



Psychosocial resources linking consumer identification and social well-being: Integrating the social identity approach with transformative service research

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ABSTRACT

This research integrates the social identity approach (SIA) to health and well-being with Transformative Service Research to explore how group-based psychosocial resources mediate the relationship between consumers' identification with service organizations and their social well-being. Two studies with US and UK consumers of sport organizations found that purpose and meaning, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust functioned as mediators between consumer identification and social well-being. In addition, in-group trust served as an immediate mediator, transmitting the effects of purpose and meaning as well as perceived pro-group norms on social well-being. These findings contribute to Transformative Service Research by illustrating group-level psychological processes for promoting consumer well-being, activated through social identification with service organizations. This perspective advances current understanding of how service organizations engage consumers as in-group members to foster their well-being, extending the application of the SIA to health and well-being in business and service research.

1. Introduction

Understanding how to promote consumer well-being is a crucial area of knowledge development for business scholars (Mick et al., 2012). Within service research, this question is addressed through a growing body of Transformative Service Research, which emphasizes the promotion of well-being as a primary goal for service organizations (Anderson et al., 2013; Anderson & Ostrom, 2015; Weaver et al., 2023). Transformative Service Research has been applied to various service sectors, including financial (Tang et al., 2024) and social services (Feng et al., 2019), education (Le et al., 2022), art (Gross et al., 2021), hospitality (Gallan et al., 2021), tourism (Mulcahy et al., 2023), and sport (Inoue et al., 2020).

Despite progress in Transformative Service Research, critical opportunities exist to clarify *how* service organizations contribute to consumer well-being (Tang et al., 2016, 2024). Scholars have called for

theoretical advancements in Transformative Service Research by integrating it with existing frameworks (Kuppelwieser & Finsterwalder, 2016). Attempts to address this call have focused on a need satisfaction approach (Ahn et al., 2019; Barnes et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2024). For example, Ahn et al. (2019) applied self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), demonstrating that the influence of integrated resort services on consumer well-being was mediated through the satisfaction of psychological needs (e.g., autonomy, competence). Based on self-concordance theory (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), Tang et al. (2016, 2024) showed that achieving personally meaningful goals through engagement in service organizations promoted consumers' well-being by satisfying their psychological needs. Although these studies offered a valuable perspective on the contribution of service organizations to consumer well-being, their emphasis was on *individual-level* psychological processes, overlooking the role of *groups* in shaping well-being (C. Haslam et al., 2018). This is a significant oversight because *group-level*

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factors, such as group membership, influence well-being beyond individual-level factors (Diener et al., 2018). Therefore, it is essential to advance a theoretical perspective that accounts for how *belonging to groups* formed around service organizations fosters consumer well-being.

We integrate the social identity approach (SIA) to health and well-being (C. Haslam et al., 2018) with Transformative Service Research to establish a comprehensive understanding of how service organizations may engage consumers as in-group members to promote their well-being. The SIA to health and well-being is an extension of the SIA (Abrams & Hogg, 1990) that illustrates the contribution of group membership and associated social identification (i.e., perceptions of oneness with social groups) to health and well-being outcomes. To apply the SIA to health and well-being in service contexts, we examine the construct of *consumer identification* by defining it as consumers' sense of oneness with a human aggregate surrounding a (service) organization (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Welzmueller & Schmidt, 2022). There is a burgeoning body of work concerning the relationship between consumer identification and well-being (Inoue et al., 2015; Sato et al., 2023; Su et al., 2016). However, this work has not been fully integrated with Transformative Service Research, which limits the theoretical and empirical insights drawn from prior evidence regarding the well-being consequences of consumer identification.

The central proposition of the SIA to health and well-being is that social identification motivates group members to share *social and psychological resources* (hereafter collectively referred to as “psychosocial resources”) that can yield positive outcomes for well-being (C. Haslam et al., 2018). This proposition aligns with evidence from Transformative Service Research scholarship, which suggests that through service consumption, consumers gain access to psychosocial resources, such as social support (Chou et al., 2021) and meaning (Mulcahy et al., 2023). However, there remains a significant gap in understanding how consumers' identification with service organizations may grant access to psychosocial resources that, in turn, enhance their well-being. This gap underscores the importance of ascertaining the mediational pathways through which psychosocial resources establish the relationship between consumer identification and well-being. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to examine the mediating roles of psychosocial resources in the relationship between consumers' identification with service organizations and their well-being.

2. Transformative service research

Before discussing our hypothesized relationships, we present an overview of Transformative Service Research to foreground the current investigation. The central purpose of Transformative Service Research is to demonstrate how services and service organizations can contribute to “uplifting changes in the well-being of consumers, employees, communities, ecosystems, and societies” (Blocker et al., 2022, p. 3). It builds on Transformative Consumer Research, which aims to help consumers tackle social challenges and enhance their quality of life by applying marketing concepts and techniques (Mick et al., 2012). While Transformative Consumer Research addresses consumer well-being across all consumption settings, Transformative Service Research focuses on the interactions between consumers and service providers (Weaver et al., 2023). In doing so, Transformative Service Research seeks to develop knowledge about how service-based interactions may influence the well-being of both consumers and service providers (Anderson et al., 2013).

Anderson et al.'s (2013) framework of Transformative Service Research identifies two primary types of well-being outcomes that can be affected through service-based interactions: hedonic and eudaimonic. *Hedonic well-being* refers to the experience of pleasure and happiness as indicated by enhancements in life satisfaction and positive affect as well as the absence of negative affect (Ryan & Deci, 2001). *Eudaimonic well-being* refers to realizing human potential, commonly operationalized through dimensions of psychological well-being (e.g., autonomy,

personal growth; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Studies have shown that service consumption is associated with both types of well-being for consumers in fitness (Le et al., 2022), hospitality (Ahn et al., 2019), and tourism settings (Mulcahy et al., 2023).

Since Anderson et al.'s (2013) foundational work, scholars have expanded their investigations to include other types of consumer well-being (Gallan et al., 2021). Examples include physical (Russell-Bennett et al., 2020), financial (Brüggen et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2024), and social well-being (Wilson-Nash et al., 2023). Among them, *social well-being*—which encompasses an individual's appraisal of their functioning and circumstances within society (Keyes, 1998; Lamers et al., 2011)—has received growing attention in Transformative Service Research (Chou et al., 2021; Feng et al., 2019, 2023; Wilson-Nash et al., 2023). For example, Wilson-Nash et al. (2023) demonstrated the role of social networking services in enhancing the social well-being of older adults during COVID-19. Feng et al. (2019, 2023) and Chou et al. (2021) found that perceptions of social interactions with other consumers and employees in service settings were associated with consumers' social well-being. The focus on social well-being reflects its increasing importance in public policy (Diener et al., 2018). Therefore, building on the emerging body of work linking services with social well-being, we examine social well-being as an outcome of consumers' identification with service organizations (see Fig. 1) to enhance the relevance of Transformative Service Research scholarship for public policy.

3. Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Fig. 1 shows our research model, developed by incorporating theoretical implications from the SIA to health and well-being (C. Haslam et al., 2018) into Transformative Service Research. Next, we review the tenets of the SIA to health and well-being to develop six hypotheses specified in our model.

