the interrelation between GUP, CNFU and the purchase of customized apparel products<br>• Investigate the interrelation between GUP, CNFU and uniqueness-enhancing activities |
| Study #4 | Passive uniqueness-seeking and customer loyalty | • *n* = 152<br>• Online survey<br>• Cross-sectional<br>• Swiss veterinarians | • Investigate *antecedents* and *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior<br>• Introduce need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) and investigate the so-termed ‘passive’ side of uniqueness-seeking<br>• Investigate the relationship between unique customer treatment and customer loyalty as well as the influence of NFUCT |
| Study #5 | Manipulation of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior | • *n* = 131<br>• Online experiment<br>• Longitudinal<br>• German students | • Investigate *processes* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior<br>• Investigate the influence of a “pro-individualism” vs. “pro-collectivism” campaign on the purchase of customized apparel products and explore changes in GUP and CNFU |

## 3.1. STUDY #1: THE INTERRELATION OF UNIQUENESS-DRIVEN CONCEPTS

### 3.1.1. Study Objectives

Study #1 especially focuses on the first and second central research questions. The first central research question asks about the *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Therefore, GUP and CNFU were employed in the study as potential psychological factors that influence and predict uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Three behavioral measures were used: The newly developed possession of individualized products (POIP), the newly developed products for uniqueness display (PFUD), and the already established uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB). Study #1 also answers the second central research question by investigating the *processes* between GUP, CNFU and consumer behavior. A variable overview is given in Figure 5 (employed variables are highlighted).

*Figure 5:* Overview of uniqueness-related variables employed in study #1



### 3.1.2. Introduction and Hypothesis

All human beings seek uniqueness to some degree (Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Tian et al., 2001). Differentiation from others can be achieved in multiple ways, for example, with material goods, experiences, beliefs, or knowledge domains (Holt, 1995; Snyder, 1992). The consumption of material goods is one of the most common ways in Western societies (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Tian et al., 2001). Countless examples can be found where individuals develop a distinct and unique image using consumer goods, for example, the purchase and use of novelty, antique, personalized, or less popular brands and products (Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Tepper, 1997; Tepper & Hoyle, 1996). Tian et al. (2001) argue that CNFU is the underlying need that explains these behaviors. CNFU is based on three subfactors: creative choice, unpopular choice, and avoidance of similarity (Tian et al., 2001) (see Chapter 2.1.1.). Generally, only the overall CNFU score is discussed (Bauer et al., 2007; Ruvio, 2008; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). However, a closer look at the subfactors might provide a deeper understanding of the CNFU concept.

Although the relationship between CNFU and consumer behavior is well established (Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001), nothing is known about the driver behind CNFU (see Chapter 2.2.). CNFU is based on the need for uniqueness (NFU) theory (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980), and was developed to be a better behavioral predictor of NFU in the consumer context (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Tian et al., 2001). Thus, CNFU as well as NFU measure the need for uniqueness, with the difference that CNFU is centered on consumer behavior and NFU on behavior in general. CNFU items are for example “I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands” or “as a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone” (Ruvio et al., 2008, p. 52). NFU items are for example “I always try to follow rules” or “I do not like to go my own way” (Synder & Fromkin, 1980, p. 79). Thus, NFU does not represent the driver behind CNFU.

Snyder & Fromkin (1980) and others (Nail, 1986; Lynn & Snyder, 2002) speculated that the perception of similarity or dissimilarity cause the need for uniqueness. Self-theory delivers the explanation for this (Snyder, 1992): According to self-theory, individuals attempt to maintain the structural integrity of the self and further strive to enhance their own self-theory (see Chapter 2.2.3). Thus, individuals who perceive themselves as unique should develop a need—such as CNFU—to maintain and to enhance this self appraisal. However, this assumption has not been tested empirically, yet, but will be done with this study.

Currently, there is no link between the CNFU-based consumer research and temporary social psychological research. However, different social psychological theories exist (Brewer, 1991; Kampmeier, 2001; Maslach, 1974) that provide valuable insights and concepts related to individuality and uniqueness-seeking. The two-component theory of individuality (Kampmeier, 2001), for example, includes a measure of mere uniqueness perception. According to Kampmeier (2001) and Kampmeier and Simon (2001), the two components of individuality are differentiation and independence. The items that measure the differentiation component are: "I am unique", "I am unusual", "I have rare characteristics", and "I am different from others". These items have been used in this thesis and for a better comprehension labeled general uniqueness perception (GUP).

In sum, study #1 enters new theoretical terrain by investigating GUP as the potential driver behind CNFU, thereby closing the missing link between CNFU-based consumer research and social psychological research. Thus, testing hypothesis 1 will create new insights about the *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior and therefore answer central research question one.

**Hypothesis 1:** General uniqueness perception (GUP) is positively related to consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU).

CNFU is said to predict a broad range of consumer behaviors (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tepper, 1997; Tian et al., 2001). However, according to Ruvio et al. (2008), most of the CNFU research took place in the United States. More research outside the US is necessary to enhance cross-cultural validity and broaden the understanding of CNFU (Ruvio, 2008; Ruvio et al., 2008). In German-speaking countries only a few studies have investigated the relationship between CNFU and consumption behavior, thus more research is requested (Bauer et al., 2007; Franke & Schreier, 2008; Michel et al., 2009). Hypothesis 2 addresses this request by investigating CNFU and uniqueness-driven consumer behavior—operationalized with three different measures—in a German-speaking setting. First, a 30-item-long list of uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) developed by Tian and McKenzie (2001) is used in order to allow for comparisons with existing US-based CNFU research. Second, a newly developed list of possessions of individualized products (POIP) is introduced. Finally, in order to control for common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003) respondents are asked in an open question to name products for uniqueness display (PFUD).

> **Hypothesis 2:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) is positively related to actual uniqueness-driven consumer behavior in a German-speaking setting.

One of the main goals of study #1 is to shed light on the underlying *processes* involved in uniqueness-driven consumer behavior as is stated in central research question two. What role do GUP and CNFU play? GUP represents a global measure of uniqueness because it measures its mere perception. GUP is not specific to a certain domain or context, as is, for example, CNFU. CNFU is based in the consumer context. As explained earlier, it is assumed that GUP is the driver behind CNFU, and that CNFU influences consumer behavior. People perceive themselves as unique (measured by GUP). And because they strive for a

stable and consistent self-theory they develop the motivation or need (measured by CNFU) to engage in behaviors that contribute to that self-perception. Finally, they actually show the respective behavior. Hence, it is assumed that CNFU mediates the GUP and actual consumer behavior relationship as detailed in hypothesis 3. Uniqueness-driven consumer behavior again is operationalized with the list of uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) and the possession of individualized products (POIP) scale.

> **Hypothesis 3:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) mediates the general uniqueness perception (GUP) and uniqueness-driven consumer behavior relationship.

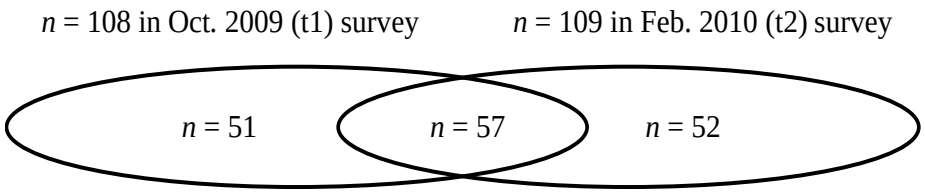
Furthermore, other concepts of self-description such as core self-evaluations (Judge, Van Vianen, & De Pater, 2004), team orientation (Eby & Dobbins, 1997), egoism and traditionalism (Kampmeier, 2001) were employed in study #1 in order to test discriminative validity of GUP and CNFU. No additional research hypothesis was formulated; the results were discussed in the descriptive statistics section (see Chapter 3.1.4.) of this study.

### 3.1.3. Method

#### Sample

Study #1 took place in Switzerland. Participants were German speaking young adults. Data was collected in two online surveys (see Figure 6). Participants of the first survey ($n$ = 108) in October 2009 (t1) were on average 30 years old ($SD$ = 6.8), with 68% of respondents being female. Participants of the second survey ($n$ = 109) in February 2010 (t2) were on average 31 years old ($SD$ = 6.9), with 71% of respondents being female. 57 participants took part in both surveys (t1 and t2). These participants were on average 32 years old ($SD$ = 7.5), and 70% were female.

*Figure 6:* Overview of participants of study #1—survey (t1) and survey (t2)




**Procedure**

Participants were recruited from a mailing list of a Swiss university. In both studies, participants were offered an opportunity to win in a lottery and receive feedback from the study results in order to enhance their motivation. In the lottery, they could win 1x60 Swiss francs and 9x30 Swiss francs payable in cash. The response rate of the first (t1) survey was 45%. Four months later, all respondents were asked to participate again. 57 of the 108 participants also completed the second (t2) survey. 52 additional participants were recruited for the second (t2) survey via the mailing list. The result was one longitudinal sample with $n = 57$ and two cross-sectional samples with $n = 108$ and $n = 109$.

**Measures**

***General uniqueness perception (GUP).*** GUP measures the individual self-perception of uniqueness and distinctiveness. The four-item GUP scale used here is an adapted and renamed version of the differentiation component of the two-component theory of individuality (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001). Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction. Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of GUP. Cronbach's Alpha was above the required .70 level (Nunnally, 1978) as displayed in Table 3.

***Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU).*** CNFU measures the need of individuals to pursue uniqueness through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods in order to develop a unique image. Tian et al. (2001) created the original CNFU scale with 31 items. Ruvio et al. (2008) recently developed and validated a short version with 12 items that retained the three-dimensional structure of CNFU with the subfactors creative choice, unpopular choice, and avoidance of similarity. In study #1 a translated version of the 12-item short-form scale was used. The English scales were translated into German following the forward-back-procedure proposed by Brislin (1980) in order to achieve conceptual equivalence. Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction. Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of CNFU. Cronbach's Alpha was .90 and thus satisfactory (see Table 3).

***Uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB).*** Uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) was measured on a 30-item, multiple-act scale that asks about actual consumer behavior (Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Participants had to indicate whether they performed each of the listed 30 uniqueness-enhancing behaviors in the last four months. Respondents were given three response options: *"yes"*, *"no"* and *"not sure"*. *"Yes"* responses were coded as one; *"no"* and *"not sure"* were coded as zero. Responses were summed up across the 30 items to calculate the overall UEB score. Thus, a higher score indicated more uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB).

***Possession of individualized products (POIP).*** Possession of individualized products (POIP) is a newly developed five-item, multiple-act scale that measures the number of different product categories (e.g., individualized apparel goods, individualized household goods) from which a person possesses at least one product. Participants were given three response options—*"yes"*, *"no"* and *"not sure"*—to indicate whether they possess a product

of the given product category or not. *"Yes"* responses were coded as one; *"no"* and *"not sure"* were coded as zero. Responses were summed up across the five items to calculate the overall possession of individualized products (POIP) score.

***Products for uniqueness display (PFUD).*** The question of products for uniqueness display (PFUD) is asked in an open form. Participants were asked to name products they use to establish a unique image and to differentiate themselves from others. The number of named products was counted and summed up to an overall score for products for uniqueness display (PFUD).

***Core self-evaluations (CSE).*** ''Individuals with positive core self-evaluations appraise themselves in a consistently positive manner across situations; such individuals see themselves as capable, worthy, and in control of their lives'' (Judge et al., 2004, p. 328-329). The core self-evaluations concept is based on four widely known psychological constructs: self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, and neuroticism (Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997).

In study #1, a 12-item short questionnaire that measures core self-evaluations was used (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003; Weiherl, Emmermacher, & Kemter, 2007). Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Items were scored in different directions. Higher mean scores indicated higher and positive levels of core-self evaluations. Cronbach's Alpha was .90 and thus satisfactory.

***Team orientation.*** Team orientation measures the individualistic vs. collectivistic orientation in team settings. Hence, it measures the degree to which people prefer to work in a team or to work alone (Eby & Dobbins, 1997). In study #1, a four-item short scale was used. Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction. Higher mean

scores indicated higher individualistic team orientation and thus a preference to work alone. Cronbach's Alpha was .88 and thus satisfactory.

***Egoism.*** Egoism is a two-item short scale that measures the degree of egoism (Kampmeier & Simon, 2001). Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of egoism. Cronbach's Alpha was .86 and thus satisfactory.

***Traditionalism.*** Traditionalism is a two-item short scale that measures the degree of traditionalism (Kampmeier & Simon, 2001). Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of traditionalism. Cronbach's Alpha was .77 and thus satisfactory.

**Analysis**

To test the psychometric properties and internal validity of GUP and CNFU, classical test theory was applied using Cronbach's Alpha and exploratory factor analysis. A principal factors extraction with varimax rotation was performed using SPSS. The principal components extraction was used prior to the principal factors extraction to estimate the number of factors, the presence of outliners, the absence of multicollinearity, and the factorability of the correlation matrices (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007).

Standard multiple regression and sequential regression were employed. The analysis was performed using a SPSS regression for the evaluation of assumptions. The results of the evaluation of the assumptions of sampling distribution, linearity and homoscedasticity of residuals were satisfactory (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). The results of the analysis of skewness and kurtosis are displayed in Table 3 in the last two columns.

Hypothesis 3 suggested a mediator model. A mediator "accounts for the relation between the predictor and the criterion" (Baron & Kenny, 1986, p. 1176). Tabachnik and Fidell (2007, p. 160) further explained that "[a]ccording to Baron and Kenny (1986) a variable is confirmed as a mediator if (1) there is a significant relationship between IV and the DV, (2) there is a significant relationship between the IV and the mediator, (3) the mediator still predicts the DV after controlling for the IV, and (4) the relationship between the IV and the DV is reduced when the mediator is in the equation. If the relationship between the IV and the DV goes zero when the mediator is in the equation, mediation is said to be perfect (or full or complete); (…) if the relationship is diminished, but not to zero, mediation is said to be partial".

### 3.1.4. Results

**Descriptive statistics**

In this study, GUP and CNFU were researched together for the first time. Therefore, several analyses were performed prior to testing the hypotheses. First, a factor analysis was performed. The evaluation of assumptions was satisfactory and four factors with Eigenvalues greater than one were found. A principal factors extraction with varimax rotation was performed using SPSS on the 16 items from the CNFU (12 items) and GUP (4 items) scales for a sample of 108 participants. Factor loadings for CNFU-creative choice were between .64 and .83; for CNFU-unpopular choice between .57 and .81; for CNFU-avoidance of similarity between .77 and .83; and for GUP between .69 and .87 (see Table 2).

*Table 2:* Factor loadings of the consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) scales

| Scale items | CNFU-CC | CNFU-UC | CNFU-AS | GUP |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Consumer need for uniqueness - creative choice (CNFU-CC) | | | | |
| I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill products because I enjoy being original. | **.83** | .16 | .21 | .07 |
| I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image that cannot be duplicated. | **.75** | .12 | .30 | .07 |
| Having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me in establishing a distinctive image. | **.74** | .28 | .37 | .17 |
| I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands. | **.64** | .31 | .27 | .13 |
| Consumer need for uniqueness - unpopular choice (CNFU-UC) | | | | |
| I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group regarding when and how certain products are properly used. | .01 | **.81** | .32 | .11 |
| I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own. | .25 | **.76** | .09 | .14 |
| When it comes to the products I buy and the situations in which I use them, I have broken customs and rules. | .21 | **.74** | .06 | .15 |
| I enjoy challenging the prevailing taste of people I know by buying something they would not seem to accept. | .40 | **.57** | .24 | .11 |
| Consumer need for uniqueness - avoidance of similarity (CNFU-AS) | | | | |
| The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it. | .29 | .12 | **.83** | -.12 |
| As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone. | .20 | .31 | **.82** | .08 |
| When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less. | .23 | .16 | **.81** | .05 |
| I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population. | .37 | .08 | **.77** | .01 |
| General uniqueness perception (GUP) | | | | |
| I'm different from others. | .04 | .03 | .01 | **.87** |
| I'm unusual. | -.03 | .16 | .19 | **.78** |
| I'm unique. | .13 | .05 | -.18 | **.70** |
| I have rare characteristics. | .20 | .24 | .03 | **.69** |

*Note.* Factor loadings for factor analysis with Varimax rotation; Main foctor loadings are in boldface; $n$ = 108

Second, Cronbach's Alpha was analyzed using SPSS and found sufficient for GUP and CNFU for both surveys (t1 and t2), as well as for the three CNFU subfactors (Table 3). Cronbach's Alpha should be within the range of .70 - .90 (Nunnally, 1978; Pospesschill, 2000).

*Table 3*: Psychometric properties of uniqueness-related constructs used in study #1

| | | | | | | Range | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *n* | *α* | *M* | *SD* | Potential | Actual | # Items | Skew | Kurtosis |
| Oct. 2009 (t1) | | | | | | | | | | |
| GUP | General uniqueness perception | 108 | .78 | 4.73 | 1.16 | 1-7 | 1.00-6.75 | 4 | -0.76 | 0.68 |
| CNFU | Consumer need for uniqueness | 108 | .90 | 3.38 | 1.17 | 1-7 | 1.00-5.92 | 12 | 1.30 | -0.87 |
| CNFU-CC | CNFU - Creative choice | 108 | .86 | 3.67 | 1.45 | 1-7 | 1.00-6.75 | 4 | 0.30 | -1.02 |
| CNFU-UC | CNFU - Unpopular choice | 108 | .80 | 3.25 | 1.22 | 1-7 | 1.00-5.75 | 4 | 0.12 | -0.88 |
| CNFU-AS | CNFU - Avoidance of similarity | 108 | .89 | 3.25 | 1.22 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 4 | 0.49 | -0.51 |
| Feb. 2010 (t2) | | | | | | | | | | |
| GUP | General uniqueness perception | 109 | .78 | 4.86 | 1.09 | 1-7 | 2.00-7.00 | 4 | -0.61 | 0.41 |
| CNFU | Consumer need for uniqueness | 109 | .90 | 3.20 | 1.13 | 1-7 | 1.00-6.75 | 12 | 0.29 | -0.01 |
| CNFU-CC | CNFU - creative choice | 109 | .87 | 3.29 | 1.44 | 1-7 | 1.00-6.75 | 4 | 0.24 | -0.76 |
| CNFU-UC | CNFU - unpopular choice | 109 | .73 | 3.00 | 1.10 | 1-7 | 1.00-6.75 | 4 | 0.44 | 0.24 |
| CNFU-AS | CNFU - avoidance of similarity | 109 | .90 | 3.31 | 1.47 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 4 | 0.62 | 0.09 |
| UEB | Uniqueness-enhancing behaviours | 109 | .67 | 9.43 | 3.86 | 0-30 | 1-19 | 30 | 0.41 | -0.09 |
| POIP | Possession of individualized products | 109 | .32 | 0.88 | 0.96 | 0-5 | 0-3 | 5 | 0.69 | 0.46 |

Third, discriminative validity was given because neither GUP nor CNFU were related with other measures of self-perception. GUP did not show significant correlations (two-tailed) with core self-evaluations ($r(108) = .09$, $p = .342$), with egoism ($r(108) = -.13$, $p = .196$), with traditionalism ($r(108) = .02$, $p = .814$), and team orientation ($r(108) = -.06$, $p = .571$). CNFU also did not show significant correlations (two-tailed) with core self-evaluations ($r(108) = -.03$, $p = .786$), with egoism ($r(108) = .10$, $p = .323$), with traditionalism ($r(108) = .03$, $p = .769$), and team orientation ($r(108) = .06$, $p = .543$).

Finally, retest-reliability for GUP was given, as GUP (t1) and GUP (t2) were significantly positively related ($r(57) = .68$, $p = .000$). The same was found for CNFU ($r(57) = .67$, $p = .000$). In sum, it can be concluded that GUP and CNFU are separate factors with sufficient psychometric qualities.

**Hypothesis testing**

Table 4 shows all correlations of uniqueness-related variables used in study #1. It includes the variables of the October 2009 (t1) survey and the February 2010 (t2) survey. Longitudinal correlations (t1 and t2) are displayed in the left lower part of the table.

*Table 4:* Correlation overview of uniqueness-related variables used in study #1

| | | October 2009 (t1) survey | | | | | | February 2010 (t2) survey | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| Oct. 2009 (t1) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | GUP | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | CNFU | .26** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | CNFU-CC | .26** | .88*** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | CNFU-UC | .33*** | .78*** | .56*** | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | CNFU-AS | .08 | .85*** | .63*** | .47*** | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | PFUD | .28** | .31** | .33*** | .29** | .17* | | | | | | | |
| Feb. 2010 (t2) | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | GUP | .68*** | .14 | .18† | .21† | -.03 | .10 | | | | | | |
| 8 | CNFU | .43*** | .67*** | .57*** | .58*** | .50*** | .35** | .34*** | | | | | |
| 9 | CNFU-CC | .29* | .49*** | .56*** | .36** | .31** | .36** | .34*** | .88*** | | | | |
| 10 | CNFU-UC | .52*** | .47*** | .32** | .73*** | .17 | .35** | .44*** | .82*** | .66*** | | | |
| 11 | CNFU-AS | .31* | .66*** | .49*** | .42** | .69*** | .17 | .11 | .83*** | .55*** | .49*** | | |
| 12 | UEB | .26* | .19† | .29* | .22* | -.03 | .24* | .21* | .34*** | .38*** | .41*** | .11† | |
| 13 | POIP | .19† | .20† | .28* | .26* | -.01 | .29* | .14† | .30** | .29* | .36*** | .12 | .46*** |

*Note.* $n$ = 108 participants in October 2009 (t1), $n$ = 109 participants in Februrary 2010 (t2), $n$ = 57 participants in both surveys (t1 and t2); † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed); GUP = General uniqueness perception; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; CNFU-CC = CNFU-creative choice; CNFU-UC = CNFU-unpopular choice; CNFU-AS = CNFU-avoidance of similarity; PFUD = Products for uniqueness display; UEB = Uniqueness-enhancing behaviors; POIP = Possession of individualized products

**Hypothesis 1:** General uniqueness perception (GUP) is positively related to consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU).

GUP was expected to be positively related to CNFU. This hypothesis was supported by the data. Correlation analyses performed on the cross-sectional data revealed a significant positive correlation for CNFU with GUP in t1 ($r(108) = .26$, $p = .004$, one-tailed) as well as in t2 ($r(109) = .34$, $p = .000$, one-tailed) as shown in Table 4. Additionally, it was examined if GUP also predicted CNFU over time. Therefore, participants were asked about their GUP and CNFU levels in October 2009 (t1) and again in February 2010 (t2). A hierarchical regression analysis performed on this longitudinal data revealed that additional variance of CNFU (t2) is explained by GUP (t1) after controlling for CNFU (t1) as is displayed in Table 5. After including CNFU (t1) ($ß = .665$, $p = .000$) in the equation in step 1, 44% of the

variance of CNFU (t2) was explained. In step 2, the addition of GUP (t1) (ß = .302, $p$ = .003) yielded another significant ($R^2_{change}$ = .087, $p$ = .003) change in explained CNFU (t2) variance. A similar regression analysis with GUP (t2) as dependent variable and CNFU as independent variable yielded no significant results.

*Table 5:* Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for general uniqueness perception (GUP) predicting consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU)

| **DV: CNFU (t2)** | ***ß*** | ***R2*** | ***R2 adj*** | ***R2 Change*** | ***df1*** | ***df2*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | .442 | .431 | .442*** | 1 | 55 |
| CNFU (t1) | .665*** | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | .529 | .511 | .087** | 1 | 54 |
| CNFU (t1) | .599*** | | | | | |
| GUP (t1) | .302** | | | | | |

*Note.* $n$ = 57; † $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001; significance tested two-tailed; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; GUP = General uniqueness perception; t1 = October 2009; t2 = February 2010

A closer examination of the CNFU subfactors revealed a somehow surprising result. A correlation analysis performed on the cross-sectional data showed no significant positive correlations for CNFU-avoidance of similarity with GUP in t1 ($r$(108) = .08, $p$ = .214, one-tailed) and in t2 ($r$(109) = .11, $p$ = .122, one-tailed) as shown in Table 4. However, in sum a positive relation between GUP and CNFU was found, thus confirming hypothesis 1.

**Hypothesis 2:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) is positively related to actual uniqueness-driven consumer behavior in a German-speaking setting.

In a German-speaking setting, CNFU was expected to be positively related to actual uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Therefore, participants were asked about their CNFU levels and about their uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB), their possessions of individualized products (POIP), and the products they use for uniqueness display (PFUD).

Standard regression analyses performed on the cross-sectional data revealed, in fact, that CNFU was positively related with these three measures of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Thus, hypothesis 2 was confirmed. The results are displayed next.

Uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) is a list of 30 behaviors such as “made or designed a product” or “shopped at yard sales or flea markets”. Participants were asked if they performed each of these behaviors in the last 4 months (“yes”) or not (“no”, “not sure”). A standard regression analysis performed on the cross-sectional data of the t2 survey showed that CNFU (ß = .34, $p < .001$) accounted for 11% of variance in uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB). This mirrors the results found in the US-samples (Tian & McKenzie, 2001). A closer look at the CNFU subfactors revealed that not all three were equally strong predictors. In another regression analysis, all three CNFU subfactors were simultaneously added to the equation. The three subfactors accounted for 19% of variance in uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB). CNFU-creative choice (ß = .27, $p = .031$) and CNFU-unpopular choice (ß = .32, $p = .007$) showed significant predictive effects, but CNFU-avoidance of similarity (ß = -.19, $p = .071$) did not.

Possession of individualized products (POIP) was analyzed next. A standard regression analysis using cross-sectional data from the t2 survey showed that 8% of variance in the possession of individualized products (POIP) was explained by CNFU (ß = .30, $p = .002$). 12% of variance in the possession of individualized products (POIP) was explained by the CNFU subfactors; among these, only CNFU-unpopular choice (ß = .32, $p = .011$) showed a significant effect.

Finally, the relation between CNFU and number of products for uniqueness display (PFUD) was analyzed. A standard regression analysis performed on the cross-sectional data of the t1 survey revealed a significant effect for CNFU (ß = .31, $p = .001$) which accounted for 9% of variance in the number of products for uniqueness display (PFUD). CNFU

subfactors explained 11% of variance in the number of products for uniqueness display (PFUD); here only CNFU-creative choice (*ß* = .31, *p* = .018) was significant.

However, a correlation analysis performed on the longitudinal sample (N = 57) only revealed a weak relation between CNFU and the behavioral measures. Correlation between CNFU at t1 and uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) at t2 was only marginally statistically significant ($r(57) = .19$, $p = .080$, one-tailed). Correlation between CNFU at t1 and possessions of individualized products (POIP) at t2 was also only marginally statistically significant ($r(57) = .20$, $p = .064$, one-tailed). However, significant positive correlations were revealed between the CNFU subfactors creative choice (t1) and unpopular choice (t1) and uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) at t2 as well as possessions of individualized products (POIP) at t2 (see Table 4). A standard regression analysis using the CNFU subfactors—not shown here—revealed similar results as the analysis of the cross-sectional data displayed above, but the significance was only marginal.

In sum, hypothesis 2 was confirmed as CNFU was indeed related to different forms of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Consequently, the next hypothesis focused on processes between uniqueness-driven self-perceptions, consumer needs and consumer behavior.

