Selangor Government's “No plastic Bag Day” Campaign: Motivation and Acceptance Level

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Abstract

The initiatives by the Selangor state government to pick Saturday as its “No Plastic Bag Day” to maximize the campaign’s impact will be used to measure the acceptance and awareness level towards protecting the environment among the Shah Alam community. Saturday was chosen because according to Selangor Exco official “Saturday will be a very effective day to get the message across to a wider crowd”. This study is hoped to provide informative result to the Selangor Environmental Department and thus recommend strategies and practical ways to improve knowledge awareness amongst households on the importance to preserve the environment.

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1. Introduction

Plastic shopping bags or plastic grocery bags are medium sized bags that are often used by shoppers to carry home their purchases. They are a common type of shopping bag in most countries where stores often provide them as a convenience to shoppers. These bags are intended for a single use to carry items...
Plastic shopping bags are often made from polyethylene or polythene film. Polyethylene is a polymer that consists of long chains of ethylene monomer. And ethylene is derived from natural gas and petroleum. Polyethylene is usually stable and resistant to degradation. Even though the polyethylene film will naturally fragment and biodegrade, but it can take many decades to do this. In the meantime plastic shopping bags can cause an environmental problem. If the plastic shopping bags are littered, they can be unsightly as well as hazardous to wildlife. Even if they are disposed of in a sanitary landfill, most of them do not readily decompose.

Many people have concerns about littered plastic shopping bags. Littered plastic bags are unsightly and can create a hazard to animal life. Littering is often a bigger problem in developing countries than in developed countries, where trash collection infrastructure is less developed in those developing countries. Efforts are underway to control excess usage, reduce littering and to increase reuse and recycling. People are encouraged to use reusable shopping bags, when possible.

In an effort to reduce plastic shopping bags use, the Selangor state government has declared every Saturday as a “No Plastic Bag Day” effective 1st January 2010. This campaign is aim at reducing the usage of plastic bags in Selangor as well as to increase the awareness level of consumers on the negative impacts of using plastic shopping bags.

Therefore, this study is timely to capture how the environmental campaign would lead to households acceptance and awareness level, and later develop lifestyles that have more benign environmental implications. On this premise, this study attempts to seek the following objectives:

i. to determine the attitude of households towards this campaign,
ii. to analyze the awareness level of households towards using of plastic shopping bags and the campaign,
iii. to identify the households’ acceptance level on the campaign.

2. Literature Review

Realizing the lack of consumer awareness has fueled the litter debate and demands to curb plastic bags use. According to Coeli (2007), there are indications that consumer sentiment is changing. Retailers across America report that consumers demand for reusable bags is increasing. In 2007, five supermarket companies operating nearly 1700 stores tracked consumers comments about bag use during various times throughout the year. These were unsolicited comments coming into their consumer affairs or corporate offices.

They received 148 requests that their stores provide reusable bags, and 121 suggested that they offer consumer incentives for using these bags. Smaller numbers expressed a preference for paper (83) and degradable plastic bags (24).

Based on the BBC News (2008), among African nations, South Africa was the first to act by banning ultra-thin plastic bags and imposing taxes on thicker ones in 2003, while Kenya and Uganda followed suit in 2007. Eritrea, Rwanda and Somalia banned all plastic bags in 2005, as did Tanzania the following year.

Australia began taking action in 2002. The nation’s Environmental Protection and Heritage Council set a goal to phase out single-use bags by the end of 2008 (Environmental Protection and Heritage Council. (2007)).

The Australian Retailers Association adopted a Code of Practice for the Management of Plastic Bags in 2003, including a commitment by major supermarkets to a 50 percent reduction in HDPE bags by end of 2005. Industry and government campaigns to promote reusable bags and recycling and dissuade shoppers from using single-use ones produced significant results. Plastic bags consumption declined from
6.9 billion in 2002 to 3.9 billion in 2005. According to CBC News (2007), in Canada, Leaf Rapids, Manitoba, became the country’s first city to ban plastic bags, starting in April 2007.

CTV (2007) also stated that Ontario is moving to reduce plastic bags use with incentives, working with the Recycling Council of Ontario and grocer and retail associations. The incentives include store points redeemable for products, airline miles or cash for consumers who use reusable bags. Retailers are training clerks to double-bag less often, fill bags with more items and stop bagging large items.

Associated Press (2008) held that China is prohibiting all supermarkets, department stores and other retailers from providing customers free plastic bags. Retailers are required to charge customers for any bags they use at a rate equal to the cost. The country banned altogether the use of ultra-thin plastic bags, which have become a major source of litter. Retailers that violate this requirement could face fines of up to 10000 Yuan ($1431).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research instrument

The survey instrument was a four page questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two sections: Section A and Section B. Section A has three main items: acceptance, awareness and attitude of households. This section is to gather as much information as possible on the extents of the households’ readiness, acceptance and adoption of the new shopping behaviour using a Likert scale of 1 to 5.

Section B was to elicit demographical information such as gender, education level, type of house and number of households. The construction of questionnaires are based on the discussion with the BM230 (Business Economics Program) group from the environmental economics class.

3.2 Sampling procedure and data collection method

Assistance was sought from BM230 students taking Environmental Economics course in distributing questionnaires to households on Saturday at few participating hypermarkets around Shah Alam, such as Giant, Tesco, Carrefour, and Jaya Jusco. A sample size of between 100 respondents is sufficient representation of the total population in Shah Alam.