3.1. Social identity approach to health and well-being

We focus on the potentially positive outcomes associated with consumers' identification with service organizations. This is not to downplay the potential detrimental features of group life. These include conflict between members, bullying of individuals, and in-group failure (Conroy et al., 2017), which correspond to the findings of Transformative Service Research studies shedding light on unintended negative outcomes of service consumption (Polonsky et al., 2024), such as financial and psychological burdens on service users and their families (Berry et al., 2022) and feelings of dissatisfaction and displeasure (Vlahos et al., 2022). While acknowledging the need for further investigations into such negative consequences and ways to mitigate them (Blocker et al., 2022), we draw from social psychological theorizing to expand knowledge concerning why consumer identification may lead to positive social and psychological outcomes. To frame our analysis, we draw from the SIA, which amalgamates social identity and self-categorization theories (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Social identity theory posits that alongside personal identity (who “I” am), people define their self-concept in terms of group memberships (who “we” are) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Turner et al. (1987) extended this idea through self-categorization theory, explaining that social identification is made possible through the self-categorization process, whereby individuals' self-stereotype themselves and others as interchangeable based on a shared interest. This self-categorical relationship makes shared understandings of social norms, out-groups, and reality possible.

Social identification leads to the intertwining of a person's self-concept with the success of their associated organizations and groups (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). When a given social identification (e.g., consumers of an organization) is activated in a person's self-concept, the group's perceived intergroup status is critical to the ways in which it is evaluated by members. When the relative status of an in-group is evaluated positively, it has beneficial consequences for members (C. Haslam

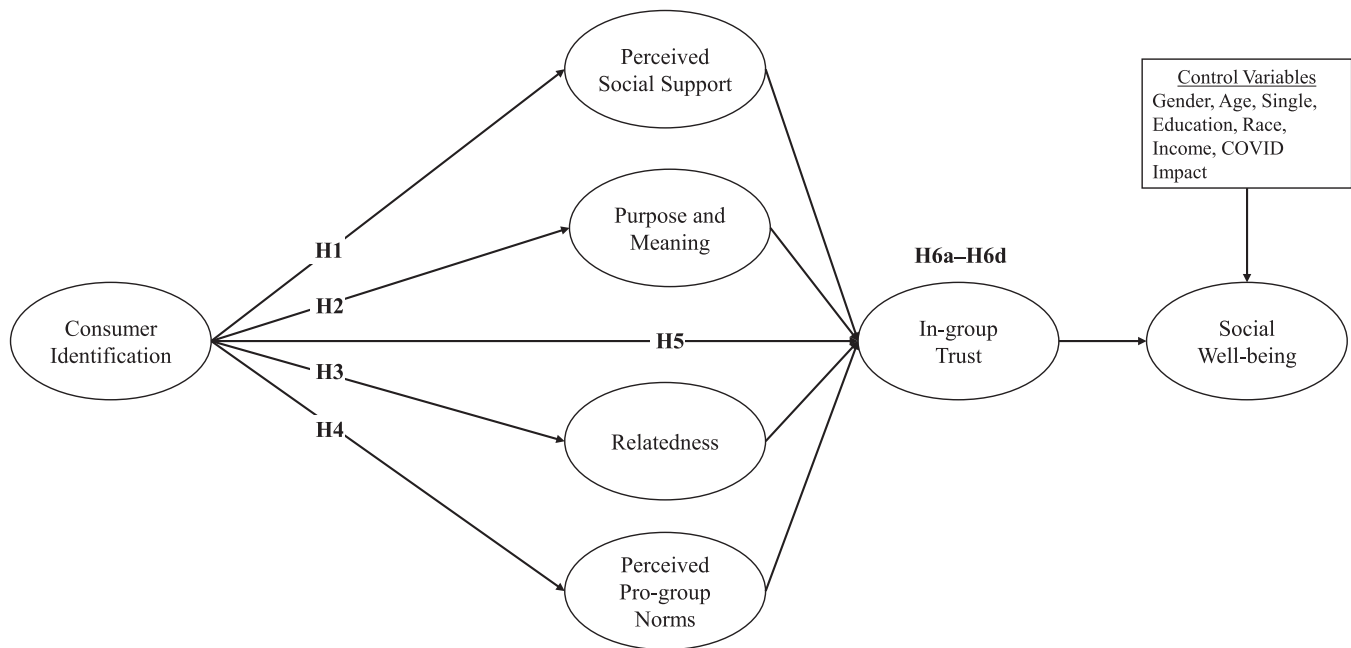


Fig. 1. Hypothesized research model.

et al., 2018). Conversely, if its status is evaluated negatively, the reverse is true. Therefore, people are driven to engage in actions to advance their group's status.

Social identity and self-categorization theories have been applied to various group contexts. Evidence suggests that employees' social identification with work groups and organizations influences in-group favoritism and intergroup competition (Hennessy & West, 1999). In addition, social identification promotes perceptions of social support among members of online support groups (Zhu & Stephens, 2019). Within service contexts, scholars have demonstrated the role of social identification with service organizations in driving intragroup behavior, such as consumers' word-of-mouth behavior toward the service company with which they identify (Kang et al., 2015). Social identification has also been found to shape intergroup relations, such as competitive attitudes and behavior toward consumers of other service organizations (Wann & Grieve, 2005).

The *SIA to health and well-being* (C. Haslam et al., 2018; Jetten et al., 2017) is distinguishable from the more conventional applications of social identity and self-categorization theories because of its recognition that group membership and associated social identification constitute an important source of health and well-being. From this perspective, identification with a group may act as a buffer against stressful situations and enhance well-being because it contributes to positive perceptions of self and gives access to support from fellow members (C. Haslam et al., 2018). In line with this notion, researchers have demonstrated that individuals' well-being is predicted by the extent to which they identify with social groups and categories, including family (S. A. Haslam et al., 2005), neighborhood (McNamara et al., 2013), and employer organizations (Steffens et al., 2017). We build on the SIA to health and well-being to explain how consumer identification is associated with social well-being.

3.2. Consumer identification and social well-being

Consumer identification is a form of social identification (Welzmueller & Schmidt, 2022). It refers to consumers' perception of oneness with a human aggregate surrounding an organization, which is engendered when the organization meets consumers' needs for similarity, distinctiveness, and self-enhancement (Bhattacharya & Sen,

2003). A nascent body of evidence indicates that identification with service organizations, such as sport teams (Inoue et al., 2015; Sato et al., 2023) and hotels (Su et al., 2016), has a positive association with consumer well-being. This relationship can be explained based on a synthesis of the SIA and Transformative Service Research. According to the SIA, identification with a service organization drives consumers to engage in "interactions with [the organization and its members]... characterized by courtesy, altruism, and sportsmanship" (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003, p. 84) that are beneficial for their well-being. Similarly, Transformative Service Research scholars propose the interaction between consumers and service organizations as the central process for influencing consumer well-being (Anderson et al., 2013). Therefore, the collective insights from these two perspectives point to a positive link between consumers' identification with a service organization and their social well-being.

