

Understanding the Barriers Against Eco-Friendly Behavior

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ABSTRACT

Over the past two decades, increased media coverage – coupled with economic incentives has substantially raised citizens' awareness and concern about environmental sustainability, but has typically failed to induce persistent behavioral changes. The ineffectiveness may due to the fact that all this time the discussions and efforts to tackle environmental problems, research conducted, and policies made by the government are always based on non – psychological perspective, such as legal studies, economic, and policy maker perspective. Effort from psychological perspective is relatively not easy to find whereas acting sustainably itself is actually a form of behavior. Hence, this study attempt to understand the gap between awareness of environmental sustainability and individual's actual behavior from a psychological perspective. The primary objective is to identify the barriers for individuals in implementing eco-friendly behavior. The data was obtained by using descriptive research method through semi-structured interview, non-participant observation combined with social experiment. As many as 32 respondents participated and chosen through incidental sampling technique. The research started by showing seven images that reflected environmental issues in order to do the mapping on participants' stage of knowledge. the results showed that there is clear evidence on "awareness -behavior" gap while barriers to act environmentally such as: laziness, underestimate their behavior toward the environment, feeling powerless to do some changes, absence of reward and punishment.

Keyword: environmental awareness, eco-friendly behavior, environmental sustainability

ABSTRAK

Selama dua dekade terakhir, peningkatan liputan media – bersama dengan pertumbuhan ekonomi telah secara substansial meningkatkan kesadaran dan kepedulian masyarakat akan kelestarian lingkungan, namun masih gagal dalam mendorong perubahan perilaku yang kontinyu. Ketidakefektifan tersebut mungkin disebabkan karena selama ini pembahasan dan upaya yang dilakukan, kebijakan yang disusun oleh Pemerintah selalu hanya berfokus pada perspektif non-psikologi, seperti perspektif hukum, ekonomi dan para pembuat kebijakan semata. Upaya dari sisi Psikologis relative tidak mudah ditemukan, sedangkan berperilaku ramah lingkungan sendiri sebenarnya merupakan sebuah bentuk perilaku. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini mencoba untuk memahami gap antara kesadaran untuk berperilaku ramah lingkungan dengan perilaku aktualnya dari perspektif psikologis. Tujuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi hambatan individu dalam menerapkan perilaku ramah lingkungan. Data diperoleh dengan menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif melalui wawancara semi terstruktur, observasi non-partisipan yang dipadukan dengan eksperimen sosial. Sebanyak 32 orang responden berpartisipasi dan dipilih melalui tehnik "incidental Sampling". Penelitian dimulai dengan menampilkan tujuh gambar yang memuat isu-isu permasalahan lingkungan populer untuk memetakan level pengetahuan responden terhadap permasalahan lingkungan terkini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat bukti yang jelas ada kesenjangan antara kesadaran dan kecenderungan untuk berperilaku ramah lingkungan. Adapun hambatannya adalah rasa malas, meremehkan perilaku baik terhadap lingkungan, merasa tidak berdaya untuk membuat perubahan terkait kerusakan lingkungan, dan tidak adanya "reward dan punishment" untuk perilaku seseorang terhadap lingkungannya.

Kata Kunci: kesadaran lingkungan, perilaku ramah lingkungan, kelestarian lingkungan

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INTRODUCTION

The environmental problem has become an undisputed fact about our current livelihoods. People around the world are facing and challenging environmental issues every day. Some environmental issues faced by people around the world included: global warming, pollution, overpopulation, waste disposal, climate change, biodiversity, deforestation, ocean acidification, acid rain, urban sprawl, and natural resource depletion. Some of them are small and only affect a few ecosystems, but others are huge and affect environmental sustainability. Morelli (2011) defined environmental sustainability as a balance condition, resilience, and interrelationship that allows society to fulfill their needs without exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems. The author of this research believes that environmental sustainability strongly depends on human behavior patterns.

As for illustration, research carried by Iskandar (2011) regarding residents' behavior who throwing a pile of rubbish into the river mentioned that basically, people who live along the river know that their behavior is wrong, they typically understand that it can pollute the river, killing the animal, and at some point, can cause a flooding. Residents also know that to dispose a trash it must be sorted first, between organic and non-organic waste. Thus, cognitively they already know what to do in terms of disposing a garbage. The attitude of the population towards the proper disposal of garbage is positive. However, their behavior indicated otherwise, they keep throwing a rubbish into the river. This condition proves that a positive attitude towards something does not necessarily make the behavior positive or linear either. To concluded, other variables must influence the occurrence of that kind of behavior. In other words, attitude is not the one and only variable that influences the tendency to behave in a certain way. Numerous theoretical frameworks have been developed to explain the gap between the possession of environmental knowledge and environmental

awareness and displaying pro-environmental behavior (Kollmuss & Agyemen, 2002).

