

Moral Licensing and the True Value of Green

Introduction and Purpose

Climate change and environmental degradation have become one of the most widely discussed issues over the passed decade (Abeliotis et al., 2010). This has coincided with an increased demand for environmentally friendly products and services (Lockie et al., 2002)... but is environmental concern the main driving factor behind these purchases? We know that appearing to be environmentally conscious is socially beneficial (Griskevicius, 2008), but how is this benefit leveraged? The answer may lie in a mental process called moral licensing, which is the notion that future behavioural choices are a function of one's behavioural history, and that good acts seemingly earn points in a mental account that subsequent immoral acts can spend (Zhong et al., 2009).

The purpose of this research is to broaden the understanding of moral licensing as it relates to the evaluations of (and motivations behind) environmentally friendly acts (EFAs), their correlates, and the effect that performing an EFA has on future behaviour. From these evaluations, criterion for determining the 'value' of environmentally friendly actions will be established.

Hypotheses

1. **An individual observed performing EFAs would be evaluated more positively than an individual not observed performing EFAs.**
2. **Participation in Environmentally Unfriendly Acts (EUAs) is evaluated less negatively if they are performed concurrently with EFAs (H2a), even if the acts are unrelated (H2b).**
3. **The 'licensing value' of an EFA is mediated by the monetary cost to the individual (H3a), however not all pro-social acts are weighed equally (H3b).**
4. **The 'licensing value' of an EFA is moderated by the objective environmental impact of the EFA.**
5. **The presence of a significant time gap between when an EFA is performed and the time at which the moral currency is spent will moderate the EFA's 'licensing value'.**
6. **The evaluation of EFAs will be moderated by whether or not the mother of the respondent had completed university studies (undergraduate or beyond) (H6a) as well as by the gender of the respondent (H6b)**

Methodology

The primary method of data collection will be an online survey via SurveyLion.com with an estimated N of 350 from a randomized sample of Canadian respondents. Once collected, the data will be analyzed with SPSS.

A pretest with an estimated N of 25 undergraduate students from the John Molson School of Business will be utilized to determine the validity and reliability of the questions. Chronbach's Alpha will be used as a measure of test-retest reliability.

Individual regressions will be run on H1, H4, and H5, and a multiple regressions will be run on both H2a and H2b, and H3a and H3b. A MANOVA will then be run for H6, partitioning the responses to the aforementioned hypotheses into categories: 1) female with educated mother, 2) female without educated mother, 3) male with educated mother, 4) male without educated mother.

Practical Implications

If significant, these findings could answer some pressing questions relevant to academics, governments, and practitioners alike.

- ❖ Do some people buy green so that they can feel less guilty about driving an SUV?
 - ❖ Could companies offer a per-product measure of environmentally friendliness to make tangible the environmental added value?
- ❖ Do altruistic behaviours have a shelf life?
 - ❖ Could companies appeal to individuals who have performed EFAs recently, and as such have depreciating moral currency to spend?
- ❖ Are educated mothers the key to raising an environmentally conscious society?
 - ❖ Should governmental programs target their campaigns accordingly to maximize the probability of positive long-term behavioural change?

Major marketing decisions may result from obtaining the answer to any one of these questions.