3.3. Psychosocial resources that link consumer identification with social well-being

Despite the presumed relationship between consumer identification and social well-being, there is limited understanding of the psychological processes that establish this relationship. Exceptions are the studies by Inoue et al. (2015, 2020) that found social support mediated this relationship. However, researchers have not examined the concurrent mediating roles of multiple psychosocial resources in connecting consumer identification with social well-being. This contrasts the perspectives of social psychologists who suggest the link between social identification and well-being is mediated by a set of different psychosocial resources (C. Haslam et al., 2018).

Psychosocial resources encompass social and psychological resources that promote well-being (Yoo & Miyamoto, 2018). Social resources contribute to enriching social relationships, while psychological resources entail mental states, beliefs, and perceptions that are beneficial for well-being (Yoo & Miyamoto, 2018). Our focus on psychosocial resources builds on a body of evidence indicating that these resources form underlying pathways through which personal and social characteristics influence health and well-being (Yoo & Miyamoto, 2018). In addition, this focus is supported by studies within Transformative Service Research, which show that services provide settings where

individuals can access and exchange resources that enhance their well-being (Chou et al., 2021). Moreover, the SIA to health and well-being proposes psychosocial resources as mediators in the relationship between social identification and well-being (C. Haslam et al., 2018). Thus, investigating the mediating roles of psychosocial resources between consumer identification with service organizations and social well-being allows us to incorporate the SIA to health and well-being into Transformative Service Research.

By integrating the SIA to health and well-being with Transformative Service Research, we hypothesize that within consumer-organization relationships, there are five types of *group-based psychosocial resources* that can be mobilized through consumers' identification with service organizations: perceived social support, purpose and meaning, relatedness, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust. These five psychosocial resources are recognized in previous reviews of social identity literature (Cruwys et al., 2014; C. Haslam et al., 2018; Jetten et al., 2017). In addition, Inoue et al.'s (2022) conceptual framework identify them as key mechanisms that explain the well-being benefits of identification with service organizations for in-group members including consumers. Although Inoue et al. developed their framework by considering crisis situations, we posit that these five resources can apply to normal consumption contexts because each resource is selected based on the universal propositions of social identity and self-categorization theories constituting the SIA (Cruwys et al., 2014; C. Haslam et al., 2018; Jetten et al., 2017).

Specifically, based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), shared group membership and social identification provide individuals with a sense of collective identity, which engenders their perceptions of *purpose and meaning* as well as *relatedness* (Jetten et al., 2017). In addition, according to self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), the more people identify with a group, "the more likely they are to perceive themselves as categorically interchangeable with others who share the same group membership" (Jetten et al., 2017, p. 796). This self-categorization process facilitates the provision and acceptance of *social support* among group members, increases their receptivity to the group's *norms*, and creates *trust* with other members (Jetten et al., 2017). Further support for our focus on each of these resources is provided next.

First, *perceived social support* refers to perceptions of the availability of assistance from others (Norris & Kaniasty, 1996). It represents the primary type of psychosocial resource that was previously examined as a mediator in the relationship between consumer identification and social well-being (Inoue et al., 2015, 2020). Through the process of self-categorization, people with stronger social identification are more willing to provide resources for other in-group members (C. Haslam et al., 2018). In addition, social identification increases people's tendency to accept and value support from others, which makes the support more instrumental in promoting well-being (C. Haslam et al., 2018).

Within the Transformative Service Research literature, researchers have demonstrated that consumers gain access to beneficial social support through service use (Chou et al., 2021; Rosenbaum et al., 2021; Rosenbaum & Smallwood, 2013). Perceived social support from other service users (Chou et al., 2021; Rosenbaum et al., 2021) and service providers (Rosenbaum & Smallwood, 2013) then contributes to enhancing individuals' well-being. This evidence, combined with the perspective that social identification is a key psychological mechanism driving the exchange of *effective social support* (C. Haslam et al., 2018), indicates that the more strongly consumers identify with a service organization, the more likely they are to perceive that social support is available from fellow members.

In this research, the label '*members of a service organization*' refers to any individuals who identify with the organization, irrespective of their formal membership status (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Inoue et al., 2022). This broad usage of the term "members" is consistent with the notion that any individual, including consumers, can self-categorize as an organizational member. Given this, we focus on the relationship between consumers' identification with a service organization and their

perceptions that other members of the organization are willing to provide social support. Our first hypothesis is:

H1: Consumer identification is positively associated with perceived social support from other members of the service organization.

Second, group membership provides people with shared goals that can make their lives more purposeful and meaningful (C. Haslam et al., 2018). This engendered sense of *purpose and meaning* represents an important resource that serves as a buffer against psychological distress (Yoo & Miyamoto, 2018). The association between social identification, perceptions of purpose and meaning, and well-being is underscored by Cruwys et al.'s (2014) review of the social psychological literature, which shows that identification with groups can alleviate clinical depression by offering a sense of purpose and meaning.

Evidence also indicates that through service consumption and encounters, consumers attain a sense of purpose and meaning. For example, consumers who reported memorable service consumption experiences had a higher level of purpose and meaning in their lives (Vada et al., 2019). Similarly, during COVID-19, the promotion of a sense of purpose and meaning was identified as a key aspect of the transformative potential of service consumption (Mulcahy et al., 2023). Therefore, we hypothesize that consumers are likely to find their lives purposeful and meaningful as their identification with a service organization increases.

H2: Consumer identification is positively associated with perceptions of purpose and meaning that consumers derive from being a member of the service organization.

Third, *relatedness* refers to the sense of belonging people develop in their surrounding environment (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Group membership enables people to feel connected with others who share similar beliefs, values, and preferences (C. Haslam et al., 2018). This social function of group membership is evident for those who identify with the group (C. Haslam et al., 2018). Concerning this social identity perspective, service scholars suggest that consumers derive a sense of relatedness by interacting with other consumers and service employees (Chu et al., 2019). In addition, the more strongly consumers identify with a service organization, the more likely they are to interact with the organization through multiple channels. In turn, these interactions are instrumental in engendering consumers' relatedness to the organization and its members (Luo et al., 2016). Previous work on Transformative Service Research explains that interactions and encounters facilitated through service consumption foster a heightened sense of relatedness among consumers (Barnes et al., 2021). Drawing from this notion, together with the SIA, we hypothesize:

H3: Consumer identification is positively associated with perceptions of relatedness with other members of the service organization.

Fourth, when people identify with a group, they become more aware of—and internalize—group norms, which reflect the implied or accepted rules of how group members should think and behave (C. Haslam et al., 2018; Terry & Hogg, 1996). When salient, group norms function as guiding principles, affecting members' thoughts and actions. While group norms can be directed toward various behaviors such as exercising (Terry & Hogg, 1996) and healthy eating (Cruwys et al., 2015), we focus on a specific form of group norms called *pro-group norms* (Gong et al., 2009). Pro-group norms encourage pro-group behavior—namely, actions taken by group members to work on behalf of their group's welfare (Barreto & Ellemers, 2002)—and lead members to contribute to the collective interests of the group and fellow members (Drury et al., 2019). For example, Ntontis et al. (2018) reported that during a crisis, people in affected areas bolstered their identification with other residents. This heightened identification promoted residents' adherence to pro-group norms for participating in community recovery efforts (Ntontis et al., 2018).