For instance, research conducted by Marcia et al. (2011) found that there was "an Attitude – Behavior Gap" in consumer intention for the green product and their actual purchase behavior. This statement was strengthened by Bamdad (2019) who found that there is a gap between individuals' eco-friendly attitude and actual travel behavior. His research showed that eco-friendly behavior of environmental experts in their home setting does not spill over to tourism context. Other study conducted by Wang and Mangmeechai (2021) found that only people with high-level perceptions of policy and strong behavior intentions who more likely to engage in eco-friendly behavior. The findings suggest that factors such as perceived policy effectiveness and actual behavioral control should be considered when implementing new policies and campaigns for waste sorting and management.

From various studies above it's clear that there is a substantial gap between environmental awareness and the actual behavior itself. Thus, what are the barriers to eco-friendly behavior? According to Hines et al. (1986) it was called "situational factors", which include economic constraints, social pressure and opportunities to choose different actions, while according to Borden and Francis (1978 as noted in Lehmann, 1999) "*person with a strong selfish and competitive orientation are less likely to act ecologically*". The latest research conducted by Kollmuss and Agyemen (2002) emphasized that the old habit as a very strong barrier for eco-friendly behavior. Therefore, it can be concluded that the answer to the question "what are the barriers to eco-friendly behavior?" is extremely intricate.

The author believes that individual behavior is affected by their surrounding (e.g. town, city, culture) thus any different methods and setting of the study used will result in different inhibiting factors and will add value to the current state of the topic. Hence, this paper aims to provide new insight regarding the gap and the barriers to environmentally friendly behavior by providing the answer to

the question above with different setting of study and method. The research did in descriptive research thus the readers could understand the whole story of why individuals tend to be inconsistent regardless of this matter in the context of society who live in areas where the environmental damage is not too severe.

METHODS

The research was carried out through a descriptive approach combined with a social experiment (*percobaan sosial*). Descriptive approach aims to describe “what exists” in a real-life situation. Mack et al. (2005) added that the descriptive approach usually used to explore the phenomenon by conducting an interview and observation. The data collection of this study was obtained through the process of interview, observation and self-reported questionnaire. In addition to that, socio-demographic data such as age, gender, education, occupation of participants were also collected when the participant fulfilled the self-reported questionnaire. While social experiment was used to test human’s reaction or action to certain situations or events in a real-life setting. A social experiment is commonly used in a type of research done in the field like psychology to see how people behave and how they respond to a particular situation.

Participants

The samples on this study were carried out through non – probability sampling techniques. More specifically is a convenience sampling technique. Convenience sampling or usually also known as incidental sampling is a sampling technique that relies on data collection from population members who are accidentally available to participate in this research (Lisa, 2008). As many as 32 people participated in this study. They were chosen based on their actual behavior toward the environment which was observed by the author during their activity in the local park (Taman

Blang Padang) of Banda Aceh. Before they were given the self-reported questionnaires and being interviewed, the participants were given first the informed consent sheet in order to find out their willingness to participated in this research.

Instruments and Data Analysis

The instruments used on this study are an interview guide, observation sheet and self-reported questionnaire prepared by using the reference of the environmental awareness theory from Ham et al. (2015), model of eco-friendly behavior by Blake (1999) combined with the theory of 7 dimensions of environmental sustainability issues by Stafford et al. (1994), Pettinger (2018) which are: long – term health of ecosystem, renewable resources, prevent the consequence of man-made global warming, intergenerational decision making, value environmental resource, protection of diversity, and targeting social welfare. The theory of typical issues in environmental sustainability was used to portray the participant knowledge or awareness on the particular issues. The data collected from the interview was analyzed and interpreted through a thematic analysis. A thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of themes in the interview data. In this study the author used data triangulation by using different data sources. The alloanamnesis has been done with the founder of Aceh Zero Plastic in order to increase the credibility and vailidity of research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research began with a brief survey about how far the community understood about the current issue related to environmental sustainability. According to Stafford et al. (1994), Pettinger (2018) there are at least 7 dimensions of environmental sustainability, respectively: long – term health of ecosystem, renewable resources, prevent the consequence of man- made global warming,

intergenerational decision making, value environmental resource, protection of diversity, and targeting social welfare. Subsequently, the author this study chose images that reflected environmental sustainability issues. The survey starts with displaying the images and then continued with the following questions: (1) what did you know about the image?; (2) How could that happened?; (3) How does the image relate to environmental sustainability?; (4) what is the impact of the image on human life?; How do you see the environmental changing in the future? From the result of this brief survey, combined with interview session and the analysis of self-reported questionnaire, it was discovered that the only issues which understood and mattered for the subjects are about “*Prevent the consequence of man-made of global warming*” and more specifically only limited to the issue of waste disposal. When they were asked to explain more about how the waste could have an impact on global warming, none of them could explain it correctly nor even close to the truth. Regarding the dimension of “*Values the environmental resources*”, the author of this study displayed the images of deforestation, almost all of the subjects on this survey were able to put the correct answer on what the image is about, but unfortunately only a few subjects who were able to explain how this image could affect environmental sustainability.

