

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the preliminary study on consumer values towards environmental products, the actual usage of non-woven bags. The main objective of the study is to examine the relationship between consumer values and the actual usage of non-woven bags. This chapter includes the research background, problem and objectives of this study. Several research questions and objectives will be developed. This chapter will also explain the importance of the study as well as the structure of this thesis.

1.2 Research Background

Earth is the home for all living things in the world. Due to humankind's ignorance and industrialization we are faced with challenges of a changing global climate and a wide range of pollution issues. It is our responsibility to remedy the harm that we have done. Therefore many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and Governments are actively cultivating the awareness about the importance of conservation.

However, environmentally friendly products always cost more due to additional, new or modified processes, techniques and systems to reduce environmental harm (Lin and Ho, 2010). According to the Greendex Survey, sponsored by the

National Geographic Society and Globescan Inc., Chinese consumers rank third, which shows they are becoming increasingly interested in environmentally friendly practices and products (China business review.com, 2010). Eighty-one per cent of the respondents are willing to pay more for energy-saving products, and 69 per cent say they try to reduce their carbon footprint. Compared to 2008, more Chinese are repairing rather than replacing broken items, using their own shopping bags, avoiding excessive packaging, buying green products, and recycling (China business review.com, 2010).

Malaysia Sirim QAS International launched an eco-labelling scheme known as ECO-LABEL, which verifies products according to environmental criteria such as Environmentally Degradable, Non-Toxic Plastic Packaging Material, Hazardous Metal-Free Electrical and Electronic Equipment, Biodegradable Cleaning Agents and Recycled Paper. The Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority (FAMA) has the Malaysia Best logo for environmentally friendly agriculture products and the Malaysian Energy Commission for energy efficient electrical products.

Recently, Malaysia has followed in the footsteps of many countries in launching a 'No Plastic Bag' campaign. This campaign is to support the reduction in plastic bag usage and is targeted at consumers and retailers, hypermarkets and mini-markets; for example, retailers will charge shoppers for plastic bags on Saturday. Plastic bags upon request will be charged RM0.20/each (The star online, 2011).

Even though some states in Malaysia are not keen on the “No Plastic Bag” campaign, the states of Penang and Selangor are aggressively participating in this campaign. To step up the green campaign in Penang, from 1st January 2011, the Penang state government imposed a “no free plastic bag” policy. This new rule applies to all retailers excluding hawkers and market traders, mini-markets and sole proprietorship business, who only adhere to it on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

The no plastic bag campaign has affected plastic bag makers who might face declining sale volumes and be forced to concentrate on the production of plastic garbage bags. However, the new rule has accelerated plastic bag maker’s efforts to develop bio-degradable plastic and non-woven bags, which are in line with the government’s vision to create a green and clean country. Hypermarkets such as Tesco and Carrefour use bio-degradable plastic bags and now most of the supermarkets and hypermarkets are selling non-woven bags. There is also an emerging trend of consumers using their own non-woven bags while shopping.

1.3 Research Problem

Despite the immense resources that are invested by the Governments and industry players in the no plastic campaign, we are uncertain whether the consumers are using non-woven bags because of the new rule that has been imposed or from awareness about the harmful use of plastic bags. To help fill this

research gap, this research study investigates the motives and behaviour of consumers when using non-woven bags during shopping.

1.4 Research Question

1. What is the relationship between consumer values (altruistic values, egoistic values, anthropocentric values, ecocentric values) and consumer awareness of the consequences?
2. What is the relationship between the consumer awareness of the consequences and attribution of responsibility?
3. What is the relationship between the attribution of responsibility and personal norms of consumers?
4. What is the relationship between the personal norms of consumers and their actual usage of non-woven bags?
5. How can the Value-Belief-Norm Theory explain consumers' use of non-woven bags?

1.5 Research Objectives

1. To identify the relationship between consumer values (altruistic values, egoistic values, anthropocentric values, ecocentric values) and consumer awareness of the consequences.

2. To identify the relationship between consumer awareness of the consequences and attribution of responsibility.
3. To identify the relationship between attribution of responsibility and personal norms of consumers.
4. To identify the relationship between the personal norms of consumers and their actual usage of non-woven bags.
5. To assist enterprises and governments in gaining a better understanding of the potential of non-woven bags.
6. To test the applicability of Value-Belief-Norm Theory in understanding consumer behaviour in the use of non-woven bags.

1.6 Importance of the Study

This study aims to determine and understand consumer behaviour in using non-woven bags within the nation, in order to assist and provide industry, related companies and the government with a better understanding of the potential market for non-woven bags.

Through this research, industry, related companies and the government can use proper strategies to encourage consumers to use non-woven bags and thereby benefit the planet. All inputs from this research will enhance the present actual usage and maximize the output from the manufacturers and the government.

1.7 Organization of the Study

This thesis has five chapters, which are structured as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one provides an overview of this thesis, background and problem of the study and presents and develops the research questions and objectives as well as reveals the importance of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two provides an overview of plastic and non-woven bags as well as discusses the theoretical background on the construct of the Value-Belief-Norm Theory.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the research methodology and provides an explanation of the research design. The research hypotheses, framework, questionnaire sampling design, data collection procedure and data analysis are revealed in this chapter.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

Chapter four presents and interprets the overall data collected in this study. The respondents' demographic profiles will be interpreted and is followed by an interpretation of the relationship between the constructs.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

The last chapter presents the final results of this study. The summary, conclusion and discussion of the managerial implications, as well as the limitations of the study are also presented.

1.8 Summary

This chapter covered the overview of this study and discussed related information including the problem statement, research questions and research objectives. The organization of the study is also included in this chapter to provide the readers with a better understanding of the structure of this thesis. Chapter two will cover the literature review.