Within service and business literature, limited research has

investigated how organizations promote adherence to pro-group norms among consumers. An exception is Romani and Gappi's (2014) experiments showing that consumers of an organization formed intentions to act for the benefit of others belonging to the organizational community. In addition, these intentions were driven by consumers' identification with the organization and shared norms of supporting others (Romani & Grappi, 2014). Based on this evidence, and the capacity of social identification to activate adherence to pro-group norms (C. Haslam et al., 2018), our fourth hypothesis suggests a positive association between consumers' identification with a service organization and their perceptions of pro-group norms (hereafter also called "*perceived pro-group norms*").

H4: Consumer identification is positively associated with perceived pro-group norms that emphasize the importance of contributing to the collective interests of the service organization and its members.

Fifth, trust generally refers to "an expectation that partners...have goodwill and benign intent in their dealing with us" (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994, pp. 135–136). Business scholars have found that trust toward an organization or brand can act as both an antecedent (Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013) and a consequence (He et al., 2012) of consumers' identification with the organization/brand. While recognizing these findings, the current research does not investigate the role of trust toward a service organization. Instead, we focus on *in-group trust*, representing individuals' trust toward members of the same group (Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2018). This research specifically defines in-group trust as consumers' expectation of goodwill and benevolence from other members (e.g., fellow consumers) of the service organization.

Within social identity literature, it is well-established that shared group membership and associated social identification foster trust toward members of the same group (Drury et al., 2019; Tanis & Postmes, 2005). This is because social identification blurs the psychological boundaries between members, leading a member to perceive themselves and others as interchangeable (Jetten et al., 2017; Turner et al., 1987). In turn, this increases the perceived similarity of others, which predicts in-group trust toward other members (Drury et al., 2019). In service settings, consumers reported trusting other consumers/members of the organization they identified with (Harris & Ogbonna, 2008). Therefore, we hypothesize that as consumers identify with a service organization more strongly, they will report a greater sense of in-group trust toward fellow members of the organization.

H5: Consumer identification is positively associated with perceptions of in-group trust toward other members of the service organization.

The literature reviewed above provides support for the notion that consumer identification enables consumers to access the five types of group-based psychosocial resources. However, prior research has not examined whether and how these resources *concurrently* mediate the relationship between consumer identification and social well-being. In addition, researchers have not investigated potential *sequential mediation pathways*, wherein one resource type may have a more immediate association with social well-being and transmit the mediating effects of the remaining resource types.

In this respect, there is conceptual and empirical support for the notion that in-group trust is particularly relevant to social well-being. Conceptually, trust is viewed as a central aspect of social interactions that are fundamental to the effective functioning of society and people's positive assessment of their social well-being (Keyes, 1998; M. Zhao et al., 2024). Empirically, a recent *meta-analysis* of 132 studies examining the relationship between trust and three well-being types (social, psychological, and physical) found a significant positive association between trust and each well-being type, with the strongest association identified for social well-being (M. Zhao et al., 2024). In our research, in-group trust represents a group-level concept that captures consumers' trust toward members of the same service organization. Thus, it is

distinguishable from social well-being, which refers to individuals' appraisal of their life circumstances in society (Keyes, 1998). Yet, the close relevance between in-group trust and social well-being suggests that in-group trust may play a crucial role in affecting social well-being.

Based on the above discussion, we expect in-group trust to function as the proximal antecedent of consumers' social well-being that transmits the mediating effects of the other four psychosocial resources. Regarding perceived social support, research shows that people develop trust in others when they perceive that those others are willing to provide social support (Ommen et al., 2011). Building on this, we propose that perceived social support from other members of the service organization increases consumers' in-group trust, which is positively linked to their social well-being (Keyes, 1998; M. Zhao et al., 2024).

In addition, as noted, social identification provides people with a shared sense of purpose and meaning (Cruwys et al., 2014). Having a common purpose, meaning, and goals serves as a psychosocial mechanism that encourages cooperation among members and fosters mutual trust (Reicher & Haslam, 2006). Therefore, we posit that a sense of purpose and meaning promotes in-group trust, which is beneficial for social well-being.

Moreover, the SIA explains that a sense of relatedness to other group members fostered through social identification drives a member "to see them [i.e., the other members] as more trustworthy" (C. Haslam et al., 2018, p. 28). This perspective—combined with evidence linking trust with social well-being (M. Zhao et al., 2024)—supports the mediating role of in-group trust in the relationship between relatedness and social well-being.

Finally, because pro-group norms direct members to prioritize the group's collective interests (Barreto & Ellemers, 2002; Drury et al., 2019), they engender expectations of reciprocity, leading members to think that other members will also act in ways that support the group's welfare, rather than exploiting the situation (Tanis & Postmes, 2005). In turn, the reciprocity expectations activated by perceived pro-group norms strengthen trust among members (Tanis & Postmes, 2005). Applying this reasoning, perceived pro-group norms are thought to increase consumers' trust in other members/consumers of the service organization, subsequently contributing to their social well-being (Keyes, 1998; M. Zhao et al., 2024).

Given the above rationales, we hypothesize that consumers of a service organization will develop greater in-group trust, thus reporting higher social well-being if their identification with the organization leads them to (a) perceive social support as more accessible, (b) derive a greater sense of purpose and meaning, (c) feel stronger perceptions of relatedness, and (d) perceive pro-group norms to a greater extent. Our final hypothesis is:

H6: There are sequential mediations whereby in-group trust mediates the positive associations among consumer identification, each of the other psychosocial resources—namely, perceived social support (H6a), purpose and meaning (H6b), relatedness (H6c), and perceived pro-group norms (H6d)—and social well-being.

3.4. Research settings

To test the six hypotheses, we conducted two studies in the sport industry: Study 1 with US consumers of a variety of professional and amateur sport organizations, and Study 2 with UK consumers of English Premier League (EPL) clubs. There are three reasons the sport industry is a beneficial service domain to study. First, with a global market size of over \$500 billion (The Business Research Company, 2023), it makes a significant contribution to the service economy. Consequently, sport has been widely studied to extend our understanding of service-related concepts and phenomena including consumer well-being (Inoue et al., 2020). Second, consuming sport services, such as following and supporting a sport team via live spectating, TV broadcasting, or social media, can foster a strong emotional connection between consumers and

sport organizations (Harris & Ogbonna, 2008). Third, sport consumption is closely linked to the attainment of health and well-being, indicating that sport services are inherently transformative (Inoue et al., 2020; Rejikumar et al., 2022).

We situated this research in the US and UK as the prevalence of poor mental health and well-being is a significant social issue for both countries (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024; Mind, 2020). In addition, these two countries share many commonalities (e.g., language, infrastructure, service-based economies) but differ in terms of political and social (e.g., healthcare) systems. This makes the US and UK relevant and important contexts for comparison, enabling us to enhance the applicability of our findings.

4. Study 1

4.1. Participants and data collection procedures

We recruited participants for Study 1 in March 2022 via Prolific—a UK-based crowdsourcing platform providing access to worldwide participants—after receiving research ethics approval. Participation was restricted to adults (≥ 18 years) who lived in the US. To maximize the number of respondents supporting a sport organization, we screened participants based on whether they regularly watched one or more of the five US major spectator sports (i.e., baseball, basketball, American football, ice hockey, soccer). Respondents were paid GBP1.20 (approximately USD1.60).

