Beyond the Desired End-State: The Pursuit of Mere Completion

Mr. Bowen Ruan
Department of Marketing
Wisconsin School of Business
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Date: October 5, 2018 (Fri)
Time: 10:30 – 12:00pm
Venue: Rm 4047 (LSK Business Building)

In 11 studies, we tested if consumers are motivated by “mere completion” – whether consumers will complete goals, tasks, or sets, irrespective of the end-state (e.g., goal reward) that is delivered upon completing them. Put simply, we find that goals are motivating not only due to their rewards, but also because consumers like to complete things – it feels satisfying. We then go a step further and explore if consumers value the pursuit of completing more than they value completion itself. Indeed, we find that individuals, counterintuitively, prefer something nearly complete over something complete. We call this phenomenon the “one-away effect” because we find that when consumers are, for example, one stamp away from completing a punch-card loyalty program, they value the card more than a completed card. Thus, in contrast to much of the research on goals that demonstrates the effect of goal end-state desirability on fostering motivation, we offer a complementary mere completion account that broadens our understanding as to why goals are motivating – which illuminates the potential for future research to examine the relatively unexplored area of post-goal effects.