

Consumers Readiness to do Away with Single-use Plastic Straws

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ABSTRACT The negative impact plastic straw on the environment has led to the vast campaign and banning of straws to curb the usage of single-use straw, especially in food premise. Reusable straw made from stainless steel may offer the solution to the problem from getting worse. However, not everyone is willing to bring their straw every time they dine out. Eliminating the use of single-use plastic straw may prove to be effective in tackling this problem. Thus, the objective of this study is to determine consumers readiness not to use single-use plastic straw. The study was conducted on 422 respondents from Kuala Lumpur, specifically in the Golden Triangle area through convenience sampling. Data collected from questionnaires were then analyzed using descriptive analysis. Results showed most respondents are willing to do away with single-use plastic straw, especially when drinking cold beverage as well as using a recyclable or compostable straw. Overall, readiness of consumers in Kuala Lumpur to do away with single-use plastic straw is high. Therefore, initiatives to reduce the usage of single-use plastic straw should focus on strategies most preferred by respondents.

KEYWORDS: Single-use; Plastic straws; To-do away; Consumers readiness; Kuala Lumpur

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INTRODUCTION

The use of single-use straw is among the 11 plastic items that are often found in the ocean (Jordan, 2018). It is also one of the plastic products that is considered a very wasteful product to use because it will only be used once. In the United States alone, an estimated eight million tonnes of plastic are dumped into the oceans, and about 0.025 per cent of that amount is single-use straws (Gibbens, 2018). With the arising issues concerning plastic straws, the European Union (EU) has proposed a widespread ban on the use of single-use straws, cutleries, and plastic cotton buds to eliminate plastic waste that has begun to appear in the food chain across Europe (Adnan, 2018).

Similarly, in Malaysia, there has been a growing concern on plastic waste including single-use straws. As reported by Mohd Khalid (2018), the ban on the use of single-use straws in Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan will be implemented on 1st January 2019. The prohibition was proposed to make consumers aware of the importance of environmental protection. Franchise company has also joined in the bandwagon with McDonald Malaysia introducing the 'Say No to Straw' campaign. This campaign was launched to help ban the use of plastic beverage straws - it is no longer given to consumers unless specifically requested at the counter (Says, 2018).

Campaigns aiming to reduce the use of single-use straw is seen as less effective as consumers are still using it daily. Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine the readiness of consumers not to use single-use plastic straw.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Beverage straw is one of the most helpful human inventions and is one of the oldest food utensils in the world. Referring to The History of Drinking (2019), the use of straws can make it easier for a

person to drink any beverages. Two types of straws available in the market today are disposable beverage straws (single-use) and reusable beverage straws (Painter, 2018). Reusable straws are gaining popularity among consumers to reduce the use of disposable straws. However, the use of disposable straws mainly plastic straws, is still in high demand because they are readily available and cheap compared to others (Denham, 2018).

Many campaigns are carried out to support the ban on the use of disposable straws, mostly plastic straws, due to the negative impact it has on the environment. The campaign was implemented to raise consumer awareness on the use of plastic straws globally and even in Malaysia. Among the campaigns are 'No Straw, Please!' by Ocean Park Conservation Foundation Hong Kong (2017), 'Skip the Straw' by Ocean Conservancy (2019), 'Say No to Plastic Straw and Single-Use Plastic' by Majlis Bandaraya Pulau Pinang (2018) and 'Tak Nak Straw' in Kuala Lumpur (Chew, 2018).

Even though much has been done to educate and increase awareness among consumers, their readiness to do away with single-use straw is still at a low level. Sivanandam (2019), reported that 10% of the respondents in his study uses plastic straw several times a day, 12% uses it at least once a day, while 31% uses straw several times a week. This shows significant number of plastic straws being disposed daily. Similarly, data released by Ocean Conservancy (2018), reveal that single-use plastic straw was ranked the 7th place in the list of items successfully collected during the 2017 International Coastal Cleanup Event. This indirectly shows the willingness of consumers to use reusable straws is still at a low level.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 422 respondents participated in this study by using convenience sampling. Respondents were approached in high traffic areas around the 'Golden Triangle' area in Kuala Lumpur, situated between Jalan Sultan Ismail, Jalan Imbi and Jalan Raja Chulan. This area was chosen as it offers several shopping malls, offices, and restaurants. The questionnaire consists of two parts: Part A designed to identify respondents demographic; and Part B to identify respondents' readiness to do away with single-use straws (5-point likert scale). Data collected were analysed using descriptive analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' readiness to not use single-use plastic straw is depicted in Table 1. The findings shows that most respondents strongly agree (37.7%) they have no problem drinking using recyclable straws such as those made from paper and corn starch. This could be because most food premises in Kuala Lumpur have started using recyclable or compostable straws. Majority of respondents also agree that they do not have a problem drinking cold beverage without using straws, indicating a positive outcome from campaigns and actions taken by food operators. Respondents' willingness not to use straws when drinking cold beverages can also be attributed to the success of Starbucks chain, where they have launched innovative beverage lid that has a funnel for cold and iced drinks (Rochman, 2018).

However, a high number of respondents agree (43.1%) and strongly agrees (31.5%) that they will request for plastic straws when needed, especially for drinking cold beverages. This can often be seen in food premises that offer options to customers such as McDonald that provides straws upon request (Jayne, 2018). A drastic approach, such as eliminating single-use straw in the premise, would

be an excellent move to curb the use of this straws. Similarly, most of them will use a single-use straw for certain type of drinks such as 'bubble tea' as there is still no recyclable or compostable option for this kind of beverages. Currently only reusable stainless-steel straw is available with a suitable width. This, however, may be inconvenient for customers to bring and clean their own straw, resulting in the use of plastic straws instead. Charging for single-use straw may be less useful to discourage customers from using plastic straw as quite a high number (32.5%) of them do not mind being charged.

Table 1. Respondents' readiness to not use single-use plastic straw

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
I do not have a problem drinking beverage using recyclable single-use straw (example: paper straw).	13 (3.1%)	22 (5.2%)	71 (16.8%)	157 (37.2%)	159 (37.7%)
I will only ask for single use straw when needed.	8 (1.9%)	21 (5.0%)	78 (18.5%)	182 (43.1%)	133 (31.5%)
I am willing to drink cold beverage without using straw.	13 (3.1%)	10 (2.4%)	67 (15.6%)	178 (42.2%)	154 (36.5%)
I will ask for single use straw depending on the type of beverage (example: bubble Tea).	12 (2.8%)	12 (2.8%)	77 (18.2%)	181 (42.9%)	140 (33.2%)
I am willing to be charged for single-use straw.	44 (10.4%)	44 (10.4%)	105 (24.9%)	92 (21.8%)	137 (32.5%)

*note: 1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Somewhat Disagree, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree

CONCLUSION

Consumer readiness to not use single-use plastic straw is high, indicating a positive outcome to curb the use of plastic straw. Findings from this study disclose that a specific strategy may prove to be more effective in encouraging consumers to do away with single-use plastic straw such as using recyclable or compostable straw and eliminating straws in food premise. Charging extra for plastic straw may have less effect on consumers and will take some time to finally show the desired result. Also, there is a need for a more convenient and innovative design that allows for drinking without relying on straws. Data from this study may benefit policy makers as well as non-profit organization in their effort to encourage consumers to do away with single-use plastic straws.

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