

Buying green can be license for bad behavior, study finds

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Those lyin', cheatin' green consumers. Just being around green products can make us behave more altruistically, a new study to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Psychological Science* has found.

But buying those same products can have the opposite effect. Researchers found that buying green can lead people into less altruistic behaviour, and even make them more likely to steal and lie than after buying conventional products. Buying products that claim to be made with low [environmental impact](#) can set up "moral credentials" in people's minds that give license to selfish or questionable behavior.

"This was not done to point the finger at consumers who buy [green products](#). The message is bigger," says Nina Mazar, a marketing professor at University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management and a self-admitted green consumer. "At the end of the day, if we do one moral thing, IT doesn't necessarily mean we will be morally better in other things as well."

Mazar, along with her co-author Chen-Bo Zhong, an assistant professor of [organizational behaviour](#) at the Rotman School, conducted three experiments. The first found that people perceived green consumers to be more cooperative, altruistic and ethical than those who purchased conventional products. The second experiment showed that participants merely exposed to products from a green store shared more money in a subsequent experimental game, but those who actually made purchases in that store shared less. The final experiment revealed that participants

who bought items in the green store showed evidence of lying and stealing money in a subsequent lab game.

But are people conscious of this moral green washing going on when they buy green products and, more importantly, the license they might feel to break ethical standards? Professors Mazar and Zhong don't know - and look forward to exploring that in further research.

More information: The complete study is available at:
www.rotman.utoronto.ca/newthin...ng/greenproducts.pdf .

Source: University of Toronto ([news](#) : [web](#))

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