



**PUBLICS' RESPONSE TOWARDS SMOKING: A  
TEST OF THE SITUATIONAL THEORY OF  
PROBLEM SOLVING**

**BY**

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement  
for the degree of Ph.D. in Human Sciences  
(Communication)**

**Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and  
Human Sciences  
International Islamic University Malaysia**

**APRIL 2014**

## **ABSTRACT**

Smoking has been an enduring problem in Asia. This health risk behaviour continues to haunt Malaysians as the number of smokers continues to rise. Taking a communication perspective on this issue, the theoretical arguments of the Situational Theory of Problem Solving is tested on Malaysians to explore their response towards smoking. The objective of this study is to understand how the Malaysian publics respond to smoking within the Situational Theory of Problem Solving framework, segmentation of the publics on the smoking issue and whether religiosity affects the publics' response towards smoking. Online survey was conducted and stratified random sampling was employed. A total of 334 administrative staff members of seven universities in Malaysia participated in this study. Data were analysed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and other statistical methods. Seven hypotheses were tested and supported. Understanding of the communicative reaction may help in the Stop Smoking campaigns as well as highlight the segmentation of the publics within this issue. Four types of publics were found similar to other studies utilising the Situational Theory of Problem Solving with aware public being the prominent group in this study. Aside from reinforcing the original model of the Situational Theory of Problem Solving, this study also added religiosity to further understand its contribution in combating health risk behaviours, such as smoking. Results show that religiosity plays an important role in increasing one's involvement recognition and problem recognition. The main objective for public relations practitioners is to mobilise the publics to become active publics on the issues concerned. Active publics have the potential to become activists as well as enhance the overall effort to solve the smoking problem.

## خلاصة البحث

يعتبر التدخين إحدى المشكلات المزمنة في آسيا. و مازال هذا السلوك المهدد للصحة يترصد بالمليزيين حيث يستمر عدد المدخنين في التزايد. و باتخاذ المنظور الاتصالي لتناول هذه المشكلة ، فإن الجدل النظرى فى ضوء نظرية حل المشكلات الموقفية قد تم اختباره على الماليزيين لاستطلاع مدى استجابتهم للتدخين. تم عمل استطلاع عبر النت وأخذت عينة طبقية عشوائية. شارك فى الدراسة ما جملة 334 إداريا يعملون فى سبع جامعات ماليزية. وتم تحليل البيانات باستخدام نموذج معادلة البناء (SEM) وتم اختبار سبع فرضيات وتدعيمها. وقد وجد أن فهم رد الفعل الاتصالي يمكن أن يساعد فى حملات وقف التدخين و يلقى الضوء على انقسام العامة تجاه هذا الموضوع. وبالإضافة إلى إعادة تطبيق النموذج الأصلي لنظرية حل المشكلات الموقفية فإن هذه الدراسة أضافت بعدا دينيا لزيادة فهم مدى مساهمته فى مواجهة التصرفات المهددة للصحة مثل التدخين. وقد أوضحت البيانات التى تم تجميعها أن التدخين يلعب دورا هاما فى زيادة وعى الشخص. إن الهدف الأساسى لممارسى العلاقات العامة هو تحفيز العامة ليصبحوا مواطنين أكثر إيجابية فى القضايا ذات الاهتمام المشترك. وإن هؤلاء الأشخاص الإيجابيين لديهم القابلية لأن يكونوا نشطاء فى مجال دعم الجهود العام فى سبيل حل مشكلة مثل التدخين.

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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SITUATIONAL THEORY OF PROBLEM SOLVING**

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*To my parents, Haji Abdul Jalil Embi and Hajah Zainab Abdullah, my soul mate, Dr.*

*Hisamudin Masdar, and my little caliphs Anwar, Afif, Asyraf, Aufa and Akmal.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Alhamdulillah, praise be to Allah (SWT) who had given me the strength and motivation to pursue my studies. To everyone who had assisted me, I am truly grateful.

