

# How Does the Licensing Effect Impact Consumers' Sustainable Behaviors?

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## Abstract

Consumer decisions usually are not made by independent events and most link to prior context or happenings. Based on previous research, the licensing effect happens when a person chooses a relatively indulgent act after a preceding morally good deed. This study attempts to test if self-licensing alters consumer intentions toward sustainable behaviors among different moral identities, genders, and overall environmental awareness. We made the following hypotheses. Firstly, participants would be licensed to make a more unsustainable decision after a prior good deed. Secondly, an individual with a higher internalized moral identity and environmental awareness would be less likely to be licensed than one with a lower moral identity. Thirdly, gender plays a moderating role in the degree of self-licensing in environmental domains. This study used experimental designs with both treatment levels including the manipulated (licensed) and control conditions. The results analyzed demonstrate no significant interaction between self-licensing and moral identity. However, it is observed that consumer sustainable behavior intentions do alter between the licensed and control conditions, and gender difference and environmental awareness significantly interact with the licensing effect. Finally, the authors discuss several important implications of these findings for businesses, environment protection organizations, and public policy officials.

**Keywords:** environmental awareness, gender difference, moral identity, self-licensing, sustainability