> **Hypothesis 3:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) mediates the general uniqueness perception (GUP) and uniqueness-driven consumer behavior relationship.

It was hypothesized that CNFU mediates the GUP and actual consumer behavior relationship. The hypothesis was tested using uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) and possessions of individualized products (POIP) as measures of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. The results show that Hypothesis 3 is supported by the data. A hierarchical regression analysis performed on the cross-sectional data of the t2 survey revealed that

CNFU works as a mediator of the GUP and uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) relationship (see Table 6).

*Table 6:* Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) predicting uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB)

| **DV: UEB (t2)** | ***ß*** | ***R2*** | ***R2 adj*** | ***R2 Change*** | ***df1*** | ***df2*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | .046 | .037 | .046* | 1 | 107 |
| GUP (t2) | .215* | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | .128 | .111 | .082** | 1 | 106 |
| GUP (t2) | .112 | | | | | |
| CNFU (t2) | .303** | | | | | |

*Note.* $n$ = 109; † $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001 ; significance tested one-tailed; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; GUP = General uniqueness perception; UEB = Uniqueness-enhancing behaviors; t2 = February 2010

The data fulfilled all four conditions demanded for a mediator effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986). (1) GUP and uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) were significantly correlated ($r$(109) = .21, $p$ = .012, one-tailed). (2) There was a significant correlation between GUP and CNFU ($r$(109) = .34, $p$ = .000, one-tailed). (3) CNFU was significantly associated with uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) after controlling for GUP. The addition of CNFU to the equation in step 2 resulted in a significant change ($R^2_{change}$ = .082, $p$ = .002) of explained uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) variance. (4) The impact of GUP on uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) was significantly weaker after controlling for CNFU. The ß-value of GUP decreased from ß = .215, $p$ = .025 to ß = .112, $p$ = .248 and lost significance after CNFU was added to the equation. Therefore, a complete mediator effect is suggested.

Possession of individualized products (POIP) was analyzed next. A hierarchical regression analysis with the possession of individualized products (POIP) as dependent variable revealed similar results as with the analysis with uniqueness-enhancing behaviors

(UEB). CNFU again functioned as a complete mediator, as all four conditions demanded by Baron and Kenny (1996) were fulfilled (see Table 4 and Table 7); thus, GUP influenced uniqueness-driven consumer behavior through CNFU. However, GUP only showed a marginally significant correlation (one-tailed) with POIP ($r(109) = .14$, $p = .071$); and thus mediator analysis was only marginally significant. However, since possession of individualized products (POIP) is measured with 5 items, it is certainly the weaker of the two behavioral measures, as it contains 25 items less than uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB). Epstein (1979) stated that personality traits better predict behaviors over multiple events compared to single behaviors.

*Table 7:* Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) predicting possession of individualized products (POIP)

| **DV: POIP (t2)** | ***ß*** | ***R2*** | ***R2 adj*** | ***R2 Change*** | ***df1*** | ***df2*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | .020 | .011 | .020† | 1 | 107 |
| GUP (t2) | .141† | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | .089 | .072 | .069** | 1 | 106 |
| GUP (t2) | .047 | | | | | |
| CNFU (t2) | .279** | | | | | |

*Note.* $n = 109$; † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ ; significance tested one-tailed; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; GUP = General uniqueness perception; POIP = Possession of individualized products; t2 = February 2010

### 3.1.5. Discussion

The intent of study #1 was to get a deeper understanding of the *processes* and *antecedents* involved in uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. In short summary, GUP was identified as the psychological driver behind CNFU, a positive relationship between CNFU and three measures of actual consumer behavior was found in a German-speaking setting, and finally it was revealed that CNFU mediates the GUP and consumer behavior relationship.

It was discussed earlier that nothing is known about the driver behind CNFU. Although CNFU evolved from NFU theory (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001) NFU does not represent the cause behind CNFU. Different authors discussed the potential influence of uniqueness perception on the uniqueness motive and explained it with the consistency principle of the self-theory (Lynn & Snyder; 2002; Nail, 1986; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Yet, no research was conducted to examine this assumption. One reason might have been that CNFU based consumer research and social psychological research, which already offers a concept measuring mere uniqueness perception, are separate research areas. The accomplishment of this study was the application of the GUP concept—adapted from the two-component theory of individuality (Kampmeier, 2001)—in the consumer behavior context. And indeed, the analyses conducted in this study proved the positive interrelation between the uniqueness-driven self- perception (represented by GUP) and the uniqueness-driven consumer need (represented by CNFU). Thus, GUP was found to be the driver behind CNFU.

Furthermore, it was highlighted that more CNFU research outside the United States is requested in general and that only limited research took place in German-speaking countries (Bauer et al., 2007; Michel et al., 2009; Ruvio, 2008). Even though consumption plays a bigger role in the US, it was expected that individuals in German-speaking countries also seek uniqueness via consumption and that CNFU is a valuable predictor of this. These expectations were confirmed, as this study showed CNFU to be related to three measures of actual consumer behavior. Therefore, study #1 enhanced the cross-cultural validity of CNFU.

Finally, the question about the *processes* between GUP, CNFU and uniqueness-driven consumer behavior was answered here. Again, study #1 entered new research terrain. It was assumed that global GUP activates the consumer-specific CNFU, which subsequently triggers consumer behavior. Therefore, a mediator process was postulated. And indeed,

CNFU mediated the GUP and consumer behavior relationship. Thus, it can be concluded that the primary driver behind action is the individuals' general uniqueness perception (GUP). Hence, study #1 not only confirms GUP and CNFU as psychological *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior, but also explains the underlying *processes*.

**Methodological implications**

The CNFU concept is conceptualized as consistent and homogenous (Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Although, most studies only use the overall CNFU score, it is assumed that all three subfactors are equally related with consumer behavior (Ruvio, 2008; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). However, the data analysis conducted in study #1 revealed an interesting and unexpected finding. The CNFU subfactors showed different predictive qualities. CNFU-creative choice and CNFU-unpopular choice were stronger predictors of consumer behavior than CNFU-avoidance of similarity. The character of CNFU-avoidance of similarity might provide an explanation: Individuals avoiding similarity stop buying or using products that are commonly popular because these products no longer enable differentiation. However, the behavioral measures used in study #1 asked individuals if they performed an activity or purchased an individualized product, but did not ask individuals about what they stopped doing or what they did not purchase. That might be a reason why CNFU-avoidance of similarity does not have such a strong predictive effect.

However, the influence of GUP on the three CNFU subfactors also was not equally strong. The relationship between GUP and CNFU-avoidance of similarity was by far the weakest. The explanation given above does not apply here. Instead, maybe the avoidance of the purchase, utilization, and disposition of commonly used consumer products does not have such a strong differentiating effect. For example, somebody who stops wearing Converse

shoes because they become mainstream does not achieve the same effect in regard to uniqueness enhancement as somebody who starts wearing Louboutin shoes. Yet it might also be a question of internal and external audience. The external audience—such as friends, family, colleagues, or strangers—might not notice that somebody stopped wearing the Converse shoes, but the person himself—and thus the internal audience—does. According to Snyder (1992), the internal audience matters most, but maybe the external audience is more important than expected, in which case one conclusion is that individuals strongly rely on the confirmation of uniqueness by an external audience. Avoiding similarity by stopping to use products appears to not have as strong an effect as the active use of products, at least in the eyes of others. Therefore, the individuals' GUP mainly influences or triggers creative choice and unpopular choice, because the behaviors associated with them promise more success in maintaining and enhancing uniqueness.

**Limitations**

There are some methodological limitations left to mention. The sample of study #1 was comprised of young adults from a Swiss university, thus, the generalization of findings is limited. A high percentage of women took part in the survey, which further limits the ability to generalize, even as no gender differences were found. The longitudinal data gives valuable insights, but results should be interpreted with caution due to the small number of participants ($n$ = 57). The questionnaire includes different behavioral measures (e.g., multiple criterion act, open questions) to avoid common method bias, however, the data is still based on self-disclosure

**Outlook**

Study #1 mainly provided insights for central research questions one and two. Central research question three asks about different *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. The next three studies—study #2, study #3 and study #4—are designed to give answers to this question. CNFU is said to predict a broad range of consumer behaviors (Bauer et al., 2007, Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001). However, possibilities and limitations have not been systematically tested yet. Therefore, study #2 examines GUP and CNFU in relation to an extreme uniqueness-enhancing behavior: Tattooing. Tattooing is a consumer behavior (Tiggemann & Golder, 2006), but not related to actual consumer products.

Study #3 responds to the request to investigate the relationship between the uniqueness motive and uniqueness-enhancing activities, such as exotic travels and risky sports (Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Snyder, 1992). Additionally, study #3 dives into the consumption of mass customized products and explores if the purchase of customized apparel products is related to GUP and CNFU. This promises valuable practical findings and thus satisfies the demand for more managerial implications of CNFU research (Bauer et al., 2007).

Study #4 replies to a statement by Salvador et al. (2009, p. 71): “Why wouldn’t people want to be treated as individual customers?” The statement points into the direction of customer service. Individuals might want to be treated as individual customers. Maybe the individuals’ uniqueness perception is also related to the desire to receive an individual customer treatment. Study #4, for the first time, explores this rather ‘passive’ side of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior.

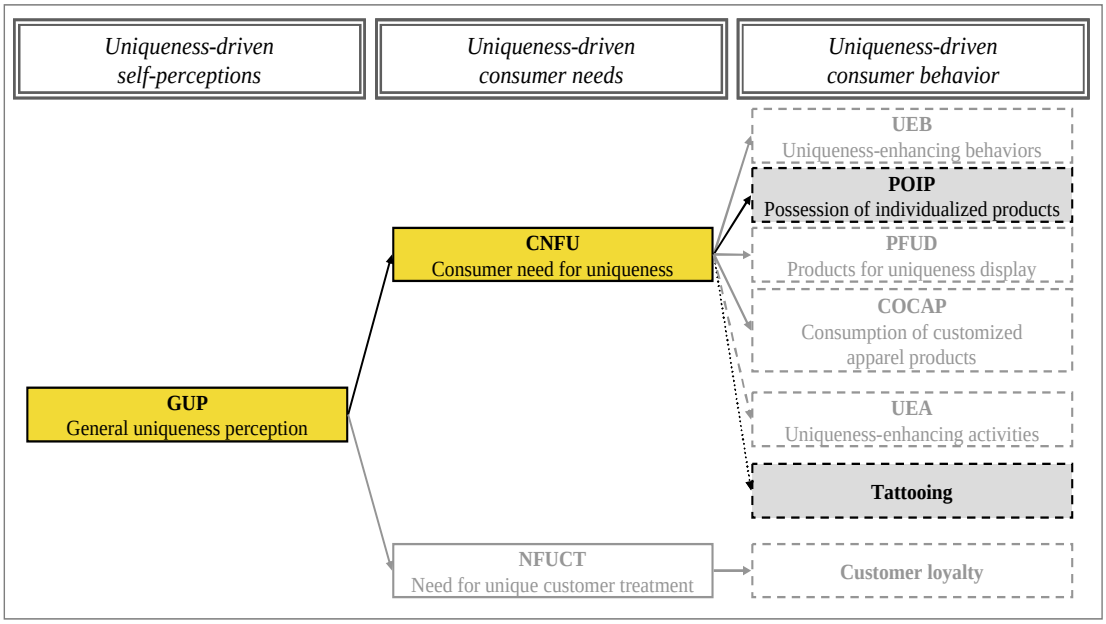
## 3.2. STUDY #2: TATTOOING—AN EXTREME FORM OF UNIQUENESS-SEEKING

### 3.2.1. Study Objectives

Study #2 responds to the third central research question, which asks about different *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. For this purpose, study #2 looks at an extreme form of uniqueness-increasing behavior: Tattooing. The influence of GUP and CNFU on tattooing behavior is investigated using a sample derived from a tattoo exhibition. To do so, a newly developed measure to determine the degree of tattooing is employed. Additionally, new insights about the psychological *antecedents*—GUP and CNFU—of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior are expected from the investigation of tattooing behavior, thus also contributing to central research question one.

Furthermore, study #2 aims to replicate some of the main results of study #1 with a non-student sample. Hence, the mediator *process* between GUP, CNFU and, in this case, possession of individualized products (POIP) is investigated again further contributing to the second central research question. A variable overview is given in Figure 7 (employed variables are highlighted).

*Figure 7:* Overview of uniqueness-related variables employed in study #2



### 3.2.2. Introduction and Hypotheses

According to a famous tattoo artist, ‘every tattoo should be as unique as its owner’ (Personal communication, 2010). The question of this study reverses the direction of this statement and asks: Is tattooing a vehicle to pursue uniqueness? Tattooing is a body modification behavior. A tattoo is a permanent marking made by inserting indelible ink into the dermis layer of the skin to change the pigment. It requires considerable cost, time, effort and the endurance of pain (Tiggemann & Golder, 2006). In past times, tattoos were famous for example among sailors, but also among criminals and other socially marginal groups, and thus tattooing was often considered as an act of rebellion and deviance (Benson, 2000). However, times have changed, and today rock-stars, movie-stars, and athletes as well as politicians and doctors wear tattoos: Tattoos have become popular among a broader population and across all socioeconomic and educational layers (Forbes, 2001).

Therefore, tattoos are no longer typical signs of social marginalization. Today the most common reasons to get tattooed are based on the goals of self-expression and identity—the motive “to feel unique” is as important for getting tattooed as “to remember an event”, “liking the look of it” or “to express myself” (Forbes, 2001; Greif, Hewitt, & Armstrong, 1999; Tiggemann & Golder, 2006). Thus, tattooing offers the individual an opportunity to seek differentiation from others, but still in a socially accepted way. This mirrors Synder and Fromkin’s (1980) idea of seeking distinctiveness in a way that does not cause social sanctions. Furthermore, it matches the assumption of optimum distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991, 1993), which postulates that individuals simultaneously strive for assimilation and differentiation. Tattoos enable differentiation and nowadays do not endanger assimilation. Still, tattooing is an extreme way of uniqueness pursuit because tattoos are permanent (or rather costly to remove) in contrast to other items such as apparel goods.

Tiggemann and Golder (2006) were the first to indicate that tattooing is related with uniqueness-seeking. They showed on a small, convenience sample that people with tattoos had a higher need for uniqueness (NFU) compared to people without tattoos. Tattooing is a consumer behavior because individuals spend considerable amounts of money on their tattoos (Forbes, 2001). CNFU was developed to be a stronger behavioral predictor in the consumer context (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Tian et al., 2001). Hence, CNFU should also predict tattooing behavior. This assumption is tested in study #2, and thus provides insights about the possibilities and limitations of the CNFU concept.

The previous study (study #1, see Chapter 3.1) postulated GUP as the ultimate driver behind uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. In agreement with the assumption of self-theory (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980, Lynn & Snyder, 2002), the individual self-perception of uniqueness is said to influence the motivation for uniqueness-increasing behavior, which finally triggers the behavior itself. Therefore, a relation between GUP and tattooing is also expected. However, so far no empirical studies have tested this relationship. The two-component theory of individuality—where GUP was originally derived from—was mainly investigated in group settings (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001; Simon, 2004). This might deliver an explanation for this missing research attention in regard to consumer behavior in general, and tattooing behavior in particular.

Tiggemann and Golder (2006) used a rather simple measure of tattooing in their study. They divided the participants into people with and people without tattoos. However, although the absolute numbers are the same, everybody would agree that there is a difference between ‘one small tattoo on your ankle joint’ and ‘one tattoo covering your whole back’. Both tattoos are just ‘one’ tattoo, but the difference on uniqueness perception might be immense. Hence, in-depth results are expected from looking at the degree of tattooing, which represents a new and more accurate measure. In study #2, participants were asked to mark

those areas in a picture of the human body that are covered by their tattoos. Afterwards the degree of tattooing was determined. Additionally, participants were asked how much money they had spent on their tattoos and how many tattoos they possessed in total. Hence, in total three measures of tattooing—tattooing degree, tattoo cost, and tattoo number—were employed. All expectations are summarized in hypothesis 4.

> **Hypothesis 4:** General uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) are positively related to different measures of tattooing behavior.

The next hypothesis is directed at the underlying *process* between GUP, CNFU and tattooing behavior. Study #1 already showed that CNFU mediated the GUP and consumer behavior relationship. If CNFU is related to tattooing behavior and GUP is the ultimate driver behind CNFU and the behavior, then CNFU should also mediate the GUP and tattooing relationship as is detailed in hypothesis 5.

> **Hypothesis 5:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) mediates the general uniqueness perception (GUP) and tattooing behavior relationship.

Study #2 includes one more objective: the replication of the main results of study #1 with a German non-student sample. A generalization of the results of study #1 was limited as the sample consisted of Swiss university students. However, the intention here is not a full replication of the results since the co-operation with the tattoo exhibition organizers restricted questionnaire length. Therefore, only the possession of individualized products (POIP) scale was employed to investigate the processes behind uniqueness-driven consumer behavior.

> **Hypothesis 6:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) mediates the general uniqueness perception (GUP) and possession of individualized products (POIP) relationship.

### 3.2.3. Method

#### Sample

Study #2 took place at a two-day yearly tattoo exhibition in Saxony, Germany. The participants of study #2 were visitors or tattoo artists at this tattoo exhibition. 183 people completed the paper-and-pencil questionnaire. 151 of these were evaluable. Participants were on average 28 years old (*SD* = 6.3), with 60% of respondents being female and 60% living in Saxony. 29 participants had no tattoo.

#### Procedure

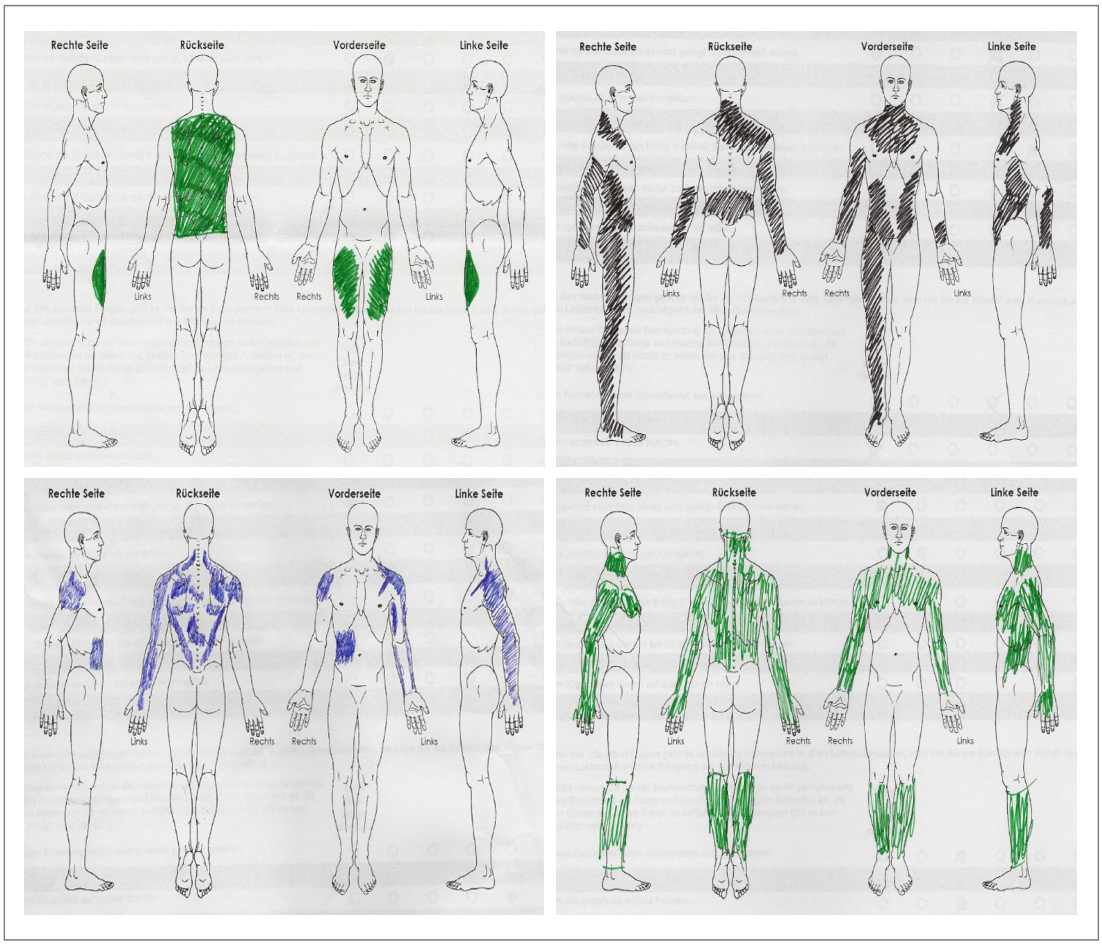
A co-operation with the organizer of the tattoo exhibition took place. The organizer received an evaluation of the tattoo exhibition—evaluation items (e.g., of food, drinks, location) were included at the end of the questionnaire—in return for the permission to distribute the survey among participants and exhibitors. Two scientific assistants asked people at the exhibition if they wanted to take part in the survey in order to help the organizer to continuously improve the event and contribute to science. The participants received a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. After they had finished the questionnaire, they were asked to drop it in a locked wooden box in order to secure anonymity. The goal to collect questionnaires of 10% of the exhibition participants was fulfilled.

#### Measures

***Tattooing behavior.*** Tattooing behavior was investigated using three measures. Participants were asked to state how many tattoos they possessed (tattoo number) and how much money they had spent for their tattoos (tattoo cost). Additionally, the degree of tattooing was introduced as a new measure (tattooing degree). Participants were given a picture of the human body where they could mark or shade those areas covered by their

tattoos (see Figure 8). Afterwards, scientific assistants used a grid pattern printed on a transparent foil to quantify the areas covered by a tattoo. The grid pattern consisted of 880 squares that could potentially be covered by tattoos. The degree of tattooing was calculated by dividing the actual number of squares covered by a tattoo through the potential total number of squares.

*Figure 8:* Four participant examples of measuring the tattooing degree




***General uniqueness perception (GUP).*** The GUP scale measures the individual self-perception of uniqueness and distinctiveness. The four-item GUP scale is an adapted and renamed version of the differentiation scale (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001). Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert type scale from *strongly*

*disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction. Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of GUP. Cronbach's Alpha was .70 and thus fulfilled the required .70 level (Nunnally, 1978) as is displayed in Table 8.

***Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU).*** The CNFU scale measures the need of individuals to pursue uniqueness through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods in order to develop a distinct image (Tian et al., 2001). Ruvio et al. (2008) developed a 12-item short form, in which the three-dimensional structure of CNFU—with the subfactors creative choice, unpopular choice, and avoidance of similarity—was substantiated.

A translated version was already used in study #1 showing sufficient psychometric properties. In study #2, a nine-item version was used. Those items with the weakest factor loading on each of the subfactors were eliminated—three items in total—in order to reduce questionnaire length. Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction. Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of CNFU. Cronbach's Alpha was .85 and thus satisfactory as is displayed in Table 8.

***Possession of individualized products (POIP).*** Possession of individualized products (POIP) is a five-item, multiple-act criterion that measures the number of different product categories (e.g., individualized apparel goods, individualized household goods) from which a person possesses at least one product. Participants were given three response options—*"yes"*, *"no"* and *"not sure"*—to indicate whether they possessed a product of a given product category or not. *"Yes"* responses were coded as one, *"no"* and *"not sure"* were coded as zero. Responses were summed up across the five items to calculate the overall possession of individualized product (POIP) score. Thus, a higher score indicated that an individual possesses more individualized products from different product categories.

**Analysis**

To test the psychometric properties and internal validity, classical test theory was applied using Cronbach's Alpha and exploratory factor analysis. Standard multiple regression and sequential regression analyses were employed. Analyses were performed using SPSS. The results of the evaluation of the assumptions of sampling distribution, linearity and homoscedasticity of residuals were satisfactory (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). A mediator model was expected in hypothesis 5 and 6. Mediator analyses were conducted in the same way as in study #1 (see Chapter 3.1.; Baron & Kenny, 1986; Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007)

### 3.2.4. Results

**Descriptive statistics**

A principal factors extraction with varimax rotation was performed using SPSS. The principal components extraction was used prior to the principal factors extraction to estimate the number of factors, the presence of outliners, the absence of multicollinearity, and the factorability of the correlation matrices (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). GUP and CNFU again were found to be separate factors. In addition, Cronbach's Alpha plus skewness and kurtosis were tested and found satisfactory as displayed in Table 8.

*Table 8:* Psychometric properties of scales used in study #2

| | | | | | Range | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | *α* | *M* | *SD* | Potential | Actual | # Items | Skew | Kurtosis |
| GUP | 151 | .70 | 4.87 | 1.23 | 1-7 | 1.50-7.00 | 4 | -0.18 | -0.36 |
| CNFU | 151 | .85 | 4.60 | 1.27 | 1-7 | 1.17-7.00 | 9 | -0.34 | -0.40 |
| CNFU-CC | 151 | .76 | 4.87 | 1.53 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 3 | -0.47 | -0.41 |
| CNFU-UC | 151 | .76 | 4.46 | 1.77 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 3 | -0.33 | -0.84 |
| CNFU-AS | 151 | .78 | 4.49 | 1.61 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 3 | -0.27 | -0.67 |
| POIP | 115 | .54 | 2.36 | 1.40 | 0-5 | 0.00-5.00 | 5 | -0.12 | -0.81 |

*Note.* GUP=General uniqueness perception; CNFU=Consumer need for uniqueness; CNFU-CC=CNFU-creative choice; CNFU-UC=CNFU-unpopular choice; CNFU-AS=CNFU-avoidance of similarity; POIP=Possession of individualized products

A new measure for tattooing was employed: The degree of tattooing. Highly significant positive correlations of tattooing degree with other indicators of tattooing behavior such as the number of tattoos ($r(125) = .57$, $p = .000$) and the tattoo cost ($r(125) = .72$, $p = .000$) were found. Furthermore, tattooing degree showed a higher correlation with tattoo cost in comparison to number of tattoos. Also, more participants responded to the tattooing degree task ($n = 151$) in comparison to the tattoo number ($n = 125$) and tattoo cost ($n = 125$) questions (see Table 9). Hence, tattooing degree seems to be a viable new measure.

Table 9: Descriptive statistics of the three measures of tattooing behavior

| Variable | *n* | *M* | *SD* | Min | Max | Item # |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tattoo number | 125 | 5.97 | 10.73 | 0 | 70 | 1 |
| Tattooing degree | 151 | 11% | 18% | 0 | 97% | 1 |
| Tattoo cost (in €) | 125 | 1676 | 4370 | 0 | 30000 | 1 |

**Hypothesis testing**

*Table 10:* Correlation overview of variables used in study #2

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | GUP | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | CNFU | .33*** | | | | | | | |
| 3 | CNFU-CC | .32*** | .82*** | | | | | | |
| 4 | CNFU-UC | .35*** | .87*** | .64*** | | | | | |
| 5 | CNFU-AS | .13 | .76*** | .37*** | .47*** | | | | |
| 6 | Tattoo number | .27** | .08 | .03 | .17† | -.01 | | | |
| 7 | Tattooing degree | .27** | .18* | .13 | .28*** | .03 | .57*** | | |
| 8 | Tattoo cost | .27** | .15† | .09 | .16† | .12 | .39*** | .72*** | |
| 9 | POIP | .14 | .25** | .28** | .20* | .12 | .07 | .12 | .23* |

*Note.* $n = 151$ participants; † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed); GUP = General uniqueness perception; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; CNFU-CC = CNFU-creative choice; CNFU-UC = CNFU-unpopular choice; CNFU-AS = CNFU-avoidance of similarity

**Hypothesis 4:** General uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) are positively related to different measures of tattooing behavior.