The completion of this thesis would not be possible without the support of my supervisor Prof. Dato' Seri Dr. Syed Arabi Idid, co-supervisor Dr. Norbaiduri Ruslan and all my lecturers in the Communication Department especially Assoc. Prof. Dr. Saodah Wok, Prof. Dr. Fazal Rahim Khan, Dr. Che Mahzan, Dr. Aida Mokhtar and Dr. Nerawi Sedu. The guidance of Prof. Sahari Nordin and Dr. Nasser is truly invaluable in conducting my data analysis. My work would not be complete without the continuous support and coaching from Dr. Kim, Jeong-Nam (Purdue University) and Prof. Ramayah Thurasamy (Universiti Utara Malaysia). Not to mention the works by Dr. Othman bin Talib (UPM) that continues to enlighten many students including myself.

I am deeply indebted to my parents, Haji Abdul Jalil Embi and Hajah Zainab Abdullah for their never ending encouragement, motivation and assistance. To my loving husband, Dr Hisamudin Masdar, your continuous support is highly appreciated. I value the sacrifices made by my family and my children, Muhammad Anwar, Muhammad Afif, Muhammad Asyraf, Aufa Aqilah and Muhammad Akmal in the course of my completing my study. I thank my sisters and all my colleagues who had assisted me in many ways in the course of conducting this study.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to the members of Doctorate Support Group, SEM group and Partial least squares group for their encouragement, assistance, guidance, inspiration, sharing of literatures and for their extensive explanation on research and statistics. My sincerest gratitude to Bro. Saiful Azwan Mustapha and many others who had lent me a helping hand when I needed it the most. I am deeply thankful to be surrounded by such beautiful people. May Allah (SWT) bestow His Mercy, Love and Forgiveness on all of you.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

CAPS	Communicant Activeness in Problem Solving
CEPS	Cognitive Entrepreneurship in Problem Solving
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SMIPS	Situational Motivation in Problem Solving
STOPS	Situational Theory of Problem Solving
STP	Situational Theory of Publics

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Smoking is a major health concern in Malaysia. Various studies on smoking prevention programmes, smoking prevalence, factors influencing cigarette smoking and patterns of smoking have been conducted in Malaysia. These studies, however, were mainly from medical, sociological and psychological schools. Taking a communication viewpoint, the present study undertakes to investigate a Malaysian response towards smoking. The examination illuminates communication behaviours related to problem solving. The present study seeks to provide an understanding of social phenomena related to the development and behaviour of publics. This chapter introduces the reasons and justifications for conducting this study. It is divided into eight sections. The first section (1.1) describes the background of the study. The second section (1.2) contains three sub-sections, explains smoking in Malaysia. The three sub-sections touches on smokers in Malaysia (1.2.1), the ‘Stop Smoking’ campaigns in Malaysia (1.2.2) and religiosity and smoking in Malaysia (1.2.3). The third section (1.3) presents the statement of the problem. The fourth section (1.4) specifies the objectives of this study. The fifth section (1.5) states the research questions formulated to achieve the objectives of this study. The sixth section (1.6) defines the scope of the study. The seventh section (1.7) highlights the significance of this research. The last section (1.8) outlines the overall structure of this thesis.

## **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and religiously plural nation in Southeast Asia (Furlow, 2009). Nevertheless, smoking cigarettes is an issue that continues to plague the Malaysian society regardless of age, gender, race and religion. “Tobacco is the most hazardous product legally on sale, and the only one that is harmful when used as intended” (Stebbins, 1990: 228). Part of the national tobacco control programme is the ‘Stop Smoking’ campaigns. ‘Stop Smoking’ campaigns by the Malaysian government under the Ministry of Health which started from a “one-man show” in 1995 and gained momentum especially after the long awaited budget had been approved. The landmark campaign, ‘Tak Nak’ was launched in 2004. Various activities had been conducted to achieve the objectives of this campaign. This long-term campaign has been launched with the cooperation of other ministries and non-governmental organisations.

