



Journal of Consumer Research Inc.

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Source: *The Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (June 2011), pp. 62-77

Published by: [The University of Chicago Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/658469>

Accessed: 12/05/2011 10:24

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When Your World Must Be Defended: Choosing Products to Justify the System

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Consumers are often strongly motivated to view themselves as part of a legitimate and fair external system. Our research focuses on how individuals adopt distinct ways of defending their system when it is threatened and, in particular, how this is revealed in their consumption choices. We find that although individuals differ in how confident they are in the legitimacy of their system, they do not differ in their motivation to defend the system when it is threatened. Instead, they simply adopt different methods of defense. Specifically, when an important system is (verbally) attacked, individuals who are the least confident in the legitimacy of the system seek and appreciate consumption choices that allow them to indirectly and subtly defend the system. Conversely, individuals who are highly confident in the system reject indirect opportunities of defense and seek consumption choices that allow them to defend the system in direct and explicit ways.

One is a member of a country, a profession, a civilization, a religion. One is not just a man. (Saint-Exupéry 1986, 76)

As so elegantly put by the writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, each of us exists within the context of the greater social systems—the overarching institutions, organizations, and norms—that we live in. Rather than being

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discrete and disconnected entities floating around the world, we each have a place within our family and groups of friends, our workplaces, our religious congregations, our communities, our countries, and so on. System justification theory suggests that because the systems we live in form a fundamental part of our lives and because we are reliant upon them, we are motivated to view these systems as fair, justifiable, and legitimate and to defend them when they are threatened (Jost and Banaji 1994; Kay and Zanna 2009). There are many ways to defend a threatened system, however, and different individuals may elect to use distinct weapons of defense—even when they are in identical situations. In the current study, we take advantage of the fact that the consumption domain provides individuals with a multidimensional source of system defense that can accommodate diverse defense preferences.

Existing research has focused primarily on direct methods

Luce, and John Lynch for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript.

John Deighton served as editor and Rebecca Ratner served as associate editor for this article.

Electronically published January 14, 2011

of defending threatened systems. Direct methods of defense are those that allow individuals to communicate their unwavering confidence in the system in a way that unambiguously indicates support for the system. In other words, when individuals employ direct methods of defense, there is no mistaking their support for the system. Examples of such direct defense methods include denying injustices (Kay, Jimenez, and Jost 2002), derogating those who criticize the system (Kaiser, Dyrenforth, and Hagiwara 2006), and resisting changes to the system (Kay et al. 2008). We propose that while some individuals will prefer and dedicate their attention to such direct methods of supporting the system, others will prefer more understated and indirect methods (both of which can be revealed by exploring an individual's consumption patterns). In contrast to direct methods of defense, indirect methods of defense are more ambiguous and require less commitment to an individual's beliefs about the system. They do not require as much confidence in the system in their execution, nor are they as easily detectable by others. Examples of such indirect methods of defense might include making an anonymous charity donation to an organization that upholds the ideals of the system or purchasing items that were manufactured by a system-supporting business but do not explicitly advertise that fact.

Our principal aim in this research is to demonstrate that individuals do in fact differ in their preferences for direct versus indirect methods. We leverage individuals' level of confidence in the system as a critical variable that determines the method they will use to defend a threatened system. We demonstrate that although individuals with high versus low levels of confidence in the system are equally motivated to defend the system when it is threatened, they prefer drastically different means of defense. Specifically, we expect individuals who are low in system confidence to prefer indirect methods of defense over direct methods of defense. This is because direct methods of defense require a level of unconditional support for the system and a commitment to ideas and behaviors that individuals who are low in system confidence are unwilling or unable to muster or share. Individuals who are high in system confidence, on the other hand, truly believe in the justness and legitimacy of the system they are defending. They unequivocally support the system and are willing to champion it vigorously. Thus, they will allocate their energies toward direct methods of system defense rather than give attention to indirect methods of defense that may be overlooked, unnoticed, and ineffective at communicating their commitment to the system.

Critically, we propose that consumption is a key domain that allows us to uncover the different defensive strategies that consumers may use. We identify two broad classes of consumption choices that can be used to support the system: indirect endorsements of the system and direct endorsements. Consumers quite often encounter choices that provide indirect opportunities to endorse particular systems (e.g., American consumers wearing Nike gym shoes, ordering a cup of Starbucks coffee, or drinking a Budweiser; buying candy to support the fund-raising efforts of a neighborhood

school). But consumers may also seek products that are more direct and support specific systems outright (e.g., bumper stickers that proclaim "I Heart New York"; bracelets that ask, "What Would Jesus Do?"; and T-shirts that read "100% Un-Hyphenated American"). In other words, while consumption as a domain may often serve as an indirect means of defense, it can also be quite direct and, thus, has the flexibility required to permit all individuals to defend the system in a manner that they are comfortable with. This flexibility of consumption provides a stark contrast to the domains studied in the system justification literatures to date (e.g., Kay et al. 2002), which have currently allowed for relatively direct methods of system defense. It is the flexibility of consumption—the fact that it encompasses both direct and indirect methods of system defense—that will allow us to uncover critical differences in how people defend their systems. We expect that when one's system is threatened, individuals who are low in system confidence will reject more direct means of defense and gravitate toward consumption choices, but only when such choices provide indirect, subtle means of supporting the system. Conversely, those who are high in system confidence will directly defend their systems by using direct, explicit means or through consumption choices that provide an opportunity to directly endorse the system. They will not, however, dedicate energy toward indirect, ambiguous means of support (such as indirect consumption choices). In essence, examining system defense in the context of consumption allows us to uncover differences in defensive behaviors that have been obscured in the contexts often studied by system justification researchers.

In what follows, we present a series of studies designed to explore the important influence of system threats on consumption preferences and, more specifically, to reveal how individuals differ in their preferences for direct versus indirect methods of system defense. We focus our studies on the American and Canadian systems. Across the studies, we highlight the role of consumption choices in allowing us to unearth the disparate defensive behaviors of different types of individuals. In the first study, we demonstrate that individuals who are low in system confidence use indirect consumption choices to defend the system and individuals who are high in system confidence do not. In studies 2 and 3, we rule out potential alternative explanations for the effects in study 1. In particular, in study 2 we distinguish system-defensive consumption choices from choices arising from another well-studied threat, mortality salience. In study 3, we rule out the possibility that motivational differences underlie the disparate defense preferences of individuals who differ in system confidence. In study 4, we show that individuals with low confidence will not defend their systems using direct means such as the derogation of others but that individuals with high confidence will. Finally, we show in study 5 that when products cease being indirect supporters of the system and become more direct and explicit supporters of the system, individuals who are low in

confidence will no longer use them to defend the system, but individuals who are high in confidence will.

Overall, this work offers several contributions. We not only provide new insights for system justification theory by demonstrating that people will defend their systems differently based on their level of confidence in the system, but we also demonstrate how consumption choices play an important role in this defense of the system. Specifically, we introduce two specific classes of choices (direct and indirect) that enable us to uncover differences in the way people prefer to defend the system as a function of system confidence. Moreover, our research adds to a growing body of literature that suggests that people use their consumption choices to react to a wide variety of threats to the self, including mortality salience, shaken self-views, and low feelings of power (e.g., Ferraro, Shiv, and Bettman 2005; Gao, Wheeler, and Shiv 2009; Liu and Smeesters 2010; Mandel and Heine 1999; Mandel and Smeesters 2008; Pavia and Mason 2004; Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Wong 2009; Rucker and Galinsky 2008). We demonstrate that the need to respond to threats to one's system, which is distinct from (and sometimes counter to) the need to defend the self (Jost and Banaji 1994), also has important implications for consumption choices.

SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION THEORY

Why do we become so defensive when an outsider criticizes our government? Why are we so ready to argue for the merits of our religious institutions, our employers, and our schools, even when they don't seem to be operating in our best interests? System justification theory was born out of a desire to understand the answers to such questions—and, more precisely, to understand how and why people accept and maintain the external social systems that they interact with. Within system justification theory, a “system” is defined formally as the overarching institutions, organizations, and norms within which a given individual functions (Jost and Banaji 1994). Individuals are said to be justifying their system when they accept, explain, and justify prevailing conditions, be they social, political, economic, sexual, or legal, simply because they exist. Such justification is thought to arise because individuals are reliant upon and often unable to change the system and are thus motivated to maintain the view that the external system is fair, legitimate, justifiable, and in order (Jost and Banaji 1994; Kay and Zanna 2009). In other words, because leaving or changing one's country, job, or religion is often not a feasible option, people regularly choose to accept and support the status quo (Laurin, Shepherd, and Kay 2010).

The idea that people find ways to cope with that which cannot be changed is akin to several other ideas previously addressed in the social psychological literature, most notably, Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance and Lerner's (1980) belief in a just world, both of which suggest that when reality does not fit with our preferred view of it, we can engage in a number of psychological strategies to correct the mismatch. System justification theory originated

in an effort to integrate and expand upon such theoretical perspectives and offers important new insights that have informed the research at hand. For example, while the theory of cognitive dissonance assumes that people will only rationalize decisions that they feel they have freely chosen (e.g., Cooper and Fazio 1984; Wicklund and Brehm 1976), system justification theory suggests that people will also rationalize that which is independent of their own decisions. Specifically, the system justification motive leads people to justify the decisions and acts of larger societal systems, even when they realize that they were not involved in the decision at hand (e.g., Kay et al. 2002, 2009). System justification theory also differs from cognitive dissonance theory in that cognitive dissonance focuses on the desire to maintain a positive image of one's self (e.g., Aronson 1992), while system justification focuses on a desire to maintain a positive image of one's system, often even at the expense of one's self. System justification theory is also consistent with the tenets of just world theory; both argue that individuals are motivated to believe that outcomes are fair, legitimate, and deserved. However, system justification extends beyond just world theory by explicitly focusing on how individuals justify the existence of external systems as a means of believing in a just world, rather than only specific outcomes that happen to specific individuals. Importantly, while system justification theory is inspired by both cognitive dissonance and just world theories, it is unlikely that one would arrive at the specific predictions offered in the present work based only on just world theory and/or cognitive dissonance theory. It is system justification theory's explicit focus on the justification of external systems—which is absent from these other theories—that is the impetus for the research at hand. In what follows, we discuss when and how consumers will be most likely to justify these external systems.

ACTIVATING THE SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION MOTIVE

Given the multiplicity of goals that people strive for every day (consciously and nonconsciously) and the overwhelming number of stimuli and decisions that they face, individuals may not always have as their top priority a goal to justify and defend their system. However, when one's system is threatened, defending it becomes particularly important. Threats to one's system occur in the real world in many forms—the evening news is replete with threats of terrorist attacks, economic turmoil, public criticisms of the government, and so on. In the laboratory, manipulations of system threat generally involve exposing participants to (fictitious) news articles describing someone's negative opinion of the sociopolitical climate of a particular system (Jost et al. 2005; Kay, Jost, and Young 2005; Lau, Kay, and Spencer 2008).

To date, researchers have found that when the system is threatened, individuals often engage in what we will refer to as direct means of system justification. Direct means of system justification involve behaviors that unambiguously reflect one's support for the system. They often involve

explicit attempts at casting instances of unfairness as justifiable and legitimate. For example, individuals often readily cast society's "winners" and "losers" as deserving of their fortune or misfortune, respectively (e.g., Jost et al. 2005; Kay et al. 2005; Lau et al. 2008). Other examples of direct justification include the straightforward denial of an injustice (Kay et al. 2002, 2009) or the derogation of people who explicitly criticize or challenge the system (Kaiser et al. 2006; Laurin et al. 2010). A commitment to ideas and actions that support the system is implied when people directly defend the system.

While researchers have often focused on direct means of defending the system, there are certainly other ways by which people can defend the system. As an analogy, imagine that you are verbally attacked by a student in your next class, personally insulted by reviewers regarding your latest manuscript, or criticized as a parent by your child's teacher. How would you defend yourself? Would you be very direct and forceful in your response, considering anything less to be ineffective and weak? Or would you be more likely to adopt a subtle and indirect approach? We suggest that just as individuals are likely to differ in the way they defend the "self," they will also differ in how they defend the "system." We argue that some individuals will reject direct means of supporting the system and will instead prefer indirect means. Indirect means of supporting the system involve behaviors that support the system in a subtle way and are ambiguous and noncommittal with respect to one's beliefs about the system. When individuals engage in indirect means of justification, it is unclear from their actions whether they are truly in favor of the system and committed to ideas and actions that support it. For example, if one chooses to defend the American system today by ordering coffee from Starbucks (American) instead of Tim Horton's (Canadian) or by driving the family's Chevy truck instead of its Toyota sedan, he is supporting the system in a way that is indirect and ambiguous with respect to his beliefs about the system. An observer might interpret his preference for Starbucks and Chevy as reflecting a desire for a particular latte or a need to haul materials, respectively, just as easily as one might interpret it as a show of support for the system.

We suggest that one's level of confidence in the system will be a critical determinant of which approach (direct or indirect) individuals prefer. We conceptualize "system confidence" as the degree to which one believes the system is fair, just, and legitimate at any given point in time but not a matter of one's desire to support the system (Banfield et al., forthcoming). We argue that individuals with high system confidence should be more confident and comfortable with directly supporting the system through direct means while individuals with low system confidence should be more comfortable with indirect means.

We propose that consumption is a key domain for uncovering such differences in how people choose to justify the system, in large part due to its flexibility in terms of being able to both indirectly and directly support the system. We argue that there are two specific classes of consumption

choices that can be mapped on to the different ways that people desire to support the system—namely, choices that indirectly support the system and those that directly support the system. Choices that indirectly support the system provide individuals with a chance to feel as if they are supporting the system without clearly articulating their underlying beliefs about the system. This might be accomplished by choosing brands that are highly representative of one's system. For example, when looking to support the American system indirectly, an individual might select a classic Tommy Hilfiger shirt and a pair of Nikes instead of a comparable Lacoste shirt and pair of Adidas. Conversely, choices that directly support the system allow individuals to support the system in a way that clearly articulates their strong confidence in and support for their system. This might be accomplished by choosing items that explicitly indicate one's support for the system. So instead of choosing a basic Tommy Hilfiger shirt, an individual might seek one that proclaims across the chest, "American classic."

Given that consumption is flexible enough to encompass both direct and indirect means of defense, we expect that it will allow us to clearly reveal how people differ in their preferred defense methods based on their level of confidence in the system—a distinction obscured in the literature to date. We expect that individuals with low confidence in the system will be more likely to turn toward subtle consumption opportunities as a means for supporting the system and away from the direct, explicit means that have been previously explored as well as direct consumption choices. Individuals with low confidence are likely to find such direct means uncomfortable for a variety of reasons, including their implied commitment to certain ideas and the justifications and behaviors that they require (which low confidence individuals may simply be ill equipped to engage in). Conversely, individuals with high confidence in the system will prefer these direct means of justifying the system. They will be drawn toward such means because these means allow them to communicate their strong, unwavering confidence in the system in a way that feels meaningful and unambiguous to themselves and others. As their energy is focused on and their defensive needs are satisfied by these explicit means of support, they will not bother with subtle means, including the indirect consumption opportunities that those with low confidence gravitate toward. Together, these points lead to the following hypotheses regarding the interaction of threats to the system and levels of system confidence on consumers' decisions.