It will be recalled that a positive relationship between GUP and tattooing behavior is expected. And indeed, GUP showed significant positive correlations with tattooing degree ($r(151) = .27$, $p = .001$, one-tailed), tattoo cost ($r(125) = .27$, $p = .001$, one-tailed), and tattoo number ($r(125) = .27$, $p = .001$, one-tailed) as is displayed (see Table 10).

Furthermore, a positive relationship between CNFU and tattooing behavior was expected. However, this assumption was only partly supported by the data. CNFU showed significant correlations with tattooing degree ($r(151) = .18$, $p = .013$, one-tailed) and tattoo cost ($r(125) = .15$, $p = .048$, one-tailed), but not with tattoo number ($r(125) = .08$, $p = .200$, one-tailed) as it is also displayed in Table 10. Overall, GUP showed a stronger correlation with the three measures of tattooing behavior in comparison to CNFU. The next hypothesis more specifically examined the way in which GUP and CNFU influenced tattooing.

**Hypothesis 5:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) mediates the general uniqueness perception (GUP) and tattooing behavior relationship.

It was anticipated that CNFU also works as a mediator when it comes to tattooing behavior. However, no evidence to support this hypothesis was found in the data of this study. CNFU did not mediate the GUP and tattooing behavior relationship. Results of hierarchical regression analysis are displayed in Table 11, 12, and 13. The third condition for a mediator effect demanded by Baron & Kenny (1986) was violated, because the addition of CNFU into the equation in step two yielded no additional significant $R^2$ changes in any of the three measures of tattooing behavior (tattooing degree, tattoo cost, and tattoo number).

*Table 11*: Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) predicting tattooing degree

| **DV: Tattooing degree** | | ***ß*** | ***R2*** | ***R2 adj*** | ***R2 Change*** | ***df1*** | ***df2*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | | .070 | .064 | .070*** | 1 | 149 |
| | GUP | .265*** | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | | .080 | .068 | .048 | 1 | 148 |
| | GUP | .230** | | | | | |
| | CNFU | .106 | | | | | |

*Note.* $n$ = 151; † $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001; significance tested one-tailed; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; GUP = General uniqueness perception

*Table 12*: Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) predicting tattoo cost

| **DV: Tattoo cost** | | ***ß*** | ***R2*** | ***R2 adj*** | ***R2 Change*** | ***df1*** | ***df2*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | | .074 | .066 | .074** | 1 | 123 |
| | GUP | .271** | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | | .078 | .063 | .004 | 1 | 122 |
| | GUP | .249** | | | | | |
| | CNFU | .070 | | | | | |

*Note.* $n$ = 125; † $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001; significance tested one-tailed; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; GUP = General uniqueness perception

*Table 13*: Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) predicting tattoo number

| **DV: Tattoo number** | | ***ß*** | ***R2*** | ***R2 adj*** | ***R2 Change*** | ***df1*** | ***df2*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | | .072 | .065 | .072** | 1 | 123 |
| | GUP | .269** | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | | .072 | .057 | .000 | 1 | 122 |
| | GUP | .270** | | | | | |
| | CNFU | -.004 | | | | | |

*Note.* $n$ = 125; † $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001; significance tested one-tailed; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; GUP = General uniqueness perception

So far the data has shown that tattooing indeed is a *manifestation* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior and that especially GUP is related with it. The next hypothesis is directed at the replication of some of the main results of study #1 on a different, non-student sample.

**Hypothesis 6:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) mediates the general uniqueness perception (GUP) and possession of individualized products (POIP) relationship.

It was expected that CNFU works as a mediator of the relationship between GUP and uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. The possession of individualized products (POIP) scale was used again to examine consumer behavior. The hypothesis was supported by the data, but only on a marginally significant level. The data fulfilled all four conditions demanded for a mediator effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986). (1) The correlation of GUP and possession of individualized products (POIP) was marginally significant ($r(116) = .14$, $p = .070$, one-tailed). (2) There was a significant correlation between GUP and CNFU ($r(151) = .33$, $p = .000$, one-tailed).

Table 14: Summary of hierarchical regression analysis of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) predicting possession of individualized products (POIP)

| **DV: POIP** | | ***ß*** | ***R2*** | ***R2 adj*** | ***R2 Change*** | ***df1*** | ***df2*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | | .019 | .010 | .019† | 1 | 114 |
| | GUP | .138† | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | | .067 | .050 | .048* | 1 | 113 |
| | GUP | .076 | | | | | |
| | CNFU | .227** | | | | | |

*Note.* $n = 116$; † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$; significance tested one-tailed; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; GUP = General uniqueness perception; POIP = Possession of individualized products

(3) CNFU was significantly associated with possession of individualized products (POIP) after controlling for GUP. The addition of CNFU to the equation in step two resulted in a significant change ($R^2_{change} = .048$, $p = .018$) of explained possession of individualized product (POIP) variance. (4) The impact of GUP on possession of individualized products (POIP) was significantly weaker after controlling for CNFU. The *ß*-value of GUP decreased from $ß = .138$, $p = .070$ to $ß = .076$, $p = .421$ and lost significance after CNFU was added to

the equation as is shown in Table 14. Therefore, a complete mediator effect was suggested. In sum, 7% of variance in possession of individualized products (POIP) was explained.

### 3.2.5. Discussion

Tattoos alter the appearance of individuals and thus provide an opportunity to create a unique image. “To feel unique” was named as one of the most common reasons for getting a tattoo (Forbes, 2001; Greif et al., 1999). Tiggemann & Golder (2006) showed that people with a tattoo have a higher need for uniqueness in comparison to people without a tattoo. Hence, tattoos are expected to be one vehicle to seek uniqueness. Therefore, it was hypothesized that GUP as well as CNFU were related to tattooing behavior. However, analyses conducted in this study revealed a strong relationship between GUP and tattooing behavior, but only a weak relationship between CNFU and tattooing behavior. These results provide new insights into GUP (Kampmeier, 2001) and CNFU (Tian et al., 2001), and thus into the psychological *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior (central research question one). Furthermore, tattooing was confirmed to be a *manifestation* of uniqueness-driven behavior (central research question three).

CNFU is said to predict a broad range of consumer behaviors (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tepper, 1997; Tian et al., 2001). Tattooing is a form of consumer behavior, as individuals spend considerable amounts of money on tattoos. Participants of this study, for example, spent up to €30,000 on their tattoos and on average €1,676 (including the 29 participants without tattoos). Thus, a strong relationship between CNFU and tattooing was expected, but surprisingly not found in the data. A possible reason for this result could be that the CNFU items were designed around the purchase and use of consumer products. Study participants might simply have not regarded tattoos as a consumer product, but rather as a body modification or experience. This result has important theoretical and practical

implications, because it clearly shows the limits of CNFU, which have not been explored before (Ruvio, 2008; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). CNFU as it is conceptualized by Tian at al. (2001) might especially be useful to predict consumer behavior that is associated with the purchase and use of products. This assumption will be further tested in study #3, where on the one hand the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) and on the other hand uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA), such as travel or sports, are investigated.

In contrast, a strong relationship between GUP and all three measures of tattooing behavior—tattooing degree, tattoo cost, and tattoo number—was found. This result indicates that GUP indeed is a global, ultimate driver behind uniqueness-driven consumer behavior as was first discussed in study #1 (see Chapter 3.1.). It was assumed that a high uniqueness perception ultimately leads to uniqueness-increasing behaviors (Bauer et al., 2007; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Study #2 empirically proved that the higher the individual's uniqueness perception the higher their tattooing behavior. Although, GUP was strongly related to tattooing behavior, the relationship was not mediated by CNFU. The reason was the weak correlation between CNFU and tattooing as discussed above. It can be speculated whether or not the more general need for uniqueness (NFU) (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980) would have mediated the GUP and tattooing behavior relationship. This would be in line with the theoretical reasoning (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980) suggesting that GUP forms and influences the behavioral motivation (behavioral need), which finally triggers the behavior. Therefore, different uniqueness-driven needs might exist reflecting different uniqueness attributes and manifesting in different behavioral patterns (Maslach, 1974; Synder, 1992; Holt, 1995). Study #4, for example, will shed light on the existence of other uniqueness-driven consumer needs besides CNFU. In conclusion, the results of study #2 suggest that the GUP concept is related to a broader array of expressions

of uniqueness, maybe even outside the consumer context, and thus represents a global driver behind uniqueness-seeking.

Furthermore, this study aimed to replicate some of the main results of the first study. Study #1 not only showed that GUP and CNFU were related, but also revealed that CNFU mediated the GUP and uniqueness-driven consumer behavior relationship in a German speaking setting. However, participants in study #1 were young Swiss adults recruited from a university mailing list. Therefore, the ability to generalize these results was limited. Study #2 was based on a non-student sample in order to overcome that obstacle. And indeed, again a significant positive correlation between GUP and CNFU was revealed. CNFU once more was found to be significantly related to possession of individualized products (POIP). The mediator effect was found, but again rather weak for the possession of individualized products (POIP).

**Methodological implications**

A new measure of tattooing behavior was developed especially for this study: tattoo degree. It was argued earlier that counting the mere number of tattoos might not be accurate enough to examine the relation between tattooing and uniqueness-seeking, because it does not reflect the magnitude of appearance alteration. This is especially important as tattoos today are very common (Forbes, 2001) and a small tattoo might not be enough to differentiate oneself from others. Tattoo degree measures the area of the body covered by tattoos. This new measure seemed not only to deliver more accurate results, but also to increase the motivation to participate. Even if it took longer to mark the areas of the body covered by a tattoo, more people responded to this item ($n$ = 151) in comparison to the tattoo number question ($n$ = 125) and the tattoo cost question ($n$ = 125). The two assistants distributing the

questionnaires at the tattoo expo stated that the participants found it interesting to report about their tattoos.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this study. First, although the questionnaire contained different behavioral measures (e.g. tattooing degree, tattoo cost) to avoid common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), all data were still based on self-disclosure. Furthermore, all analyses were based on cross-sectional data. Hence, no causal conclusions could be drawn. For example, it cannot be concluded that higher GUP caused a higher degree of tattooing, because participants were already tattooed when they answered the GUP items. Future research should measure the GUP level and the degree of tattooing at two points in time. The practical problem here is that individuals do not often get tattoos, which makes research unpredictable. Therefore it is recommended to investigate those domains of appearance alteration first, where individuals more often or regularly change their appearance, for example, by the acquisition of new products. The apparel goods sector promises to by such a domain.

Furthermore, the results in regard to the possession of individualized products (POIP) again were only significant on a lower 10% level. One major reason could be the length of this multiple-act criterion, as, for example, the uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) scale with 30 items used in study #1 showed highly significant results.

## 3.3. STUDY #3: CONSUMPTION OF CUSTOMIZED APPAREL PRODUCTS

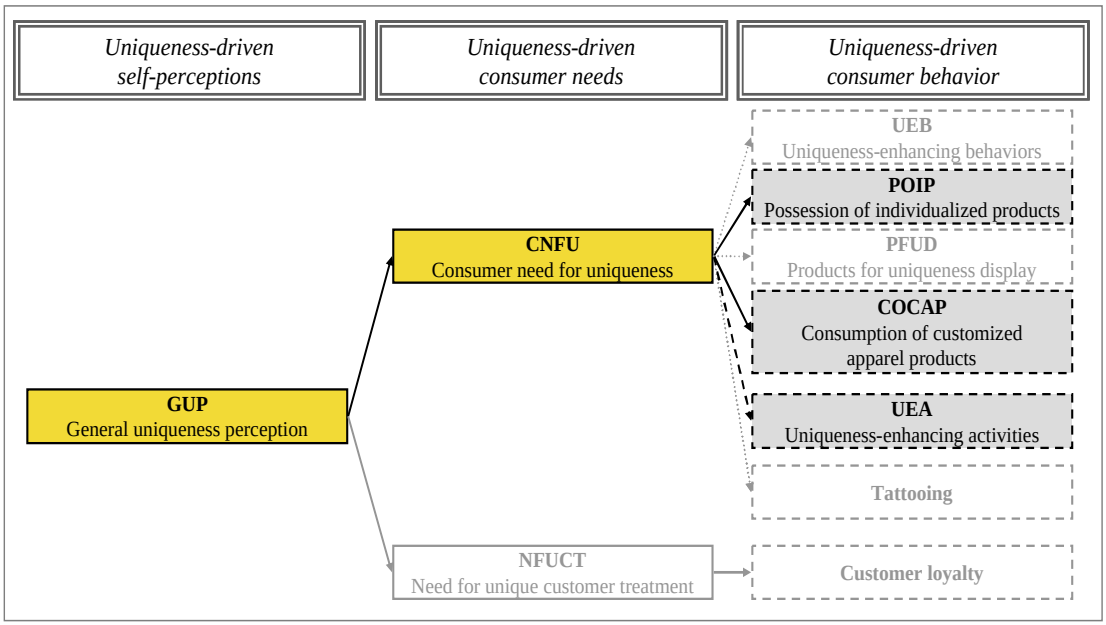
### 3.3.1. Study Objectives

Study #3 explores different behavioral *manifestations* of uniqueness-seeking in the consumer context and sheds light on the possibilities and limitations of GUP and CNFU—the psychological *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior—and thus gives answers to central research questions one and three.

On the one hand, study #3 investigates *manifestations* of uniqueness-seeking in the context of mass customization; thereby focusing on apparel products. This represents the major part of study #3. Not only is the mere possession (measured with POIP), but also the consumption of customized apparel products (measured with COCAP) examined. The latter includes the amount of Euro spent and the price premium paid. On the other hand, uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) are investigated by using a newly developed 30-item scale to further test the predictive potential and limits of CNFU and GUP.

Finally, study #3 is a pre-study of study #5. The GUP and CNFU values measured here were used to create two equal experimental groups for study #5 (see Chapter 3.5.).

*Figure 9:* Overview of uniqueness-related variables employed in study #3



### 3.3.2. Introduction and Hypotheses

"We live in a 'mass-world' era, with mass production, mass media, and mass communication. Everything we see, touch, and buy is available in abundance in the same form to us, and everyone around us. How do we present our uniqueness to the world?" (Ruvio, 2008, p. 444). The—somewhat ironic—answer given by the industry is mass customization. According to Davis (1996, p.177), "mass-customization of markets means that the same large number of customers can be reached as in the mass-market of the industrial economy, and simultaneously they can be treated individually as in the customized markets of the pre-industrial economies". Product units down to the number of one can be produced with cost-efficient methods (Cox & Alm, 1999). Thus, "individuality becomes the standard" (Piller, 2007, p. 631). However, the implementation of mass customization is associated with severe costs and risks as, for example, different high profile failures such as Levis Strauss or Mattel's "My Design Barbie" showed (Franke et al., 2009; Piller, 2008; Piller & Müller, 2004; Salvador et al., 2009; Wilson, 2007). Therefore, business companies are interested in the investigation of factors that influence the success of mass customization.

Overall, the scientific attention for mass customization increased in recent years (Dellaert & Stremersch, 2005; Gilmore & Pine, 1997; Kamali & Loker, 2002; Piller, 2004). However, the vast majority of research is directed at the economic side of mass customization, such as implementation issues, economic benefits and costs (Duray & Milligan, 1999; Huffman & Kahn, 1998; Piller, 2006; Piller & Müller, 2004; von Hippel, 2005; Salvador et al., 2009). The customer side has been sparsely addressed so far, but is equally important. Existing studies in this area looked, for example, at the readiness for mass customization (Bardakci & Whitelock, 2004, 2005), the evaluation of customized products (Simonson, 2005), or customer preferences (Franke et al., 2009). However, according to

Michel et al. (2009, p. 1), systematic research on the "underlying motivations for choosing mass-customized products" is missing.

Uniqueness-seeking is certainly one of the major reasons for the purchase of mass customized products. Surprisingly, only a few studies investigated the interrelation of the uniqueness motive and mass customization (Bauer et al., 2007; Fiore et al., 2004; Franke & Schreier, 2008; Michel et al. 2009). For example, Franke & Schreier (2008, p. 102) showed that "the desire for unique products moderates the link between perceived uniqueness [of a product] and delta-WTP [willingness to pay for the product]". A two-percent change of explained variance (change in $R^2 = 0.02$; $p > .10$, one-sided) was found (Franke & Schreier, 2008). Bauer et al. (2007) revealed that individuals with high CNFU levels have a higher preference for options to customize jeans compared to individuals with low CNFU levels, but they did not show if these individuals would actually spend more money on these options.

Study #3 examines uniqueness-seeking in the context of mass customization, and thus addresses the general lack of research in this area. Mass customization exists across all industries. However, it is assumed that the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) is an especially important manifestation of uniqueness-seeking, because apparel products immediately alter the individual appearance (Piller & Müller, 2004). Tiggemann and Golder (2006, p. 310) stated, "one domain of considerable importance to many people is that of appearance". People notice the changes in their own appearance, and others are able to do so as well. Hence, apparel goods are relevant for the external and the internal audience and enable people to differentiate themselves from others (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder, 1992).

Previous studies, for example, showed a higher interest for customized products among people with high CNFU levels (Bauer et al., 2007; Michel et al., 2009; Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001). Similarly, two of my own studies (study #1 and study #2) showed that CNFU is positively related to the possession of individualized products (see Chapter 3.1 and

Chapter 3.2). However, no studies so far revealed how much more money people with high CNFU levels actually spent on customized apparel products compared to people with low CNFU levels, or how much price premium they normally pay for customized apparel products. Undertaking study #3 delivered direct managerial implications as requested by Bauer et al. (2007). Furthermore, new theoretical insights are expected. Investigating if CNFU can actually predict the amount of Euro spent on customization options sheds further light on the predictive potentiality and limitations of the CNFU concept. In addition, it proves that customized apparel products are indeed useful vehicles to satisfy the uniqueness motive.

Hypothesis 7 summarizes the aforementioned assumptions. To test it, the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) was investigated. Participants were asked how many customized apparel products they had actually bought in the last six months, how much money they had spent on these products, and how much price premium in comparison to standard products they had paid. Furthermore, the possession of individualized products (POIP) scale was used again, in order to show differences in the possession of individualized apparel products, as well as other product categories.

> **Hypothesis 7:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) is positively related to the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP).

Study #1 and study #2 (see Chapter 3.1. and Chapter 3.2) postulated that a general human perception of uniqueness triggers the consumer need and behavior. In the same light, study #3 investigates the influence of GUP on CNFU and subsequently the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP).

> **Hypothesis 8:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) mediates the general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) relationship.

In addition, taking into account that consumer products are only one way to pursue uniqueness (Belk, 1988; Maslach et. al, 1985; Snyder, 1992) study #3 investigates further *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Snyder (1992, p. 16), for example, stated "a person's sense of specialness is (…) also defined by that person's (…) important experiences (e.g., vacations to exotic locations throughout the world)". Lynn and Harris (1997a) therefore suggested investigating the uniqueness motive in regard to physically risky activities such as sky-diving. Still, research on activities such as unusual travel, extreme sports, or exotic hobbies associated with uniqueness-seeking is non-existent. However, a relationship between GUP as well as CNFU with uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) is expected and appears to be examined for the first time.

Furthermore, the potentiality and limitations of the CNFU concept are addressed by looking at uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA). CNFU is said to predict a broad range of consumer behavior (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2001). However, study #2 (see Chapter 3.2.) only showed a weak relation between CNFU and tattooing behavior, even so tattooing behavior was found to be a *manifestation* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Therefore, it was argued that CNFU might be an especially good predictor of uniqueness-seeking related to specific consumer products. This would go along with the original CNFU conceptualization by Tian et al. (2001, p. 52), who defined CNFU as "the trait of pursuing differentness relative to others through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods". Hence, study #3 tests if CNFU is also related to uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA), which are not related to the use of specific consumer products.

In addition, the influence of GUP on uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) is examined. Again, it was assumed that GUP is the general driver behind the consumer need and the subsequent behavior. Hence, it is expected that CNFU mediates the GUP and uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) relationship as is expressed in hypothesis 9.

**Hypothesis 9:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) mediates the general uniqueness perception (GUP) and uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) relationship.

### 3.3.3. Method

#### Sample

Study #3 took place in Germany. The 397 participants were on average 24 years old (*SD* = 2.8), with 75% of respondents being female, and were recruited from a mailing list of a German University. Participants were offered an opportunity to win in a lottery, and to receive feedback of the results in order to enhance their motivation. In the lottery, they could win 1x100 Euros and 15x20 Euros payable in cash. The participants received a link to the questionnaire via e-mail.

#### Measures

***General uniqueness perception (GUP).*** GUP measures the individual self-perception of uniqueness and distinctiveness. The four-item GUP scale used here is an adapted and renamed version of the differentiation scale (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001). Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of GUP. Cronbach's Alpha was .76 and thus satisfactory.

***Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU).*** CNFU measures the need of individuals to pursue uniqueness through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods in order to develop a distinct image. Ruvio et al. (2008) developed a short version with 12 items that retained the three-dimensional structure of CNFU with the subfactors creative choice, unpopular choice, and avoidance of similarity. In study #3, a nine-item short-form, already

employed in previous own studies, was used. Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction, so that higher mean scores indicated higher levels of CNFU. Cronbach's Alpha was .89 and thus satisfactory.

Participants were split into two groups using the theoretical mean of the scale. The potential range of the scale was one to seven, thus the theoretical mean was four. Hence, participants with CNFU levels higher than four were allocated to the high CNFU group and participants with CNFU levels lower than four were put into the low CNFU group.

***Possession of individualized products (POIP).*** Possession of individualized products (POIP) is a five-item, multiple-act scale that measures the number of different product categories (e.g., individualized apparel goods) from which a person possesses at least one product. Participants were given three response options—*"yes"*, *"no"* and *"not sure"*—to indicate whether they possess a product of the given product category or not. Again, this scale was already successfully applied in study #1 and study #2. *"Yes"* responses were coded as one; *"no"* and *"not sure"* were coded as zero. Responses were summed up across the five items to calculate the overall possession of individualized products (POIP) score.

***Consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP).*** COCAP measures in three questions the extent to which individuals purchase customized apparel products. The participants were instructed to think about products that allow the determination and customization of style or size, typically via the internet. In the first question, participants were asked how many customized apparel products or accessories they had bought in the last six months (COCAP / Number). Next, participants were asked about the total amount of money they had spent on these products (COCAP / Euro). Finally, participants were asked about the price premium they had paid for these products, in comparison to equivalent standard products (COCAP / Price). Furthermore, participants were asked how much money

they had spent in total on apparel goods and accessories in the last six months, including the customized products. The Euro value spent on customized products was then subtracted to calculate the amount of money participants spent on apparel products and accessories that were standard and thus not customized (COSAP / Euro). Finally, participants were asked how easy they found the purchase of products via the internet (internet usage).

***Uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA).*** Uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) were measured on a newly developed 30-item, multiple-act scale that asked about actual consumer activities. The list of activities was developed following open interviews with consumers. Two research assistants asked interviewees about activities that they find unusual in general, and activities that differentiate them from others. Example items of the uniqueness-enhancing activities were: "Visited a country, region, or city that most people would not visit", "spent money on an unpopular hobby", "attended an unusual work-shop or seminar (e.g., 'learn how to laugh')", "engaged in so-called fun sports (e.g., bungee jumping, rafting)", or "spent money on an extraordinary activity (e.g., with 'my days' a diner in the sky)". Participants had to indicate whether they had performed each of the listed 30 uniqueness-enhancing activities in the last six months. Respondents were given three response options: *"yes"*, *"no"* and *"not sure"*. *"Yes"* responses were coded as one; *"no"* and *"not sure"* were coded as zero. Responses were summed up across the 30 items to calculate the overall UEA score. Thus, a higher score indicated more uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA).

**Analysis**

To test the psychometric properties and internal validity of GUP and CNFU, classical test theory was applied using Cronbach's Alpha and exploratory factor analysis. A principal factors extraction with varimax rotation was performed using SPSS prior hypothesis testing.

Results were satisfactory. Standard multiple regression and sequential regression analyses were employed. Analyses were performed using SPSS. The results of the evaluation of the assumptions of sampling distribution, linearity and homoscedasticity of residuals were satisfactory (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). The results of the analysis of skewness and kurtosis are displayed in Table 15 in the last two columns.

Only those participants who had spent at least one Euro on apparel products in the last six months were included in the analysis. Therefore, 53 participants were eliminated from all analyses that included the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). Hypotheses 8 and 9 suggest a mediator model; therefore the approach of Baron and Kenny (1986) was applied (see Chapter 3.1 and Chapter 3.2).

### 3.3.4. Results

#### Descriptive statistics

Cronbachs' Alpha was analyzed using SPSS and found sufficient for GUP and CNFU as well as for the three CNFU subfactors (see Table 15). Cronbach's Alpha should be within the range of .70 - .90 (Nunnally, 1978; Pospesschill, 2000).

*Table 15:* Overview psychometric properties of scales used in study #3

| | | | | | Range | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | *α* | *M* | *SD* | Potential | Actual | # Items | Skew | Kurtosis |
| GUP | 397 | .76 | 4.77 | 1.04 | 1-7 | 1.25-7.00 | 4 | -0.35 | 0.01 |
| CNFU | 397 | .89 | 3.50 | 1.19 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 9 | 0.05 | -0.45 |
| CNFU-CC | 397 | .87 | 3.69 | 1.44 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 3 | -0.01 | -0.72 |
| CNFU-UC | 397 | .82 | 3.56 | 1.41 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 3 | 0.17 | -0.69 |
| CNFU-AS | 397 | .85 | 3.36 | 1.46 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 3 | 0.30 | -0.72 |
| UEA | 397 | .76 | 9.27 | 4.48 | 0-30 | 0-26 | 30 | 0.57 | 0.31 |
| POIP | 397 | .45 | 1.53 | 1.24 | 0-5 | 0-5 | 5 | 0.49 | -0.53 |

*Note.* GUP=General uniqueness perception; CNFU=Consumer need for uniqueness; CNFU-CC=CNFU-creative choice; CNFU-UC=CNFU-unpopular choice; CNFU-AS = CNFU-avoidance of similarity; UEA=Uniqueness-enhancing activities; POIP=Possession of individualized products

**Hypothesis testing**

*Table 16:* Correlation overview of variables used in study #3

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | GUP | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | CNFU | .31*** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | CNFU-CC | .27*** | .83*** | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | CNFU-UC | .35*** | .85*** | .62*** | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | CNFU-AS | .16** | .79*** | .45*** | .50*** | | | | | | | |
| 6 | UEA | .31*** | .46*** | .37*** | .47*** | .31*** | | | | | | |
| 7 | POIP | .22*** | .35*** | .37*** | .33*** | .17*** | .44*** | | | | | |
| 8 | COCAP / Number | .09† | .23*** | .24*** | .20*** | .12* | .27*** | .26*** | | | | |
| 9 | COCAP / Euro | .08† | .19*** | .19*** | .17** | .12* | .26*** | .21*** | .66*** | | | |
| 10 | COCAP / Price | .05 | .18** | .16** | .17** | .12* | .19*** | .31*** | .32*** | .39*** | | |
| 11 | COSAP / Euro | -.03 | .03 | .10* | .00 | -.03 | .02 | .14** | -.09† | .07† | .05 | |
| 12 | Internet usage | -.08† | -.01 | -.05 | -.03 | .04 | -.04 | -.11* | .04 | -.01 | -.08† | -.07† |

*Note.* $n$ = 397 participants for variables 1 to 7; $n$ = 344 for variables 8 to 12, because only customers that bought at least one apparel product in last 6 months were inlcuded; † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed); GUP = General uniqueness perception; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; CNFU-CC = CNFU-creative choice; CNFU-UC = CNFU-unpopular choice; CNFU-AS = CNFU-avoidance of similarity; UEA = Uniqueness-enhancing activities; POIP = Possession of individualized products; COCAP / Number = Number of customized apparel products bought in last 6 months; COCAP / Euro = Amount of Euro spent on customized apparel products in last 6 months; COCAP / Price = Price premium paid for customized apparel products in last 6 months; COSAP / Euro = Amount of Euro spent on standard apparel products; Internet usage = participants ability to use the internet

**Hypothesis 7:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) is positively related to the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP).

