

# Past Or Present? - Temporal Categorization of Recently Completed Actions in Goal Pursuit

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Cite as:

Chun YoungJin, Maglio Sam (2025), Past Or Present? - Temporal Categorization of Recently Completed Actions in Goal Pursuit. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 54th, (126416)

Paper from the 54th Annual EMAC Conference, Madrid, Spain, May 25-30, 2025



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## **Extended Abstract**

This research examines how temporal categorization of recently completed actions—classified as part of the present or past—affects motivation in goal-directed contexts. Across four studies, we show that goal-directed actions are more likely categorized as part of the present than actions in other contexts (Studies 1A and 1B). Study 2 identifies a lack of mental closure as the driver of this categorization, linked to beliefs about motivational benefits. However, Study 3 reveals that present categorization reduces motivation for subsequent goal-directed actions. These findings advance temporal perception and goal-pursuit literature by highlighting how goal-setting hinders mental closure, keeping actions mentally salient, and uncovering a disconnect between motivation beliefs and actual engagement. By strategically framing completed actions—such as workouts or financial tasks—marketers can foster long-term commitment in domains like fitness, productivity, and loyalty programs.

**Key words:** *temporal categorization, goal motivation, mental closure*