“Forest fires indeed can damage the environment... but I don’t have any idea about how it’s related to us. Since we live far from the forest. Hmm.. In my opinion maybe because there is no green area anymore huh?..” (Subject SH, line: 00053)

“I used to see the deforestation on the news. It’s happened because some industrial or companies wanted to make way for agriculture or grazing. It’s bad thing to do I can say. It’s bad because deforestation affects the

animals life..” (Subject FM, line: 00067)

The fact is the problem of deforestation is actually bigger than that. Unfortunately, only few participants mentioned something about how with fewer trees around to take in carbon dioxide, the greenhouse gas could accumulate in the atmosphere which can accelerate global warming or how the deforestation also can threaten the worlds’ biodiversity.

It can be concluded that most of the participants were failed to see the bigger picture of current environmental issues. Based on these findings, the environmental awareness within the 32 participants towards the issues of environmental sustainability was very inadequate.

Most of the subjects stating that environmental issues such as global warming only occur in overseas to be more spesific in western countries not in the area where they live today. Thus, it makes them feel fine to turn a blind eye towards it.

“I don’t really understand nor like I care about the global warming. I guess it only existed in some countries like America or Canada. etc. The developed contries have so many industrial factories and it does cause a global warming, I guess. But us? We don’t have factories here in Banda Aceh, I believe we are safe”. Global warming is not happening here”. (Subject IR, lines 000112)

As stated by Gifford (2011) that an individual might not captivated in eco-friendly behavior because they are simply unaware that global warming is happening; or they might aware but are lack-informed about the science of the global warming. This statement also strengthened by Van der Linden et al. (2015), invidual often feel powerless in achieving large foal such as mitigating global warming.

Most of the subject admitted that they are care about the environmental issues but they do not always know where to start the eco-friendly behavior in their daily basis.

"I do care about the environment. If the environment is damaged, we will also be affected right? But I just simply don't know where to start to. Hmm...at least I start with small things like not doing littering" (Subject RF, lines 00025)

The result was similar to the research findings by Landry et al. (2018) who mentioned that some individuals might think incapable of performing effective pro-environmental actions in their lives.

Having lack of awareness toward the environmental issues, they also stated that the major environmental issues somehow will not directly affect them thus they are not responsible to act environmentally friendly for now. To conclude, the mismatch between awareness of environmental sustainability and the action towards it happened because most of the subjects think that the environmental sustainability issue rarely linked to their local conditions. Research shown that individuals may not behave in accordance with environmental sustainability when they have litter control over the outcome of situation (Gifford, 2011).

When environmental issues were deliberately elicited, participants displayed their awareness but failed to indicate the real action in their daily life activities. As for barriers in implementing pro-environmental behavior according to the participants such as: laziness, underestimated their contribution, feeling powerless, being pessimistic, and the lack of reward and punishment system.

"...one thing to do if you care for the environment is by separating the waste, right? If I am not mistaken it's called 3R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), but I am too lazy

to do so... It's troublesome..." (Subject IR, lines 00044)

"..You know, most of people don't take into action regardless the environment, they care but yet they don't do anything about it. Thus, I think my contribution won't make any difference unless we are all working on that together." (Subject BF, lines 00023)

"when you take green into action, I mean like really care and do many things about environmental sustainability, the local government or even the government of Indonesia are just disinterested. They don't have a strict regulation about it. Environmental problem is not on their main agenda, it's always more about the infrastructure, so why bother?" (Subject RM, lines 000104)

The result shows that there is indeed a very clear gap between attitudes towards the sustainable environment and the possibility of eco-friendly behavior. All subjects in this study understood the importance of being environmentally-friendly because it will improve their quality of life, but failed to do so in their daily lives' basis. In light of other pressing local issue, general issues such as environmental sustainability is not perceived as a considerable threat at the moment therefore the action regardless that matter perceived unnecessary. Previous research shown that people with diverse cultural backgrounds have different perspectives and priorities (Landry et al., 2018), meaning people will use different excuses for their behavior depending on the contextual factors (Gifford & Nilson, 2014). As for Acehnese, environmental sustainability was far from their concern for now. As if environmental problem such as global warming is the issue that only faced by the western countries such as America, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, and Australia.