- H1:** The effect of system threat on consumption choices that indirectly support the system will be moderated by individuals' confidence in the system. Individuals with low confidence in the system will be more likely to support the system through consumption choices that offer the opportunity to indirectly support the system when the system is threatened versus when it is not. Individuals with high confidence in the system will show no differences in such consumption

choices when the system is threatened versus when it is not.

- H2:** The effect of system threat on direct consumption choices and other direct means of justifying the system will be moderated by individuals' confidence in the system. Individuals with high confidence in the system will be more likely to support the system directly (via explicit arguments or consumption choices that offer the opportunity to directly support the system) when the system is threatened than when it is not. Individuals with low confidence in the system will show no differences in such direct support for the system when the system is threatened versus when it is not.

In what follows, we present five studies that highlight the important influence of system threats on consumption choices. Specifically, we seek to demonstrate how people differ in the way they prefer to defend their system, how this is revealed via consumption choices, and why.

EXPERIMENT 1

In our first experiment we investigate how the need to justify one's system leads individuals to prefer consumption choices that indirectly support their system. We expect to find that when facing a clear threat to the system, individuals with low confidence in the system will be more likely to choose national brands (i.e., those founded and headquartered in the United States) over international brands (i.e., those founded and headquartered outside the United States). We consider national brands to be a means of indirectly supporting the system because they allow individuals to show support for their country without explicitly expressing a commitment to ideas and beliefs that support the system. If, for example, individuals decided to protest against American policies tomorrow, they could rationalize their choice of Nike shoes today as one based on color, size, price, quality, and so on without ever focusing on a desire to support the system. Importantly, we do not expect individuals with high confidence in the system to change their consumption preferences, as they prefer more direct means of doing so and direct their resources and energy toward searching for those types of outlets. This initial demonstration would be consistent with recent research demonstrating that threats to personal control and extreme attacks on a country are often most likely to generate a reaction from individuals with little confidence in that country (Banfield et al., forthcoming).

Method

Participants. Thirty-six individuals were recruited from a nationally representative sample to participate in a study online. The mean age was 42.6 (ranging from 19 to 75), and all were U.S. citizens.

Procedure. Individuals were told that the purpose of this study was twofold: first, we were interested in their reaction to a current issue, and second, we wanted to better understand their attitudes toward consumer goods. Participants were assigned to one of two conditions and asked to read a paragraph about the United States. The paragraphs were similar to the content that one hears on the evening news, in daily newspapers, and so on. In the system threat condition, participants read the following paragraph, introduced as an excerpt from a British newspaper and written by a British journalist following his recent trip to the United States (e.g., Kay et al. 2005; Lau et al. 2008):

In the past, American society has been held up across the world as an example to follow. For instance, its democratic system of government and ideal of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" for all were touted as gold standards for the world's nations to strive for, and both the American government and the American people were admired by all for actively upholding values of kindness, tolerance and harmony between groups and between individuals. However, the past few decades have seen objective deterioration of the quality of American life and standards of living, and in the face of internal and international strife, those values which were once seen as quintessentially American have gradually been replaced by more selfish and narrow-minded attitudes. In recent years, the global community has begun to recognize that their positive view of America has more basis in the past than in current reality, and has increasingly tended towards more negative appraisals of America.

In the no threat condition, participants read the same instructions, but the article was as follows:

In the past, American society has been held up across the world as an example to follow. For instance, its democratic system of government and ideal of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" for all have been touted as gold standards for the world's nations to strive for, and both the American government and the American people have been admired by all for actively upholding values of kindness, tolerance and harmony between groups and between individuals. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of American society, however, has been its steadfastness in the face of external forces contrary to it. The quality of American life and standards of living have improved in each of the past few decades, and even in the face of increased internal and international strife, those quintessentially American values have continued to be defended by American citizens and officials, at home and abroad. In recent years, the global community has begun to recognize that their positive view of America warrants active efforts to encourage other nations to emulate its successful sides.

After reading the article, participants were told that we wanted some time to pass prior to continuing with the study and were thus going to ask a few unrelated questions in the meantime. We then asked participants to choose a brand from each of three sets of brands, where one brand in each

set was a national brand and the other was an international brand. Both brands in a set were from the same category and in the same price range: Nike versus Adidas duffle bag, Chevy versus Toyota car, Budweiser versus Corona beer mug. (These items were pretested among a separate group of participants from the same population [$N = 47$]. Participants were asked to identify which brand was the most representative of American culture and values. The national brand in each pair was chosen as the more system-supporting item at least 90% of the time in each pair of items.)

Next, in order to eliminate mood as a viable explanation for the effect of the manipulations, participants were asked to complete a three-item measure of their current mood. They were asked to describe their overall mood (5-point scale from miserable to delighted), the extent to which they were in a negative mood (5-point scale from not at all to extremely, reversed scored), and the extent to which they were in a positive mood (5-point scale from not at all to extremely). These three measures were averaged together to form a reliable index ($\alpha = .87$). Participants then completed questions about their confidence in the system (Kay and Jost 2003). This eight-item scale measures perceptions of the fairness, legitimacy, and justifiability of the prevailing system and includes items such as, "In general you find society to be fair," "Most policies serve the greater good," and "The U.S. is the best country in the world to live in." It is designed to capture differences in people's explicitly stated confidence in the status quo and is not a measure of motive or one's desire to justify the system. Those who score higher on the scale do not necessarily hold a stronger motive to view the system as fair. Participants initially indicated their degree of agreement on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 9 (strongly disagree), but the scores were recoded prior to analyses so that higher scores indicate increased levels of system confidence. A mean system confidence score was calculated for each participant by collapsing across the eight items ($\alpha = .80$).

After completing the measure of system confidence, participants answered a few demographic questions and were debriefed and thanked for their participation. Of note, manipulated system threat did not have a significant effect on mood ($F(1, 34) = .13, p = .72$). Also, given that the system confidence measure was administered at the end of the study, we ran an ANOVA to confirm that it was not affected by manipulated system threat and found it was not ($F(1, 34) = .02, p = .89$). This is not surprising given the length of time that elapsed between the manipulation and the scale. While administering the scale at the end of the study allowed us to see that the effects hold without first activating the system confidence construct, the scale was included at the beginning of the study in the remaining experiments to eliminate any concerns that the manipulations affected the scale responses.

Results

Our primary goal was to establish that people with low confidence in the system are more likely to choose national

brands that indirectly support the system after facing a standard system threat manipulation than when not. We did not expect people with high confidence in the system to respond to the threat with the given consumption choices. A repeated measures logistic regression analysis was conducted with threat condition and the continuous measure of system confidence (mean centered) as the predictors. The choice of national brand versus international brand in each of three sets of choices was the dependent variable, where higher values represent the choice of more national brands. The analysis revealed a significant simple effect of threat condition ($B = .34, Z = 1.93, p = .05$). Participants preferred national brands more often when threatened than when not threatened. This effect was qualified by a significant interaction of condition and the system confidence measure ($B = -.48, Z = -3.33, p < .001$). As system confidence is a continuous measure, we followed the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991) and outlined in a recent *Journal of Consumer Research* editorial (Fitzsimons 2008) to probe this interaction. Accordingly, the analysis was repeated at one standard deviation below the centered mean of the system confidence measure and one standard deviation above. The analysis revealed a significant simple effect of condition among low confidence individuals ($B = .99, Z = 3.68, p < .001$). Low confidence individuals were more likely to choose national brands when threatened (57%) than when not (15%). As anticipated, the effect of condition was not significant among individuals with high confidence in the system ($B = -.31, Z = -1.21, p = .22$; see fig. 1).

