

Influence of Environmental Consciousness and Knowledge on Green Practices: An Islamic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Green practices are a practice that has been long introduced to society today as part of daily practices in life. It was introduced with the aim of protecting and caring for this earth from activities that have a negative environmental effect. In order to assimilate these green practices into their daily lives, it was found that the environmental consciousness and knowledge factors were one of the motivators that influenced society to get involved in that practice. Hence, arises several questions, such as: what is meant by environmental consciousness and knowledge? What causes these factors to motivate green practices? How do these factors influence society to get involved in these practices? How are these factors debated from an Islamic perspective? Thus, this working paper aimed to explain these factors that influence on green practices from an Islamic perspective. Data was obtained from the main source of reference in Islam, Al-Qur'an and the Hadith as well as factors. In conclusion, the study found that the environmental consciousness and knowledge factors were capable of influencing and motivating society to get involved in green practices. In the process, this study also explained how these factors are debated in Islamic epistemology secondary sources, literature and previous studies. The data were analysed using the content analysis method in a classical qualitative mode to further explain the role of these.

Keywords: Green Practices, Islamic Perspective, Environmental Consciousness, Environmental Knowledge

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Numerous efforts have been initiated by responsible parties to ensure that the environment is safe and conducive, such as recycling practices or 3-R campaigns (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), “going green” campaign, “earth hour” campaign and “no plastic bag day” campaign (Golnaz Rezai *et.al.*, 2015). All these practices and campaigns are referred to as “green practices”. These green practices are closely related to activities concerning the conservation and preservation of the environment aimed at alleviating the negative effects on the environment in whatever context (Sun-Hwa Kim *et.al.*, 2017). Based on the intention to alleviate negative effects on the environment; hence, green practices play a dominant role among environmental activists and a large number of interested parties. Therefore, factors that encourage the implementation of green practices are frequently discussed. Based on current discussions, two main

factors have been identified as influencing green practices, namely environmental consciousness (Mostafa Mohammad, 2007; Amal Said, Hassan Elnaby & Wier, 2003; Chan & Lau, 2000) and environmental knowledge (Cox, 2008; D'Souza, Taghian & Lamb, 2006; Schahn & Holzer, 2005; Rokicka, 2002; Geller, 1981; Arbuthnot & Lingg, 1975).

Hence, this working paper intended to elaborate on the influence that could drive society to get involved in green practices. Next, the identified factors, namely environmental consciousness and knowledge were analysed to determine how these factors influenced society to adopt green practices as part of daily life. Then, both these factors were analysed from an Islamic perspective.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, this working paper was divided into four parts. The first part elaborated on the background of green practices. The second part discussed the factors that influenced society to get involved in green practices. It outlined previous studies and literature reviews that found environmental consciousness and knowledge to have an influence on society to get involved in green practices. The next part analysed the two factors from an Islamic perspective. The last part formed a conclusion about the two factors mentioned above.

2.1 GREEN PRACTICES

Green practices can be defined as any form of activity that involves development and application of products, campaigns, policies, equipment as well as systems to conserve the environment and natural resources as well as minimise or reduce the negative effects of human activity (Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water, 2009). Manakotla and Jauhari (2007) had defined 'green' as nature friendly and a sense of responsibility to the environment. According to Divine and Lepisto (2005), green practice is synonymous with a green lifestyle.

Therefore, it is clear that green practices comprise activities or matters that are nature friendly or represent the responsibility of humankind towards the natural environment. Among examples of activities that are green in nature are recycling practices, consumption of organic foodstuff, buying green products etc.

Green practices first gained attention when an increasing number of parties began to take notice about the fact that the earth and its environment was going to face the perils of destruction. The problem emanated from continuous development and lack of preservation initiatives among humans who were aggressive in carrying out development activities that caused the yearly increase in the rate of destruction and carnage. To counter this phenomenon, green practices not only gained attention but the commitment towards its implementation was also emphasised in international relations; for example, in Malaysia's commitment pledged during the Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen in 2009 that aimed to foresee a 40 percent decrease in carbon emissions by 2020. In realising this commitment, the Malaysian government, under the

auspices of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment had initiated 8 steps towards implementing and adopting green practices¹:

