



## Environmental Responsibility Denial Due To Optimism In Green Technology

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### ABSTRACT

Rebound effects are generally suggested to originate from cost savings per unit of use (Sorrell, 2009). Additionally, de Haan (2009) suggested reductions of moral load as cause for rebound effects. Both, savings of monetary costs as well as reductions of moral load, are generated intraindividually through the utilisation of green technology. However, drawing on qualitative research findings (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole, & Whitmarsh, 2007) and referring to the concept of vicarious moral licensing (Kouchaki, 2011), we suggested that an individual's moral load can be reduced as well through optimistic beliefs regarding the problem-solving capacity of green technology in a society as a whole. Hence, we hypothesized that optimism in green technology weakens the individual's felt responsibility to act pro-environmentally.

We developed a scale to measure greentech optimism in order to test quantitative models of the suggested responsibility denial mechanism. In two studies (N = 642, N = 169) the scale was then integrated into a prediction model for environmentally responsible behaviour based on the Norm activation model (Schwartz, 1977). Results from structural equation modelling suggest that greentech optimism weakens the individual's feelings of moral obligation to act pro-environmentally via the mediators problem awareness and awareness of consequences. However, the results further suggest that the hypothesized model only holds true for situations in which pro-environmental behaviour is related to high behavioural costs.

The findings make an important contribution to research on psychological explanations for rebound effects. Implications for sustainability policy as well as paths for future research are discussed.

### REFERENCES

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