

# Perceptions Towards No Single-Use Plastic Policy: The Case of Casual Dining Restaurants

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## ABSTRACT

Environmental challenges are becoming a never-ending source of study. Many nations are currently focusing on environmentally friendly policies. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 9003 established an ecological solid waste management program. In 2020, the municipality of Odiongan, Romblon enforced the "no single-use plastics" ordinance in all businesses, including restaurants. The goal of this research was to discover local green rules that apply to casual dining restaurant businesses. It also sought to establish how participants felt about the local government's green programs and identified the numerous green efforts and practices of selected restaurants as well as the impact of green policies on their operations as viewed by the owners/managers. The descriptive-qualitative approach using interview as a data collection method was used. Results show that the town of Odiongan is facing several challenges in properly implementing its green initiatives such as the availability and durability of low-cost alternative packaging materials. The policy on "no single-use plastics" needs to be understood more by casual dining restaurant owners and the general public.

Keywords: *green policies, green practices, operations, performance, casual dining restaurants*

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## INTRODUCTION

Several businesses began to distinguish themselves by embracing green practices and developing unique green products to ensure continuous consumer happiness. However, some of these businesses saw these practices, which assure the long-term viability of social life, as a burden and a liability (Azmi et al., 2017). Even though services are naturally ethereal, service operations frequently necessitate numerous tangible features of service goods that have an environmental impact. One of the least sustainable economic sectors has been identified as the restaurant industry (Wang et al., 2013). As a result, the restaurant industry bears a more significant share of the blame for environmental damage.

Environmental concerns have pushed practitioners to implement numerous environmental efforts in recent years. This development has prompted a significant study on the link between green efforts, green performance, and business performance (Seroka-Stolka, 2016). According to Flammer (2013), the

bouyant stock market reaction declines as more eco-friendly initiatives are implemented, implying decreasing marginal returns from environmental activities. Flammer conducted a follow-up study in 2015, which found a more significant marginal benefit for firms in industrial areas with higher corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. Recently, Tuppura et al. (2016) used sample data from US enterprises across four industry sectors to investigate the relationship between CSR and corporate financial performance. They discovered a bi-directional link between these two variables in the garment sector, energy, food, and forestry, when they looked at causality's influence. Given the rapidly expanding number of restaurants and the widespread habit of eating out, which has an increasingly negative influence on the environment, business establishments need to participate in green practices immediately. Firms may obtain economic benefits, improve environmental performance, and improve their corporate image by participating in the green practices' movement (Chen Tan et al., 2019).

In 2020, the municipality of Odiongan, Romblon mandated all establishments to refrain from the consumption of single-use plastics in support of Republic Act No. 9003, an act providing for an ecological solid waste management program, creating the necessary institutional mechanisms and incentives,

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declaring certain acts prohibited and providing penalties, appropriating funds, therefore, and for other purposes. Section 2-(f) provides greater private sector participation in solid waste management. This disrupted the operations of all existing businesses as they looked for alternative packaging materials for their products. It became one of the municipality's major priorities in prohibiting the use of plastics.

One of the challenges of the private sector, including restaurants in the town, is using paper instead of plastics unless the latter is recyclable. Wastes must be segregated and single-use plastics must be banned. Using plastic spoons and forks is prohibited, even plastic straws. Take-out orders require an additional fee for paper boxes or microwaveable containers. Some green practices to cope with these are purchasing spoons and forks made of corn starch.

These green practices that relate to banning plastic use are one of the green policies of Odiongan. However, it poses a challenge to the private sector as they will look for an alternative supplier that will maintain their operations and revenue.

This study aimed to determine the local government's green policies related to restaurant operations and the perceptions of selected owners/managers about the green policies mandated by the local government and their effect on their operations. Likewise, the various green initiatives and practices of selected casual restaurants in Odiongan, Romblon were determined.

### ***On Plastic Use***

The continuous dependence of people on plastics increases their consumption leading to a higher global environmental problem. Only two million tons per year were produced in 1950. Annual output has roughly doubled hitting 381 million tons in 2015 (Ritchie & Roser, 2018).

In 2002, Bangladesh became the first country to prohibit thinner plastic bags, followed by Morocco in 2016. In 2011, Australia became the first country to outlaw plastic bags. All merchants were subject to the prohibition on single-use, lightweight polyethylene polymer plastic bags with a thickness of less than 35 microns (these are the thin plastic bags with handles that were commonly provided at supermarket check-outs) (Policarpio, 2017).

In the Philippines, plastic straws and stirrers (66%), plastic *labo* bags (65%), styrofoam or polystyrene food containers (64%), sachets (60%), tetra packs for juices (59%), plastic drinking cups (56%), cutlery such as plastic spoons and forks (54%), plastic bottles for juice (49 %), and plastic bottles for water (41%) are the most commonly used plastics (Alegado, 2020). Nine provinces, 11 cities, and 101 municipalities have approved resolutions requesting the National Solid

Waste Management Commission (NSWMC) to release the long-awaited list of non-environmentally acceptable goods and packaging (NEAPP), which includes single-use plastics (Oceana, 2021). The province of Romblon was not included in the list. Davao Oriental Province has signed a petition calling for a statewide ban on single-use plastics, joining 30 other coastal provinces and local government units around the country (Palicte, 2020). Because much plastic debris ended up in the ocean, Davao enacted a resolution.

In addition, seven municipalities in Metro Manila passed their city ordinance about banning single-use plastics. Ordinance No. 10-109 of Muntinlupa City restricts plastic bags on dry products, regulates their use on wet items, and outlaws the use of styrofoam. Plastic bags, styrofoam/stylophone as packaging materials, and containers for dry items and food products are forbidden in commercial places.