- i. **Feed-In Tariff (FIT) Scheme**
The feed-in-tariff (FIT) scheme was introduced to encourage the use of renewable energy, such as solar, biomass and biogas, by selling products or excess energy to utility companies appointed by Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB);
- ii. **Green Technology Financing Scheme - GTFS**
GTFS was created to develop the supply and use of green technology as well as to enable production companies and green technology consumption companies in Malaysia to make easy loans to finance their activities.
- iii. **Mixing 5% Bio-diesel with 95% Fossil Diesel (B5) Program**
The B5 Program refers to the use of 95% fossil diesel mixed with 5% bio-diesel from palm oil. The use of B5 would reduce glass house gas (GHG) emissions because the contents of carbon components in bio-diesel B5 is absorbed in the atmosphere by oil palm during the photosynthesis process. Hence, the bio-diesel B5 component is presumed to be carbon-neutral and able to reduce GHG emissions.
- iv. **Green Building Index (GBI) Certification Program**
GBI Malaysia is an initiative under the Malaysia Architecture Association (PAM) that recognises new building plans and upgrading existing building plans according to the building and upgrading specifications as a nature-friendly building (*green building*). The plan for every building registered under this program is studied and differences in energy consumption compared to ordinary buildings were ascertained in the form of decreased GHG emissions. This data would only be reported to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) when the building is going to be built or the building upgrading process has begun.
- v. **Use of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) by Vehicles**
Both petrol and CNG are fossil-based fuels. However, due to the difference in chemical structure, the carbon emission factor for CNG is lower compared to that of petrol. This means that for each unit of energy, the GHG emissions from using CNG is lower compared to GHG emissions from using petrol.
- vi. **Use of Public Transport and Hybrid Vehicles**
Encourage people to use the light rail transit (LRT) and Monorail services that were introduced in Kuala Lumpur under the maintenance of RAPID KL and the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system under the maintenance of Syarikat Prasarana Malaysia Bhd. Data on the sale of hybrid vehicles is also being monitored.
- vii. **The Sustainability Achieved via Energy Efficiency (SAVE) Program**

¹ Excerpt from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (2015).

The SAVE Program is one of the pilot projects under the National Key Economy Area (NKEA) for the Oil, Gas and Energy sector in the Economic Transformation Program (ETP). The SAVE Program was launched on 7 July 2011 and ended in 2013. The Program was deemed to be successful in reducing domestic electricity consumption by 208.96GWj cumulatively (from 2011 to 2013), which is equivalent to savings in electricity bills amounting to RM45.55 million. Overall, the decrease in CO₂ emissions through this program was estimated to be 208,705 tons (CO₂).

viii. “Green the Earth: One Citizen, One Tree” Campaign

The Ministry had also implemented the Planting 26 Million Trees Campaign with the theme “Green the Earth: One Citizen, One Tree”, which was launched nationwide in conjunction with World Earth Day on 22 April 2010. Until the end of 2013, 53 million trees have been planted in an area covering 65,560 hectares across Malaysia.

Looking at the efforts and steps undertaken, it is clear that efforts to realise green practices are viewed seriously by various parties. However, according to Muhammad Qayyum (2010), it was found that society’s awareness about green practices, especially his observations in the context of green technology, had still not achieved a satisfactory level. According to him, many among the public are not used to it, are not in the know and do not understand the term ‘green’, especially green technology. Anny Lim (2010) found that the level of society’s consciousness towards green practices were yet to achieve a satisfactory level. This, according to him, was due to the ‘do not care less’ attitude of Malaysia’s general society towards green practices

Therefore, it is important to examine the factors that could cultivate green practices among the general society so that green practices could be realised and achieved. In view of this, this working paper had initially examined the main factor according to an Islamic perspective since Muslims are a significant population in this world comprising 1.8 billion people or 24% of the global population. Although this number is the second highest after Christianity (2017); a study by the Pew Research Institute had suggested that considering the high birth rate among Muslim countries, the Muslim population could potentially become the largest population by 2070 (Huda, 2017). Hence, for this reason, it is highly significant for the green practices context to be viewed from an Islamic perspective.

3.1 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE GREEN PRACTICES

According to the analysis carried out, it was found that two main factors, namely environmental consciousness and environmental knowledge, were frequently instigating society get involved in green practices. Therefore, the influence of these two factors were determined based on previous studies.

3.1.1 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

According to several previous studies, environmental consciousness was one of the factors that could influence a person to get involved in any green activity. According to Yeung (2004)², environmental consciousness is defined as the effective characteristics used to determine whether a person is worried, considerate as well as likes or dislikes something related to the environment.