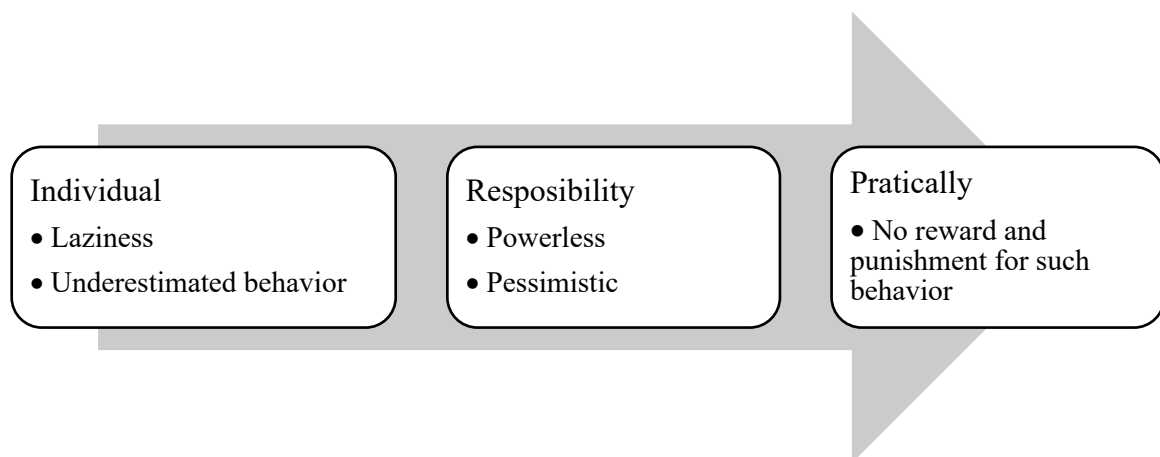


Figure 1. Barriers Against Eco-Friendly Behavior

For illustration, the most common environmental problem faced by the local community according to the respondents of this research was related to the waste disposal management and some of them also mentioned about air pollution. The local issues as stated above are more likely to be discussed and taken into action then a global environmental problem such as climate change or global warming.

"...Hmm..what to say, I guess the common environmental issue here is related to waste management. We can see that everyday we are still struggling with the rubbish. It is the real situation here" (Subject TY, lines 00017)

"...I don't want to blame anybody, I myself still couldn't manage my behavior toward trash. Then why should I think about what currently happening in another world?" (Subject TY, lines 32)

There is an indication, the respondents of this research think that local and global environmental problems are not fully interconnected. This kind of belief usually called as "ideological barriers". Ideological barriers are created by pre-conceived ideas and the way an individual thinks about the world (Gifford, 2011). Therefore, there is a need to

address the disconnect between local issues and global environmental problems, in order to make it is relevant to the local community and hopefully change their ideology about the environment. By bridging the gap, hopefully the global awareness will arise and concrete action related to environmental conservation will also carried out.

As for the barriers acting go-green according to the participants consists of several things for instance: 1) laziness – this variable comes from within the individual himself caused by a habit, 2) underestimated their contribution toward the environment, 3) feeling powerless – that they do not have a power to repair the environmental damage which has been or will be occur in the future, 4) being pessimistic toward their actions – this is happening because they think that preserving the environment is not an individual job, 5) no reward nor punishment – means no consequences for their actions, either they are being environmentally friendly or not. The conclusion from the findings of this study can be seen in the figure 1.

To complete the data collection, and for the importance of data triangulation the author of this research, later on, interviewed the founder of "Aceh Zero Plastic (AZP)" the first local community in Banda Aceh city whose concern about the environmental issue. According to the founder, the common

problem faced by Acehnese is they lack information about the environmental issues.

“If people worldwide have talked and done something about how to deal with global warming, most people in Aceh still don’t care about things as simple as protecting the environment from a pile of rubbish”

The interview result above shows that the author’s research findings are in line with the experience of AZP founder during managing the community.

CONCLUSION

Some conclusions could be drawn from the findings such as there is clear evidence on an “awareness – behavior” gap. The gap might occur due to the perception of no link between the global sustainable environment issue and the local conditions. The barriers to implement eco-friendly behavior such as laziness, underestimated their contribution toward the environment, feeling powerless, being pessimistic, and the lack of reward and punishment system. Weakness of Research: the results of this study cannot be generalized to other populations because of the very specific nature of its population. It is suggested for the researcher in future studies, to use other sampling techniques with a larger population.

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