It was hypothesized that CNFU is positively related to the actual consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). Consumption does not only include the number of products bought in the last six months (COCAP / Number), but also the amount of money spent on them (COCAP / Euro) and the price premium paid (COCAP / Price) for them. Table 16 reveals that CNFU is in fact positively related with all three measures of consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). CNFU showed significant positive correlations ($r(344) = .23$, $p = .000$) with COCAP / Number, with COCAP / Euro ($r(344) = .19$, $p = .000$), and with COCAP / Price ($r(344) = .18$, $p = .001$). No significant correlation ($r(338) = .03$, $p = .284$) between CNFU and the amount of money spent on standard apparel products (COSAP /

Euro) was found. Furthermore, although respondents stated that they had bought 35% of their customized apparel products via the internet, no relation ($r(338) = -.03$, $p = .320$) between CNFU and the ability to purchase products via the internet (internet usage) could be found, as was expected.

Practitioners might also be interested in the actual numbers, especially in regard to money spent and price premium paid: Individuals with high CNFU levels bought on average 2.59 customized apparel products in the last 6 months and spent 90€ on them, thereby paying a 17% higher price compared to the standard price (see Table 17). In contrast, individuals with low CNFU levels bought significantly less (1.15 products), paid significantly less (33€), and paid by tendency a smaller price premium (9%).

*Table 17:* Overview comparison of consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) of individuals with high and low consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) levels

| | Low CNFU | | | High CNFU | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | 95% CI | *M* | *SD* | 95% CI | *p* |
| How many customized apparel products did you buy in the last 6 months? (COCAP / Number) | 1.15 | 2.72 | [0.78, 1.53] | 2.59 | 4.44 | [1.85, 3.33] | .000 |
| How much money did you spend on customized apparel products in the last 6 months? (COCAP / Euro) | 33 € | 108 € | [18€, 48€] | 90 € | 179 € | [60€, 120€] | .000 |
| How much price premium have you spend on these products in comparison to equivalent standard products? (COCAP / Price) | 9% | 41% | [3%, 15%] | 17% | 45% | [10%, 25%] | .092 |
| How much money did you spend on non-customized apparel products in the last 6 months? (COSAP / Euro) | 228 € | 191 € | [201€, 254€] | 258 € | 258 € | [215€, 301€] | .213 |

*Note.* CNFU=Consumer need for uniqueness; low CNFU with $n = 205$; high CNFU with $n = 139$; two-tailed ANOVA

In addition, a detailed analysis of the possession of individualized products (POIP) scale confirmed the relationship between CNFU and the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). 60% of participants with high CNFU levels possessed at least one individualized product in the category “apparel & accessory”, whereas only 36% of

individuals with low CNFU possessed such a product. The difference with a delta of 24% ($p$ = .000) was significant (see Table 18 in second column). Furthermore, it shows that the highest differences between individuals with low and high CNFU levels were found in the "apparel & accessory" and "household & furnishing" categories. Similar results were already found in study #1 and study #2, but have not been reported there.

*Table 18*: Overview of possession of individualized products (POIP) in study #3 comparing individuals with low and high levels of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU)

| | Percentage of participants that possess at least one product per product category | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Individualized apparel & accessory products | Individualized sports & recreational products | Individualized nutrition & food products | Individualized electronic & mechanic products | Individualized household & furnishing products |
| CNFU high | 60% | 19% | 38% | 29% | 56% |
| CNFU low | 36% | 6% | 31% | 18% | 31% |
| Delta | 24%*** | 13%*** | 7%† | 11%** | 25%*** |

*Note.* $n$ = 397; † $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001; significance tested one-tailed; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; high CNFU (CNFU value above four on a one to seven scale); low CNFU (CNFU value below four on a one to seven scale); delta = high CNFU minus low CNFU, positive delta indicates more possessions of individualized products by individuals with high CNFU levels

In sum, CNFU was, as expected, positively related with all three measures of consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). And indeed, CNFU was able to reveal differences in the actual amount of Euro spent and price premium paid for customized apparel products. Furthermore, it was revealed that individuals with low and high CNFU levels especially differ in the "apparel & accessory" and "household & furnishing" categories. The next hypothesis is aimed at the *processes* behind the consumer behavior.

**Hypothesis 8:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) mediates the general uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) relationship.

It was hypothesized that CNFU mediates the relationship between GUP and the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). And indeed, the mediator effect was supported by hierarchical regression analysis performed on the data, but only with marginal significance. The first (1) condition for a mediator effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986) demands a significant relationship between IV and the DV. GUP showed weak marginally significant correlations with COCAP / Number ($r(344) = .09$, $p = .056$) and with COCAP / Euro ($r(344) = .08$, $p = .071$), but not with COCAP / Price ($r(344) = .05$, $p = .170$) (see Table 16). Therefore, only COCAP / Number and COCAP / Euro fulfilled the first condition.

The other three conditions demanded by Baron and Kenny (1986) were fulfilled by the data. (2) CNFU showed significant positive correlations with the three measures of consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP), as is displayed in Table 16. (3) CNFU was significantly associated with consumption of customized products (COCAP) after controlling for GUP. The addition of CNFU into the equation in step two resulted in a significant change ($R^2_{change} = .044$, $p = .000$) in explained COCAP / Number variance (see Table 18) and significant change ($R^2_{change} = .031$, $p = .001$) in explained COCAP / Euro variance (see Table 19). (4) The impact of GUP on consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) lost significance after controlling for CNFU. After CNFU was added to the equation, the ß-value of GUP decreased from $ß = .086$, $p = .056$ to $ß = .005$, $p = .933$ for COCAP / Number (see Table 18). In regard to COCAP / Euro the ß-value of GUP decreased from $ß = .079$, $p = .071$ to $ß = .011$, $p = .843$ after CNFU was entered into the equation (see Table 19).

*Table 19*: Summary hierarchical regression analysis of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) predicting the number of customized apparel products bought in the last 6 months (COCAP / Number)

| **DV: COCAP / Number** | | ***ß*** | ***$R^2$*** | ***$R^2$ adj*** | ***$R^2$ Change*** | ***df1*** | ***df2*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | | .007 | .004 | .004† | 1 | 342 |
| | GUP | .086† | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | | .051 | .046 | .044*** | 1 | 341 |
| | GUP | .005 | | | | | |
| | CNFU | .224*** | | | | | |

*Note.* $n$ = 344; † $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001 (one-tailed); GUP = General uniqueness perception; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; COCAP / Number = Number of customized apparel products bought in last 6 months

*Table 20*: Summary hierarchical regression analysis of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) predicting the amount of Euros spent on customized apparel products in the last 6 months (COCAP / Euro)

| **DV: COCAP / Euro** | | ***ß*** | ***$R^2$*** | ***$R^2$ adj*** | ***$R^2$ Change*** | ***df1*** | ***df2*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | | .006 | .003 | .006† | 1 | 342 |
| | GUP | .079† | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | | .037 | .031 | .031** | 1 | 341 |
| | GUP | .011 | | | | | |
| | CNFU | .188** | | | | | |

*Note.* $n$ = 344; † $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001 (one-tailed); GUP = General uniqueness perception; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; COMCAP / Euro = Amount of Euros spent on customized apparel products in last 6 months

In sum, CNFU mediated the relationship between GUP and the number of customized apparel products bought (COCAP / Number) as well as the relationship between GUP and the amount of money spent on these products (COCAP / Euro). However, the effect was only of marginal significance, and only a small percentage of COCAP variance was explained in total. The next hypothesis leaves the context of mass customization and investigates uniqueness-related activities.

> **Hypothesis 9:** Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) mediates the general uniqueness perception (GUP) and uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) relationship.

CNFU was expected to mediate the relationship between GUP and uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA). It is worth mentioning that the uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) scale is a 30 item multiple act criterion. Participants were asked if they performed ("yes") each of these 30 activities in the last six months or not ("no", "not sure"). And indeed, hierarchical regression analysis supported the mediator effect. All four conditions demanded by Baron & Kenny (1986) were fulfilled. (1) There was a significant correlation between GUP and uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) ($r(397) = .31$, $p = .000$). (2) GUP and CNFU showed a significant positive relation ($r(397) = .31$, $p = .000$) (see Table 16). (3) CNFU was significantly associated with uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) after controlling for GUP. The addition of CNFU into the equation in step two resulted in a significant change ($R^2_{change} = .148$, $p = .000$) in explained uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) variance (see Table 21). (4) The impact of GUP on uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) was strongly reduced after controlling for CNFU, but still significant. After CNFU was added to the equation, the ß-value of GUP decreased from $ß = .310$, $p = .000$ to $ß = .183$, $p = .000$ (see Table 21). Thus, CNFU partially mediated the relationship between GUP and uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA). In total, GUP and CNFU explained 24% of the behavioral variance.

*Table 21*: Summary hierarchical regression analysis of consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) predicting uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA)

| **DV: UEA** | | ***ß*** | ***$R^2$*** | ***$R^2$ adj*** | ***$R^2$ Change*** | ***df1*** | ***df2*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | | .096 | .094 | .096*** | 1 | 395 |
| | GUP | .310*** | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | | .244 | .240 | .148*** | 1 | 394 |
| | GUP | .183*** | | | | | |
| | CNFU | .405*** | | | | | |

*Note.* $n$ =397; † $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (one-tailed); GUP = General uniqueness perception; CNFU = Consumer need for uniqueness; UEA = Uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA)

### 3.3.5. Discussion

In short summary, the intent of study #3 was to further explore *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior and to deepen the understanding of its psychological *antecedents*: GUP and CNFU. The data showed that through CNFU, GUP influenced the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). Furthermore, partly through CNFU, GUP influenced the engaging in uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA). Additionally, study #3 presented practical implications by showing how much money individuals actually spent on customized apparel products.

Mass customization is predicted to become the standard of the century, providing individualized products for everybody (Cox & Alm, 1999; Piller, 2007). However, as expressed earlier, scientific attention to mass customization has just taken off, especially in regard to the customer side (Bauer et al., 2007; Bardakci & Whitelock, 2004, 2005; Franke et al., 2009; Franke & Schreier, 2008; Michel et al., 2009). Still, mass customization is not a business panacea. Severe costs and obstacles are associated with the implementation of mass customization (Franke et al. 2009; Pine et al., 1993; Salvador et al., 2009). Therefore, it is crucial for practitioners to know what amount of money is on the table and what factors influence customer spending. This study addressed the demand for more research on the underlying motivations and processes influencing the consumption of mass customized goods (Michel et al., 2009).

Study #3 showed for the first time that over a time period of six months, individuals with high CNFU levels spent more money (57€) on customized apparel products and accepted a higher price premium (8%) compared to individuals with low CNFU levels. It could be argued that people with higher CNFU levels generally spend more money on apparel goods. However, this alternative explanation was ruled out, because no differences between individuals with high and low CNFU levels in regard to the amount of money spent

on non-customized apparel products was found in the data. Furthermore, respondents stated that they bought 35% of their customized apparel products via the internet. The ability to use the internet could potentially be another source of influence, because mass customized products are very often configured and sold online (Kamali & Loker, 2002). However, no relation between CNFU and the ability to purchase products via the internet was found. Thus, the uniqueness-motive is a clear driver behind the expenditure for customized apparel products. Hence, it is recommended that business companies include CNFU into their customer surveys. Individuals with high CNFU levels are especially attracted to customization options and are willing to spend considerably more money on them. Business companies could use this information to improve business plans and decisions.

However, not only practical recommendations, but also scientific implications can be derived from study #3. Firstly, it was argued before that multiple ways to pursue uniqueness exist, and that physical characteristics represent an important uniqueness attribute (Fromkin, 1968; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Apparel products were expected to be a central vehicle for uniqueness-seeking, because they influence the important appearance domain (Tiggemann & Golder, 2006). And indeed, across five investigated product categories, the greatest differences between individuals with low and high CNFU levels were found for apparel products, but also for individualized household and furniture products. The latter probably represents a less unsuitable category for the empirical investigation of actual consumption behavior, because people do not buy a kitchen every day.

Secondly, as explained above, individuals with high CNFU levels did actually spend more money on customized apparel products in the last six months compared to individuals with low CNFU levels. This clearly shows the potential of the CNFU concept. It is not only related to preferences for customized products as was already shown before (Bauer et al.,

2007; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2001), but also to actual expenditure.

Thirdly, the investigation of uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) provided further insight into the potentiality and limitations of the CNFU concepts, and thus the psychological *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Although already discussed earlier (Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980), no research so far investigated CNFU in relation to activities such as exotic travel, extreme sports, or unusual hobbies. Data analyses of study #3 showed that CNFU partly mediated the GUP and uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) relationship. This result shows that CNFU can also predict consumer behavior that is not directly related to the use of specific products. Thus, CNFU indeed predicts a broad range of uniqueness-related consumer behaviors (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio et al., 2002; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001).

Fourthly, the mediator analyses conducted in study #3 provide further evidence that GUP is the driving force behind the consumer need and the behavior (see Chapter 3.1. and Chapter 3.2.). GUP did strongly relate to uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) and also influenced such seemingly remote behaviors as spending money for customized products. However, the mediator effect of CNFU on consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) was only weak. Several circumstances could provide an explanation. Single items were used to investigate the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). A multiple-act criterion potentially would have provided higher correlations. Furthermore, maybe fit and comfort are more important for the purchase of customized apparel products than expected (Piller & Müller, 2004). For example, customized suits might be bought for comfort reasons instead of differentiation reasons. If increased comfort or function (Piller & Müller, 2004) are more important than appearance alteration, then the predictive value of CNFU is diminished. While study #3 investigated apparel goods in general, countless product

types exist in the apparel goods segment. Upcoming research should focus on singular product categories where the style component is of particular importance, such as customized hoodies or jumpers (see study #5, Chapter 3.5.)

**Limitations**

The present research has some limitations. First, the study is based on young adults from a university. Hence, a generalization of the results is limited. However, for practitioners, university students might represent a valuable and important market segment; for example for mass customized apparel goods such as T-Shirts, shoes or jumpers. All analyses were based on self-disclosure questionnaire data. Furthermore, the study was a correlative cross-sectional design. Therefore, no causal conclusion can be drawn. Additionally, the average price premium was calculated across all kinds of customized apparel products. However, Piller & Müller (2004) showed that the price premium customers are willing to pay for customization strongly depends on the degree of customization. Adidas, for example, can charge up to a 50% price increase for their customized shoes, because they offer customization options in regard to style, fit, comfort, and functionality. Nike, who only offers style options, can only ask for premiums up to 10%. If differences in the willingness to accept a price premium already exist within one product category, certainly there are even higher differences between different products categories and segments.

**Outlook**

So far GUP was established as the general driver behind a broad range of uniqueness-driven consumer behaviors. GUP was related to uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB) (see study #1, Chapter 3.1.), to the possession of individualized products (POIP) (see study #1, Chapter 3.1), to tattooing behavior (see study #2, Chapter 3.2.), to the consumption of

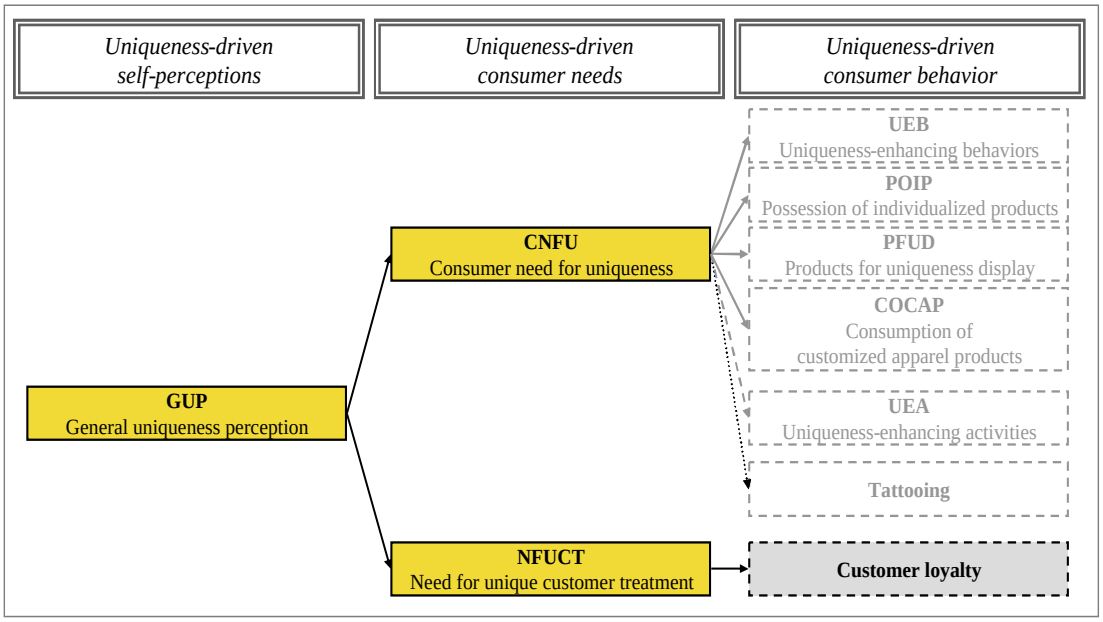
customized apparel products (COCAP) and to uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA). However, CNFU did not always fully mediate the GUP and uniqueness-driven consumer behavior relationship. This might indicate the existence of additional uniqueness-driven consumer needs. Furthermore, all of these behaviors listed above are rather 'active' behaviors. Individuals actively do something, for example, purchase a customized T-Shirt, go on an exotic vacation, or get a tattoo, which contributes to their uniqueness perception. However, what about 'passive' uniqueness enhancement? For example, in the form of individualized customer service? The next study explores this 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking.

## 3.4. STUDY #4: PASSIVE UNIQUENESS-SEEKING AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY

### 3.4.1. Study Objectives

Central research question number three asks about different *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Therefore, study #4 enters a new terrain. In contrast to the previous three studies, it explores the so termed 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking in the consumer context. Individuals might feel unique because business companies treat them in a unique and special way. Such a unique customer treatment (UCT) involves activities like customer service or customer relationship management. Study #4 investigates if individuals differ in their need for such a treatment. Hence, with the need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) a new uniqueness-driven consumer need is introduced and its impact on customer loyalty examined. Furthermore, the role of GUP and CNFU in relation to this newly developed consumer need is investigated, thereby deepening the understanding of the psychological *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior.

*Figure 10:* Overview of uniqueness-related variables employed in study #4



### 3.4.2. Introduction and Hypotheses

Do customers who perceive themselves as unique individuals also favor unique treatment? No empirical research so far was directed at this relationship. However, it seems obvious that people "want to be treated as individual customers" (Salvador et al., 2009, p. 71). Countless real life examples exist for businesses already following this strategy. Business companies conduct surveys and ask about customer needs and desires. They track personal data such as birthdays, marriage status, or parenthood to send individual greeting cards as well as matching product offers. A state-of-the-art sales force, for example, knows the exact economic and personal environment of their customers and thus treats them accordingly. The stark increase of mass customization potentially delivers an explanation for this new demand for personalized customer treatment. Mass customization is predicted to eventually become the standard of the century (see Chapter 2.3.; Piller & Müller. 2004). It is argued that the enjoyment of customization of products will sooner or later affect other consumer areas as well, for example, customer service (Gardyn, 2001; Pine, 1993).

Synder & Fromkin (1977, 1980) first introduced the need for uniqueness theory and postulated that all human beings pursue uniqueness to some extent. There is general agreement in the uniqueness literature (Brewer, 1991; Maslach, 1974; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Ziller, 1964) that "there are many dimensions on which people can pursue self-uniqueness" (Lynn & Snyder, 2002, p. 398). One major way is consumption behavior (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2001). Uniqueness research identified various consumer behaviors that help individuals develop a unique image, such as the combination of novelty, personalized, or unpopular products and brands (Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). My own previous research confirmed and expanded this relationship (see Chapter 3.1.; Chapter 3.2; Chapter 3.3.). However, all of these studies focused on 'active' consumer behavior, which involved the acquisition, utilization, or disposition of

consumer goods, or the engagement in consumer activities. Individuals 'actively' do something, e.g., purchase a pink hat, print an individualized motif on a hoodie, or start bungee jumping to differentiate themselves from others. The CNFU items were designed to measure such 'active' behaviors. For example, "I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image that cannot be duplicated" or "I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group regarding when and how certain products are properly used" (Ruvio et al., 2008, p. 52).

However, do individuals also differ in their need for 'passive' uniqueness enhancement? For example, unique treatment by business companies as described above. Snyder & Fromkin (1980) highlighted the existence of different uniqueness attributes such as physical, material, informational or experiential characteristics that allow uniqueness pursuit. In the consumer context, for example, people do not only differentiate themselves by appearance alternation, but also by unique experiences such as uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) (see Chapter, 3.3.). Furthermore, the important role of the external audience for the formation of uniqueness perception was stressed before (see Chapter 2.1.). Hence, customers who perceive themselves as unique should also favor a customer service that is special, personalized and unique, because such an customer experience caused by an external audience should satisfy the uniqueness motive.

Neither CNFU, nor other uniqueness-related concepts such as the NFU scale (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980) or the desire for unique consumer products scale (Lynn & Harris (1997a, 1997b) were expected to tap such a 'passive' need, because they measure the motivation for 'active' uniqueness-seeking (see also Chapter 2.1.). Therefore, a new construct is introduced in study #4: A need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT). NFUCT represents an additional uniqueness-driven consumer need, besides the already established CNFU as a new theoretical terrain is entered. Different uniqueness-related concepts and theories suggest the

existence of inter-individual differences (Brewer, 1991; Kampmeier, 2001; Maslach 1974; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Tian et al., 2001). Thus, NFUCT, similar to CNFU, is also conceptualized as an inter-individual differences variable. NFUCT, similar to CNFU, measures the individual consumer need. Example items of NFUCT are: "Companies should ask me about my personal customer needs" or "it is important to me that companies treat me as an individual". The difference between the 'active' and 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking is highlighted in Table 22, as the words 'active' and 'passive' possess an "extraordinary range of meanings" (Blumler, 1979, p. 13).

Table 22: Description of 'active' and 'passive' uniqueness-seeking in the consumer context

| Uniqueness-seeking | Description | Product use | Consumer need that influences behavior | Example |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Active | Consumer purchases, uses, or disposes a product to develop and enhance a distinct self- and social image | Primary: Consumer uses product to satisfy uniqueness need | Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) | • Always buys yellow shoestrings<br>• Designs own customized T-Shirt<br>• Combines different clothes to develop own outfit |
| Passive | A business company asks about, listens to, and responses to individual customer needs, thus a customer receives a unique treatment and feels special | Secondary: Consumer does not use product itself to satisfy uniqueness need | Need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) | • Customer receives favorite seat in restaurant<br>• Insurance company field force regularly asks about needs<br>• Bank reacts on personal life situation, e.g. marriage, birth |

Hypothesis 10 is directed at the validation of the NFUCT construct. For a pre-test, NFUCT was already included in study #1, but results were not reported there. All results in regard to factor structure, psychometric properties, and discriminative qualities are shown and discussed in this study. Discriminative qualities are measured in regard to a list of customer characteristics such as preferences for product price, product usability or contact with customer service.

**Hypothesis 10:** Need for unique consumer treatment (NFUCT) is a separate construct from consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) and shows sufficient psychometric properties and discriminative qualities.

NFUCT is conceptualized as a uniqueness-driven consumer need, because it focuses on customer behavior influenced by the uniqueness motive. It is believed that NFUCT mirrors another way to fulfill the desire to be different and feel unique. Therefore, NFUCT—similar to CNFU—has to be influenced by an individuals' general uniqueness perception (GUP). GUP was postulated as the general driver behind the need and the behavior (see Chapter 2.2). Hypothesis 11 summarizes these assumptions.

**Hypothesis 11:** General uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) are positively related to need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT).

Why investigate the 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking? First of all, it expands the range of behaviors related to the uniqueness-motive and opens a new and interesting research domain. The direct practical implications are another reason. Business companies have already reacted to the 'active' CNFU by providing individuals various products that enable them to develop and enhance a distinct self- and social image. However, many companies, for example insurance companies, banks or pharmaceutical companies, do not produce products that allow individuals to differentiate themselves from others. Pharmaceutical companies, for example, underlie strict regulations and cannot produce products that are customized to each individual customer; at least not yet. Thus, these business companies have to use a different way to address individuals' need for uniqueness: They, for example, focus on customer service or customer treatment. It has been shown that individual customer treatment is already common among business companies. It is assumed that unique customer treatment (UCT) results in increased customer loyalty. A representative survey in the United

States revealed that 70% of the surveyed adults "are more loyal to companies that make an effort to get to know (…) their personal needs and tastes" (Gardyn, 2001, p. 52 )

In study #4, customer loyalty was operationalized by two commonly used practical measures: Net Promoter Score (NPS) and share-of-wallet (SoW). Net Promoter Score is a customer loyalty measure that is widely used by business companies across the globe (Reichheld, 2003, 2006). Share-of-wallet (SoW) represents a rather objective measure of customer loyalty (Schawel & Billing, 2009). Share-of-wallet measures the share of money a customer spends on products from one company out of the total expenditure for this product category.

Veterinarians, in their role as customers of pharmaceutical companies, were chosen as a sample. The reasons were the following: The products that pharmaceutical companies offer do not enable differentiation or the development of an unique image—especially in the case of veterinarians who do not even use the products for themselves. However, pharmaceutical companies do rely on customer service such as sales force initiatives or customer surveys. Hence, some companies might offer quite extensive unique customer treatment (UCT) and others might not. Hypothesis 12 summarizes the above mentioned assumptions.

> **Hypothesis 12:** Unique customer treatment (UCT) is positively related with different measures of customer loyalty.

The final hypothesis again focuses on the influence of the psychological *antecedents* and *processes.* As explained above, NFUCT is conceptualized as an inter-individual difference variable. Hence, individuals with high NFUCT levels favor personalized customer service, whereas individuals with low NFUCT levels prefer to be treated just like everybody else. In hypothesis 13, it is postulated that NFUCT influences the relationship between unique customer treatment (UCT) and customer loyalty. This means that a customer group

with a high NFUCT level receiving a personalized treatment should behave differently from a customer group with low NFUCT level receiving the same treatment.