Discussion

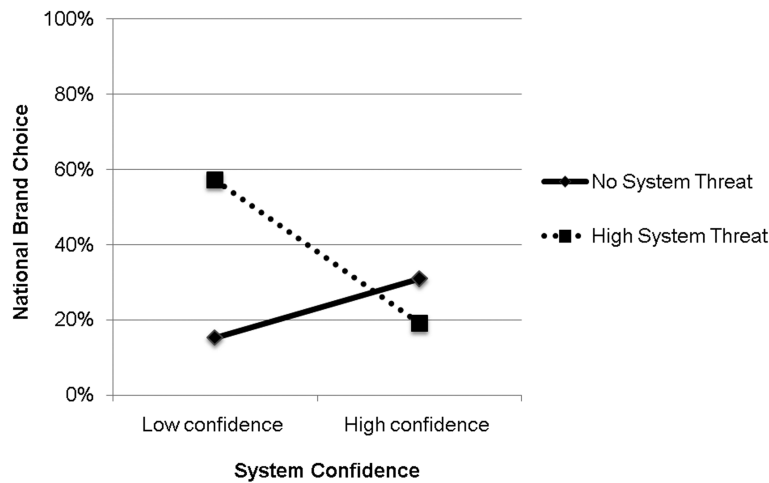
Study 1 demonstrates that individuals with low confidence in their system are more likely to use consumption choices to indirectly defend the system when facing an attack on the system than when not. We also find that system threat does not change the product preferences of individuals with high confidence in the system. Thus, hypothesis 1 is supported and provides the foundation for the studies that follow.

EXPERIMENT 2

Given that previous research has demonstrated that people also respond to other threats with a stronger preference for national brands, especially mortality salience threats (Fransen et al. 2008; Jonas et al. 2002; Jonas, Fritsche, and Greenberg 2005; Liu and Smeesters 2010), one might wonder whether the pattern we observe in study 1 would be the same for any threat. In other words, do individuals with low versus high confidence in the system react differently to all threats?

In study 2, we aim to show that system threat is unique in its effects, particularly as related to mortality salience. Terror management theory suggests that under threat, individuals should strengthen or polarize their worldviews, regardless of the specific content of those worldviews (Arndt, Greenberg, and Cook 2002). In the context of our

FIGURE 1
PRODUCT CHOICE BY SYSTEM THREAT CONDITION AND SYSTEM CONFIDENCE



research, this would suggest that threat should lead those who are low in system confidence to have even less confidence in the system and that those who are high in system confidence should become even more confident in the system. In terms of study 1 specifically, a mortality salience explanation for our effects would predict that threat should decrease the likelihood that low system confidence individuals will choose system-supportive consumption items and increase the likelihood that high system confidence individuals will do so. This is not the pattern we observe in study 1, however. In study 1, threat caused low system confidence individuals to actually increase their system defense through selecting consumption products that are indirectly supportive of the system while high system confidence individuals did not.

Although the results of study 1 suggest that terror management theory is not driving our results, it is nevertheless still conceivable that a threat to the system may highlight individuals' sense of mortality and, through doing so, alter their consumption patterns. Consistent with this, terror management theory suggests that fear of mortality is at the root of all motivational behavior (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon 1997). To rule out a mortality salience explanation for our results, we explicitly pit system threat against mortality salience. Because system threat and mortality salience threaten two different aspects of the self—that is, people's sense of mortality versus their feelings about the legitimacy of the system—we do not expect that they will lead to the same pattern of defensive behavior. Under system threat, we expect to see that low system confidence individuals will prefer to defend the system using indirect consumption methods and that high confidence individuals will not. We do not expect to see this interaction replicate under mortality salience. It is important to note, however, that we do not mean to suggest that the effects of mortality salience will

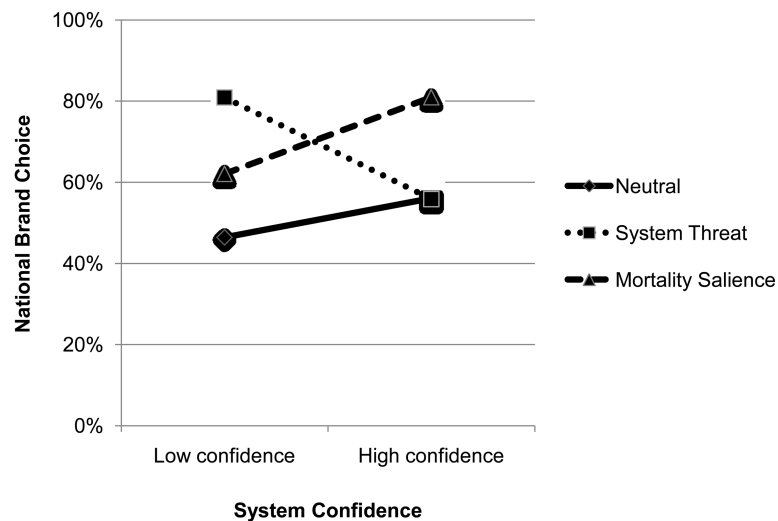
never be moderated by individual differences that are relevant to the underlying motivations associated with threats to mortality; we are simply suggesting that mortality salience is distinct from fears regarding the legitimacy of one's system and, thus, it should not be moderated by one's confidence in the legitimacy of the system.

Method

Participants. One hundred and eighteen individuals were recruited from a nationally representative sample to participate in a study online. The mean age was 53 (ranging from 18 to 83), and all were U.S. citizens.

Procedure. Similar to study 1, individuals were told that we were interested in their reaction to a current issue and their attitudes toward a variety of consumer goods. We first asked participants to complete the measure of system confidence ($\alpha = .80$). They then completed a filler task. Next, participants were assigned to one of three conditions. In the system threat condition, participants received the same threat paragraph as presented in study 1 ("In the past, American society has been held up across the world as an example to follow . . ."). In the mortality salience condition, participants responded to two open-ended questions used in much of the previous mortality salience research (e.g., Arndt et al. 2002): "In the space provided, please briefly describe the emotions that the thought of your own death arouses in you" and "Jot down, as specifically as you can, what you think will happen to you physically as you die and once you are physically dead." Participants in the neutral condition responded to the same two open-ended questions, except with reference to dental pain (e.g., Arndt et al. 2002). All participants were then asked to complete a neutral filler exercise (i.e., they were asked to read a short paragraph about U.S.

FIGURE 2
PRODUCT CHOICE BY SYSTEM THREAT CONDITION AND SYSTEM CONFIDENCE



geography) and answer questions about their mood (with the same three-item measure of study 1; $\alpha = .85$). This filler was introduced between the manipulation and choice task in accordance with prior mortality salience research that has found mortality salience manipulations to be most effective after a delay (e.g., Arndt et al. 2002; Liu and Smeesters 2010). Participants then completed the same dependent variable used in study 1 (choice of national vs. international brand in three pairs of items).