In total, 503 individuals participated in the survey. Of them, our final sample consisted of 478 individuals who (a) indicated support for a sport organization, (b) provided a valid organization name for their supporting sport organization, (c) passed an attention filter, and (d) had no missing values. For the attention filter, respondents were asked to choose the type of organization they were sharing their opinions about in the survey from seven response options (e.g., sport organization, bank, insurance company). Only respondents choosing the correct answer “sport organization” were retained in the final sample.

4.2. Measures

The scales we used are presented in Supplementary Material 1. In the survey, participants were asked to type the name of a sport organization they most identified with. Then, for this organization, respondents assessed the extent to which they received the five types of group-based psychosocial resources from other organizational members or by being a member. Consistent with the broad definition of members noted above, the survey included a brief explanation to clarify that the term “members” referred to any individuals (e.g., club members, supporters, fans) associated with the organization. To measure respondents’ perceptions of each psychosocial resource type, we adapted multi-item scales developed and validated in previous research. The measures were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7).

First, we used three items from Iwasaki and Mannell (2000) to measure *perceived social support* from other members of the favorite sport organization. Research demonstrated that these items adequately capture individuals’ perceptions of the emotional aspect of social support from fellow members (Inoue et al., 2020). We focused on emotional support, as it has been shown to have a stronger association with consumers’ well-being than tangible (e.g., borrowing items) or informational (e.g., receiving advice) social support (Inoue et al., 2015). Second, we adapted a four-item short form of the Purpose in Life test (Schulenberg et al., 2011) to measure the extent to which being a consumer/member of a sport organization offered a sense of *purpose and meaning*. Third, perceptions of *relatedness* with other members of the organization were adapted from Sheldon and Bettencourt’s (2002) three-item relatedness scale. Fourth, to measure the *perceived pro-group norms* shared among members of the favorite sport organization, we

adapted four items from a scale of group norms suggested by Haslam et al. (2018). These items captured individuals’ perceptions of how performing pro-group behavior intended to promote the collective interests of members is incorporated into their group’s norms. Fifth, *in-group trust* was measured with four items adapted from Yamagishi and Yamagishi (1994).

The survey also included scales for consumer identification and social well-being, our independent and dependent variables. For *consumer identification*, we used Mael and Ashforth’s (1992) scale to assess respondents’ degrees of identification with their favorite sport organization. For *social well-being*, we employed a five-item scale of social well-being from Lamers et al. (2011). In this scale, respondents indicated how often they experienced a state (e.g., “that you had something important to contribute to society”) capturing social well-being during the past month on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *never* (0) to *every day* (5).

Additionally, we measured the following control variables to account for the extent to which participants’ social well-being differed by their sociodemographic characteristics: gender (1 = *men*; 0 = *otherwise*), age, single (1 = *single*, 0 = *otherwise*), level of education (1 = *less than high school*; 7 = *doctoral/professional degrees*), race (1 = *White*; 0 = *otherwise*), and household income (1 = *USD0 – USD20,000*; 11 = *USD200,001 and more*). Furthermore, because data collection occurred during the late phase of COVID-19, its lasting impacts might have adversely affected social well-being. To account for this, we adapted three items from Kaniasty (2012) to measure the extent to which participants experienced COVID-19-related impacts (1 = *yes*; 0 = *no*): “Have you ever felt like your life is in danger during the COVID-19 pandemic?”; “Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, have you or has anyone in your immediate family been laid off or lost their job?”; and “Because of the COVID-19 outbreak, have you or has anyone in your immediate family had work hours or pay cut?”.

4.3. Analysis and results

4.3.1. Sample characteristics

The 478 individuals in the sample represented residents from 48 US states—excluding Idaho and Wyoming—and the District of Columbia. The absence of respondents from these two states reflects their small population sizes (Idaho ranks 13th smallest and Wyoming is the smallest among the 50 US states) and the lack of major professional or college sport organizations in these states. Of the 478 individuals, 70.9 % chose a professional sport team as the sport organization they most identified with, 26.4 % chose a sport league or governing body, and 2.7 % chose a college sport team/department. In addition, 40.6 % indicated that their sport organizations operated in the local community while the other 59.4 % chose a non-local organization. Regarding sociodemographic characteristics, participants’ mean age was 39.6 years ($SD = 13.5$; range: 19–85); 60.3 % were men, 39.3 % were women, and 0.4% were non-binary; 43.3 % were single; 70.9 % had a 4-year college or higher degree; 72.8 % were White; and 66.9 % had an annual household income of USD60,001 + . In addition, 36.0 % indicated that their life was in danger during COVID-19, 19.9 % stated that they or a member of their immediate family had been laid off or lost their job because of COVID-19, and 34.9 % reported that they or a member of their immediate family had work hours or pay reduced because of COVID-19.

4.3.2. Assessment of the reliability and validity of scales

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) via Mplus 7.0 to assess the reliability and validity of the multi-item scales. The CFA results offered the following model fit indices, supporting the overall fit of the measurement model: $\chi^2/df = 814.00/356 = 2.29$, CFI = 0.96, SRMR = 0.06, and RMSEA = 0.05. As shown in Supplementary Material 1, all scales had construct reliability (CR) values greater than 0.70 and average variance extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.50, which supported the reliability and convergent validity of each scale. Table 1

Table 1Correlations of constructs in Study 1 ($N = 478$) and Study 2 ($N = 490$).

Study 1: Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Consumer Identification	(0.79)						
2. Perceived Social Support	0.51	(0.91)					
3. Purpose and Meaning	0.60	0.66	(0.94)				
4. Relatedness	0.65	0.72	0.70	(0.91)			
5. Perceived Pro-group Norms	0.41	0.33	0.39	0.45	(0.77)		
6. In-group Trust	0.52	0.44	0.54	0.47	0.59	(0.86)	
7. Social Well-being	0.31	0.28	0.28	0.29	0.25	0.44	(0.74)
Study 2: Constructs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Consumer Identification	(0.73)						
2. Perceived Social Support	0.44	(0.88)					
3. Purpose and Meaning	0.56	0.58	(0.93)				
4. Relatedness	0.57	0.72	0.60	(0.89)			
5. Perceived Pro-group Norms	0.32	0.41	0.36	0.51	(0.77)		
6. In-group Trust	0.39	0.33	0.42	0.45	0.46	(0.87)	
7. Social Well-being	0.19	0.23	0.26	0.27	0.31	0.26	(0.71)

Notes. Values in parentheses represent the square root of the average variance extracted. All correlations are significant ($p < 0.01$).

demonstrated that the square root of the AVE of each scale was greater than the correlations between any pair of scales. Additionally, we employed the HTMT package in R to calculate the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio. The results presented in Supplementary Material 2 demonstrated that all HTMT ratio values were below the threshold of 0.85, providing evidence of the scales' satisfactory discriminant validity (Voorhees et al., 2016).

Given our use of a cross-sectional survey design, a potential concern arises regarding the possible inflation of the relationships between constructs due to common method variance (Williams et al., 2010). Therefore, we employed the CFA marker-variable technique outlined by Williams et al. (2010) to assess the presence of common method variance in our data. This technique involves estimating multiple CFA models with a marker variable to assess (a) the existence of common method variance (Baseline model vs. Method-C model), (b) unequal method variance (Method-C model vs. Method-U model), and (c) bias due to common method variance (Method-C or Method-U model vs. Method-R model).