**Hypothesis 13:** Need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) moderates the unique customer treatment (UCT) and customer loyalty relationship.

### 3.4.3. Method

#### Sample

The data for study #4 was collected via an online survey. Participants ($n$ = 152) were German-speaking Swiss veterinarians, with an average age of 49 years ($SD$ = 12.2). 29% of the respondents were female.

NFUCT was first pre-tested in study #1. However, NFUCT results were not reported there and are discussed here together with the results of study #4. Two online surveys were used in study #1. The data from the second survey included the pre-test of the NFUCT concept. The participants were German-speaking younger adults recruited via a mailing list of a Swiss university. Participants ($n$ = 109) were on average 31 years old ($SD$ = 6.9), with 71% of respondents being female.

#### Procedure

A complete list with e-mail addresses of 536 of Swiss veterinarians was obtained from the association of Swiss veterinarians. An invitation e-mail that included the survey link was sent to the veterinarians. They were offered an opportunity to win in a lottery and receive feedback of the study results in order to enhance their motivation. In the lottery, participants could win 1x100 Swiss francs and 4x50 Swiss francs payable in cash. 221 veterinarians began the online survey. 152 questionnaires were complete and evaluable. Thus, almost 30% of Swiss veterinarians were surveyed.

**Measures**

***General uniqueness perception (GUP).*** GUP measures the individual self-perception of uniqueness and distinctiveness. The four-item GUP scale used here is an adapted and renamed version of the differentiation scale (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001). Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction. Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of GUP. Study #1 (.78) and the present study (.86) showed that Cronbach's Alpha is above the required .70 level (Nunnally, 1978).

***Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU).*** CNFU measures the need of individuals to pursue uniqueness through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods in order to develop a distinct image. A translated version of the CNFU short form developed by Ruvio et al. (2008) was already used in study #1, study #2, and study #3.

In study #4, one item per subfactor was used in order to reduce questionnaire length. The resulting three-item version only allowed calculation of the overall CNFU value, not of the subfactors. Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction. Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of CNFU. Cronbach's Alpha of the three-item version used in study #3 was .72 and was thus satisfactory.

***Need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT).*** NFUCT is a newly developed construct. It measures the degree to which individuals desire to be treated as individual customers. Individuals with high NFUCT levels want business companies to ask about, listen to, and respond to their personal customer needs and wishes. They do not want to be treated like any other customer. They desire individualized service and treatment.

The five NFUCT items were developed exclusively for this thesis and were pre-tested in study #1 (see Table 23). In study #4, the items were adapted to match the study setting (see

Table 24). Although item structure and content were identical, items were modified to ask about “pharmaceutical companies”, instead of “business companies” in general. Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction. Higher mean scores indicated higher levels of NFUCT. Additionally, participants were split into two groups using the theoretical mean of the scale. Hence, participants with NFUCT levels higher than four were allocated to the high NFUCT group and the others were put into the low NFUCT group.

***Unique customer treatment (UCT).*** Unique customer treatment (UCT) measures the degree to which a customer feels treated in a unique and special way by a certain business company. This includes that a business company asks about, listens to and responds to customer needs, and that a customer is treated individually and not like any other customer.

The items of unique customer treatment (UCT) are based on the NFUCT items. They have an identical structure and content. However, NFUCT measures if a customer wants a unique treatment; in contrast, unique customer treatment (UCT) measures how a customer actually perceives the treatment of a specific business company. Hence, participants respond to “Pharma Co. asks about my personal customer needs” (UCT) instead of “Pharmaceutical companies should ask about my personal customer needs” (NFUCT).

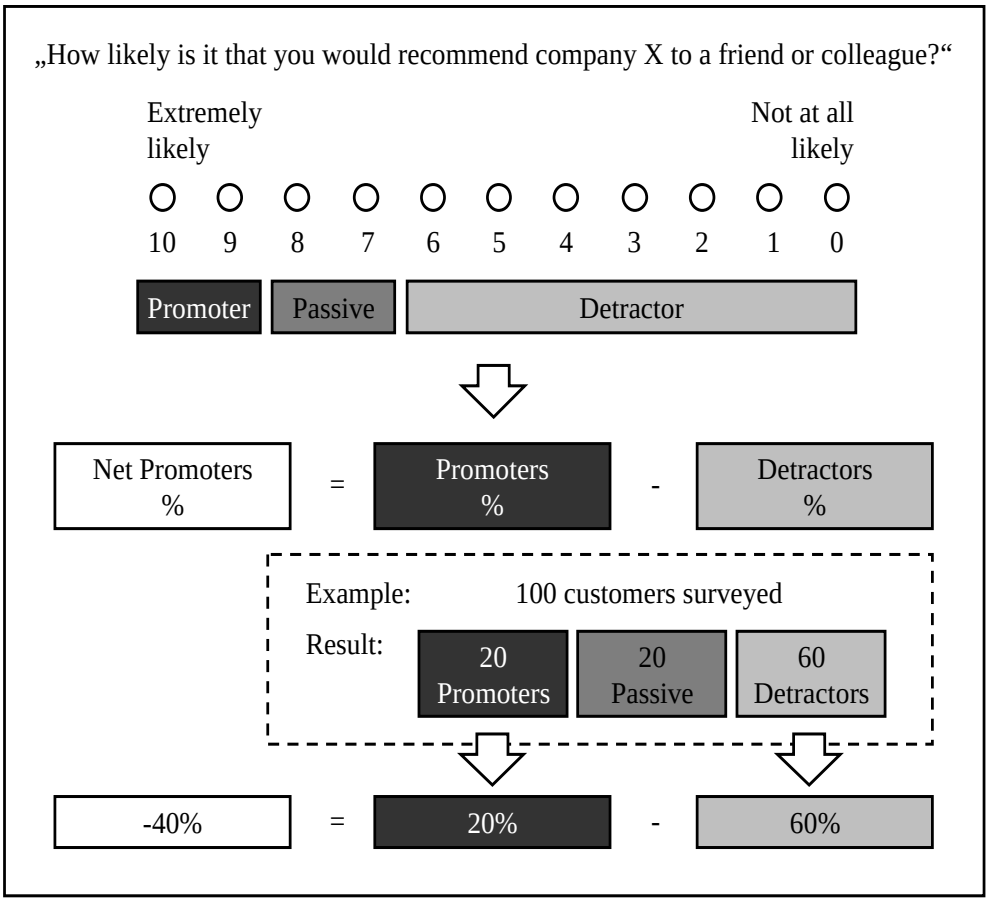
Participants were instructed to choose one pharmaceutical company from which they buy products. They should think about that specific company while answering the items. “Pharma Co.” was used as a placeholder for this chosen pharmaceutical company in the items. Participants responded to each of the five items using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction. Higher mean scores indicated higher unique customer treatment (UCT) levels.

***Customer characteristics.*** Customer characteristics measure the importance of several factors such as product price, product usability, customer service, customer information or

company image (see Table 26). Participants responded to each of the eleven items via a scroll bar. One side of the scroll bar was labeled “not important”, the other “very important”. Additionally, a number value was displayed while moving the scroll bar. Thereby “not important” equaled one and “very important” equaled 100. The higher the number value, the higher was the importance of each customer characteristic.

***Net Promoter Score (NPS).*** Net Promoter Score (NPS) is a practical metric for customer loyalty used in hundreds of companies such as Apple, American Airlines, Allianz, E.On, Nokia, Sony, or Hertz (Reichheld, 2003, 2006). Across several industries and countries, business companies with high NPS show substantially stronger growth rates compared to business companies in the same industry with low NPS (Reichheld, 2006).

*Figure 11:* Overview Net Promoter Score (NPS) calculation




*Note.* “Net Promoter® is a registered trademark of Bain & Company, Inc., Fred Reichheld and Satmetrix Systems, Inc.”

NPS is based on one question: How likely is it that you would recommend company X to a friend or colleague? Participants responded to the question using an 11-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all likely* (0) to *extremely likely* (10). The derived value—the Net Promoter value—is used to determine the Net Promoter status: Detractors have a score of zero to six; passives have a score of seven or eight; and promoters have a score of nine or ten. Thus, promoters are extremely likely to recommend the company to a friend or colleague. Research showed that promoters stay longer with a company, buy more and recommend more often than detractors or passives (Reichheld, 2003, 2006). The NPS is calculated by subtracting the percentage of detractors in the survey by the percentage of promoters (see Figure 11).

In study #3, the participants in their role as veterinarians were asked: "How likely is it that you would recommend 'Pharma Co.' to a friend or colleague?" The participants were instructed to continue thinking about the same pharmaceutical company as in the unique customer treatment (UCT) questions.

***Share-of-wallet (SoW).*** Share-of-wallet is a measure of customer loyalty (Schawel & Billing, 2009). Share-of-wallet measures the share of money a customer spends on products from one company, out of the total expenditure for this product category. For example, if a customer spends 200 Euros on Hugo Boss suits, and the total suits expenditure of this customer is 800 Euros, then the share-of-wallet of Hugo Boss is 25%. If a veterinarian practice buys half the pharmaceutical products from one company, then the share-of-wallet would be 50%. In this study, veterinarians were instructed to think about their practice and were asked, "what percentage of your total expenditure for pharmaceutical products do you buy from Pharma Co?". Again, participants should think about the same pharmaceutical company as in the unique customer treatment (UCT) and Net Promoter Score (NPS) questions. Participants were given one Likert-type item with eleven response-options (0% to

100%) to mark the percentage of share-of-wallet. Additionally, the share-of-wallet (SoW) status was calculated (low SoW < 25%, medium SoW = 25% to 50%; high SoW > 50%). Share-of-wallet status represents a more viable measure, because a share-of-wallet close to 90-100% is rather unrealistic, because no pharmaceutical company covers the whole product range.

**Analysis**

To test the psychometric properties and internal validity, classical test theory was applied using Cronbach's Alpha and exploratory factor analysis. A principal factors extraction with varimax rotation was performed using SPSS. The principal components extraction was used prior to the principal factors extraction to estimate the number of factors, the presence of outliners, the absence of multicollinearity, and the factorability of the correlation matrices (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). Standard multiple regression and sequential regression analyses were employed. Analyses were performed using SPSS. The results of the evaluation of the assumptions of sampling distribution, linearity and homoscedasticity of residuals were satisfactory (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007).

### 3.4.4. Results

> **Hypothesis 10:** Need for unique consumer treatment (NFUCT) is a separate construct from consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) and general uniqueness perception (GUP) and shows sufficient psychometric properties and discriminative qualities.

NFUCT was already employed in study #1—not reported there—in order to pre-test factor structure and psychometric properties. Results of study #1 and study #4 are discussed here together. When NFUCT was introduced in the research on uniqueness-seeking, it was assumed that NFUCT is a separate construct besides GUP and CNFU. Therefore, factor

analysis was employed. Factor analysis performed on data of study #1 revealed, as expected, five factors with Eigen values greater than one (see Table 23). This pre-test showed that NFUCT was a separate construct from CNFU-creative choice, CNFU-unpopular choice, CNFU-avoidance of similarity, and GUP.

*Table 23:* Summary of factor analysis of uniqueness related constructs used in study #1

| | GUP | CNFU-CC | CNFU-UC | CNFU-AS | NFUCT |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| General uniqueness perception (GUP) | | | | | |
| I'm different from others. | **.87** | .14 | .07 | .04 | .12 |
| I'm unusual. | **.79** | .08 | .06 | .11 | .12 |
| I have rare characteristics. | **.74** | .25 | .06 | .02 | .02 |
| I'm unique. | **.58** | .04 | .39 | .14 | .12 |
| Consumer need for uniqueness - creative choice (CNFU-CC) | | | | | |
| I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image that cannot be duplicated. | .16 | **.86** | .12 | .09 | .08 |
| I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill products because I enjoy being original. | .24 | **.80** | .06 | .31 | .17 |
| Having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me in establishing a distinctive image. | .03 | **.78** | .24 | .24 | .14 |
| Consumer need for uniqueness - unpopular choice (CNFU-UC) | | | | | |
| I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group regarding when and how certain products are properly used. | .15 | .13 | **.77** | .12 | .28 |
| I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own. | .,2 | .43 | **.55** | .27 | .08 |
| When it comes to the products I buy and the situations in which I use them, I have broken customs and rules. | .16 | .53 | ***.49*** | .12 | .08 |
| Consumer need for uniqueness - avoidance of similarity (CNFU-AS) | | | | | |
| As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone. | .03 | .11 | .16 | **.90** | .15 |
| When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less. | .03 | .18 | .03 | **.87** | .09 |
| The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it. | .00 | .34 | .10 | **.81** | .19 |
| Need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) | | | | | |
| I do not want business companies to treat my like any other customer, I want them to listen and respond to my personal needs. | .04 | .11 | .11 | .14 | **.91** |
| It is important to me that business companies treat me as an individual. | .11 | .13 | .14 | .04 | **.88** |
| I want special customized products and services from business companies. | .07 | .11 | .10 | .01 | **.82** |
| Business companies should ask me about my personal customer needs. | .09 | .02 | .05 | .10 | **.78** |
| Business companies should not consider myself as an exchangeable average customer. | .14 | .12 | .07 | .37 | **.77** |

*Note*: Factor loadings for factor analysis with Varimax rotation; boldface = main factor loadings; boldface and italics = second highest factor loading; $n = 109$

Another factor analysis performed on the data of study #4 replicated the results. NFUCT—here focusing on pharmaceutical companies—was found, as expected, to be a

separate construct from GUP and CNFU—here measured by a three-item short version (see Table 24). Thus, the data of study #1 and study #4 revealed that NFUCT is a discrete factor.

*Table 24:* Summary of factor analysis of uniqueness related constructs used in study #4

| Scale items | GUP | NFUCT | CNFU |
|---|---|---|---|
| General uniqueness perception (GUP) | | | |
| I'm unusual. | **.83** | .05 | .25 |
| I have rare characteristics. | **.83** | .18 | .11 |
| I'm different from others. | **.81** | .13 | .29 |
| I'm unique. | **.73** | .33 | .09 |
| Need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) | | | |
| It is important to me that pharmaceutical companies treat me as an individual. | .14 | **.84** | .11 |
| Pharmaceutical companies should ask me about my personal customer needs. | .13 | **.83** | .11 |
| Pharmaceutical companies should not consider myself as an exchangeable average customer. | .15 | **.81** | .15 |
| I do not want pharmaceutical companies to treat my like any other customer, I want them to listen and respond to my personal needs. | .10 | **.80** | .30 |
| I want special customized products and services from pharmaceutical companies. | .18 | **.78** | .03 |
| Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) | | | |
| I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill products because I enjoy being original. | .10 | .20 | **.82** |
| I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own. | .28 | .21 | **.77** |
| As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone. | .45 | .05 | **.56** |

*Note.* Factor loadings for factor analysis with Varimax rotation; Main factor loadings in boldface; $n$ = 152

Furthermore, Cronbach's Alpha as well as skewness and kurtosis were tested for the new NFUCT scale and found satisfactory (see Table 25).

*Table 25:* Overview psychometric properties of need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT)

| | | | | | Range | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | *α* | *M* | *SD* | Potential | Actual | # Items | Skew | Kurtosis |
| Study #1 | 109 | .91 | 3.77 | 1.43 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 5 | -0.03 | -0.50 |
| Study #4 | 150 | .89 | 3.60 | 1.53 | 1-7 | 1.00-7.00 | 5 | 0.14 | -0.74 |

Finally, it was expected that NFUCT possesses discriminative qualities. Therefore, NFUCT was investigated in relation to different customer characteristics. Thus, participants were split into a high NFUCT and a low NFUCT group, as supposed different NFUCT levels were associated with different customer characteristics (see Table 26).

*Table 26:* Overview comparison customer characteristics between individuals with low and high need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT)

| Customer characteristics | Low NFUCT | | | High NFUCT | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *M* | *SD* | 95% CI | *M* | *SD* | 95% CI | *p* |
| Adverse reaction of products for animals | 89.02 | 14.81 | [85.87, 92.18] | 90.17 | 18.78 | [85.52, 94.82] | .675 |
| Product usability (e.g., products are easy to apply) | 85.49 | 19.20 | [81.40, 89.59] | 90.17 | 13.01 | [86.95, 93.39] | .092 |
| Product price-performance ratio | 82.51 | 19.74 | [78.30, 86.71] | 75.52 | 23.72 | [69.65, 81.40] | .050 |
| Product stability (products in stock today and tomorrow) | 74.75 | 24.59 | [69.51, 79.99] | 74.49 | 20.93 | [69.31, 79.68] | .946 |
| Integrated and holistic customer service | 56.97 | 30.66 | [50.43, 63.,5] | 70.29 | 26.59 | [63.,7, 76.88] | .006 |
| Social image of company (e.g. sustainability, ethics) | 59.79 | 29.07 | [53.,6, 65.99] | 59.88 | 31.89 | [51.97, 67.78] | .987 |
| Contact with customer services/ customer support | 53.48 | 30.20 | [47.05, 59.92] | 55.29 | 27.80 | [48.40, 62.18] | .706 |
| Contact with sales force/ field team | 46.24 | 28.50 | [40.17, 52.32] | 61.05 | 25.57 | [54.71, 67.38] | .001 |
| Customer information (e.g. info mails, internet presence) | 41.83 | 28.54 | [35.74, 47.91] | 51.83 | 31.22 | [44.09, 59.57] | .042 |
| Economic image of company (e.g. market size, stock value) | 21.23 | 22.23 | [16.49, 25.97] | 25.63 | 27.23 | [18.88, 32.38] | .275 |

*Note.* Participants were asked how important they find different customer characteristics on a scale fom one ("not important") to 100 ("very important"); NFUCT = need for unique customer treatment; low NFUCT with $n = 87$; high NFUCT with $n = 65$; two-tailed ANOVA; sorted via highest importance

For example, individuals with high NFUCT levels evaluated ‘contact with sales force/ field team’, ’customer information’ as well as an ‘integrated and holistic customer service’ as more important compared to individuals with low NFUCT levels. In general, as anticipated,

individuals with high NFUCT levels evaluated customer characteristics associated with customer service as being more important. On the other hand, high NFUCT individuals evaluated 'product price-performance ratio' as being less important compared to low NFUCT individuals.

The same analysis comparing the customer characteristics of individuals with high CNFU and low CNFU levels revealed no significant differences. In sum, research question 10 can be answered with 'yes': NFUCT is a separate factor with sufficient psychometric properties and discriminative qualities. The next hypothesis asked about the *antecedents* of NFUCT.

> **Hypothesis 11:** General uniqueness perception (GUP) and consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) are positively related to need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT).

It was hypothesized that NFUCT is positively related with GUP and CNFU. And in fact, Table 27 reveals a significant positive correlation in study #1 and study #4. Regression analysis performed on the data of study #4 revealed a significant predictive effect for GUP (*ß* = .39, $p$ = .000) that accounted for 15% of NFUCT variance.

*Table 27:* Overview uniqueness related constructs used in study #1 and study #4

| | GUP | CNFU | NFUCT |
|---|---|---|---|
| General uniqueness perception (GUP) | --- | .34*** | .26** |
| Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) | .56*** | --- | .41*** |
| Need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) | .39*** | .38*** | --- |

*Note.* † $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001 (one-tailed); study #4 ($n$ = 152) correlations displayed below the diagonal; study #1 ($n$ = 109) correlations displayed above the diagonal

**Hypothesis 12:** Unique customer treatment (UCT) is positively related with different measures of customer loyalty

The individual and unique customer treatment (UCT) by business companies was expected to go along with a higher customer loyalty. NPS and share-of-wallet (SoW) were employed as measures of customer loyalty. In addition, participants were asked how they perceived the unique customer treatment (UCT) of one pharmaceutical company. Hypothesis 12 was supported by the data: Unique customer treatment (UCT) was positively correlated with share-of-wallet (SoW) ($r(147) = .16$, $p = .017$, one-tailed) and with share-of-wallet (SoW) status ($r(147) = .22$, $p = .004$, one-tailed). Furthermore, unique customer treatment (UCT) was positively correlated with the Net Promoter value ($r(146) = .65$, $p = .000$, one-tailed) as well as with Net Promoter status ($r(146) = .58$, $p = .000$, one-tailed). In sum, the data showed that the higher the unique customer treatment (UCT) the higher the customer loyalty.

**Hypothesis 13:** Need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) moderates the unique customer treatment (UCT) and customer loyalty relationship.

After showing that unique customer treatment (UCT) was positively related to customer loyalty, it was assumed that this relationship was moderated by individuals' NFUCT. Two measures of customer loyalty were employed: Share-of-wallet (SoW) and Net Promoter Score (NPS). Share-of-wallet (SoW) was analyzed first.

As supposed, NFUCT did moderate the unique customer treatment (UCT) and share-of-wallet (SoW) relationship. Regression analysis performed on the data of study #4 revealed that after step 1, with unique customer treatment ($ß = .207$, $p = .014$, one-tailed) and NFUCT ($ß = -.066$, $p = .240$, one-tailed) in the equation, 3% of variance was explained (see Table 28). In step 2, the addition of the moderator variable UCT*NFUCT—a multiplication of the

centered values of unique customer treatment (UCT) and NFUCT—to the equation revealed another significant ($R^2_{change}$ = .018, $p$ = .049, one-tailed) change in explained variance.

*Table 28:* Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for unique customer treatment (UCT) and need for unique customer treatment predicting share-of-wallet (SoW)

| DV: Share-of-wallet (SoW) | ß | $R^2$ | $R^2$ adj | $R^2$ Change | df1 | df2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | .034 | .021 | .034* | 2 | 144 |
| Unique Customer Treatment (UCT) | .207* | | | | | |
| Need For Unique Customer Treatment (NFUCT) | -.066 | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | .052 | .033 | .018* | 1 | 143 |
| Unique Customer Treatment (UCT) | .230** | | | | | |
| Need For Unique Customer Treatment (NFUCT) | -.067 | | | | | |
| UCT*NFUCT | .137* | | | | | |

*Note.* $n$ =147;† $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001; one-tailed

Regression analysis performed on the data using the share-of-wallet (SoW) status revealed even stronger results (see Table 29). A significant predictive effect of unique customer treatment (UCT) (ß = .286, $p$ = .001, one-tailed) and the moderator variable UCT*NFUCT (ß = .172, $p$ = .018), which accounted for 8% of share-of-wallet variance, was found. NFUCT (ß = -.078, $p$ = .196) alone had, as expected, again no influence on share-of-wallet (SoW) status.

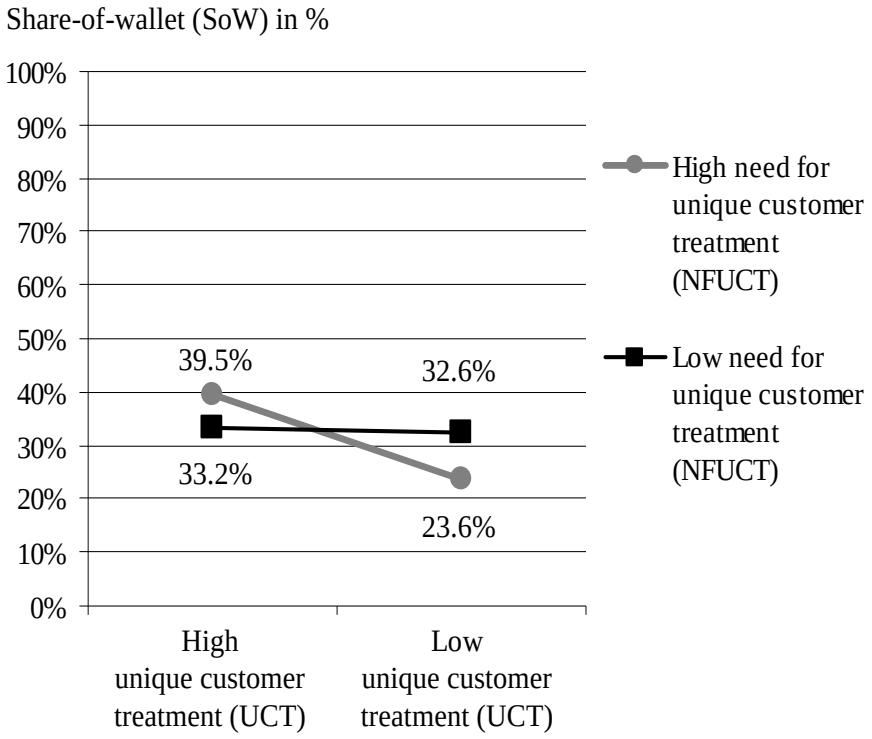
*Table 29:* Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for unique customer treatment (UCT) and need for unique customer treatment predicting share-of-wallet (SoW) status

| DV: Share-of-wallet (SoW) status | ß | $R^2$ | $R^2$ adj | $R^2$ Change | df1 | df2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | | .053 | .040 | .053* | 2 | 144 |
| Unique Customer Treatment (UCT) | .253** | | | | | |
| Need For Unique Customer Treatment (NFUCT) | -.077 | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | .082 | .063 | .029* | 1 | 143 |
| Unique Customer Treatment (UCT) | .286** | | | | | |
| Need For Unique Customer Treatment (NFUCT) | -.078 | | | | | |
| UCT*NFUCT | .172* | | | | | |

*Note.* $n$ = 147;† $p$ < .10; * $p$ < .05; ** $p$ < .01; *** $p$ < .001; one-tailed; Share-of-wallet (SoW) status (low < 25% , medium 25-50%, high > 50%)

The moderator effect of NFUCT is also displayed in Figure 12. Four different customer groups were created. Therefore, participants were split into a low and high NFUCT group as well as into a low and high unique customer treatment (UCT) group. The average share-of-wallet was calculated for each of the four groups. For example, the highest share-of-wallet (39.5%) was found in the group where customers with a high NFUCT level also received a high unique customer treatment (UCT). This share-of-wallet connotes that this customer group on average bought 39.5% of all products from the pharmaceutical company in question.

*Figure 12:* Share-of-wallet (SoW) differences between the four customer groups




A one-way ANOVA was used to test for share-of-wallet differences among the four customer groups, and indeed, share-of-wallet differed significantly across the four groups ($F(3, 143) = 3.74$, $p = .013$). Tukey's post-hoc comparisons of the four groups showed that the high NFUCT and high UCT group with mean share-of-wallet of 39.5% (95% CI [33.3%,

45.7%]) significantly differed from the high NFUCT and low UCT group with a mean share-of-wallet of 23.6% (95% CI [18.8%, 28.5%]), $p$ = .006. Comparisons between the other groups were not significant. In sum, a moderator effect of NFUCT on share-of-wallet (SoW) was found.

Next, the second measure of customer loyalty was analyzed: NPS. NFUCT was also expected to moderate the unique customer treatment (UCT) and NPS relationship. However, NPS is a group score determining customer loyalty of a group, not individuals. For example, only four NPS scores can be calculated if the sample is split into four groups. Thus, NPS did not allow for statistical significance testing. The descriptive results are shown in Table 30; they again support hypothesis 13. The highest NPS (27%) was found in the group where the high NFUCT of individuals was matched by a high unique customer treatment (UCT) by the company. The lowest NPS (-72%) was found in the group where individuals with high NFUCT levels faced low unique customer treatment (UCT). The latter group again showed even less customer loyalty compared to the group where low NFUCT was matched with low unique customer treatment (UCT). Although no statistical tests validate the differences, the results are noteworthy, because NPS represents a widely accepted and employed practical measure of customer loyalty.