Pasig's City Ordinance No. 9 Series of 2010 was implemented in July 2011. Plastics are banned from dry products and their usage is regulated for wet items. The use of styrofoam and similar materials in food, vegetables, and other items is likewise prohibited under this regulation. Styrofoam food containers and straws are included. Cutlery, plastic eating goods, and plastic kitchen wares are not covered.

With City Ordinance No. 1036-11, Las Piñas City initiated its ban on single-use plastic in January 2012. Individuals and businesses are prohibited from distributing thin-film, single-use, carry-out, plastic bags and polystyrene foam (styrofoam/stylophone) under the municipal code.

Plastic bags are not allowed in Pasay City, according to City Ordinance No. 4647. The usage of recyclable paper carry-out bags and reusable bags is also encouraged by this law.

In Makati, a Plastic Regulation Order requires businesses to supply free or for a fee paper bags, cloth bags, basket/woven bags, or equivalents. Business owners must also report plastic, styrofoam, and other non-biodegradable materials to the Plastic Monitoring Task Force under the legislation.

Following Ordinance SP-2876, Quezon City imposed a single-use plastic ban in February 2020. This regulation prohibits the distribution and use of single-use plastics in the city. For dine-in guests, single-use and throwaway products such as plastic spoons, forks, knives, plastic/paper cups, plates, straws, stirrers, and styrofoam are prohibited. Personal hygiene products such as bar and liquid soap, shampoo and conditioner, and other single-use containers are also forbidden in hotels.

In 2020, Paranaque City passed City Ordinance No.18-40, which prohibited using single-use plastic in all dry products. Plastic bags, straws, spoons & forks, glasses, and stirrers are prohibited.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive qualitative method. Two owners and two managers of casual dining restaurants in the municipality of Odiongan were interviewed about their perceptions of the effect of the "no single-use plastic policy" on their operations. A representative from the municipal mayor's office answered questions about the existing local green policies related to the food industry. The interviews were recorded with the participant's consent, transcribed and analyzed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The local government unit of Odiongan has many regulations regarding green policies, especially in solid waste management. There is an ordinance that aims to reduce plastic consumption. Odiongan wants to be known as a green municipality by promoting "Go Green Odiongan". Though there were many projects and programs the town wants to pursue, funding is the biggest problem.

As to the participants' perceptions regarding the "No-Single Use Plastic" policy, they are willing to follow the green policy by the LGU and are willing to be part of the save the earth movement; however, it was apparently becoming a burden for them as well. The LGU extended no suggestion for alternative or possible materials. Interestingly, one of the participants has been using biodegradable plastic bags provided by the Department of Science and Technology. Annoyance on the part of the customers was also a concern the establishment identified.

According to a countrywide poll conducted by Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) and Social Weather Stations, 6 out of 10 people are eager to buy food condiments in recyclable or refillable containers rather than sachets, and 4 out of 10 believed that enterprises should look for alternatives to plastic (Alegado, 2020).

The participants believed that the green policy affected the operations of their establishment. The habit of using disposable plastic materials has been an issue of concern. The customers kept asking for disposable plastic spoons, forks, cups, and bags. The participants received complaints about their products' taste, especially with their drinks when the customers used paper instead of plastic straw. The taste of the drink was affected. Participants also reported that the price of the paper materials they used was much higher than the plastic ones. For example, customers would ask for another when the paper straw got soaked and softened. For take-outs, microwaveable containers became the alternatives with an additional fee to be shouldered by

the customers. They also received complaints about the durability of the paper bag; thus, paper bags for take-outs are usually doubled.

Not only the participants but also the customers were experiencing challenges following the green policy implemented by the municipality of Odiongan. Furthermore, the participants claimed that their operations and revenue had been affected. The cost of alternative materials was twice as much. The higher cost of materials badly hurt their revenue. Some kept their menu price the same despite this situation. On the other hand, some establishments asked for additional payment only for take-out containers.

The owners/managers of casual dining restaurants are proactive in complying with the green policy of the municipality despite the difficulty of looking for alternative solutions to the "single-use plastic". This affected both their operation and financial performance. As much as they want to shift back to plastics because it is more convenient and less cheap, the ordinance prevented them from doing so.

To fully support the "no-single use plastic" policy of the LGU, the following green practices by the were enumerated by the participants: (a) use of paper cups and glasses instead of plastic cups; (b) use of paper straw/ metal straw as an alternative for plastic straw; (c) use of paper box, microwaveable container, paper bags and paper handles for take-outs; and (d) encouraging customers to bring containers for take-outs to avoid extra charges.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The green policies of the local government of Odiongan, especially in the ban on single-use plastics, are well-implemented in the town. Participants show initiative to comply with the ordinance despite the apparently limited orientation about this environmental program. One of the problems faced by casual dining restaurants is getting support and accurate information about single-use plastics. Participants experienced challenges in looking for suppliers of alternatives for single-use plastics. Using paper materials as alternatives has been a challenge for restaurants because of customer complaints and higher cost which eventually affects revenues.

Collaboration among government agencies is encouraged to provide alternatives for plastics that may focus on reducing, reusing, and recycling. Further research may be done such as the relationship between green policies and price increase, implementation of no single-plastic use and financial performance and waste characterization study in restaurants comparing the volume of plastic and paper wastes generated.

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## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization and design: K.V., G.M.; data collection: K.V., J.F., I.F., O.E.; analysis and interpretation of results: K.V., R.V., S.F.; draft manuscript preparation and revision: K.V., G.M.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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