For the marker variable, we used nonprofit domain importance, which assessed respondents' views on supporting nonprofits that combat manufacturing sweatshops (Lichtenstein et al., 2004). This variable was measured on a seven-point Likert scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7) with two items: "supporting nonprofits that fight manufacturing sweatshops is important to me" and "I could see myself donating some of my time to supporting nonprofits that help fight manufacturing sweatshops." These items were adapted from Lichtenstein et al. (2004) and demonstrated adequate reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.81$). We selected nonprofit domain importance as the marker because it is similar in format but conceptually distinct from the seven substantive constructs examined in this research.

The chi-square difference tests (see Supplementary Material 3) showed that the Method-C model provided a better fit compared to the Baseline model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 45.99$; $p < 0.001$, $\Delta df = 1$), but had a poorer fit compared to the Method-U model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 56.22$; $p < 0.001$, $\Delta df = 28$). This indicated that common method variance was present and affected the indicators of our substantive constructs differently. However, when comparing the Method-R model to the Method-U model, $\Delta\chi^2$ was 1.71 ($p = 1.00$, $\Delta df = 21$), meaning no bias stemmed from common method variance in the correlation among the seven substantive constructs. These results suggest that common method variance is unlikely to influence the results of hypothesis testing reported below (Williams et al., 2010).

4.3.3. Hypothesis testing

We estimated a structural model specifying consumer identification as an exogenous variable, the five types of group-based psychosocial resources as mediators, and social well-being as an endogenous

outcome. As predicted in H6a–H6d, in-group trust was included as an immediate mediator, transmitting the effects of the other psychosocial resources to social well-being. Additionally, correlational paths were included between perceived social support, purpose and meaning, relatedness, and perceived pro-group norms to account for their associations. The model also contained paths from each of the control variables to social well-being to consider any differences in social well-being due to sociodemographic characteristics and impacts of COVID-19.

The structural model fit the data well: $\chi^2/df = 1210.91/613 = 1.98$, CFI = 0.95, SRMR = 0.06, and RMSEA = 0.05. As presented in Table 2, the hypothesized paths collectively yielded a significant total association of consumer identification with social well-being ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$). Specifically, consumer identification was significantly and positively associated with perceptions of each type of group-based psychosocial resource: perceived social support ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$), purpose and meaning ($\beta = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$), relatedness ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$), perceived pro-group norms ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), and in-group trust ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$), confirming H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5. In addition, purpose and meaning ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived pro-group norms ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$)—but not perceived social support ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = 0.05$) and relatedness ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.08$)—had a significant positive association with in-group trust. In turn, in-group trust was positively associated with social well-being ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$), controlling for the sociodemographic characteristics and COVID-19 impacts.

To test the mediation effects through in-group trust, we performed the indirect effect approach (X. Zhao et al., 2010), which involved calculating an indirect effect using the direct path coefficients and assessing the statistical significance of the indirect effect by obtaining its 95 % confidence intervals (CI). The direct paths produced significant indirect positive effects on social well-being through in-group trust for purpose and meaning ($B = 0.07$, 95 % CI [0.035, 0.113]) and perceived pro-group norms ($B = 0.19$, 95 % CI [0.126, 0.260]), but not for perceived social support ($B = 0.03$, 95 % CI [-0.002, 0.075]) and relatedness ($B = -0.03$, 95 % CI [-0.079, 0.011]). Moreover, further assessments of the indirect associations between consumer identification and social well-being through purpose and meaning, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust indicated significant sequential mediational pathways between consumer identification, purpose and meaning, in-group trust, and social well-being ($B = 0.04$, 95 % CI [0.023, 0.074]) and between consumer identification, perceived pro-group norms, in-group trust, and social well-being ($B = 0.05$, 95 % CI [0.032, 0.075]). The evidence supported H6b and H6d, while rejecting H6a and H6c.

To assess the robustness of the above results, we compared the hypothesized structural model with an alternative partial-mediation model that included direct paths from perceived social support, purpose and meaning, relatedness, and perceived pro-group norms to social well-

Table 2

Standardized results of structural models in Study 1 ($N = 478$) and Study 2 ($N = 490$).

Path	Study 1		Study 2	
	β	t	β	t
<i>Total effects</i>				
Consumer Identification → Social Well-being	0.22**	7.80	0.12**	5.35
<i>Hypothesized paths</i>				
Consumer Identification → Perceived Social Support (H1)	0.51**	13.80	0.44**	10.62
Consumer Identification → Purpose and Meaning (H2)	0.60**	18.55	0.56**	15.98
Consumer Identification → Relatedness (H3)	0.65**	21.77	0.57**	16.47
Consumer Identification → Perceived Pro-group Norms (H4)	0.41**	9.61	0.32**	6.79
Consumer Identification → In-group Trust (H5)	0.21**	3.95	0.13*	2.28
Perceived Social Support → In-group Trust	0.11	1.95	-0.08	-1.15
Purpose and Meaning → In-group Trust	0.26**	4.59	0.19**	3.39
Relatedness → In-group Trust	-0.12	-1.73	0.16*	2.12
Perceived Pro-group Norms → In-group Trust	0.42**	10.04	0.31**	6.23
In-group Trust → Social Well-being	0.43**	10.01	0.31**	6.87
<i>Effects of control variables</i>				
Gender → Social Well-being	-0.02	-0.48	0.03	0.56
Age → Social Well-being	0.01	0.15	-0.13**	-2.71
Single → Social Well-being	-0.05	-0.91	-0.03	-0.66
Education → Social Well-being	0.05	1.03	0.11*	2.25
Race → Social Well-being	0.07	1.58	-0.10*	-2.15
Income → Social Well-being	0.16**	3.15	0.07	1.50
COVID impact (life in danger) → Social Well-being	0.01	0.26	-0.10*	-2.21
COVID impact (lost job) → Social Well-being	0.07	1.23	0.01	0.11
COVID impact (pay reduction) → Social Well-being	-0.04	-0.71	-0.17**	-3.28

Note. β = Standardized coefficients. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

being. This alternative model provided the following model fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 1204.97/609 = 1.98$, CFI = 0.95, SRMR = 0.06, and RMSEA = 0.05. A chi-square difference test involving the comparison between the chi-square value (χ^2) of the alternative model and that of the hypothesized model indicated that the inclusion of the four direct paths did not result in a significant improvement in the model fit: $\Delta\chi^2 (\Delta df = 4) = 5.94$, $p = 0.20$. In addition, none of the four direct paths was significantly associated with social well-being. These results provided support for the full mediation of in-group trust.

We also tested two more alternative models (see Supplementary Material 4) for additional robustness assessments. These analyses showed that the hypothesized structural model provided a superior model fit, further supporting our hypothesis testing results.

4.4. Discussion

Study 1 uncovered the sequential mediating processes that established a positive relationship between consumer identification and social well-being. Specifically, in-group trust served as a conduit through which purpose and meaning and perceived pro-group norms—both of which were associated with consumer identification—had an indirect association with social well-being. Although conceptual work suggested the possible mediating roles of multiple psychosocial resources (C.