*Table 30:* Overview Net Promoter Score (NPS) and Net Promoter Status across the four customer groups

| | High unique customer treatment (UCT) | | | | Low unique customer treatment (UCT) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | NPS | Promoter | Passive | Detractor | NPS | Promoter | Passive | Detractor |
| High NFUCT | 27% | 39% ($n$ = 16) | 49% ($n$ = 20) | 12% ($n$ = 5) | -72% | 5% ($n$ = 1) | 18% ($n$ = 4) | 77% ($n$ = 17) |
| Low NFUCT | 22% | 44% ($n$ = 8) | 33% ($n$ = 6) | 22% ($n$ = 4) | -63% | 6% ($n$ = 4) | 25% ($n$ = 16) | 69% (n = 45) |

*Note.* n = 146; NFUCT = Need for unique customer treatment; NPS=Net Promoter Score; NPS= Promoter (%) - Detractor (%); Net Promoter Status determined by Net Promoter value: Promoter (9-10), Passive (6-8) and Detractor (0-6); number of participants (N) displayed in parentheses

### 3.4.5. Discussion

In short summary, the overall intent of this study was to reveal the existence of another rather 'passive' uniqueness-driven consumer need (besides CNFU) and to investigate its influence on actual consumer behavior. To do so, first the NFUCT concept was developed and introduced. NFUCT measures the extent to which customers want to be treated individually. Hence, NFUCT research focuses on the so-called 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking, as no 'active' consumer behavior such as product purchase or disposition is involved. The study highlighted that NFUCT is a separate construct from CNFU and GUP with sufficient psychometric properties and discriminative qualities. Secondly, it was shown that GUP is positively related to NFUCT, thereby further supporting the notion that GUP is the driver behind consumer need and consumer behavior. Thirdly, data analyses revealed that a unique and individual customer treatment is positively related to higher levels of expressed customer loyalty. Two practical measures of customer loyalty were used, thereby strengthening the practical validity of the study. Finally, it was shown that NFUCT moderates this unique customer treatment (UCT) and customer loyalty relationship.

It was shown before, that multiple domains to pursue uniqueness exist and that consumption is one central way for uniqueness-seeking (Holt, 1995; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Tian et al., 2001). Furthermore, it was argued that in the consumer context, not only physical characteristics were influenced by appearance alteration (Snyder, 1992; Tian & McKenzie, 2001; Tiggemann & Golder, 2006), but also that experiences such as vacations to exotic places can satisfy the human uniqueness motive. Therefore, it was assumed that people who perceive themselves as unique, favor experiences that make them feel unique. Personalized or individualized customer service was said to be such an experience. However, the uniqueness literature does not present any concept that measures the need for such a 'passive' uniqueness enhancement. Most concepts, including CNFU,

measure ‘active’ consumer behavior (Lynn & Harris, 1997a, 1997b; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001). Therefore, the NFUCT concept was newly developed and introduced in study #4.

NFUCT was conceptualized as an inter-individual difference variable. Several other concepts and theories already showed that people differ in their uniqueness-related perceptions, motivations, and behavior (Brewer, 1991; Maslach, 1974; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Tian et al., 2001; Ziller, 1964). The results of the pre-test in study #1 as well as those of study #4, showed that NFUCT is a separate construct with satisfactory psychometric properties. Furthermore, it was investigated whether NFUCT can reveal differences in customer characteristics in order to prove discriminative validity. For this purpose, a low NFUCT group and a high NFUCT group were created and compared across the different customer characteristics, such as contact with sales force, product price, or customer information. Overall, participants with high NFUCT levels found customer characteristics associated with customer service more important compared to participants with low NFUCT levels. This was not a surprising result, as customer service is the main vehicle to ensure an individual customer treatment. Furthermore, the data showed that individuals with high NFUCT levels found a price-performance ratio significantly less important than individuals with low NFUCT levels. This result has an interesting practical implication. High NFUCT individuals seemed to be less price-sensitive. This indicates that companies offering a unique treatment, e.g., in the form of customer service, can afford to employ a premium price strategy, but only if their customers have a need for this, in this case, if the customers have high NFUCT levels.

Study #1, #2, and #3 revealed that the global perception of uniqueness is the ultimate driver behind the motivation for ‘active’ consumer behavior. People perceive themselves as unique, and in order to preserve a consistent self-theory they develop a need for uniqueness-

increasing behaviors, and finally engage in such behaviors (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Therefore, GUP was also expected to influence the need for personalized or unique customer service. And indeed, data analyses showed a positive relationship between GUP and NFUCT. Additionally, correlation analysis revealed a positive relationship between CNFU and NFUCT. This is not surprising, as both are uniqueness-driven consumer needs. However, CNFU did not explain the differences in customer characteristics—NFUCT did. Hence, it is more likely that GUP influences both CNFU and NFUCT, instead of CNFU being the driver for NFUCT.

Next, the relationship between unique customer treatment (UCT) and customer loyalty was explored. It was explained that business companies are already reacting to the human uniqueness motive. For example, various business companies produce customized or individualized products that allow differentiation and the creation of a unique image (Piller, 2007; Piller & Müller, 2004; Pine, 1993; Salvador et al., 2009). Others, such as banks, insurance companies or pharmaceutical companies, cannot produce products that allow such a uniqueness pursuit. The only way for them to appeal to the individual need for uniqueness is customer service. In this study, veterinarians were chosen as participants because they are customers of pharmaceutical companies which do not offer products that can be used for differentiation, but provide extensive customer service. From an economic perspective, the unique treatment of a customer only makes sense if it ultimately impacts profits—for example, if it leads to higher customer loyalty, which is argued to result in higher revenues. In this study, two widely used and accepted practical measures of customer loyalty have been employed: Share-of-wallet (Schawel & Billing, 2009) and NPS (Reichheld, 2003, 2006). And indeed, correlation analysis performed on the data revealed a significant positive relationship between the individuals‘ appraisal of unique customer treatment (UCT) and the share-of-wallet (SoW). Results can be considered rather conservative because participants were asked

to think about a company of which they are actually customers: Hence, share-of-wallet must be larger than zero. Furthermore, a share-of-wallet of 100% or close to 100% is unlikely because no pharmaceutical company offers all products. Additionally, highly significant positive correlations were found between unique customer treatment (UCT) and NPS. In sum, it was shown that veterinarians who perceive a high unique customer treatment (UCT) report high customer loyalty.

So far it has been shown that people differ in their need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT), and that unique customer treatment (UCT) positively influences customer loyalty. However, does the individual NFUCT also influence customer loyalty? The answer given by this study is ‘yes’. Regression analyses performed on the data of study #4 confirmed NFUCT as a moderator of the unique customer treatment (UCT) and customer loyalty relationship. Additionally, participants were split into four groups in order to highlight this moderator effect. In general, the highest customer loyalty in terms of share-of-wallet and NPS was found in the customer group where individuals with high NFUCT levels received a high unique customer treatment (UCT). Or to put it in other words, a group where the high need for personalized service was actually matched by such a service from the company, showed the highest customer loyalty. In contrast, the lowest customer loyalty was found in the high NFUCT and low unique customer treatment (UCT) group. In this group, the high need for a unique treatment was not matched by a unique treatment by the company.

In sum, practical as well as theoretical implications can be derived from study #4. The practical conclusions are twofold. Firstly, business companies who treat their customers in a unique way and not like everybody else will eventually create higher loyalty among their customers. Secondly, a unique customer treatment makes especially sense if customers have high NFUCT levels, meaning that the customers value and desire such a unique treatment.

Furthermore, the results of this study showed that if customers want to be treated in a special way and this desire is not fulfilled, they answer with decreased customer loyalty.

The theoretical implications might be even stronger. Research on uniqueness-seeking so far only explored active consumer behavior (Bauer et al., 2007; Fiore et al., 2004; Lynn & Harris, 1997; Michel et al., 2009; Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). However, this study showed that people who perceive themselves as unique also desire unique customer treatment. Hence, new a *manifestation* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior was identified. A new inter-individual differences variable—a need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT)—was introduced and placed in the context of existing concepts such as CNFU and GUP (Kampmeier, 2001; Tian et al., 2001). Therefore, study #4 opened the door to a new research direction, which was termed the 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking.

Furthermore, study #4 showed that GUP is not only related to CNFU, but also to other uniqueness-driven consumer needs. This provides further evidence that GUP measures the global ultimate driver behind various consumer needs and consumer behaviors. Most likely GUP also influences uniqueness-enhancing behaviors outside the consumer context, which is not a focus of this thesis. Hence, study #4 also contributed to central research question one, as it deepened the understanding of the psychological *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to this study. Firstly, all analyses were based on questionnaire data and are thus self-disclosure. Although different question designs were used, there was still the problem of common method bias, especially in regard to the NFUCT and UCT scales, which were based on the same item structure and content. Additionally, the practical

value of the study certainly would have been even higher if actual share-of-wallet (SoW) data from pharmaceutical companies, or from the veterinarians' practice would was used. However, it was assumed that veterinarians were able to give accurate share-of-wallet (SoW) information.

Second, providing a list of the top ten pharmaceutical companies and asking the unique customer treatment (UCT) and customer loyalty questions to each company would have created a larger data pool. Additionally, a comparison between pharmaceutical companies would have been possible. However, on the one hand, it was not intended to evaluate pharmaceutical companies. On the other hand, interviews conducted before the survey with representatives of pharmaceutical companies as well as representatives of the association of Swiss veterinarians indicated that veterinarians would hesitate to express their opinions about particular pharmaceutical companies in an online questionnaire. Hence, the participants were instructed to think about any pharmaceutical company from which they purchase products. It is noteworthy that participants were given the opportunity to name the pharmaceutical company they were thinking of. However, only 27% of participants did, which affirmed the chosen procedure.

Third, the main assumption behind all analyses regarding the unique customer treatment (UCT) and customer loyalty was "ceteris paribus", meaning that all other conditions are the same: It was assumed that there were no systematic differences between the pharmaceutical companies which the participants had chosen; and that all differences are randomly distributed. A systematic bias would appear, if, for example, all participants that expressed a high perception of unique customer treatment (UCT) were thinking about one and the same company, and this company also had the lowest prices and the best products, while at the same time participants that reported a low perceived unique customer treatment (UCT) were thinking about one and the same company which simultaneously had the worst

products and prices. However, analyzing the 27% of participants who stated the name of the company did not support such an unlikely scenario. Finally, all analyses were based on cross-sectional data, which allows no casual conclusions.

**Outlook**

Study #2, #3 and #4 were mainly directed at different *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior and thus at central research question three. The next study mainly focuses on the *antecedents* and *processes* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior and thus on central research question one and two.

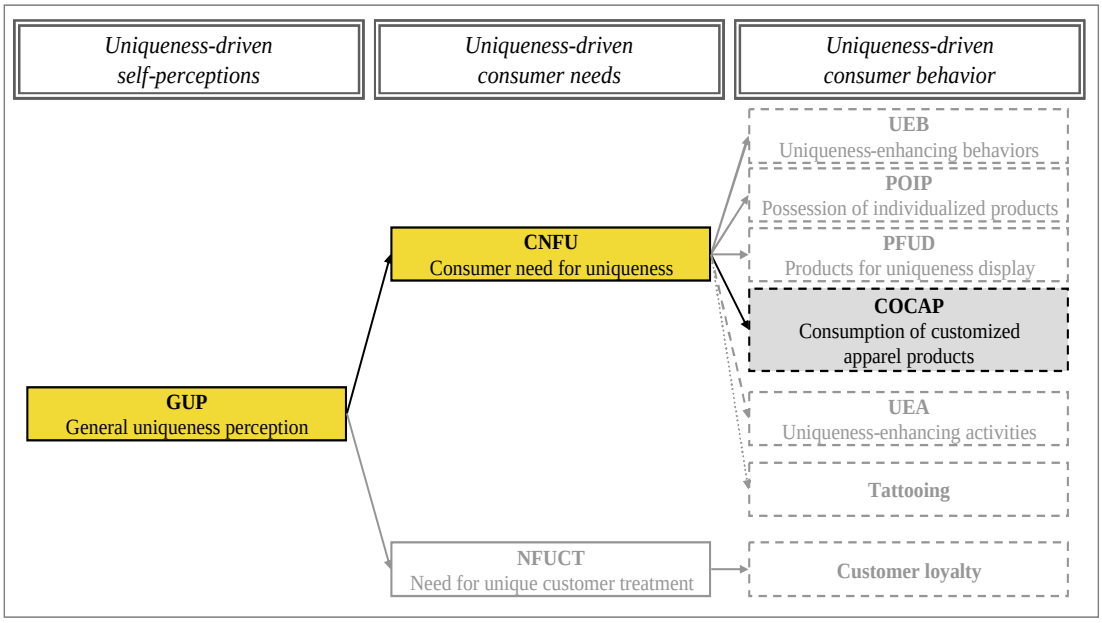
Although the 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking promises to be an interesting research area, the final study again focus on 'active' consumer behavior, as was already done in the first three studies. Study #5 will investigate situational influences on uniqueness-driven consumer behavior.

## 3.5. STUDY #5: MANIPULATION OF UNIQUENESS-DRIVEN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

### 3.5.1. Study Objectives

Study #5 is mainly directed at central research question number two, as it investigates the *processes* behind uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Here, not only the psychological influences, but also situational influences are examined. Study #5 tests if a manipulation of the general uniqueness norm—the level of uniqueness that is socially appropriate and desirable—causes a behavioral change. Two equal experimental groups were created by evenly splitting participants of study #3 using their GUP and CNFU values. Afterwards, these groups either received an e-mail with a "pro-individualism" campaign or a "pro-collectivism" campaign especially developed for study #5. After this manipulation, participants were asked about their consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) to examine behavioral changes. Furthermore, the influence of the "pro-individualism" campaign was investigated in regard to a change of GUP and CNFU.

*Figure 13:* Overview of uniqueness-related variables employed in study #5



### 3.5.2. Introduction and Hypotheses

Do people who think that being unique is socially desired, show uniqueness-enhancing behaviors more often? The influence of the human uniqueness motive on behavior is well documented (Bauer et al., 2007; Lynn & Harris, 1997a; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Michel et al., 2009; Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). However, Snyder and Fromkin (1980) already argued that not only psychological factors such as the need for uniqueness, but also situational factors influence uniqueness-related behavior. Imhoff and Erb (2009, p. 311) stated, "NFU must be conceptualized not only as a trait in which individuals differ, but as a temporary motivation as well. That is, situational conditions can give individuals the feeling that they are too similar to or too different from others". In general, "the uniqueness literature suggests that whenever people feel overly undifferentiated, whether due to temporal situational pressures or stable individual differences, they will take steps to reduce this negative emotional state" (Berger & Heath, 2007, p. 132). Therefore, it is assumed that not only the psychological *antecedents* GUP and CNFU influence consumer behavior, but also situational factors.

Research supports this assumption by showing that people alter their behavior if their sense of uniqueness is experimentally influenced (Brewer, 1991; Brewer et al., 1993; Maslach, 1974; Simon, 1997; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). The typical experimental setting includes a 'direct' bogus uniqueness feedback. For example, Snyder and Fromkin (1980) had students complete a survey about their personality traits, interests, values and so on. The students then received a bogus computer-generated profile telling them that they are either slightly or highly similar to 10.000 other students who completed the same survey. The behavioral measure employed afterwards showed that students in the highly similarity condition engaged in more uniqueness increasing activities, compared to students in the slightly similarity condition.

However, no prior work on uniqueness appears to have looked at the behavioral effects of an 'indirect' manipulation of an individuals' sense of uniqueness. What does 'indirect' manipulation mean? In contrast to 'direct' manipulation, 'indirect' manipulation does not aim to alter the individuals' self-perception of uniqueness. Rather, it aims to change the individuals' appraisal of the social appropriateness of uniqueness in general. People are not told that they are very similar to others, but they are told that being distinct from others is socially appropriate. Study #5, for the first time, employs such an 'indirect' manipulation and investigates the influences on consumer behavior. Therefore, study #5 provides further insights about the *processes* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior.

In the previous experiments conducted to examine situational influences on uniqueness-seeking, as explained above, participants received a stimulus (e.g. bogus feedback) and afterwards a behavioral measure was applied. Study #5 followed the same procedure. The consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) was used as the behavioral measure. My own research (study #3) identified it as a vehicle to enhance uniqueness, as in the time frame of the last six months, individuals with high CNFU levels spent considerably more money on customized apparel products (€90) and paid a higher price premium (17%) for these products, compared to individuals with low CNFU levels (€33 and 9%) (see Chapter 3.3.). In study #5 participants' 'virtual' consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) was measured.

The direct practical implications were one reason to choose the consumption of customized goods as a behavioral measure. Mass customization of consumer goods is on a continuous rise (Davis, 1986; Piller, 2007; Pine, 1993) as was already explained in Chapter 2.3. "Mass customization denotes to an offering that meets the demands of each individual customer, but can still be produced with mass production efficiency" (Piller, 2007, p. 631). In general, business companies expect higher revenues from mass customization, as they charge

higher prices for the customized products (Franke et al., 2009; Piller & Müller, 2004; Wilson, 2007). However, mass customization is not a business panacea. It is associated with severe costs and implementation risks (Franke et al., 2009; Piller et al., 2004; Pine et al., 2003; Salvador et al., 2009). Therefore, it is crucial for practitioners to search for factors supporting a successful mass customization implementation, as well as for factors supporting the running operation. One notable fact is that 25% of magazine advertisements use uniqueness as a central or subordinate theme (Lynn & Harris, 1997a). Surprisingly, only a few studies investigated the human uniqueness motive in relation to mass customization, but it appears to be a crucial success factor (Bauer et al., 2007; Fiore et al., 2004; Franke & Schreier, 2008; Michel et al., 2009). Study #5 examines the effect of 'indirect' uniqueness-manipulation on the consumption of customized apparel goods and thus adds to the request for managerial implications of uniqueness-research (Bauer et al., 2007).

The employed manipulation stimulus is discussed next. Lynn and Snyder (2002, p. 403) stated that "people tend to seek uniqueness in ways that are socially acceptable". There is general agreement in the uniqueness literature that individuals most likely engage in uniqueness-enhancing behaviors that are socially accepted, and do not cause social isolation or social sanctions (Brewer, 1991; Lynn & Harris, 1997a, 1997b; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Tian & McKenzie). According to the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) an individual's attitude about the behavior and their subjective norm influence the behavior intention, which finally triggers the behavior itself. The subjective norm is influenced by the opinions of referent others as well as the motivation to comply. Opinions of referent others also include generally accepted behavioral norms. Hence, a norm change causes a behavioral change. Thus, if the uniqueness norm—the standard of social appropriateness of uniqueness—changes, then uniqueness-driven consumer behavior as a

consequence is also assumed to change, because people are interested in behaving in a socially accepted way.

Therefore, two experimental conditions were developed for study #5 in order to manipulate the participants' uniqueness norm. Participants either received a "pro-individualism" poster campaign or a "pro-collectivism" poster campaign. The "pro-individualism" campaign intended to create a positive picture of individualism and uniqueness, telling the participants that it is good and socially desirable to be a unique individual. In the "pro-collectivism" condition, participants were told exactly the opposite. In this condition it was said that it is important to be a team player, and that it is good to possess a strong community feeling and the sense of 'we'. As a consequence, it was expected that participants in the "pro-individualism" condition show a higher expenditure for customized apparel products compared to participants in the "pro-collectivism" condition as stated in hypothesis 14.

> **Hypothesis 14:** Individuals receiving a "pro-individualism" poster campaign show higher consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) compared to individuals receiving a "pro-collectivism" poster campaign.

The main intention of study #5 was the examination of behavioral changes caused by situational influences. However, the next two hypotheses were directed at changes in GUP and CNFU itself, which might deliver a deeper understanding of the *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior.

In general, uniqueness or individuality concepts are usually conceptualized as stable traits (Kampmeier, 2001; Maslach, 1974; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Tian et al., 2001). GUP, for example, is said to be a rather stable personality characteristic (Kampmeier, 2001). In support of this assumption, my own longitudinal results (study #1, see Chapter 3.1.) revealed

that GUP retest reliability is given ($r(57) = .68$, $p = .000$). In contrast to this widely held view of stable uniqueness concepts, a stronger need for uniqueness was found in Western societies, providing evidence of a cultural influence on uniqueness-seeking (Burns & Brady, 1992; Kim & Drolet, 2003; Kim & Markus, 1999; Maslach et al., 1985; Oysermann, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Furthermore, previous studies on human uniqueness, as explained above, revealed the influence of situational factors on uniqueness-related behavior (Brewer, 1991; Brewer et al., 1993; Maslach, 1974; Simon, 1997; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). These studies manipulated the individual perception of similarity or dissimilarity to others and investigated the subsequent behavioral changes (Brewer, 1991; Brewer et al., 1993; Maslach, 1974; Simon, 1997; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). These studies did not measure the assumed change in self-perception of uniqueness itself, they only looked at the behavioral consequences. Furthermore, participants in these studies were only interested in returning to status-quo, meaning they aimed to reestablish their experimentally manipulated sense of uniqueness. Thus, these studies did not investigate if individuals' uniqueness perception potentially increased or decreased. Therefore, the question about the changeability of uniqueness perception itself remained open. Study #5 addressed this shortcoming.

Individuals not only alter their behavior, but also their cognitive reactions in order to satisfy their uniqueness motive (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Lynn and Snyder (2002, p.396) said, "one way people can protect their perceptions of self-uniqueness is by discounting threatening information and recalling (or focusing on) available uniqueness-affirming information". Different studies (see Lynn & Snyder, 2002), for example, showed that people changed their self-ratings of beliefs, attitudes or experiences in order to react on threats of their uniqueness perception (Ames & Iyengar, 2004; Ganster, McCuddy, & Fromkin, 1977;

Fromkin, 1970; Weir, 1971). Hence, it is assumed that individuals can cognitively change their uniqueness perception without actually changing their behavior.

It was argued before, that people strive to behave in a socially accepted manner when it comes to uniqueness-seeking (Brewer, 1991; Lynn & Harris, 1997a, 1997b; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Tian & McKenzie). Therefore, individuals might also change their uniqueness perception if they come to the conclusion that a higher uniqueness, for example, is socially accepted or desired. Therefore, study #5 tests if participants who receive a "pro-individualism" campaign telling them that being unique is admirable and socially accepted, change their uniqueness perception as stated in hypothesis 15.

> **Hypothesis 15:** A "pro-individualism" manipulation increases the general uniqueness perception (GUP).

CNFU is also said to be a stable trait (Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Again, my own longitudinal results (study #1) showed that CNFU retest reliability is given ($r(57) = .65$, $p = .000$). However, if individuals' GUP changes, then consequently their CNFU should change too. People strive for a consistent self-theory (see Chapter 2.2.). If individuals alter their self-perception of uniqueness, for example, because the general uniqueness norm changes, they will eventually also change the motivation and consequently the behavior. However, as it was argued above, people can cognitively alter their uniqueness perception in order to adjust to external stimuli (see Lynn & Snyder, 2002). So why change the motivation for uniqueness-seeking? For example CNFU, and a final engagement in uniqueness-enhancing behavior, e.g. the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). Lynn & Snyder (2002, p. 402) argued: "While the need for uniqueness can bias peoples' perceptions of themselves and others, those perceptions can deviate from reality only so much before the discrepancies become obvious and the perceptions are no

longer sustainable in the context of interpersonal commerce". So, even as people can adjust their uniqueness self-perceptions to match external influences, in the long-run they have to change their behavior, and therefore their need (or motivation). Hence, it is hypothesized that participants who receive a "pro-individualism" change their CNFU level.

> **Hypothesis 16:** A "pro-individualism" campaign increases individuals' consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU).

### 3.5.3. Method

#### Sample

180 young German adults participated in study #5. Only the 131 participants with completed questionnaires (with a successful manipulation and without outliers) were included in the analysis. The 64 participants of the "pro-individualism" condition were on average 24 years old (*SD* = 2.7), with 78% of respondents being female. The 67 participants of the "pro-individualism" condition were on average 23 years old (*SD* = 2.2), with 84% of respondents being female.

#### Procedure

The underlying idea of study #5 was to show not only personality variables, but also situational stimuli influence uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Therefore, it was crucial to create two experimental groups that did not differ in the psychological *antecedents* —GUP and CNFU—of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. For this reason, participants of study #3—where GUP and CNFU values have been measured—were asked if they wanted to participate in another survey. In this survey they could win 1x100 Euros and 15x20 Euros payable in cash. Those participants who agreed were split into two equal groups, using their GUP and CNFU values. One month later, both groups received an e-mail invitation to study

#5. The invitation was identical for both groups, except for the link to the two manipulation conditions. Hence, participants did not know that two different experimental conditions existed. Furthermore, they should not have been aware of the connection between study #3 and study #5 because the e-mail invitations came from different researchers, with different research backgrounds.

After the participants opened the link to the online questionnaire, they were told that the department of business psychology currently has two market research projects. Project #1 was said to be a cooperation with a large German institution, which plans to launch a poster campaign. Participants were instructed to pre-test the campaign posters. However, project #1 actually was the situational manipulation. One group received a “pro-individualism” poster campaign. The other group received a “pro-collectivism” poster campaign.

Project #2 was said to be a cooperation with an apparel goods company, which plans to launch new product customization options. Participants were instructed to state the price they were willing to pay for the opportunity to customize different products. This ‘virtual’ consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) was identical for both groups.

Finally, the participants were given the GUP and CNFU scales. These scales were not given before, because participants most likely would have recognized the items and realized the connection between study #3 and study #5. Hence, it has to be mentioned that before the participants answered the GUP and CNFU items, they not only received the “pro-individualism” campaign (or “pro-collectivism” campaign), but also engaged in the ‘virtual’ consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP), which could additionally have influenced their GUP and CNFU ratings.

**Measures**

***The "pro-individualism" condition.*** Project #1 was the cover story for the experimental manipulation. Participants were told that in project #1, a large German institution was working alongside the department of business psychology, in order to evaluate the valence and fit of several posters of their new poster campaign. The title of the campaign was said to be: "Make a difference – be different".

*Figure 14:* Poster examples from the "pro-individualism" campaign

Participants were told that the campaign aims were to create a positive attitude towards individuality and uniqueness; and that distinctiveness, independence and individuality are good and socially desirable. Seven campaign posters had been developed especially for this study. Participants had to answer four items per poster—"The poster has a positive message", "I like the poster", "The poster appeals to me", and "The poster is in line

with the campaign title"—in order to enhance manipulation processing. A seven-point Likert scale ranging from agreement to disagreement was used. German poster slogans were used in the original study material.

***The "pro-collectivism" condition.*** Project #1 was the cover story for the experimental manipulation. These participants were also told that in project #1, a large German institution was working alongside the department of business psychology, in order to evaluate the valence and fit of several posters of their new poster campaign. The title of the campaign was said to be: "Together stronger – we need more sense of unity".