The ‘Anti-Tobacco’ or ‘Stop Smoking’ campaign in Malaysia is moving towards persuasion and mobilization after the initial stages of increasing individual levels of knowledge and raising awareness of the consequences of smoking. However, further investigation of the Malaysian perception of smoking is vital towards achieving the ultimate goal of a free tobacco society. ‘Stop Smoking’ campaigns that seek to educate and persuade the public to stop smoking, should include a baseline understanding of how the public is accepting and reacting to the issues at hand. Better understanding of how the general public view current issues and trends in smoking provides a better platform for public relations practitioners to deliver their messages and to plan for effective campaigns.

Acknowledging that attention to public-oriented perspective is needed for successful campaigns, this study seeks to evaluate the Malaysians’ perception of

smoking in light of the ‘Stop Smoking’ campaigns launched by the Ministry of Health, Malaysia. This study draws upon Kim-J.N. and Grunig’s Situational Theory of Problem Solving (2011) as the framework for understanding public perception and communication behaviour in relation to smoking. The Situational Theory of Problem Solving was developed from the Situational Theory of Publics (STP). Originally suggested by Grunig (1997), the Situational Theory of Problem Solving was subsequently developed further by Kim- J.N. (2006).

The question is how the public perception of smoking is affecting their reaction to the measures taken to cope with smoking particularly the ‘Stop Smoking’ campaigns. The act of taking, selecting and giving information on the smoking issues is dependent on the way the public recognises the problem, perceive possible constraints, level of personal involvement in the issues, whether they have prior knowledge or experiences that guide their judgments on the issues and their level of motivation in solving the problem.

## **1.2 SMOKING IN MALAYSIA**

Cigarette smoking is a form of tobacco consumption that causes serious public health problems in Malaysia. The National Poisons Centre at Universiti Sains Malaysia reported that tobacco related diseases such as heart diseases, cerebrovascular disease and cancers continue to be the leading causes of death in Malaysia for the past two decades ([www.prn2.usm.my](http://www.prn2.usm.my)). The estimation is that 10,000 deaths in Malaysia every year are attributed to smoking (Ministry of Health, 2004; Rapeah et al., 2008, Cheah & Naidu, 2012). Smoking also causes oral cancer (Asmani, Norkhafizah, Nyi & Nizam, 2009, 2010) periodontal diseases such as gingivitis and periodontitis, and

higher rate “of having a child with cleft lip or palate,” (Rapeah et al., 2008: 77; Nur Adinar & Al Bayaty, 2008).

The health hazard caused by smoking is considered as, “the number one preventable health problem in the world,” (Stebbins, 1990: 228; Vimala, 1985). Smoking is both a health and social issue as it affects not only the health of individuals but also impacting the society in the form of financial burden and pollution. The dominant provision for health care in Malaysia which is highly subsidized by the Malaysian government is through taxation. The cost to treat smokers in Malaysia suffering from the three main diseases due to smoking was RM 3.5 billion in 2007 (Utusan, 24 November 2007). Tan, Yen and Nayga (2009) reported that Malaysian government is spending more than RM3 billion annually to treat lung cancer, cardiovascular diseases and chronic respiratory diseases which are all smoking related diseases. It is predicted that the cost will keep on rising with the prevalence of smoking continued at its current rate. This is a waste of public money especially with the distressing universal trend in the rise of health care cost. Emerging concern is also reflected on the prevalence of smoking amongst women which brings about distinctive negative consequences to their health compared to male smokers (Morrow & Barraclough, 2003). Furthermore, second hand smoking is causing non smokers, especially children, their health and even lives (Zarihah, 2007).

### **1.2.1 Smokers in Malaysia**

The National Health and Morbidity Survey conducted by the Malaysian Health Ministry in 2006 reported that 46.5 percent of adult men (18 years and above) were smokers (<http://dph.gov.my>). The number of Malaysian male smokers is among the

highest in the region (Lim, et al., 2009). Cheah and Naidu (2012) maintained that smokers in Malaysia tend to be young, earn a low income, male, single, Malay, employed, stayed in rural area and primary educated. The highest prevalence of smokers, especially among male adults was in Kelantan (38.3%) followed by Pahang (37.3%) (Rapeah et al., 2008).