Results

A repeated measures logistic regression was conducted to test our prediction that the impact of system threat on brand choice would be moderated by system confidence while the impact of mortality salience would not. The predictors were the three conditions (system threat, mortality salience, neutral condition), as well as the continuous measure of system confidence. The dependent variable was the choice of national versus international brand among three pairs of items (where a higher score indicates more national brands). We first find a simple main effect of condition (comparing system threat and neutral conditions) whereby higher system threat leads to the choice of more national brands ($B = .77$, $Z = 2.60$, $p = .009$). We also find a simple main effect of condition when comparing mortality salience and the neutral condition ($B = .92$, $Z = 3.05$, $p = .002$) whereby mortality salience leads to greater choice of national brands than the neutral condition. Importantly, the simple main effect of system threat versus the neutral condition was qualified by an interaction with the measure of system confidence ($B = -.63$, $Z = -.44$, $p = .01$), while the effect of mortality salience was not ($B = .22$, $Z = 1.01$, $p = .31$).

In accordance with Aiken and West (1991), we probe this interaction of condition (system threat vs. neutral) and system confidence at high and low levels of system confidence. At low levels of system confidence, we find a main effect of system threat condition whereby individuals facing high system threat are more likely to choose national brands than those facing low system threat ($B = 1.59$, $Z = 3.93$, $p < .0001$; $M_{\text{high threat}} = 81\%$, $M_{\text{low threat}} = 56\%$). However, at high levels of system confidence, there is no effect of threat condition ($B = .04$, $Z = .09$, $p = .93$; see fig. 2).

Discussion

The results of study 2 provide further support for the idea that individuals with low (but not high) confidence in the system will use indirect consumption choices to support the system when the system is threatened. Moreover, study 2 demonstrates that not all threats have the same effects on consumption choices. System threat appears to be unique in its distinct pattern among individuals with low versus high levels of confidence in the system, suggesting that consumption choices serve different needs in response to system threats than they do in response to mortality salience.

EXPERIMENT 3

In studies 1 and 2, we demonstrated that individuals with low versus high levels of confidence in the system react differently to the opportunity to defend the system through indirect consumption choices. While we argue that this is because they differ in their preferred method of defending the system, one may wonder if it is instead a lack of motivation that keeps high confidence individuals from responding to indirect consumption choices. We seek to reject

this alternative explanation by using a lexical decision task to demonstrate that the activation of the justice motive (as measured by the accessibility of justice-related words) does not differ between low and high confidence individuals when the system is threatened.

Method

Participants. Ninety-one participants were recruited from a Canadian university. The mean age was 19 (range was from 17 to 27).

Procedure. When signing up for this study, participants were asked to complete the measure of system confidence (slightly modified with all references to America replaced with Canada; $\alpha = .86$). Upon arriving at the lab, participants were asked to read a threatening or nonthreatening paragraph about the Canadian system, written by a British journalist, just as in studies 1 and 2 (e.g., Kay et al. 2005; Lau et al. 2008).

System threat condition:

These days, many people in Canada feel disappointed with the nation's condition. Many citizens feel that the country has reached a low point in terms of social, economic, and political factors. They feel that Canada is becoming less significant in the world, and is often ignored when global issues are at hand. . . . It seems that many countries in the world are enjoying better social, economic, and political conditions than Canada. More and more Canadians express a willingness to leave Canada and emigrate to other nations.

No-threat condition:

These days, despite the difficulties the nation is facing, many people in Canada feel that the nation is in better shape relative to the past. Many citizens feel that the country is relatively stable in terms of social, economic, and political factors. They feel that Canada is becoming more significant in the world, and often plays a role when global issues are at hand. . . . It seems that compared with many countries in the world the social, economic, and political conditions in Canada are relatively good. Very few Canadians express a willingness to leave Canada and emigrate to other nations.

Participants were then asked to complete a test of their verbal ability on the computer. The test was in fact a lexical decision task that was used to measure the degree to which reading the article had activated the justice motive. The procedure for the lexical decision task was adopted directly from Kay and Jost (2003), who used it to gauge whether complementary stereotypes satisfy or threaten the justice motive. The target letter strings were displayed in black lettering on a white background in the center of the computer screen. Participants were permitted to work at their own pace. They first completed 12 practice trials and then 75 experimental trials. Participants were then told to judge as quickly as possible whether the letter string displayed on the screen was a word or not by pressing a key labeled "word" (the A key) if they thought the string was a word

or by pressing the key labeled "nonword" (the L key) if they did not think it was a word.

For each trial, participants were exposed to one of the following: (a) a nonword (36 letter strings, with each string shown only once), (b) a neutral word (volume, finger, calendar, candle, with each word shown six times), or (c) a justice-related word (fair, legitimate, just, valid, justified, with each word shown three times). The nonwords were generated by changing one letter in randomly selected words. The neutral and justice words were taken from Kay and Jost (2003).

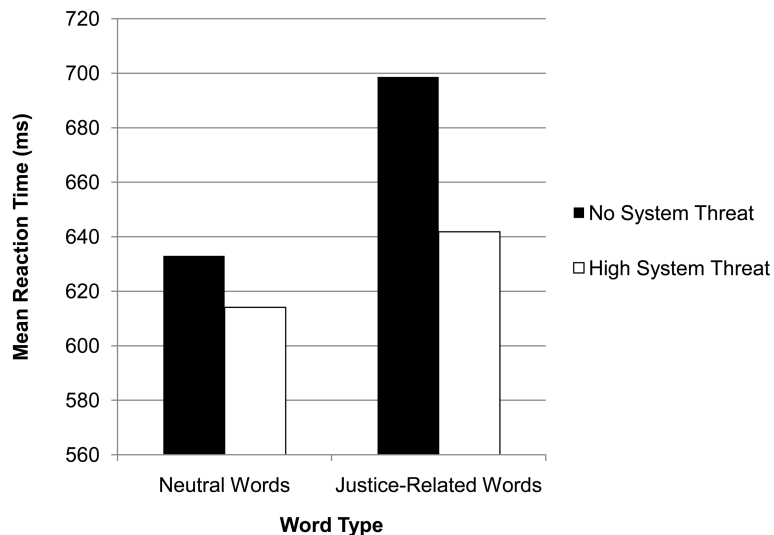
The justice-related words were the focal words for examining the impact of system threat among individuals with low and high confidence in the system. Neutral words were introduced to control for unforeseen and nonspecific effects of primes on lexical decisions. Mean response latencies were calculated for each participant by averaging across trials within each category of word stimuli. (Following standard procedures for analyzing reaction-time data, mean response latencies exceeding three standard deviations from the mean and errors greater than 10% were removed. Eighty-three participants are thus included in the analyses that follow.)

Results

We hypothesized that exposure to the system threat condition would threaten beliefs in the justice of the system and therefore lead to faster reaction times for justice-related words (but not for neutral words). Our key concern, distinct from that explored in Kay and Jost (2003), was whether or not this would be truer for individuals with low confidence in the system. If so, this would indicate that the system threat leads to greater motivation for low confidence than high confidence individuals. We began by analyzing the three-way interaction with the following factors: threat condition (high system threat vs. control), word type (response latency to justice-related words and neutral words), and a continuous measure of system confidence. The word type factor was a within-subjects variable. The three-way interaction of threat condition, word type, and system confidence was not significant ($F(1, 79) = 2.38, p = .13$). However, as predicted, the analysis yielded a two-way interaction of condition and word type ($F(1, 79) = 5.52, p = .02$; see fig. 3). There were no other significant main effects or interactions, with the exception of a simple effect of word type where neutral words were recognized more quickly than justice words across both conditions ($F(1, 79) = 38.65, p < .0001$).