*Figure 15:* Poster examples from the "pro-collectivism" campaign

Participants were told that the campaign aims were to create a positive attitude towards unity and team playing; that we all are the same, and that being part of a group is good and socially desirable. Seven campaign posters were developed especially for this study. Participants had to answer four items per poster—"The poster has a positive message",

"I like the poster", "The poster appeals to me", and "The poster is in line with the campaign title"—in order to enhance manipulation processing. A seven-point Likert scale ranging from agreement to disagreement was used. German slogans were used in the original study material.

***Consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP).*** The participants were told that in project #2, the department of business psychology was working with an apparel goods company. The company planned to launch two new customization options for their products. In order to make a cost/benefit calculation, the company wanted to pre-test the price they could charge for the two product options in a 'virtual' purchase task. This was 'virtual', as participants did not really spend money; they just stated their willingness to pay for customization options.

Firstly, the two options were explained. The "color option" included the availability of different colors. Participants were told that they could purchase the products in any of the 40 different colors displayed. The "motif option" included the opportunity to customize the products with an individual motif (print/garment) (see Figure 16)

*Figure 16:* The two customization options to be evaluated by the participants

Secondly, a product was presented to the participants: a hoodie with a base price of €20 (see Figure 17). Participants were instructed to state how much money they would spend if the "color option" were available. Then, they were asked how much money they would

spend on the product if the “motif option” were available. In total, participants were given pictures of five apparel products—hoodie (€20), hoodie with zipper (€25), windbreaker (€35), fleece jacket (€25), and fleece vest (€15)—with varying base prices.

*Figure 17:* Example of apparel product displayed for evaluation

**Product 1: Hoodie**

Men
Base price: 20,- Euro

Women
Base price: 20,- Euro

In order to derive a measure for the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP), the price premium per product, and per product option was calculated. For example, somebody who spent €30 for the “color option” of the hoodie was willing to pay a €10 price premium. Two measures were derived: A measure for the “color option”, which is the sum of price premiums participants were willing to pay for each of the five products, if the forty colors were available, and a measure for the ”motif option”, which is the sum of the price premiums participants were willing to pay for each of the five products if the individual motif prints or garments were available.

Only the two style options were made available for the participants, not the opportunity to customize the fit or functionality, since the style option is said to possess the greatest influence on individuals’ uniqueness perception (Piller & Müller, 2004).

***General uniqueness perception (GUP).*** GUP measures the individual self-perception of uniqueness and distinctiveness. The four-item GUP scale used here is an adapted and renamed version of the differentiation scale (Kampmeier, 2001; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001).

Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction so that higher mean scores indicated higher levels of GUP. Cronbachs' Alpha was satisfactory.

***Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU).*** CNFU measures the need of individuals to pursue uniqueness through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods, in order to develop a distinct image. Tian et al. (2001) created the original CNFU scale with 31 items. Ruvio et al. (2008) recently developed and validated a short version with 12 items that retained the three-dimensional structure of CNFU, with the sub-factors creative choice, unpopular choice, and avoidance of similarity. In study #5, a six-item short-form was used. Participants responded to each item using a seven-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). All items were scored in the same direction, so that higher mean scores indicated higher levels of CNFU. Cronbachs' Alpha was satisfactory. Participants were split into two groups of equal size. Hence, participants with a CNFU value greater than 3.6 were allocated to the high-CNFU group, and the others to the low-CNFU group.

**Analysis**

All posters were tested prior to study #5 with a sample of 50 students from a German university. Participants answered questions about the valence of the posters and whether the posters represented the "pro-individualism" or the "pro-collectivism" theme. Of the original 24 posters, the best 14 were selected—seven for each manipulation condition.

49 of the 180 participants were eliminated from study #5 for several reasons. First, a manipulation check was included. After the participants finished the evaluation of the seven

posters in project #1, three final questions were given. Participants were instructed to state how much they liked the campaign (valence), how much they could identify with the campaign (identification), and if they thought the campaign either supported the individual or the group (theme). An eleven-point Likert scale was used. Only those participants with valence and identification scores higher than four were included in the analysis. Additionally, those participants who got the campaign theme wrong were excluded from the sample. For example, the participants who believed the "pro-collectivism" campaign supported the individual rather than the group. 19 participants were eliminated in order to ensure a successful manipulation. Furthermore, ten participants with a non-German background were excluded from the analysis as the impact of the poster slogans were expected to be stronger on native speakers. And finally, 20 outliers were eliminated: These were participants who either spent no money on apparel goods in the last six months or more than 1000 Euros, as well as participants who were willing to spend unrealistically high amounts of money on the "color option" and the "motif option".

As stated earlier, the GUP and CNFU values measured in study #3 were used to create two equal groups. To make sure that the two groups really did not differ in their GUP and CNFU levels, a difference test on the data of study #3 was applied after the final sample of study #5 became available. No significant difference between the "pro-individualism" and "pro-collectivism" groups was found in regard to GUP and CNFU.

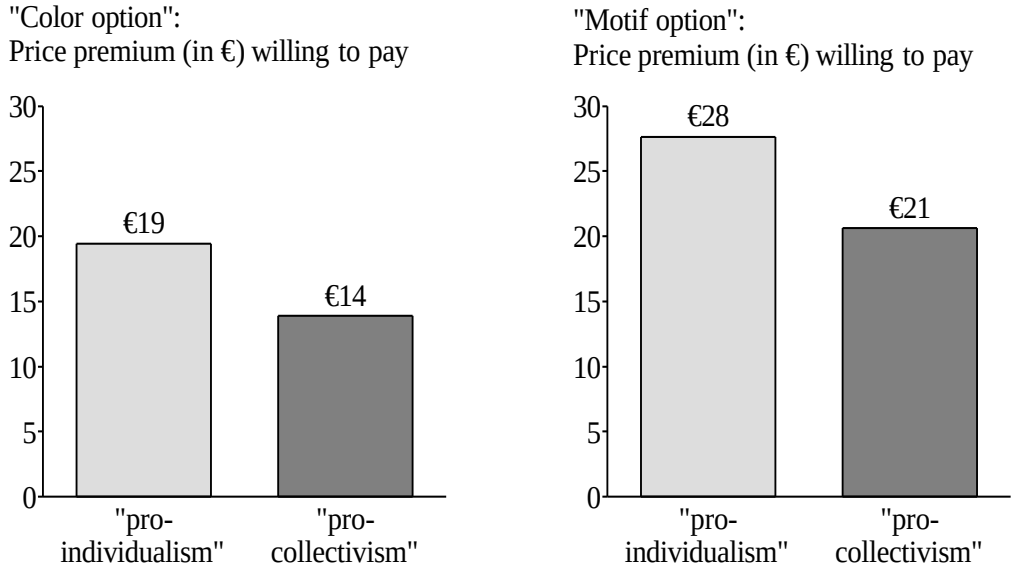
In sum, both groups did not differ in their GUP and CNFU levels before the start of study #5. Only those participants with a successful "pro-individualism" and "pro-collectivism" manipulation were included. Outliers that could have impaired the data analysis were eliminated. To analyze the data, ANOVA, as well as paired sample t-tests using SPSS were employed. Preconditions were successfully tested.

### 3.5.4. Results

> **Hypothesis 14:** Individuals receiving a "pro-individualism" poster campaign show higher consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) compared to individuals receiving a "pro-collectivism" poster campaign.

It was expected that individuals who evaluated posters of a "pro-individualism" campaign would show a higher willingness to pay for customized apparel products, than individuals evaluating posters of a "pro-collectivism" campaign. After the participants received either of the two manipulations, they were asked how much money they would spend if they could customize different apparel products with a "color option" or a "motif option". Indeed, participants receiving a "pro-individualism" campaign were willing to spend significantly more money for these product options in comparison to participants receiving the "pro-collectivism" campaign (see Figure 18).

*Figure 18:* Willingness to pay for the "color option" and the "motif option" to customize apparel product under the "pro-individualism" and "pro-collectivism" condition




Participants in the "pro-individualism" condition were willing to spend €5 ($F = 3.20$, $p = .038$, one-tailed) more on the "color option" compared to participants in the "pro-

collectivism" condition. Furthermore, participants in the "pro-individualism" condition were willing to spend €7 ($F$ = 2.75, $p$ = .049, one-tailed) more on the "motif option" compared to participants in the "pro-collectivism" condition. Hence, the situational manipulation actually caused a difference in the willingness to pay, as both groups did not differ in their GUP and CNFU levels (as was explained earlier). In total, participants were willing to spend more money on the "motif option" compared to the "color option". The next two hypotheses investigated the effects of the "pro-individualism" or "pro-collectivism" campaign on GUP and CNFU.

**Hypothesis 15:** A "pro-individualism" manipulation increases the general uniqueness perception (GUP).

GUP was expected to change if an individual encountered a "pro-individualism" campaign and subsequently engaged in a task that involved the 'virtual' purchase of customized apparel products. The GUP value was measured in study #3 and again at the end of study #5 on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 7. Indeed, paired sample t-tests revealed that the GUP value increased in the "pro-individualism" condition. Mean GUP in study #3 was 4.75, which changed to 5.07 in study #5. The change was significant ($M_{diff}$ = 0.32, $p$ = .001, $n$ = 64, one-tailed). No significant GUP change was found in the "pro-collectivism" condition ($M_{diff}$ = 0.18, $p$ = .113, $n$ = 67, two-tailed).

**Hypothesis 16:** A "pro-individualism" campaign increases individuals' consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU).

CNFU was expected to change if an individual encountered a "pro-individualism" campaign, and subsequently engaged in a task that involved the 'virtual' purchase of customized apparel products. The CNFU value was measured in study #3 and again at the

end of study #5 on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 7. Indeed, paired sample t-tests revealed that the CNFU value increased in the "pro-individualism" condition. Mean CNFU in study #3 was 3.53 and changed to 3.89 in study #5. The change was significant ($M_{diff}$ = 0.36, $p$ = .001, $n$ = 64, one-tailed). No significant CNFU change was found in the "pro-collectivism" condition ($M_{diff}$ = 0.17, $p$ = .103, $n$ = 67, two-tailed).

### 3.5.5. Discussion

It is assumed that not only personality constructs, but also situational factors play a role when it comes to uniqueness-seeking (Berger & Heath, 2007; Imhoff & Erb, 2009; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Study #5 delivered further evidence for this assumption. Previous studies on uniqueness have shown that a manipulation of individuals' sense of uniqueness, via 'direct' bogus distinctiveness feedback, resulted in behavioral changes (Brewer, 1991; Brewer et al., 1993; Maslach, 1974; Simon, 1997; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). However, so far no studies have manipulated the uniqueness norm of individuals (the level of uniqueness which is socially appropriate and desirable) and investigated the behavioral consequences. Therefore, the main objective of study #5 was to test if uniqueness-driven consumer behavior could be influenced by such a manipulation. Two experimental groups were created that did not differ in their psychological *antecedents*—GUP and CNFU—of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior prior to the manipulation. And indeed, a campaign targeting the individuals' uniqueness norm altered participants' consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). Individuals who received a "pro-individualism" campaign were willing to spend significantly more money on two options to customize different apparel products, in comparison to individuals who received a "pro-collectivism" campaign.

The practical implications are obvious. Although mass customization promises increased revenues and profits, the implementation is associated with tremendous costs and

risks (Franke et al., 2009; Piller et al., 2004; Piller & Müller, 2004; Salvador et al., 2009). Hence, practitioners are interested in ways to enhance a successful implementation as well as running operation. Study #5 showed that the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) can be influenced by stimuli which aim to change the general uniqueness norm. This is of particular practical importance, as business companies cannot directly influence the individual uniqueness perception; for example, by telling a specific customer that he or she looks like everybody else. This information could be used to influence decisions in regard to advertising and marketing.

The theoretical implications are discussed next. Study #5—in line with previous studies—showed that external stimuli played an important role when it came to uniqueness-seeking. Therefore, stable inter-individual difference variables such as GUP and CNFU do not alone explain uniqueness-driven consumer behavior (Berger & Heath, 2007; Imhoff & Erb, 2009, Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Study #5, for the first time, showed that external stimuli directed at changing the uniqueness norm influenced behavior. If individuals began to think that it was socially desirable to be unique, they would engage in uniqueness-increasing behaviors. The theory of reasoned action might deliver one explanation (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) stated that a change of the subjective norm towards a behavior will change the behavioral intention, and finally the behavior itself. It is assumed that the “pro-individualism” campaign changed the subjective norm of the participants towards a more positive picture of uniqueness; whereas the “pro-collectivism” campaign caused the opposite. As a result, participants in the “pro-individualism” condition spent more money on customized apparel products, which supported the creation of a unique social and self-image.

Before discussing the role of GUP and CNFU on this change in consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP), the changes of GUP and CNFU themselves will be

highlighted. There is general agreement in the uniqueness literature that uniqueness concepts are rather stable inter-individual difference variables (Kampmeier, 2001; Maslach, 1974; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980; Tian et al., 2001). GUP is also conceptualized as a stable personality characteristic (Kampmeier, 2001). However, no studies so far have measured individuals' uniqueness perception before and after an experimental manipulation. Therefore, little was known about the changeability of GUP. Study #5 showed that the GUP level of individuals who received a "pro-individualism" campaign increased, whereas no significant changes have been found for individuals who received a "pro-collectivism" campaign. GUP was first measured in study #3, and then again one month later at the end of study #5 (after the manipulation and the behavioral task). It is noteworthy that not only the manipulation campaign, but also the subsequent 'virtual' consumption task—where the participants decided how much money they were willing to pay for customization options—might have influenced the measurement. Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that GUP was not measured again at a later point in time to actually examine how long the changes in GUP prevailed. Still, it seems that GUP is not as stable as expected.

This revealed change in GUP supports the notion of cognitive reactions to uniqueness-relevant information (Fromkin, 1970; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Individuals seemed to be able to cognitively change their self-uniqueness perception in order to prevent negative consequences or emotions. The data of study #5 suggested that individuals, who were told that it is desirable to be unique, enhanced their uniqueness perception without engaging in real behavior that could have caused such a change. Again, the 'virtual' consumption of customized apparel products might also have contributed to the change in uniqueness perception. Still, participants only stated their willingness to pay for customization options. They did not purchase and wear these products in public, where an external audience could have contributed to the uniqueness perception. This also supports the

assumption of the importance of the internal audience in the construction of uniqueness perception (Snyder, 1992).

CNFU the second psychological *antecedent* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior is discussed next. CNFU was also said to be a stable trait (Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). However, the majority of CNFU research focused on the relation with consumer behavior, and did not experimentally test changes in CNFU itself. Study #5 again entered new terrain, and showed that the individuals' CNFU level did actually increase in the "pro-individualism" condition. Again, CNFU did not significantly change in the "pro-collectivism" condition. GUP was proposed as the ultimate driver behind the consumer need and behavior (see Chapter 2.2.). Hence, if GUP changed, CNFU must have changed as well. Subsequently, the behavior must have changed too. Therefore, the change in GUP might deliver another explanation for the increase in consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) in the "pro-individualism" condition of study #5. The reason why changes in GUP will eventually lead to behavioral changes in the long-run is, that a mere cognitive alteration of uniqueness perception will be falsified by reality sooner or later (Lynn & Snyder, 2002).

Study #5 also has implications for society in general. It was stressed that uniqueness-seeking is more common in Western societies (Burns & Brady, 1992; Kim & Markus, 1999; Maslach et al., 1985; Oysermann et al., 2002). The results of this study might deliver one potential explanation. The general uniqueness norm in Western societies is higher than in Eastern societies. It is accepted and even rewarded if people differentiate themselves from others (Kampmeier, 2001; Kim & Markus, 1999; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Study #5 showed that a rather simple poster campaign already influenced uniqueness-related self-perceptions, needs, and behavior. Just imagine the impact of the whole industry. Business companies will eventually further increase their efforts to create a positive picture of individuality and uniqueness in order to increase the revenues of customized products, as

can be seen in the high percentage of advertisements appealing to the uniqueness motive (Lynn & Harris, 1997a). As a consequence, individuals could purchase and use these products in order to enhance their uniqueness, and adhere to the socially accepted image of uniqueness. Eventually, individuals or even entire societies might become more individualistic. Snyder (1992, p. 20) has already described a consumer catch-22 carousel as follows; “To the extent that the scarcity advertisements are successful, however, we lose our sense of uniqueness because many other people also have acquired ‘our’ special commodity”. Hence, consumers have to continue their search for sources that affirm their sense of uniqueness. Consequently, a uniqueness carousel is started, which might result in a general increase of individuality and uniqueness.

**Limitations**

There are some limitations to this study. First of all, data is collected via online-questionnaires and is therefore based on participants’ self-disclosure; what really caused the change in the willingness to pay for customized products can only be interpreted. For example, the subjective norm might have changed and thus caused the behavioral change, but it might also just have been a positive uniqueness priming, that influenced the willingness to spend more money on the customization options. Furthermore, it was a convenient sample of young adults at a German university. On one hand, this limited generalization, but on the other hand, this might be a relevant target segment.

Another criticism could be the missing control group. It was decided to either have a ”pro-collectivism” condition or a neutral control condition. It was expected that the number of participants would be insufficient to test all three experimental conditions. Since a stronger difference in behavior was expected in case of usage of the “pro-collectivism”, this condition

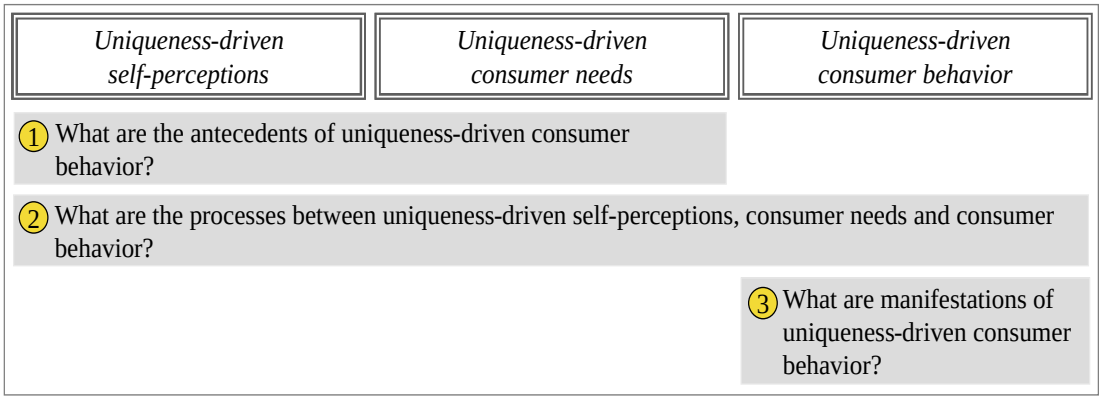
was favored. Future research will have to investigate the impact of the “pro-individualism” campaign against a neutral control condition.

The intention was to test changes in uniqueness-driven consumer behavior, not primarily to test changes in GUP and CNFU. No direct conclusion of the impact of the manipulation can be drawn from the data, because participants engaged in the ‘virtual’ customization task between the manipulation and the GUP and CNFU measurement. The ‘virtual’ customization task also potentially influenced GUP and CNFU.

## 4. SUMMARY AND OVERALL DISCUSSION

The overall objective of this thesis was to gain a deeper understanding of the *antecedents*, *processes*, and *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Three central research questions (see Figure 19) were derived from this objective and investigated in five studies (N=1048) across different demographic and socio-economic backgrounds. The three central research questions are closely linked with each other but will be discussed one by one in relation to theoretical implications and practical implications. Furthermore, limitations of this thesis are briefly discussed again and an outlook for further research is given.

*Figure 19:* Overview of the three central research questions



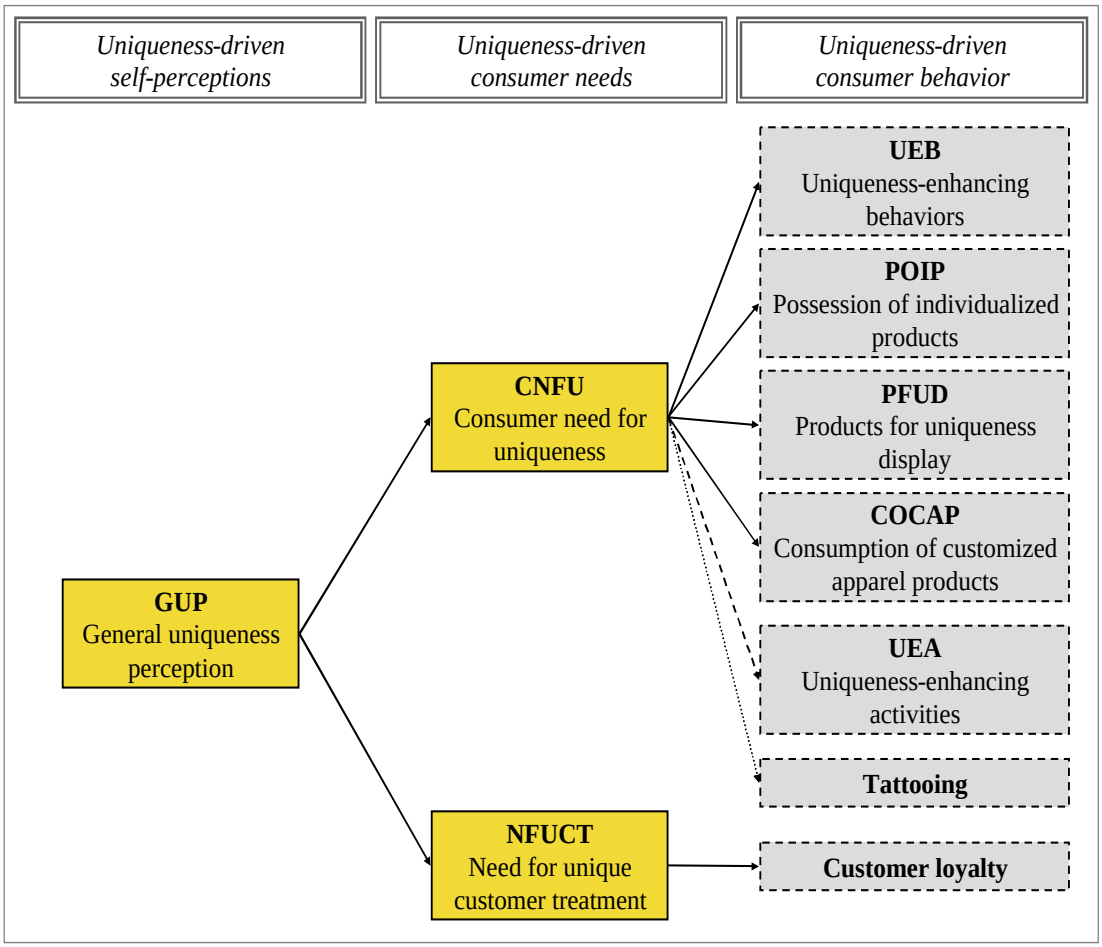

### 4.1. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

#### 4.1.1. Antecedents of Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior

It was highlighted before that all human beings seek uniqueness to some extent (Maslach, 1974; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Ziller, 1964). There is general agreement that various ways to pursue uniqueness exist and that consumption is one of the most important (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio, 2008; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Tepper, 1997; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Hence, individuals use

consumer goods or consumer activities in order to differentiate themselves from others and create a unique image (Tian et al., 2001). Consumers, for example, buy customized, rare, or novel products, or combine ordinary products in a new and special way (Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Several studies already showed a relation between consumers' need for uniqueness, in short CNFU and such consumer behaviors (Bauer et al., 2007; Michel et al., 2009; Ruvio, 2008; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al. 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Hence, CNFU was identified as one *antecedent* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. CNFU was also used as a central concept in this thesis (see Figure 20).

*Figure 20:* Overview of concepts and variables employed in this thesis



However, no empirical research has so far identified factors forming or activating this consumer need. CNFU evolved from NFU theory (Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001), but as was explained earlier, NFU is not the force behind CNFU (see Chapter 2.2.). CNFU is just an application of NFU in the consumer context (Ruvio, 2008) as both measure the need for uniqueness and thus a motivational component. Hence, little is known about the causes of CNFU. This shortcoming was successfully addressed by the different studies of this thesis. General uniqueness perception, in short GUP, was identified as the ultimate driver behind CNFU. Snyder and Fromkin (1980) already speculated that individuals' self-perceptions influence their uniqueness need. Therefore, as suggested by different authors (Maslach, 1974, Simon, 1974), this thesis separately investigated uniqueness-driven self-perceptions, motivations, and behaviors.

It was assumed that social psychological research provides a concept that measures the mere self-perception of uniqueness. And indeed with GUP such a concept was found. GUP was adapted from the two-component theory of individuality (Kampmeier, 2001, Kampmeier & Simon, 2001). Hence, this thesis closed the missing link between CNFU-based consumer research and temporary social psychological research. A significant positive relation between GUP and CNFU was found in all five studies. Furthermore, study #1 showed that GUP predicted CNFU over time. Thus, GUP was identified as another *antecedent* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior because it influences CNFU which in turn influences consumer behavior. The underlying *processes* are discussed later in the section processes behind uniqueness-driven consumer behavior (see Chapter 4.1.2.).

The CNFU concept was conceptualized as homogenous and it was assumed that all three subfactors—creative choice, unpopular choice, and avoidance of similarity—are equally related to consumer behavior (Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Although the overall score was used in the five studies of this thesis, an interesting

finding regarding the subfactors should be mentioned here. Study #1 revealed that the CNFU subfactors possess different predictive qualities (see Chapter 3.1.). Study #2 and #3 confirmed this finding, but results were not discussed there. The correlation between CNFU-avoidance of similarity and different measures of consumer behavior was weaker compared to CNFU-creative choice and CNFU-unpopular choice. The character of the CNFU-avoidance of similarity scale could deliver an explanation. The scale measures the individuals' motivation to avoid purchasing or using products that are commonly used. In contrast, the employed behavioral measures typically asked study participants if they had done something, for example, spent money on a customized apparel product or read a book not on the 'bestseller' list. Participants were not asked what they stopped purchasing or stopped doing, which probably would have revealed a stronger relation with CNFU-avoidance of similarity.

However, of all three subfactors CNFU-avoidance of similarity also showed the weakest relation with GUP. Opposite to Snyders' (1992) assumption, this could indicate a greater importance of the external audience for the formation of uniqueness perception. CNFU-creative choice and CNFU-unpopular choice appear to trigger more obvious forms of behavior, behavior that most likely is not only recognized by an internal audience, but also by an external audience such as friends, family or other people (see Chapter 2.1.). Most likely it is not as easy for others to recognize and thus comment if individuals stopped wearing or stopped using products. Hence, avoidance of similarity might not be as powerful to create a unique and distinct image, because it has less impact on the external audience. The weaker correlation of GUP and CNFU-avoidance of similarity at least points to such an interpretation. Thus, it can be concluded that the external audience is more important than expected. In sum, future research should also focus on the CNFU subfactors, because they promise interesting findings.