4. Analysis and finding

4.1. Profile of Respondents and Attitude towards the Campaign

Table 1 provides the respondents’ demographic profile. As shown, majority of the respondents are female as we can conclude most of the shopping activities done by women. Likewise, the percentage of race reflects the current ethnic proportion in Malaysia. The majority of them cited ‘Tesco and Giant Supermarket’ – two of the most favorites’ hypermarkets in Malaysia as the place they bought their groceries.
Table 1. Background of respondents (n=100)

| Age          | Percentage | Education Level       | Percentage |
|--------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|
| 18-20 years  | 10         | Diploma and below     | 20         |
| 21-27 years  | 30         | Bachelor              | 70         |
| 27 and above | 60         | Master and above      | 10         |

| Type of house | Percentage | Percentage |
|---------------|------------|------------|
| Flat          | 50         | Semi-detached| 15         |
| Terrace       | 20         | Bungalow    | 15         |

| Race          | Percentage | Gender     | Percentage |
|---------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Malay         | 66.3       | Male       | 40.0       |
| Chinese       | 18.7       | Female     | 60.0       |
| Indian        | 12.0       |            |            |
| Others        | 3.0        |            |            |

Table 2 provides an overview of Shah Alam households’ attitude towards the campaign. As demonstrated in the table, the households were rather receptive towards the campaign when they support (mean 4.15) that the campaign is at the right time. Likewise, they seemed reluctant to bring their recycle bags on Saturday (2.89) and did not think paying 20sen for a plastic bag is a fair price (2.96). Nonetheless, they agreed that ‘supermarkets/shopping outlets should use paper bags instead of plastic bags’ (4.06). It is critical to the long-term success of a campaign to build the attitude by paying attention to understanding these households better and meeting their needs as closely as possible and at the same time protecting the environment as they agreed that the campaign is at the right time (4.30).

Table 2. Household’s attitude towards campaign

| Questions                                                                 | Mean |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Do you think the campaign is at the right time?                           | 4.30 |
| Do you support this campaign?                                            | 4.15 |
| Do you bring your own recycle bag while shopping on Saturday?             | 2.89 |
| Do you think paying 20 cents for plastic bag is a fair price?             | 2.96 |
| Do you agree that supermarkets/shopping outlets should use paper bags instead of plastic bags? | 4.06 |

Scale 1- Strongly disagree - 5 strongly agree
4.2. Awareness and Acceptance of the Campaign

Table 3 shows the finding of the awareness level of the households about the danger of plastic bags and their awareness towards the environment campaign. The findings revealed that 80% of the respondents have good awareness about the danger of plastic bags. The same percentage of respondents is highly aware that the use of plastic bags will reduce the environment quality. By participating in the plastic bags campaign, 85% is aware that they will help the environment and 75% is also aware that they have to pay 20 cents for a plastic bag. Rather than using plastic bags, would it better to use paper bags on Saturday because it is biogradable item, 49% respondents responded that they are highly aware.

Table 3. Plastic and campaign awareness level

| Items                                      | Percentage |               |               |               |               |               |
|--------------------------------------------|------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                                            | Not aware  | Little Awareness | Neutral | Moderate Awareness | High Awareness | Standard Deviation | Mean |
| Plastic bag is non-biogradable item.       | 4          | 6              | 10           | 40            | 40            | 1.068          | 3.97 |
| The use of plastic bag will reduce environmental quality. | 2          | 3              | 15           | 40            | 40            | 0.917          | 4.13 |
| Your participation in this campaign will help the environment. | 2          | 6              | 12           | 45            | 35            | 0.947          | 4.05 |
| You have to pay 20sen for a plastic bag on Saturday. | 8          | 8              | 12           | 24            | 48            | 1.286          | 3.96 |
| Paper bag is better than plastic bag because it is biogradable item? | 2          | 1              | 19           | 29            | 49            | 0.972          | 4.22 |

In Table 4, the findings of the acceptance level showed that 66% respondents agreed that they are comfortable with the campaign and only 10% respondents disagreed that the campaign is at the right time. Majority of the respondents find it convenience to bring their own shopping bags. On whether the campaign helps the environment or not, 89% respondents responded positively to the statement. To practice the campaign everyday, 75% agreed with the action.
Table 4. Plastic and campaign acceptance level

| Items                                           | Percentage |            |            |            | Standard Deviation | Mean |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------------|------|
|                                                 | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |      |
| Comfortable with this campaign.                 | 25         | 41         | 26        | 5         | 3                  | 0.974| 3.80 |
| The campaign is at the right time.              | 34         | 35         | 21        | 9         | 1                  | 1.002| 3.92 |
| Convenience to bring your own shopping bag.     | 19         | 27         | 30        | 18        | 6                  | 1.158| 3.35 |
| This campaign will help the environment.        | 46         | 32         | 11        | 8         | 3                  | 1.078| 4.10 |
| This campaign should be practiced every day.    | 28         | 28         | 19        | 19        | 6                  | 1.251| 3.53 |

5. Conclusion

From the study, we could summarize that generally households are supporting the campaign initiated by the Selangor state government. The results revealed that most of the respondents showing positive reaction about the campaign regardless of the education background. Despite of the three months campaign, we can conclude that “white pollution” has reduced and level of awareness of the households especially in Selangor towards the environment is increasing. This campaign should make people understand better about the environmental damage that caused by plastic bags which required a very long term to be disposed naturally. This campaign has indirectly educate people about the consequences of not properly disposed plastic bags, reducing the usage of plastic bags, the long term consequences that the world may suffer as well as the hazardous environment that our future generation would inherit.

Based on the study we would recommend the authorities or related parties to increase the price of each plastic bag demanded on weekend or limit the number of plastic bags allowable for each customer during the week days. This action would help to reduce the number of plastic bags being used and littered in Shah Alam. Other than that, businesses are encourage producing plastic bags with pictures or words that depict the environmental damage that caused by plastic bags, which then would make consumers aware and realize the importance of keeping our environment free and clean from plastic bags litters. Lastly, authorities could also reward businesses that do not provide plastic bags to the end consumers or users.

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