The World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO.WHO) reported that one in five Malaysian teenagers is a smoker, with the average of 50 teenagers starting to smoke every day. The smoking prevalence among teenage boys (12-18 years) is 30 percent while smoking among teenage girls is eight per cent in 1999. This figure of teenage girl smokers has doubled from 4.8 per cent in 1996 (<http://www.wpro.who.int>).

Studies have identified Malay males as the major smokers in Malaysia (Sawsan et al., 2006; Ghani et al, 2012). Sawsan et al. (2006) found that the minority smokers were Indian. Amongst the female smokers in Malaysia, the majority were from the higher income and lower education group. They also found different patterns of smoking rate among men and women such as the peak rate and smoking prevalence. Males and Malays are more likely to initiate smoking while females and Indians are less likely to cease smoking on the other hand the Chinese are the most likely to quit smoking (Ghani et al, 2012).

### **1.2.2 Stop Smoking Campaigns in Malaysia**

Stop Smoking campaigns have been launched periodically by the Malaysian Health Ministry since 1995. Prior to the official government national campaigns, various anti-smoking campaigns were organized by schools, the Ministry of Health and non-

governmental organizations since 1970 ([www.wpro.who.int](http://www.wpro.who.int)). Initially, the campaigns sought to increase people's awareness and knowledge of the hazards of smoking. Currently, the 'Anti-Tobacco' or 'Stop Smoking' campaigns in Malaysia are moving towards persuading people to cease smoking.

The Stop Smoking campaigns in Malaysia applied several theories of persuasion such as source credibility, fear appeals, social learning, social cognitive theory and behaviourism to achieve its objectives (Hizlinda, Noriah, Noor Azimah, Farah Naaz, Anis Ezdiana, & Khairani, 2012). Understanding the arguments proposed by social learning, social perception, social cognition and attitudes theorists may enlightened us on how to prevent smoking initiation among adolescents. For example, factors such as conformity and peer pressure can be used to persuade teenagers not to smoke. That is, the identified possible causes of smoking are used in reverse; instead of making adolescent smoke, the factors are used to make them stay away from tobacco. This can be done through vicarious learning and modeling in which we imitate behaviours of others. Thus, credible models can persuade adolescents to abstain from smoking just like advertisements can persuade people or the target audience to purchase the product.

Cohen, Shumate & Gold (2007) pointed out that the common social influence theories used by communication scholars for health communication include the theory of reasoned action, the health belief model and the social cognitive theory. These theories guide the design of health campaign messages, including the 'stop smoking' campaigns in the United States. While the social cognitive theory is used in the smoking cessation programme in New Zealand (Whittaker, R., Dorey, E., Bramley, D., Bullen, C., Denny, S., Elley, C. R., ... & Salmon, P., 2011). In Europe, such as Netherlands and Greece, psychosocial theories like the theory of planned behaviour

and the theory of reasoned action have been used as part of their tobacco control measures (Droomers, M., Schrijvers, C. T., & Mackenbach, J. P., 2004; Vardavas, C. I., Symvoulakis, E. K., Connolly, G. N., Patelarou, E., & Lionis, C., 2010).

The actual process of changing attitudes and behaviours of smokers involved theories of social psychology, abnormal psychology and physiological psychology. Social psychology centres on the study of attitudes and behaviours of the individual in the social context; how they are formed, shaped and changed. In abnormal psychology, smoking is categorised as part of substance abuse and dependence. It is also related to stress. Physiological psychologists study the effects of smoking on our physical and psychological health. These are some of the theoretical base of the anti-tobacco campaign conducted in Malaysia. Some of the campaigns that were launched in Malaysia are *Tak Nak* campaign, 'Healthy Lifestyle' campaign and *Kempen Nafas Baru Bermula Ramadhan* (A new breath starts in Ramadhan campaign) (Zariah, 2007).