Haslam et al., 2018; Inoue et al., 2022), empirical studies have tested single-mediator models (e.g., S. A. Haslam et al., 2005; Inoue et al., 2020). Thus, Study 1 was the first to assess the mediation of the proposed five types of psychosocial resources concurrently through a sequential mediation model. Notably, the structural model results indicated that perceived social support and relatedness had no indirect association with social well-being via in-group trust. These results suggest that when examined concurrently, purpose and meaning, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust play a more significant role in explaining social well-being. To validate these results with another sample, we conducted Study 2 in a different sport consumption setting.

5. Study 2

Study 2 was conducted with UK residents supporting one of the 20 EPL clubs. The EPL is an ideal setting for understanding how service organizations may affect consumers' lives (Harris & Ogbonna, 2008). In addition, the EPL is one of the most popular professional sport leagues in the world, with each club followed by millions of audiences via live attendance, television broadcasts, and social media.

5.1. Participants and data collection procedures

We recruited participants in April 2022 via Prolific. Participation was restricted to individuals who were 18 years+, lived in the UK, and were EPL fans. Respondents were paid GBP1.20. Four hundred and ninety-one individuals initially answered the survey, all of whom supported an EPL club and passed an attention filter question (i.e., the same question as Study 1, with the correct option of "EPL club"). One respondent who had missing data on a sociodemographic question was removed, resulting in the final sample size of 490.

5.2. Measures

We used the same measures as Study 1 for consumer identification, the five types of psychosocial resources, and social well-being. Additionally, the survey included measures for the control variables examined in Study 1. Of them, we used UK specific response options for income (i.e., 6-point scale from £0–£20,000 [1] to £100,001 or more [6]) and education (i.e., 5-point scale from *primary school* [1] to *postgraduate degree* [5]).

5.3. Analysis and results

5.3.1. Sample characteristics

The 490 respondents included UK residents supporting 19 EPL clubs and living in all 12 UK regions. Their gender was 50.8 % men, 49.0 % women, and 0.2% non-binary; and the mean age was 39.4 years ($SD = 12.7$; range: 19–78). Additionally, 35.3 % of the respondents were single; 68.4 % had a college/university or higher degree; 85.3 % were White; and 51.6 % had an annual household income of GBP40,001 or more. Regarding COVID-19 related questions, 27.1 % indicated their life was in danger during COVID-19, 20.6 % reported they or a member of their immediate family had been laid off or lost their job because of COVID-19, and 36.3 % stated they or a member of their immediate family had work hours or pay reduced because of COVID-19.

5.3.2. Assessment of the reliability and validity of scales

We estimated a CFA including all multi-item scales using Mplus 7.0. The results indicated an adequate fit of the measurement model: $\chi^2/df = 673.21/356 = 1.89$, CFI = 0.97, SRMR = 0.05, and RMSEA = 0.04. In addition, as presented in Supplementary Material 1, the CR and AVE values of all scales met the threshold values ($CR \geq 0.70$, $AVE \geq 0.50$), and the square root of each scale's AVE exceeded the correlations between any pair of scales (see Table 1). The HTMT ratio values in Supplementary Material 2 also substantiated that all observed ratios

remained below the benchmark of 0.85, supporting discriminant validity (Voorhees et al., 2016). Additionally, we employed the CFA marker-variable technique (Williams et al., 2010) to assess the extent of common method variance. This analysis used three items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$) adapted from the attitude toward the color blue scale, which represents an ideal marker variable (Miller & Simmering, 2023). Results from chi-square difference tests indicated that common method variance was unlikely to bias the results of hypothesis testing (see Supplementary Material 5).

5.3.3. Hypothesis testing

We next estimated a structural model to test the hypothesized relationships. This model yielded satisfactory model fit indices: $\chi^2/df = 1147.10/613 = 1.87$, CFI = 0.95, SRMR = 0.06, and RMSEA = 0.04. As presented in Table 2, the direct paths in this model produced a significant total association of consumer identification with social well-being ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.001$). Specifically, consumer identification had a significant positive association with perceived social support ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$), purpose and meaning ($\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$), relatedness ($\beta = 0.57$, $p < 0.001$), perceived pro-group norms ($\beta = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$), and in-group trust ($\beta = 0.13$, $p = 0.02$). These results confirmed H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5. In addition, purpose and meaning ($\beta = 0.19$, $p = 0.001$), relatedness ($\beta = 0.16$, $p = 0.03$), and perceived pro-group norms ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), but not perceived social support ($\beta = -0.08$, $p = 0.25$), were significantly related to in-group trust. In turn, in-group trust had a significant positive association with social well-being ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$).

The direct path coefficients resulted in significant indirect positive effects on social well-being through in-group trust for purpose and meaning ($B = 0.04$, 95 % CI [0.012, 0.066]) and perceived pro-group norms ($B = 0.09$, 95 % CI [0.047, 0.144]). However, the 95 % confidence intervals of the indirect effects of perceived social support ($B = -0.02$, 95 % CI [-0.051, 0.016]) and relatedness ($B = 0.03$, 95 % CI [-0.002, 0.071]) through in-group trust included zero, pointing to nonsignificant mediation (X. Zhao et al., 2010). Additionally, based on the analysis of the indirect effects of consumer identification on social well-being through purpose and meaning, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust, there were significant sequential mediational pathways between consumer identification, purpose and meaning, in-group trust, and social well-being ($B = 0.02$, 95 % CI [0.007, 0.039]) and between consumer identification, perceived pro-group norms, in-group trust, and social well-being ($B = 0.02$, 95 % CI [0.009, 0.033]). These results confirmed H6b and H6d, but disconfirmed H6a and H6c.

5.4. Discussion

Based on data from UK consumers supporting EPL clubs, Study 2 offered further evidence of the sequential mediational pathways involving purpose and meaning, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust for connecting consumer identification with social well-being. The significant mediating roles of these three psychosocial resources—and nonsignificant roles of perceived social support and relatedness—aligned with Study 1. Both studies thus established purpose and meaning, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust as influential mediators between consumer identification and well-being, providing an alternate perspective from previous research, which has emphasized social support as a crucial mediator (S. A. Haslam et al., 2005; Inoue et al., 2020).

6. General discussion

6.1. Theoretical implications

The current research makes three main contributions to Transformative Service Research. First, it addressed the need for theoretical advancements in Transformative Service Research that incorporate

interdisciplinary insights (Kuppelwieser & Finsterwalder, 2016; Tang et al., 2016, 2024) by integrating propositions from the SIA to health and well-being (C. Haslam et al., 2018)—an emergent social psychological approach to well-being promotion. Through this integration, we have demonstrated group-level psychological processes indicating that: (a) three types of psychosocial resources activated through group membership and associated social identification—purpose and meaning, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust—mediate the relationship between consumer identification and social well-being, and (b) in-group trust transmits the indirect effects of purpose and meaning and perceived pro-group norms by acting as the proximal antecedent of social well-being. These group-based processes, rooted in social and group psychology, constitute a shift from previous Transformative Service Research studies that focused on individual-level psychological processes based on the need satisfaction approach to explain services' role in consumer well-being (Ahn et al., 2019; Barnes et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2016, 2024). Consequently, our research offers new theoretical insights into Transformative Service Research by suggesting that social identification with service organizations can grant consumers access to group-based psychosocial resources that support their well-being.