To further investigate the two-way interaction of threat condition and word type, we focused first on the effect of condition on the justice-related words. The main effect of condition was significant ($F(1, 79) = 2.00, p = .05$). In the threat condition, participants showed faster reaction times to justice-related words ($M = 641.8$ milliseconds) than people in the neutral condition ($M = 698.6$ milliseconds). To further confirm that there was no significant interaction with system confidence, we also analyzed the interaction of condition and system confidence among only

FIGURE 3
REACTION TIME BY SYSTEM THREAT CONDITION AND WORD TYPE



the justice-related words. It was not significant ($F(1, 79) < 1, p = .99$).

Next, we analyzed the effect of condition on the neutral words. The effect of condition was not significant ($F(1, 79) = .79, p = .38$), indicating that people were not simply faster at recognizing all words after threat. We also checked the interaction of condition and system confidence among only the neutral words, and it was not significant ($F(1, 79) < 1, p = .34$).

Discussion

Study 3 provides evidence that individuals who are low in system confidence and those who are high in system confidence both respond to threats to their system with increased system justification concerns. Thus, differences in motivation to defend the system cannot explain the pattern of results we found in studies 1 and 2.

Throughout this paper, we have argued that low confidence individuals prefer indirect methods of defense and that high confidence individuals prefer more direct methods of defense. In studies 1 and 2, we demonstrated that low confidence individuals apply this motivation to making consumption choices that allow them to indirectly support the system. In study 4, we test the hypothesis that high confidence individuals prefer more direct means of justification.

EXPERIMENT 4

Study 4 tests our hypothesis that low confidence individuals are using indirect consumption choices in lieu of more direct means of justifying the system while high confidence individuals prefer more direct routes of justification. To test

this hypothesis, we provide participants with both a direct system justification option (i.e., the opportunity to explicitly disagree with and derogate the source of the threat) and an indirect option (i.e., the choice of national vs. international brands) following system threat. We expect that, following system threat, individuals with low confidence in the system will respond via the indirect consumption choices whereas individuals with high confidence will respond via direct derogation of the speaker.

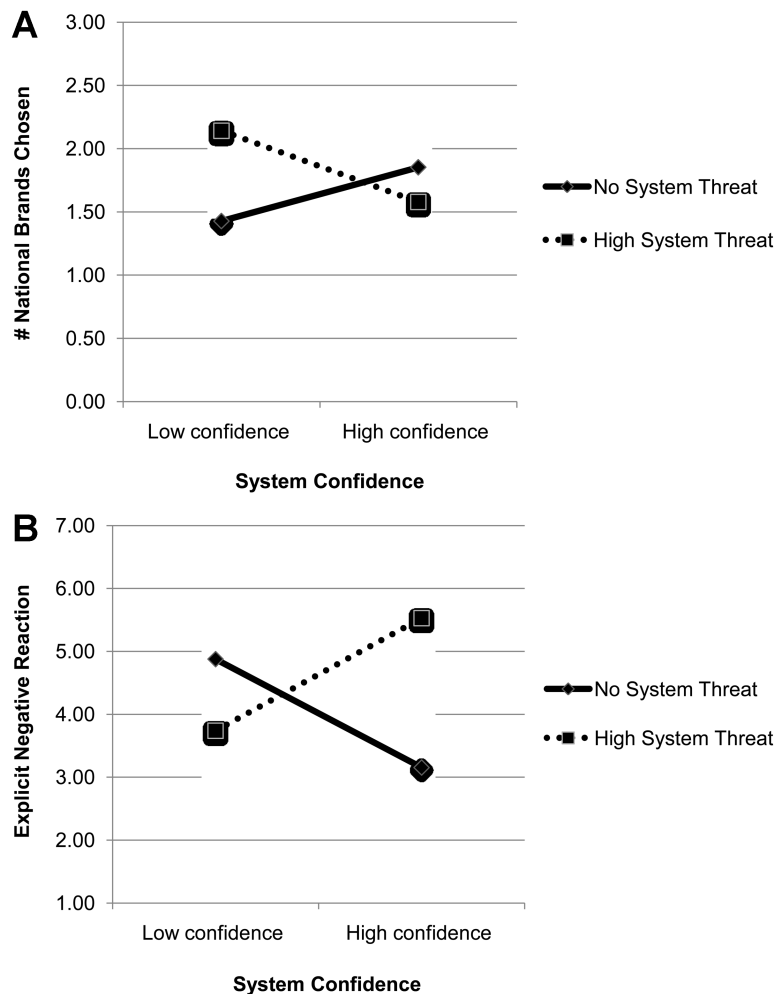
Method

Participants. Eighty-eight individuals were recruited from a nationally representative sample to participate in a study online. The mean age was 53 (ranging from 21 to 84), and all were U.S. citizens.

Procedure. Individuals were told that we were interested in their reaction to a current issue and their attitudes toward consumer goods. Participants first completed the measure of system confidence ($\alpha = .75$) and a filler scale. Participants were then assigned to one of two conditions, purportedly written by a British journalist as in the prior studies: either the system threat condition (“In the past, American society has been held up across the world as an example to follow . . .”) or a neutral paragraph about U.S. geography. Participants were then given the opportunity to state how they felt about the author of the paragraph that they just read. They rated the extent to which the speaker was biased, ignorant, jealous, inaccurate, and unfair on a scale of 1–7, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree. We formed an index of direct response by averaging the response to each adjective ($\alpha = .91$). Participants were then asked to choose between three pairs of national versus

FIGURE 4

PRODUCT CHOICE (A) AND SPEAKER RATINGS (B) BY SYSTEM THREAT CONDITION AND SYSTEM CONFIDENCE



international brands (same as in studies 1, 2, and 4). Finally, we measured mood ($\alpha = .72$) and found no effect of condition on mood ($F(1, 86) = .35, p = .56$).

Results

Our hypothesis was that individuals who were low versus high in system confidence would respond differently to the opportunity to directly and indirectly support the system. The predictors in our repeated measures analysis were threat condition (high threat vs. no threat), system confidence measure, and type of response (indirect system support via choice of national brands and direct system support via the derogation of the speaker). The “type of response” was a within-subjects variable. Of note, response to the passage in terms of consumption choice (national vs. international brands) was measured as the total number of national brands

chosen instead of using repeated measures logistic regression to allow us to make direct comparisons to the direct response index. (The results are also significant when we use the repeated measures logistic regression analysis.) The dependent variable consisted of the standardized scores for the number of national brands chosen and ratings of the speaker. The graphs present the raw results (see fig. 4A and B).

The results revealed a three-way interaction of condition, system confidence, and type of response ($F(1, 84) = 20.68, p < .0001$.) To better understand this interaction, we first analyze the two-way interaction of condition and system confidence when the response measure is indirect (i.e., the number of national vs. international brands chosen). This interaction is significant ($B = .54, t(1, 84) = 2.80, p = .01$). Next, we analyze the two-way interaction of condition and system confidence when the response measure is direct

(i.e., explicit derogation). This interaction is also significant ($B = -1.37$, $t(1, 84) = -3.89$, $p = .0002$); however, the patterns differ among these interactions significantly.

To better understand the patterns of the interactions noted above, we first probe the significant interaction of condition and system confidence on the indirect dependent variable (i.e., national vs. international brands). In accordance with Aiken and West (1991), we analyze the effect of condition for individuals who are low versus high in confidence in the system (one standard deviation below and above the mean of system confidence, respectively). We find a significant effect of condition on the indirect dependent variable among low confidence individuals ($B = -1.09$, $t(1, 84) = -2.92$, $p = .004$) such that low confidence individuals are more likely to choose national brands when threatened ($M = 2.14$) than when not threatened ($M = 1.43$). Consistent with our previous findings, we do not find a significant effect of condition on the indirect dependent variable among high confidence individuals ($B = .28$, $t(1, 84) = .94$, $p = .35$).