Furthermore, CNFU was said to predict a broad range of consumer behaviors (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). However, not all *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior are based on the "acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods" as the definition of CNFU suggests (Tian et al., 2001, p.52). Thus, this thesis tested the predictive limits and potential of CNFU. Study #2, for example, only revealed a weak relation between CNFU and different measures of tattooing behavior. In contrast, a strong correlation for GUP was found (see Chapter 3.2.). Study #3 revealed that CNFU as well as GUP were correlated with a list of uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) (see Chapter 3.3.). Furthermore, study #4 showed that individuals with low and high CNFU levels significantly differed in their consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP). As a conclusion, although CNFU is especially a good behavioral predictor when it comes to consumer behavior associated with the usage of products, it is indeed related to a broader range of consumer behaviors (Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). However, all these behavioral measures rather focused on 'active' uniqueness-driven consumer behavior.

Snyder and Fromkin (1980) already stressed the existence of different uniqueness attributes such as physical, material, informational or experiential characteristics that allow uniqueness-seeking. Individuals who, for example, purchase customized apparel products change their physical characteristics and appearance. Hence, they look different from other people. However, not all uniqueness-driven consumer behaviors involve appearance alteration. For example, Snyder (1992) assumed and study #3 finally experimentally proved that uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA), such as extreme sports or exotic vacations also allow uniqueness pursuit. Thus, consumer experiences play an important role. Therefore, it was assumed that customers who make the experience of a special, personalized, or unique treatment, for example, in the form of customer service, will also feel unique. In the same

light, Salvador et al. (2009, p. 71) stated that individuals "want to be treated as individual customers". Hence, individuals with a strong desire for uniqueness were expected to favor such a 'passive' uniqueness-enhancement. Neither CNFU, nor other uniqueness-related concepts such as the NFU scale (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980) or the desire for unique consumer products scale (Lynn & Harris (1997a, 1997b) were expected to tap such 'passive' behaviors, because they measure the motivation for 'active' uniqueness-seeking. Hence, study #4 entered new theoretical terrain and showed that a need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT) exists and that it influences actual customer behavior (see Chapter 3.4.). NFUCT was found to be highly related to GUP and CNFU but was identified as a separate factor. Hence, NFUCT was postulated as an additional psychological *antecedent* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior besides GUP and CNFU. In sum, the introduction of NFUCT successfully addressed the lack of studies in regard to the so-termed 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking, and thus potentially opened a new and promising area of research.

The five conducted studies showed that GUP was associated with a broad range of behaviors. GUP was found to be related to CNFU, a need triggering 'active' uniqueness-driven consumer behavior, as well as to NFUCT, a need triggering 'passive' uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Hence, GUP indeed seems to be the global driver behind the need and the behavior. The underlying processes are explained next.

### 4.1.2. Processes Behind Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior

So far research has mainly studied the interrelation between CNFU and different forms of consumer behavior (Franke & Schreier, 2008; Michel et al., 2009; Ruvio, 2008; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Although several authors already speculated about the influence of self-perception of similarity or dissimilarity on the human uniqueness motive, no empirical studies specifically measured individuals'

uniqueness perception and examined its role in uniqueness-seeking (Fromkin, 1970; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Nail, 1986; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). The studies conducted in this thesis, for the first time, showed that GUP through the consumer need influences consumer behavior. CNFU was found to be a mediator of the GUP and uniqueness-driven consumer behavior relationship. This *process* was confirmed using already established measures of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior such as uniqueness-enhancing behaviors (UEB; Tian et al., 2001) as well as newly developed measures such as possession of individualized products (POIP), uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA), or consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) (see study #1, #2, and #3). Furthermore, this mode of action was found to be valid in German and Swiss student and non-student samples. Additionally, a study using an age-mixed sample ($n$ = 129) with an average age of 50 years ($SD$ = 16.8)—not reported in this thesis—found CNFU to mediate the GUP and uniqueness-enhancing behavior (UEB) relationship. In conclusion, across different samples and measures, GUP (the perceptual component of uniqueness-seeking) influences consumer behavior though CNFU (the motivational component of uniqueness-seeking), thus this seems to be a universally valid *process*.

Self-theory delivers an explanation why GUP causes CNFU (Snyder, 1992). According to self-theory, people strive to maintain the structural integrity of the self (the so-called consistency process) and enhance the own self theory (the so-called ego-enhancement process). Hence, in line with the consistency process, individuals develop a behavioral motivation to keep the perceived self-concept stable. Thus, individuals perceiving themselves as highly unique (high GUP) should also have a high need to maintain that perception (high CNFU). The question remains open how people develop a high uniqueness perception in the first place. It was previously highlighted that genetic, social and cultural factors cause actual differences between individuals (Bauer et al., 2007). Every person possesses a unique

genotype (Dobzhansky, 1956; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). These existing differences are—at least in Western societies—further enhanced by socialization processes that, for example, reward differentiation from others (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Kampmeier, 2001). However, not only external rewards seem to increase uniqueness perception (Bauer et al., 2007; Snyder, 1992; Vignoles et al., 2000). Snyder states (1992, p. 11): "It is assumed that there is some intrinsic satisfaction to be derived from the perception that one is separable from the masses." As a consequence, individuals come to perceive that they are to some extent different from others.

GUP and CNFU were identified as the psychological *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Furthermore, a generally valid mediator *process* was postulated. However, study #5 showed that not only these personality factors, but also situational stimuli influence consumer behavior providing additional insights into the *processes* behind uniqueness-driven consumer behavior (see Chapter 3.5.). In general, "the uniqueness literature suggests that whenever people feel overly undifferentiated, whether due to temporal situational pressures or stable individual differences, they will take steps to reduce this negative emotional state" (Berger & Heath, 2007, p. 132). Hence, the influence of situational conditions was already acknowledged before and proven in different studies (Brewer, 1991; Brewer et al., 1993; Imhoff & Erb, 2009; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Maslach, 1974; Simon, 1997; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). These studies typically manipulated the perception of similarity or dissimilarity to others by a direct 'bogus' uniqueness feedback (see Chapter 3.5.). However, in study #5, for the first time, participants were not told that there are similar or dissimilar to others, they were told that being unique is positive or negative. And indeed participants who received a "pro-individualism" poster campaign telling them that uniqueness is socially accepted and desired showed significantly higher consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) compared to participants who

received a "pro-collectivism" poster campaign, telling them the exact opposite. Both experimental groups did not differ in their GUP and CNFU levels. Hence, situational stimuli that aimed to manipulate the general uniqueness norm—the level of uniqueness that is socially accepted and desired—had an influence on uniqueness-seeking.

In the following a potential explanation for this situational influence on behavior is given. Individuals not only change their behavior, but also their cognitive reactions in order to react on external uniqueness information (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Lynn and Snyder (2002, p.396) highlighted that "one way people can protect their perceptions of self-uniqueness is by discounting threatening information and recalling (or focusing on) available uniqueness-affirming information". Hence, individuals can cognitively alter their self-ascribed perception of uniqueness. Other studies, for example, showed that people who received threatening information in regard to their uniqueness perception altered their self-ratings of beliefs, attitudes, or experiences (Fromkin, 1970; Ganster et al., 1977; Lynn & Snyder, 2002; McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976; Weir, 1971).

Thus, participants in the "pro-individualism" condition of study #5 might have cognitively changed their uniqueness perception because the level of social acceptance of uniqueness was experimentally changed. Individuals tend to pursue uniqueness in a socially accepted way which does not cause social sanctions (Lynn & Harris, 1997a, 1997b; Ruvio, 2008; Synder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980; Tian et al., 2001; Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Hence a cognitive adaption to the new norm seems plausible. The change in GUP would then have changed CNFU as was explained earlier. Indeed, an increase in GUP and CNFU was found among participants in the "pro-individualism" condition. Again it has to be mentioned that the virtual consumption task also could have contributed to a change in uniqueness perception (see Chapter 3.5.). It could be questioned why individuals at all change their behavior, for example, purchase customized products in order to differentiate themselves

from others, if they can just cognitively adjust their perception. To this end Lynn & Snyder (2002, p. 402) stated: "While the need for uniqueness can bias peoples' perceptions of themselves and others, those perceptions can deviate from reality only so much before the discrepancies become obvious and the perceptions are no longer sustainable in the context of interpersonal commerce."

In addition, study #5 also created valuable information in regard to the stability of the psychological *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. GUP as well as CNFU were conceptualized as rather stable personality constructs (Kampmeier, 2001, Kampmeier & Simon, 2001; Ruvio et al., 2008; Tian et al., 2001). Previous studies did manipulate the perception of similarity and dissimilarity and examined the behavioral consequences, but these studies did not investigate changes in uniqueness perception or need itself (Brewer, 1991; Brewer et al., 1993; Maslach, 1974; Simon, 1997; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Therefore, study #5 delivered new insights about the changeability of GUP and CNFU. GUP and CNFU did increase in the "pro-individualism" condition. GUP and CNFU were first measured in study #3 one month before the manipulation in study #5 and again at the end of study #5. It would have been interesting to examine how long this change prevailed, but not further GUP and CNFU measurements were conducted..

In the same light, it is worth mentioning again that a higher need for uniqueness was found in Western societies, thus highlighting the cultural influence (Burns & Brady, 1992; Kim & Markus, 1999; Maslach et al., 1985; Oysermann et al., 2002). Analysis conducted in another study—not reported in this thesis—also revealed a strong cultural effect. Older participants (>60 years) from former East Germany showed significantly lower levels of GUP and CNFU than older participants (>60 years) from former West Germany. However, no differences between younger individuals were found. Apparently, 40 years of socialist culture advertising similarity and equality have lasting influences on uniqueness perception and the

need for uniqueness among the older generation. Hence, the experimental manipulation of the uniqueness norm in study #5 delivered one potential explanation for such cultural differences.

### 4.1.3. Manifestations of Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior

This thesis aimed to identify a broad range of *manifestations* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Therefore, the 'active' as well as the 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking were studied. In regard to the 'active' side, several new measures such as possession of individualized products (POIP), the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP), uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA), and tattooing degree were developed and examined together with GUP and CNFU. Tattooing, for example, was identified as a rather extreme form of uniqueness-seeking, because individuals spent considerably amounts of money to permanently change their appearance (see study #2, Chapter 3.2.). This shows that appearance and physical characteristics are important sources of differentiation (Snyder, 1992). The investigation of uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) in study #3 on the other hand showed that consumer experiences also play an important role for uniqueness-seeking (see Chapter 3.3). Furthermore, study #4 revealed that people with a high uniqueness perception also have a high need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT), providing further proof for the importance of customer experiences and shedding light on the 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking.

However the main attention in this thesis was given to the appearance domain. Therefore the apparel products sector was chosen as the research area, because it was assumed that people use apparel products in order to create a unique image (Tian et al., 2001). The consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) was examined, because of obvious practical implications, which will be discussed later in greater detail. Previous studies, for example, have already shown a higher interest for customized products among

people with high CNFU levels (Bauer et al., 2007; Michel et al., 2009; Ruvio, 2008; Tian et al., 2001). Study #3 for the first time showed that individuals with high CNFU levels spent more money on customized apparel products compared to individuals with low CNFU levels. The appearance domain most certainly serves the external audience because individuals actively present their self-perceived uniqueness to the outside world. This again strengthens the importance of the external audience. However, if an increasing number of people are tempted to show their differences to the world it will eventually become more and more difficult to be unique. Hence, individuals have to continue and increase their search for sources that affirm their sense of uniqueness. Consequently, a consumer catch-22 carousel (Snyder, 1992) is started and might result in a general increase of individuality and uniqueness in society.

## 4.2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

### 4.2.1. Antecedents of Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior

As aforementioned, GUP, CNFU, and NFUCT have been identified as *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. The investigation of the consumption of customized consumer goods was one major focus of this thesis because of the potential managerial implications. Mass customization is on a continuous rise and on its way to becoming the standard of the century (Davis, 1986; Piller, 2007; Pine, 1993) as was already explained in Chapter 2.3. Mass customization promises greater revenues and profits for businesses (Franke et al., 2009; Piller & Müller, 2004, Wilson, 2007). However, it is also associated with severe costs and risks (Franke et al., 2009; Piller et al., 2004; Pine et al., 2003; Salvador et al., 2009). Therefore it is crucial for practitioners to search for factors supporting a successful mass customization implementation as well as factors supporting the running operation.

The different studies in this thesis showed that CNFU not only is related to the possession of customized products, but also to the amount of money spent on these products. Study #3, for example, showed that individuals with high CNFU levels in the last six months spent on average 90€ on customized apparel products, thereby paying a 17% higher price compared to the standard price. In contrast, individuals with low CNFU levels paid significantly less (33€), and paid by tendency a smaller price premium (9%) (see Chapter 3). Hence, practitioners could use CNFU in customer surveys in order to determine the demand or desire for customized products. Furthermore, businesses could evaluate, for example, to which extend customization options would be appreciated by their customers. In addition, companies could use CNFU information to improve customer segmentation and, for example, just offer customization options in those segments with high CNFU levels.

Study #4 showed that individuals differ in their need for unique customer treatment (NFUCT). Overall, customers with high NFUCT levels, in contrast to customers with low NFUCT levels, for example, rated customer service as more important as price-performance ratio. Thus, high NFUCT individuals seemed to be less price-sensitive. As a consequence, companies offering a unique customer service would be able to charge a price premium if their customers have high NFUCT levels. Furthermore, study #4 revealed that NFUCT moderates the unique customer treatment and customer loyalty relationship. Two widely used and accepted practical measures of customer loyalty have been employed: Share-of-wallet (Schawel & Billing, 2009) and NPS (Reichheld, 2003, 2006). In sum, the highest customer loyalty in terms of share-of-wallet and NPS was found in the customer group where individuals with high NFUCT levels received a personalized customer service. In contrast, the lowest customer loyalty was found in the group where individuals with high NFUCT levels encountered no personalized service. Hence, it is recommended to include the new inter-individual difference measure NFUCT in customer surveys. Companies, for example,

can identify customer segments with high NFUCT levels that appreciate extensive customer service. Those customers will reward personalized customer service with increased customer loyalty, but decrease loyalty if their need is not matched by efforts of the company.

Finally, it is recommended to include GUP in customer surveys if businesses offer customized products and also provide personalized customer service. GUP measures the ultimate driver behind the motivation for 'active' as well as 'passive' uniqueness-driven consumer behavior. Furthermore, the four items represent a short and economic measure, which are requested by practitioners (Drolet & Morrisson, 2001). In sum, information about customers' GUP, CNFU and NFUCT levels should help practitioners to make better business decisions and ultimately contribute to the business success.

### 4.2.2. Processes Behind Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior

Different studies have already shown that the manipulation of the individual's perception of similarity or dissimilarity to others causes behavioral changes (Brewer, 1991; Brewer et al., 1993; Maslach, 1974; Simon, 1997; Snyder, 1992; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). However, companies cannot directly influence the individual uniqueness perception, for example, by telling a specific customer that he or she looks like everybody else. Study #5 showed that the consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) can be influenced by stimuli aiming to change the general uniqueness norm. This might explain why already 25% of magazine ads use uniqueness as a central or subordinate theme (Lynn & Harris, 1997a). Companies might be further interested in developing marketing or advertisement campaigns that establish a positive picture of uniqueness in society.

### 4.2.3. Manifestations of Uniqueness-Driven Consumer Behavior

It was discussed earlier that all individuals want to be different, but not too different (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Thus, human beings always carry two different motivations—the motivation to be different and the motivation to belong somewhere (Brewer, 1991, 1993; Lynn & Harris, 1997a, 1997b; Pickett et al., 2002; Synder & Fromkin, 1977, 1980). Consumer behavior is special in the universe of uniqueness-seeking behaviors because using products or commodities is a socially safe way to pursue uniqueness (Ruvio, 2008; Snyder, 1992; Tepper, 1997; Tian et al., 2001). Therefore, companies offer a comfortable way to pursue uniqueness and simultaneously satisfy the need for assimilation and differentiation (Ruvio, 2008). The apparel industry, for instance, produces a great variety of apparel articles because customers ask for means to differentiate themselves. What appears to be new is that now the industry started to create the demand for ever finer means of differentiation. With the introduction of methods of mass customization it seems to be possible to even produce product units of one (Cox & Alm, 1999; Piller, 2007; Piller & Müller, 2004). Therefore, it appears that companies on the one hand deliver means to satisfy the human uniqueness motive, but on the other hand create a greater demand for it. Examples are countless: MyMuesli (create own cereal), Mini Cooper (design the roof with own graphic), Condé Nast's TasteBook (produce cookbook with own recipes), Dell (customize your personal computer), Blends for Friends (develop individual tea blend), Mi Adidas (determine the color, comfort, and functionality of sport shoes), Lego (craft own products), Tommy Hilfiger (customize own pair of jeans) (Duray & Milligan, 1999; Michel et al., 2009; Piller, 2007; Piller et al., 2004; Salvador et al., 2009).

Hence, the customization of all sorts of consumer products is already on its way to becoming the state of the art. However, study #3 and study #4 showed that people with a high perceived uniqueness are also interested in uniqueness-enhancing activities (UEA) and

unique customer service. Thus, the industrial customization and individualization of activities such as vacations will eventually be the next step. In the same light, personalization of customer service might further increase in the upcoming years.

## 4.3. LIMITATIONS

Some of the general limitations of the five studies should be discussed here again. First, all analyses were based on questionnaire data. Even though different methods such as open questions, closed questions, different scales and formats were used, still the data might be prone to common method bias as all data was based on self-disclosure. Second, although longitudinal data was used in study #1 and study #5, the majority of studies were based on cross-sectional data. Therefore, causal conclusions can not be drawn for those studies. Third, the majority of studies were based on rather convenient samples gathered at the university which might limit generalization. Therefore, one additional study was conducted—not reported in this thesis—that confirmed the main results in a mixed-age non-student sample ($n$ = 129). However, especially in regard to consumption of customized apparel products (COCAP) younger individuals might represent an interesting customer segment. Fourth, other psychological *antecedents* of uniqueness-driven consumer behavior besides GUP, CNFU and NFUCT might exist. Materialism (Richins, 1994, 2004)—not reported in this thesis—was, for example, included in study #3, but did not yield strong additional explanatory effects. Finally, in general it would have been better to have larger samples, especially in regard to the missing neutral control group in study #5.

## 4.4. OUTLOOK

This thesis provided several new theoretical as well as practical implications; additionally it provided new research ideas and directions. First, uniqueness-seeking should be further investigated in the context of mass customization. There are important practical implications. CNFU should be included in customer surveys to truly understand the readiness of customers for mass customization. However, more research is needed, especially on real life data. Companies could survey their customers and compare results with internal revenue data (e.g. use customer bonus cards such as payback).

Second, more research on NFUCT is requested. Study #4 showed that the 'passive' side of uniqueness-seeking promises to be a viable research area with practical as well as theoretical implications. However, more studies on NFUCT using samples from different industries and different sorts of customer treatment in order to further validate the concept are needed. Furthermore, longitudinal data is necessary to prove retest-validity and predictive qualities. In addition, 'passive' uniqueness-seeking could also be relevant outside the consumer context and should be investigated.

Third, little to nothing is known about the influence of age on uniqueness-seeking. Most studies in this field of research included younger participants (Brewer, 1991; Franke et al., 2009; Kampmeier & Simon, 2001; Lynn & Harris, 1997a, 1997b, Michel et al., 2009; Ruvio, 2008; Synder, 1992; Tepper, 1997). Even those studies based on a mixed-age sample did not directly analyze age differences (Tian & McKenzie, 2001). Armstrong, Saunders, Owen, Roberts, and Koch (2009) examined the need for uniqueness of older women, but did not compare it to that of younger women. Dollinger and Dollinger (2003), for example, indicated that the self becomes more individualistic with age, but did not specifically analyze need for uniqueness or consumer behavior. In sum, the lack of systematic research addressing uniqueness-seeking among older individuals is surprising. This is especially surprising

because demographic change caused by an aging population is omnipresent (Beinhocker, Davis, & Mendonca, 2009; Birg, 2006; Heinson, 2005; Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004; Kohlbacher & Herstatt, 2008; Noda, 2007). Furthermore, older people have come to represent a very important customer segment as they are increasing in number and economic power (Beinhocker et al., 2009; Stiller, 2005; Stroud, 2005). Thus, future research should investigate the influence of age on uniqueness-driven consumer behavior.

Finally, it was aforementioned that Western societies eventually become more and more individualistic. There is no negative connotation. Uniqueness does not automatically mean egoism. Study #1, for example, showed no correlation between GUP and a measure of egoism (see Chapter 3.1.). Snyder and Fromkin (1980) already advertised a positive picture of uniqueness. Uniqueness-seeking does not only provide positive aspects for the individual, but also for the society in general. Individuals, for example, benefit because higher complexity of self-aspects ensures higher social functionality (Simon, 2004), because the establishment of uniqueness provides a basis for comparison and self-definition (Brewer, 2001), and because uniqueness perception in general is emotionally satisfying and necessary for the psychological welfare (Lynn & Snyder, 2002). The society, for example, benefits because people who differentiate themselves from others also "develop different attitudes, beliefs, knowledge bases, and skills. This diversity of human resources is an asset of immense value" (Lynn & Snyder, 2002, p. 404). The greater range of knowledge, skills, and abilities made available by diversity can help society to overcome potential challenges (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). However, it is argued that the mere existence of diverse resources is not sufficient. Individuals have to publically display their differences in order to allow identification of the critical resources needed to solve potentially emerging challenges (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Thus, individuals are invited to show their differences to the world.

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## 6. APPENDIX

*Appendix A:* Overview employed constructs including items

| Constructs | Abbreviation/ or sub-constructs | Items |
|---|---|---|
| General uniqueness perception | GUP | I'm unusual. |
| | | I'm different from others. |
| | | I'm unique. |
| | | I have rare characteristics. |
| Consumer need for uniqueness (CNFU) | CNFU – avoidance of similarity | The more commonplace a product or brand is among the general population, the less interested I am in buying it. |
| | | As a rule, I dislike products or brands that are customarily bought by everyone. |
| | | I often try to avoid products or brands that I know are bought by the general population. |
| | | When a product I own becomes popular among the general population, I begin to use it less. |
| | CNFU – creative choice | Having an eye for products that are interesting and unusual assists me in establishing a distinctive image. |
| | | I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands. |
| | | I often try to find a more interesting version of run-of-the-mill products because I enjoy being original. |
| | | I often combine possessions in such a way that I create a personal image that cannot be duplicated. |
| | CNFU – unpopular choice | I have often gone against the understood rules of my social group regarding when and how certain products are properly used. |
| | | I have often violated the understood rules of my social group regarding what to buy or own. |
| | | When it comes to the products I buy and the situations in which I use them, I have broken customs and rules. |
| | | I enjoy challenging the prevailing taste of people I know by buying something they would not seem to accept. |
| Need for unique customer treatment | NFUCT | Companies should ask me about my personal customer needs. |
| | | It is important to me that companies treat me as an individual. |
| | | I do not want companies to treat my like any other customer, I want them to listen and respond to my personal needs. |
| | | I want special customized products and services from companies. |
| | | Companies should not consider myself as an exchangeable average customer. |

| Constructs | Abbreviation/ or sub-constructs | Items |
|---|---|---|
| Uniqueness-enhancing behaviors | UEB | Bought a product with my name or initials on it. |
| | | Made or designed a product. |
| | | Shopped for an outfit by mixing and matching clothes from different stores. |
| | | Signed up for a new hobby that would not interest most people. |
| | | Bought a product from a marketer that supports social causes I believe in. |
| | | Made a new product from existing products. |
| | | Shopped at yard sales or at garage sale. |
| | | Read a book that is not a "Best Seller". |
| | | Bought a product that only an expert in the area would buy. |
| | | Combined clothing of different styles and from different time periods to form an outfit. |
| | | Shopped or browsed mail order catalogues from speciality stores. |
| | | Rented an "artsy" video or went to an "artsy" movie. |
| | | Bought something that people my same sex would not typically buy. |
| | | Participated in a hobby or sport that others find unusual. |
| | | Shopped at stores that sell second-hand merchandise. |
| | | Attended a concert of an artist I admire. |
| | | Used a product for a purpose different from the one intended by the manufacturer. |
| | | Shopped out of town stores other than on holiday or vacation trips. |
| | | Tried a new place or form of entertainment. |
| | | Bought an unpopular brand for reasons other than price. |
| | | Altered my appearance in a way that attracted attention. |
| | | Browsed books/magazines for novel ideas on home improvements or home decorating. |
| | | Attended a meeting of a special social group or exclusive club. |
| | | Wore something in a social situation or in public that would shock others. |
| | | Bought a product that was unusual in its color or design. |
| | | Publicly displayed a good that is out of character for someone in my social group. |
| | | Bought a luxury item that most people I know can't afford. |
| | | Bought something I felt would receive a lot of attention. |
| | | Bought something to add to a collection I've started. |
| | | Wore clothing that accentuated my positive physical characteristics in a noticeably way. |

| Constructs | Abbreviation/ or sub-constructs | Items |
|---|---|---|
| Uniqueness-enhancing activities | UEA | Signed up for a new hobby that would not interest most people. |
| | | Read a book that is not a "Best Seller". |
| | | Bought a product that only an expert in the area would buy. |
| | | Rented an "artsy" video or went to an "artsy" movie. |
| | | Participated in a hobby or sport that others find unusual. |
| | | Attended a concert of an artist I admire. |
| | | Tried a new place or form of entertainment. |
| | | Attended a meeting of a special social group or exclusive club. |
| | | Visited a country, region, or city that most people would not visit. |
| | | Planned an unusual trip. |
| | | Visited an unusual theater show. |
| | | Did an activity in an unusual manner. |
| | | Visited a restaurant that is an insider tip. |
| | | Visited a country that is not one of the typical and popular travel destinations. |
| | | Built up a distinctive online identity. |
| | | Took part in a live action role play. |
| | | Completed an exceptional collection. |
| | | Took part in an outdoor experience not many would do. |
| | | Did a certain sports activity that is not trendy. |
| | | Ate or drank something that is out of character for my social group. |
| | | Went to a concert not many would go to. |
| | | Spent money on an unpopular hobby. |
| | | Spent money on an extraordinary activity (e.g., with ‘my days’ a diner in the sky). |
| | | Engaged in so-called fun sports (e.g., bungee jumping, rafting). |
| | | Listened to music of a lesser-known band. |
| | | Attended an unusual work-shop or seminar (e.g., ‘learn how to laugh’). |
| | | Got involved in a political affair or party that is not common. |
| | | Got trained in a domain most people don't know. |
| | | Took part in an unusual activity and became a trendsetter. |
| | | Became a member of an association only a few people belong to. |

| Constructs | Abbreviation/ or sub-constructs | Items |
|---|---|---|
| Possession of individualized products | POIP | I do posses individualized apparel and accessory products (e.g. t-shirts with own motifs, self-designed shoes, individualized jewellery, …) |
| | | I do posses individualized sports and recreational products (e.g. customized mountain bike, self-designed snowboard, individualized moterbike helmet, …) |
| | | I do posses individualized nutrition and food products (e.g. individualized vitamin diet, individualized breakfast cereals, …) |
| | | I do posses individualized electronic and mechanic products (e.g. self-designed watches, individualized cars, smartphone with apps, …) |
| | | I do posses individualized household and furnishing products (e.g. customized furniture, customized kitchen, self-designed wall paper, …) |

*Appendix B:* Declaration of originality of this dissertation

# Eidesstattliche Erklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich, Philipp Weiherl, dass ich die vorliegende Dissertation selbstständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel verwendet habe.

Zwickau, 11.03.2011 _____
Philipp Weiherl