Second, our research offered an alternative perspective to a body of work within Transformative Service Research that emphasized the well-being benefits of social support and relatedness (Barnes et al., 2021; Rosenbaum et al., 2021; Rosenbaum & Smallwood, 2013). Findings from Studies 1 and 2 consistently indicated a more robust and stable role of purpose and meaning, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust in explaining variance in social well-being, compared to perceived social support and relatedness. Notably, according to the results of correlational analyses (see Table 1), both perceived social support and relatedness had significant, positive correlations with social well-being. However, these associations were attenuated when purpose and meaning, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust were simultaneously examined in our structural models. Our findings advance Transformative Service Research by indicating that, in contrast to prior emphasis on social support and relatedness (Barnes et al., 2021; Rosenbaum et al., 2021), perceptions of purpose and meaning, pro-group norms encouraging contributions to group interests, and trust toward fellow group members—fostered through social identification with service organizations—may yield more substantial well-being benefits for consumers.

Third, this research provided new evidence suggesting the role of service organizations in enhancing consumers' social well-being, contributing to the growing view that social well-being is a significant type of well-being in Transformative Service Research (Chou et al., 2021; Feng et al., 2019, 2023; Wilson-Nash et al., 2023). Previous studies identified perceptions of positive social interactions with other consumers and service employees as significant antecedents of consumer social well-being (Chou et al., 2021; Feng et al., 2019, 2023; Wilson-Nash et al., 2023). Our research has extended this understanding by showing that consumers' perceptions of social interactions can be operationalized through the five types of psychosocial resources (i.e., perceived social support, purpose and meaning, relatedness, perceived pro-group norms, in-group trust) that emerge as consumers identify with a service organization. Moreover, the results of our two studies have established the reliability and validity of measurement scales for each of the five resource types. By providing the conceptual basis for the five resource types based on the SIA to health and well-being and offering their reliable and valid scales, the current research lays a foundation for future research to explore how interactions during service consumption promote specific psychosocial resources that benefit social well-being across different service contexts.

6.2. Practical implications

Transformative Service Research scholars have increasingly recognized the promotion of consumer social well-being as an important goal

for service organizations (Chou et al., 2021; Feng et al., 2019, 2023; Wilson-Nash et al., 2023). Examining social well-being—beyond more traditional well-being outcomes including hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Anderson et al., 2013)—is essential to advancing service organizations' role in “improving overall well-being” (Feng et al., 2019, p. 737) for consumers and contributing to public policy (Diener et al., 2018).

Against this background, the current research augmented the practical implications of previous Transformative Service Research studies on social well-being (Chou et al., 2021; Feng et al., 2019, 2023; Wilson-Nash et al., 2023) by highlighting the importance for service organizations to facilitate a sense of identification—or oneness—among consumers to contribute to consumer social well-being. To foster consumer identification, service organizations should communicate an identity consumers view as distinctive, prestigious, and similar to their own (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). One way these identity factors can be signaled is to leverage celebrity endorsements. For instance, there are several contemporary cases within the airline industry where celebrity partnerships (e.g., Tom Brady and Delta Airlines, Penélope Cruz and Emirates) are used to communicate achievement, attractiveness, and familiarity. This connection with celebrity and success extends to professional sport via jersey sponsorship deals (e.g., Etihad and Manchester City FC, Emirates and Real Madrid). In essence, these attention-getting efforts can foster a stronger sense of consumer identification, which enables consumers to find purpose and meaning, internalize pro-group norms, and develop in-group trust.

Another way service organizations can promote social well-being is by activating the mobilization of psychosocial resources via corporate social responsibility (CSR), which can facilitate trust and a sense of purpose and meaning (Bhattacharya et al., 2009). For instance, Alaska Airlines has a Care Coalition campaign which communicates the company's strong connection with sustainability, equitable hiring practices, and other social initiatives they care about as a service organization. Another example is the FC Barcelona Foundation, the charity arm of FC Barcelona which focuses on fostering social well-being and integration by implementing activities in education, health, and community development.

In addition, service organizations can enhance social well-being by developing communities around their organizational and brand identity (Harris & Ogbonna, 2008). Examples of social communities based on a connection to a service organization include Airbnb Host Clubs, and many supporters' clubs of professional sport teams such as the Green Bay Packers Cheesehead Nation. In the interest of activating pro-group norms which lead to in-group trust and social well-being, service organizations can develop customer connection platforms as mediums for idea sharing and indicators of how members think and behave.

6.3. Limitations and future research

Limitations are expected to arise in all research, and ours is no exception. First, we used data from consumers of sport organizations to test our hypotheses. Future research should be conducted in relation to other types of service organizations (e.g., healthcare, hospitality, financial service) to foster a broader discourse on the link between consumer identification, psychosocial resources, and well-being.

Second, drawing on the SIA to health and well-being, we demonstrated the psychological processes through which psychosocial resources mediated the relationship between consumer identification and social well-being. However, given our examination of the five psychosocial resources identified in Inoue et al.'s (2022) conceptual framework—which focused on consumer-organization relationships during crises—we may have overlooked other important factors that influence these relationships in normal consumption contexts. Hence, future research should examine the influences of additional factors, such as

consumers' perceived uniqueness and congruence of organizations' identity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) and their perceptions of product pricing (Popp & Woratschek, 2017).

Third, we did not examine the potential mediating role of collective efficacy. Collective efficacy refers to “the group's ability to overcome adversity” (McNamara et al., 2013, p. 394) and can act as an important mediator when examining groups facing hardship, such as residents of stigmatized communities. Therefore, a relevant research question for future research is how consumers identifying with stigmatized service organizations—such as gambling companies, organizations facing allegations of unethical conduct, and organizations with negative consumer reviews—may cultivate collective efficacy to enhance their well-being despite the adversity posed by negative stereotyping.

Fourth, the examined psychological processes may involve other mediational mechanisms, where the satisfaction of psychological needs transmits the effects of psychosocial resources on social well-being (Greenaway et al., 2016). Examining such mechanisms would provide a more nuanced understanding of the underlying psychological processes. This would also enable the integration of the current research model with the need satisfaction approach (Ahn et al., 2019; Barnes et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2024).

Fifth, we operationalized consumer social well-being based on Keyes's (1998) conceptualization. However, previous researchers used collective self-esteem as an alternative measure of social well-being (Wann & Pierce, 2005). It is important to test whether the current results remain consistent when collective self-esteem is used to assess consumer social well-being.

Sixth, the use of a cross-sectional design restricted our ability to establish causal relationships. Future research endeavors could benefit from adopting experimental and longitudinal research designs to establish the causal effects of consumer identification on social well-being.

7. Conclusions

This research has demonstrated the psychological processes through which consumer identification is associated with social well-being by identifying the mediating roles of purpose and meaning, perceived pro-group norms, and in-group trust. These insights address the need for further theorization in Transformative Service Research, extending the application of the SIA to health and well-being in business and service research. The current research provides a beneficial foundation for future studies to explore the well-being implications of consumer identification and psychosocial resources across various service contexts.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Yuhei Inoue: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Mikihiro Sato:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis. **Steve Swanson:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Funding acquisition. **Daniel Lock:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **James Du:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis. **Daniel C. Funk:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Appendix A. Supplementary materials

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115361>

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