Having replicated the pattern that we observed in the previous studies with respect to our indirect dependent variable (national vs. international brand choices), we now analyze the interaction of condition and system confidence on the direct dependent variable (i.e., explicit derogation). We again analyze the effect of condition for individuals who are low versus high in confidence in the system (one standard deviation below and above the mean of system confidence, respectively). There is no significant effect of condition on the direct dependent variable among individuals with low confidence in the system ($B = 1.14$, $t(1, 84) = 1.66$, $p = .10$), indicating that low confidence individuals do not express significantly more negative comments about the speaker when threatened than when not threatened. However, we do find a significant effect of condition among high confidence individuals ($B = -2.37$, $t(1, 84) = -4.25$, $p < .0001$), whereby high confidence individuals express more negative comments when threatened ($M = 5.53$) than when not ($M = 3.15$).

Discussion

The results of study 4 support our hypothesis that in the face of threat, both individuals who are high and those who are low in system confidence support the system but that they do so in very different ways. Specifically, our results indicate that individuals with high confidence in the system chose to directly justify the system by derogating a threatening speaker. Individuals with low confidence in the system, on the other hand, avoided directly supporting the system through derogation and instead turned to indirect consumption choices to justify the system.

While these findings provide strong support for the idea that individuals with low confidence in the system will turn to consumption choices as a means to justify the system and away from the direct means studied in the literature to date, study 5 seeks to provide an important boundary condition regarding exactly when such individuals will do so. If we are correct in arguing that low confidence individuals use

consumption choices because they often provide an indirect means of supporting the system, it follows that when these choices are no longer indirect and are instead direct means of justifying the system, low confidence individuals should no longer be comfortable using them to defend the system, while high confidence individuals should find value in using them.

EXPERIMENT 5

In study 5, our objective is to demonstrate that consumption choices can not only be used to indirectly support the system but also often provide direct support for the system. We argue that these two characteristics of consumption choices allow us to clearly demonstrate distinctions in how people prefer to defend the system. According to our conceptualization, individuals with low confidence in the system should only use their choices to support the system when they provide an indirect, subtle means of doing so. When choices become direct and explicit tools for defending the system, they lose value for low confidence people but gain value among high confidence people. To test this idea, participants are given the opportunity to choose between a national product and an international product when the national product supports the American sociopolitical system indirectly (as in studies 1, 2, and 4) or when the national product supports the American system in a very direct way. We expect that when threatened individuals are provided with the opportunity to choose an indirect national brand, the pattern from prior studies will emerge: individuals with low confidence in the system will respond via their consumption choices and those with high confidence will not. Conversely, if individuals are provided with the opportunity to choose a direct, system-justifying national brand, individuals with low confidence in the system will not respond, but those with high confidence will. In other words, those with high confidence in the system will finally consider the opportunity to choose national brands that are directly, explicitly supporting the system as a meaningful way to defend the system.

Method

Participants. One hundred and thirty-eight individuals were recruited from a nationally representative sample to participate in a study online. The mean age was 50 (ranging from 21 to 80), and all were U.S. citizens.

Procedure. Individuals were told that we were interested in their reaction to a current issue and their attitudes toward consumer goods. Participants first completed the measure of system confidence ($\alpha = .79$) and a filler scale. Participants were then assigned to one of two conditions, purportedly written by a British journalist: either the system threat condition (“In the past, American society has been held up across the world as an example to follow . . .”) or the geography control. Participants were then asked to choose one item in each of three pairs of national versus international brands. In the indirect condition, par-

participants made a choice between a shirt from an American company that showed no direct support for the system (i.e., the shirt displayed only the brand's logo) and a shirt from a foreign company (that also displayed only the brand's logo) for three different pairs of items. The pairs included Old Navy versus French Connection T-shirt, Ralph Lauren polo-style versus Lacoste polo-style shirt, Nike versus Puma T-shirt. In the direct condition, participants chose between the same three pairs of brands, except the national shirts in this case had a statement that directly endorsed the system embedded on the front of the original shirt design. More specifically, the Old Navy shirt had an American flag added to the front of the original design; the Ralph Lauren shirt had "U.S. Pride" typed on the front of the original design; and the Nike T-shirt had "Love It or Get Out" surrounding an American flag on the front of the original design. The international brands were identical in the direct and indirect conditions.

Results

Pretest. To ensure that the items described above as direct versus indirect means of support for the system were viewed as such by participants, a pretest was conducted with 28 adults from the same population as the main study. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each direct and indirect product demonstrated support for the United States (where 1 = not at all and 7 = to a great extent). For our analyses, two indexes were formed based on the average ratings of the direct options ($\alpha = .87$) and the average ratings of the indirect options ($\alpha = .89$). Results indicated that the direct options were indeed rated as significantly higher in support for the United States ($M_{\text{direct}} = 5.17$, $M_{\text{indirect}} = 1.67$; $t(27) = 10.40$, $p < .0001$). Of note, this pattern held for each individual pair of direct versus indirect options as well (e.g., Old Navy direct shirt vs. Old Navy indirect shirt).

Main Results. Our hypothesis was that individuals who were low versus high in system confidence would respond differently to the opportunity to directly or indirectly support the system through their choices. The predictors in our logistic regression repeated measures analysis were threat condition (high threat vs. no threat), system confidence measure, and type of national brand included in the choice set (indirect national brand vs. direct national brand).

The results revealed a three-way interaction of condition, system confidence, and type of national brand ($B = -1.29$, $Z = -3.15$, $p < .01$.) To better understand this interaction, we first analyze the two-way interaction of condition and system confidence when the national brand in the set is "indirect" (i.e., national brand with no explicit endorsement of the system). This interaction is significant ($B = .50$, $Z = 2.03$, $p = .04$; see fig. 5A). Next, we analyze the two-way interaction of condition and system confidence when the national brand in the set is direct (i.e., national brand with explicit endorsement of the system). This interaction is also significant ($B = -.79$, $Z = 2.41$, $p = .02$; see fig.

5B); however, the patterns between these interactions are opposite in direction.

To better understand the patterns of the interactions noted above, we probe the significant interaction of condition and system confidence on the choice between the indirect national brands and international brands. We first analyze the effect of condition for individuals who are low versus high in confidence in the system (one standard deviation below and above the mean of system confidence, respectively). We find a significant effect of condition on the indirect dependent variable among low confidence individuals ($B = -1.01$, $Z = -1.98$, $p = .05$) such that when the national brand is an indirect form of support for the system, low confidence individuals are more likely to choose national brands when threatened ($M = 80\%$) than when not threatened ($M = 60\%$). Consistent with our previous findings, we do not find a significant effect of condition on the choice between the indirect national brands and international brands among high confidence individuals ($B = .22$, $Z = .61$, $p = .54$).

Having replicated the pattern that we observed in previous studies with respect to individuals who are given a choice between indirect national brands and international brands, we now analyze the interaction of condition and system confidence on the choice between direct national brands and international brands. We again analyze the effect of condition for individuals who are low versus high in confidence in the system. There is no significant effect of condition on the dependent variable among individuals with low confidence in the system ($B = .38$, $Z = .81$, $p = .42$), indicating that low confidence individuals do not choose more national brands when threatened than when not threatened if the national brand directly endorses the system. However, we do find a significant effect of condition among high confidence individuals ($B = -1.58$, $Z = -2.32$, $p < .02$), whereby high confidence individuals are more likely to choose the national brand when threatened ($M = 89\%$) than when not threatened ($M = 64\%$) if the national brand directly endorses the system.