According to Mostafa Mohammad (2007), environmental consciousness is the most important factor for a marketer because this factor would help the marketer identify and approach the section of society that is truly conscious about the environment. According to Amal Said, Hassan Elnaby and Wier (2003), the level of environmental consciousness among the society was predicted to be high because the society laid importance on issues of health. This means that a society that emphasises on health has the potential to become a society that is frequently conscious about the environment.

Environmental consciousness should be emphasised in society in order to provide a sense of awareness to the general society about the negative effects culminating from our own lifestyle (Soon,1988)³. He further stated that with the sense of awareness, the society would form a new concept, which is an attitude to endeavour towards encouraging and maintaining environmental quality (Soon,1998)⁴.

Chan and Lau (2000) found that consciousness towards green ecology and knowledge could encourage consumers to buy green products. Hence, it could be concluded that with a society that is conscious about the environment and negative changes to nature, the society would endeavour to adopt green practices in their daily lives.

3.1.2 ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE

According to Jamilah Ahmad, Hasrina Mustafa, Hamidah Abd Hamid and Juliana Abd Wahab (2011), knowledge is defined in a context of seeking, maintaining and using information in life. Whereas, according to Fryzell and Lo (2003), knowledge in the context of consumers is defined as a character that influences the whole decision-making process. The researchers also stated that environmental knowledge could be defined as general knowledge about facts, concepts and the relationship between the natural environment and the ecosystem.

Kaufmann, Panni and Orphanidou (2012) explained that individuals who possess environmental knowledge are individuals who emphasise on matters related to producing a product, the influence of a product on the environment and the desired responsibility for maintaining environmental sustainability. The consumer's knowledge about nature includes the greenhouse effect, waste management, chemical waste and recycling (Norazah Mohd Suki, 2003). D'Souza, Taghian, Lamb and Peretiakos (2006) stated that knowledge about environmental issues influences a person's awareness about brands and a positive attitude towards green products. According to Cox (2008), consumers who possess knowledge about the

² Excerpt from Nurul Zarirah Nizam, Ismi Rajjani, Nusaibah Mansor and Siti Norbaya Yahaya (2014).

³ Excerpt from Mohd Fazli Sabri and Teoh Yong Yong (2006)

⁴ Excerpt Mohd Fazli Sabri and Teoh Yong Yong (2006)

cause and effect on nature have a high level of awareness and have the potential to use green products.

This clearly shows that the knowledge about nature factor plays an important role in encouraging an individual to get involved in matters that are nature or green friendly.

Kaplowitz and Levine (2005) found that students from public universities in America who involved themselves in the field of science such as medicine, natural science and agriculture possessed immense knowledge about issues pertaining to the environment. Arbuthnot and Lingg (1975), Geller (1981) and Schahn and Hozler (1990) had all shared the view of Kaplowitz and Levine (2005). Their findings showed that environmental knowledge could influence a person to get involved in environmental behaviour. In a similar vein, Rokicka (2002) in Poland found that individuals who possessed a high level of environmental knowledge were inclined to possess pro-environmental behaviour.

4.1 INFLUENCEING FACTOR ACCORDING TO AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

A basic aspect related to green practices is seen in the fundamentals of tasawur Islam, which presumes that the environment is a creature created by Allah SWT and bestowed on humankind in a form of pleasure that should be managed well. Thus, the importance of nature created by Allah SWT should be taught to Muslim so that the society is thankful and appreciative of all the joy bestowed by Allah SWT.

Islam believes that everything that exists has its own role on earth. According to Ibrahim Abdul-Matin (2010;1), everything created by Allah SWT is made in perfect balance (*mizan*). For example, plants and animals act as friends, protectors and food to humans. The sun and the moon symbolizes day and night work as a natural human clock to determine the time to play, rest, sleep and even pray. Islam proves that Allah SWT created human beings for the environment. The evidence of Allah SWT emphasizes His balance can be seen in surah *al-Baqarah* as follows;

“He has created man; He has taught him speech (and intelligence). The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed. And the herbs and the trees- both (alike) bow in adoration. And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance (Justice). In order that you may not transgress (due) balance. So establish weight with justice and fall not short in balance. It is he who has spread out the earth for (His) creatures”

(Surah *al-Baqarah* 2:3-10)

