

Department of Marketing



Research Seminars Series

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The Virtue of Having Enough: Contentment as an Alternative Signal of Status

Abstract: Contentment has long been seen as a form of wealth, one that results not from having an abundance of resources but from being satisfied with the resources you have. This research proposes that contentment can serve as a signal of status, akin to displays of material wealth. Seven studies present evidence that consumers perceive individuals expressing contentment to be higher in status. This perception is not merely a result of contentment being a positive emotion. Expressing contentment leads to higher status perceptions, even when compared to another positive state. Notably, this effect is independent of the income level of the focal person since it emerges even when those expressing contentment have a low income. The positive effect of expressed contentment on perceived status occurs because consumers perceive content individuals to be more moral. However, these effects are attenuated when the individual engages in conspicuous consumption, such as wearing a luxury outfit, at which point consumers no longer perceive the content person as more moral. The findings further highlight the downstream consequences of these effects, showing that consumers exhibit greater interest in brands endorsed by users who express contentment.