Discussion

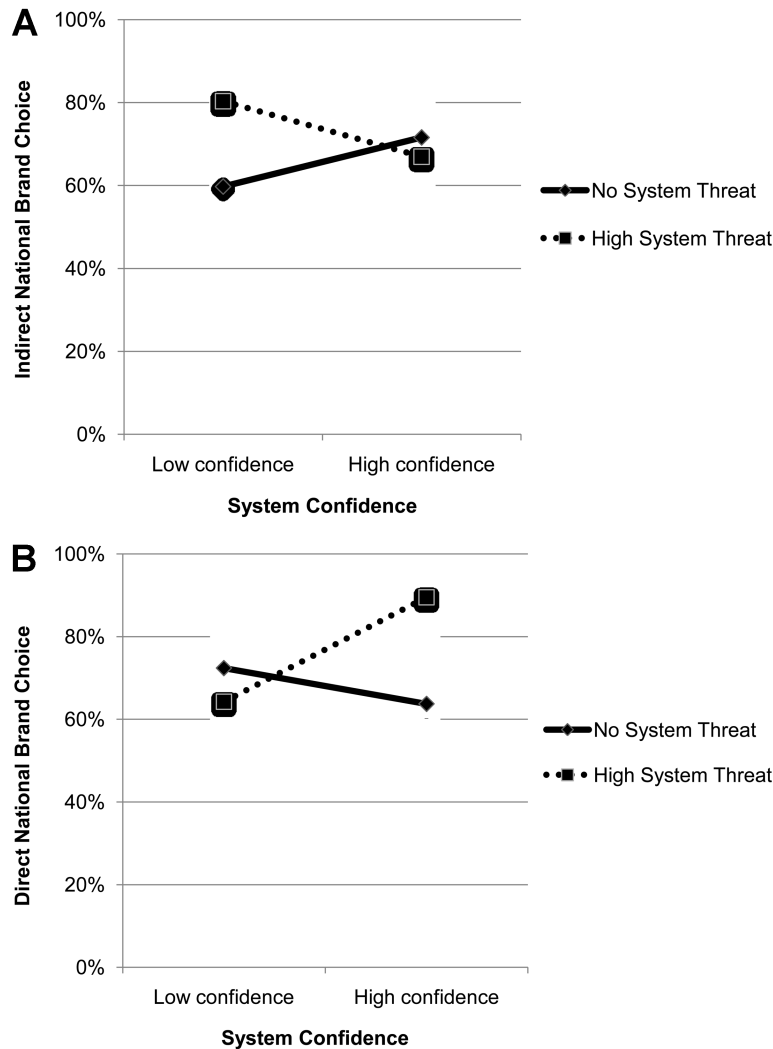
Study 5 provides further support for the idea that individuals with low confidence in the system often use their consumption choices as a means to justify the system because it is an indirect, comfortable means of justifying the system. We demonstrate that when this ceases to be true, and consumption becomes a direct, explicit means of justifying the system, low confidence individuals no longer use their choices to defend the system. Individuals with high confidence, however, will now perceive the choice as a meaningful opportunity to defend the system. In this way, consumption proves to be a flexible domain that illustrates both direct and indirect defense of the system.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across five studies, we have demonstrated that people use their consumption choices to defend the system. More im-

FIGURE 5

INDIRECT (A) AND DIRECT (B) PRODUCT CHOICE BY SYSTEM THREAT CONDITION AND SYSTEM CONFIDENCE



portantly, we have demonstrated that how they do so (directly vs. indirectly) depends on their level of confidence in the system. In study 1, we demonstrated that individuals with low confidence in the system are more likely to choose national brands when threatened than when not but that individuals with high confidence are not. In study 2, we demonstrated that system threat has distinct effects from mortality salience when system confidence is considered. In study 3, we leveraged a lexical decision task to demonstrate that the differential behavior of individuals with low versus high confidence in the system cannot be accounted for by differences in motivation. Finally, in studies 4 and 5, we demonstrated that individuals who are low versus high in confidence in the system prefer different means of justifying the system. Individuals with low confidence in the system

prefer to support the system indirectly through consumption choices (when such choices provide an indirect means of supporting the system) while those with high confidence in the system prefer to respond directly, either by derogating the source of a threat (study 4) or by using consumption choices that directly support the system (study 5).

Together, these studies offer several important theoretical contributions. First, this research contributes significantly to the system justification literature by demonstrating how the interaction between situational and dispositional factors reveals systematic ways by which individuals differ in their means of supporting the system. Second, this research demonstrates how exploring distinct forms of consumption choices (direct and indirect) allows us to reveal such differences. Specifically, we focus on the value of indirect

consumption choices for low confidence individuals (who reject the means of system justification previously explored) as well as the value of direct choices for those with high confidence in the system. Thus, in exploring consumption as a route to justification, we not only enhance our understanding of the flexible way that consumption choices can be used to cope with threats but we also uncover a pattern of justification behavior that may have otherwise gone unnoticed in system justification research. In addition, this work contributes to the growing literature in consumer research that focuses on how people respond to threat by demonstrating that (1) not all threats will affect consumption preferences in the same way and (2) threats beyond those focused on the self can affect choices.

This research raises several questions for future investigation. One important topic pertains to understanding whom people are communicating with when they select direct versus indirect means of defense. Are they choosing products as a way of communicating their thoughts about the system to others? Or is it about personal communication to themselves? In other words, would we find the same pattern of results in both public and private consumption settings? Along the same lines, would there be any differences among people who differ in their motivation to impress others (e.g., low vs. high self-monitors)? If individuals are driven to demonstrate their support of the system to others, we would expect weaker effects when dealing with private consumption and weaker effects among individuals who are not as concerned with public opinion. If individuals are communicating to themselves, on the other hand, we might expect to see the same pattern regardless of whether the consumption is public or private and regardless of their levels of self-monitoring.

Research could also explore more deeply the reasons why high confidence individuals do not choose to support the system through indirect consumption choices when these are the only consumption options available for supporting the system. Our hypothesis is that these individuals would rather resort to other means of directly supporting the system (e.g., derogating others) than systematically invest time or money into indirect, subtle means of defense. However, further research is required for a better understanding of this behavior. Through such research, one might also discover specific instances in which indirect methods of defense are attended to and appreciated by high confidence individuals.

It would also be interesting to explore the conditions under which participants are actually likely to reject the system through consumption choices. System justification theory does not suggest that people will always justify the system. Given that the system justification motive is designed to help people cope with specific existential and epistemic threats (Jost and Hunyady 2002, 2005), the system justification motive fades when these threats are not salient. Thus, it would be interesting to explore the particular conditions under which people will begin to reject the current, yet outgoing, status quo in consumption choices in favor of inevitable change.

We hope that the theoretical implications of this research

will initiate future work that allows researchers to better understand how consumers defend their world through their consumption choices. We also hope that it provides helpful insights to marketers launching the newest initiatives for Nike, Starbucks, Chevy, or other brands that hold strong associations for their home country. While they may assume that individuals with the highest levels of confidence in the system will be the most likely to support such products, it appears that individuals with the lowest confidence in the system may actually be the most eager target, particularly during times of threat—but only when those products steer clear of explicit, direct support for the system.

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