In short, humans and the environment need to work together to enhance and develop the earth rather than oppress each other for their own benefit. According to Noraziahi binti Mohd Yusop and Latipah binti Sidek (2010), environment is not seen as a source for human activities but an entity to increase knowledge and strengthen the faith, which

would help humankind to achieve a more orderly progress. Therefore, Islam has prohibited the destruction of nature and specifically this earth itself, as outlined in the verse in surah *al-Rum*, as follows;

“Corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by [reason of] what the hands of people have earned so He may let them taste part of [the consequence of] what they have done that perhaps they will return [to righteousness]”
(Surah *al-Rum* 30:41)

According to the verse, Allah SWT had emphasised on the destruction and carnage that would occur due to human actions such as the mismanagement of nature caused by a lack of responsibility and faith. Islam constantly maintains the importance of caring and preserving the earth from elements that could destroy it or have a negative effect on nature. This is mentioned in surah *al-Baqarah*, which explains the prohibition, as follows;

“And when it is said to them, "Do not cause corruption on the earth," they say, "We are but reformers. Unquestionably, it is they who are the corrupters, but they perceive [it] not”
(Surah *al-Baqarah* 2:11&12)

The verse in Surah *al-Baqarah* above strongly encourages humans to abstain from actions that could destroy this earth. However, in reality, getting caught in the wave of development and seeking technological progress, humankind’s responsibility towards the earth and nature is all but forgotten. Humans who are aggressive in development activities without having any effective and continuous preservation efforts could cause an increasing rate of destruction of this earth and nature.

Nevertheless, an initiative to decrease the rate of destruction and carnage of nature is by assimilating green practices in everyday life. Based on the analysis, in order to ensure that green practices are adopted, two main factors that influences society to get involved in environmental preservation were identified, which were environmental consciousness and environmental knowledge. Both these factors could be cultivated among the Muslims when they have a sense of responsibility towards the thrust bestowed on them. This is referred to as a feeling of servitude as well as a feeling of having a God (Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, 2009).

In other words, according to Islamic perspectives, green practices and factors that lead towards the realisation of green practices could be achieved by educating Muslims to have a feeling of responsibility towards whatever that is entrusted to them; thus, the relationship between humans and Allah SWT is frequently emphasised. Muslims who always ensure that whatever that is done is aimed at obtaining the blessings (*mardhatillah*) of Allah SWT are indirectly Muslims who are always responsible for whatever is happening on this earth, especially in regards to environmental care. This was elaborated by Muhammad Syukri Salleh (2003), who stated that in efforts to secure development and also efforts in any field, humans should first aim to obtain blessings (*mardhatillah*).

According to Muhammad Syukri Salleh (2003), in order to obtain blessings (*mardhatillah*), there are three points that should be stressed. First, humankind should *tauhid* (monotheism) with Allah SWT. Whatever is done by a person should be done sincerely in the name of Allah SWT and not because of the wish to gain praise. Hence, when evaluating the factors that influence society to practice green, humankind should firstly cultivate a sense of *tauhid* (monotheism) to Allah SWT and be sincere in whatever they do. Preservation efforts should be carried out sincerely and not with the intention to obtain praise from those around them. Second, is to safeguard the syariat established by Allah SWT. As a khalifah on this earth, humankind is responsible for the preservation of this earth from elements that could otherwise destroy it. This is evident in the concept of prohibition conveyed by Allah SWT to humankind regarding the act of saving nature from destruction, as mentioned in Surah *al-Baqarah*. Third is to safeguard the morality and personality of a Muslim. A Muslim should endeavour to abstain from acts that are *mazmumah* in nature. In this study, humankind should firstly examine their morality and personality to determine if their acts of destruction or carnage were due to elements of *mazmumah*. Therefore, when all these three elements are emphasised and initiated, then blessings (*mardhatillah*) would be forthcoming once green practices and environmental care are achieved.

5.1 CONCLUSION

It could be concluded that in every act that is committed, humankind should first endeavour to seek blessings (*mardhatillah*). Thus, if this aim is prioritised and pursued earnestly, then other desirable elements would follow through and happiness on this earth and the afterlife would be achieved. Therefore, in order to influence humankind to adopt green practices in life, the main objective, which is to seek blessings (*mardhatillah*) should be given priority first while ensuring that the factors that influence green practices are based on tasawur Islam.

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