### **1.2.3 Religiosity and Smoking in Malaysia**

Religion is an important part of Asia where it is considered as a way of life. In Malaysia, religion is part and parcel of the Malaysian people. Religion not only guide Malaysians how to live their life, it also shapes their identity and heavily influenced their behaviours. Realizing the importance of religion to Malaysians and the correlation between religiosity and smoking behaviour, it makes sense to include religious aspects in 'Stop Smoking' campaigns. For example, 'Stop Smoking' campaign targeting Muslims was run during the fasting month of Ramadhan to encourage Muslim smokers to stop smoking completely or having religious heads or

institutions such as Imams and mosques, priests and churches, etc. to be part of the voices in the campaign.

Noting the contribution of religiosity in the public response towards smoking, more strategies could be made to utilize religion as part of the overall fight against smoking in Malaysia. Religious values could be utilised to be part of the information campaign against smoking. For Muslims, the campaign could quote Quranic verses and highlight the recent ruling by certain states that smoking is prohibited (*haram*). Even for non-Muslims, their religious teachings could be used to hinder smoking initiation and encourage smokers to stop smoking. More emphasis could be given to promoting good health (maintaining a healthy lifestyle by choosing not to indulge in health risk behaviours) as part of one's religious obligation. As such the perceptions of Malaysians could be shaped to view smoking as being a hindrance in increasing one's religiosity.

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The Situational Theory of Publics (STP) is one of the theories used for explaining the response of the publics towards certain issues. This theory was developed by James Grunig to explain the communication behaviour of publics (Grunig, 1997). Spanning over 42 years, the Situational Theory of Publics proposed by Grunig in 1968 had been developed to explain and predict the mixed responses (cognitive, attitude and communication behaviour) of publics to important issues. This theory provides systematic and scientific method of segmenting the public particularly for public relations strategic communication planning.

Grunig (1979) followed the work of John Dewey in 1927 and Herbert Blumer in 1966 which contended that publics are formed around issues. This is how the STP define public; “a public is a group of people who: face a similar problem, recognize that the problem exists, and organize to do something about the problem,” (Grunig and Hunt, 1984: 145).

The Situational Theory of Publics consists of three independent variables, namely, problem recognition, constraint recognition and level of involvement that determine the dependent variables of information processing (passive communication behaviour) and information seeking (active communication behaviour). Correlations of the independent with the dependent variables were used to categorize publics for various situational issues. Studies utilising STP for single issue found that the relationships among the variables produced four types of publics such as active publics, aware publics, latent publics and non-publics (Ni & Kim-J. N., 2009; Sung & Yang, 2009). In addressing these different types of publics, different types of messages and delivery methods need to be employed.

The Situational Theory of Publics has been further developed into the Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) which further clarifies the communication behaviour and cognitive approaches that people use in solving problems. This theory enables researches to further understand peoples’ communication behaviour (when, why and how they communicate) in problematic situations. The Situational Theory of Problem Solving (STOPS) consists of four independent variables, one mediating variable and one second order dependent variable.

This study will integrate the concepts and variables from the Situational Theory of Problem Solving to explain the Malaysian public response towards smoking. The

alarming number of smokers especially among the youths (10 years old and above) and women necessitates that more effective measures be taken to reduce smoking habits amongst Malaysians. The negative effects of smoking, particularly on the health of smokers, had been highlighted again and again through the campaigns; however, the objectives of the past campaigns have not been fully achieved as the number of smokers keeps on rising.

This study seeks to identify the types of publics and their communication behaviour in relation to smoking so as to assist future ‘Stop Smoking’ or ‘Anti-Tobacco’ campaigns and provide further understanding on the public perception (as part of the general public) on smoking. Different types of publics require different campaign techniques for the campaign to be effective. The argument is that active and aware publics are more receptive to campaigns and other forms of communication in comparison to non-publics (Ni & Kim, 2009).

The examination of this theory (STOPS) in a multi-racial, but majority Muslim country will further test its theoretical utility in explaining people’s active communication behaviour. Furthermore, within the context of health risk behaviours like smoking, the role of religiosity in publics’ problem recognition and perception of being personally affected by the problem is also explored.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this research is to understand how the Malaysian public view smoking within the context of the Situational Theory of Problem Solving. The study aims to investigate the public perception, motivation and communicative action in relation to