

Marketing Colloquia

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3:00 PM – 4:20 PM, JMHH 741

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The Preference for Potential

Abstract: When people seek to impress others, they often do so by highlighting their personal achievements. Despite the intuitive appeal of this strategy, we demonstrate that people tend to prefer potential rather than achievement when evaluating others. Indeed, compared to references to achievement (e.g., “this person has become a leader in the field”), references to potential (e.g., “this person could become a leader in the field”) appear to stimulate greater interest and excitement, which translates into more favorable reactions. We document this preference for potential using targets ranging from athletes to comedians to graduate school applicants and measures ranging from salary allocations to online ad clicks to admission decisions.