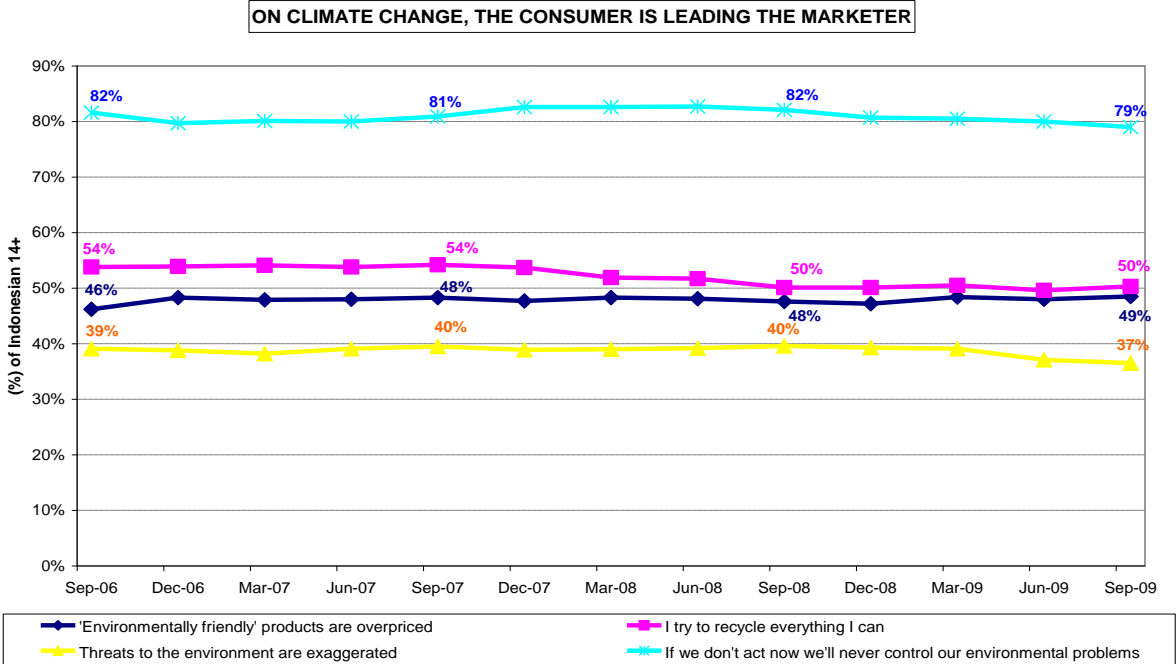


Green is the colour of the toxic waste in our wallets.

As world leaders assemble in Copenhagen to discuss real emissions reduction targets, the deniers and the sceptics continue to wage their own war on the environment. Ignoring the mountains of data compiled by the best names in the business, keeping their eyes shut to the man-made pall that hangs over the world’s cities everyday, they have now decided to embrace climate change for tactical reasons. They readily acknowledge the floods in Saudi Arabia, the erosion in Maldives, the melting in Antarctica. And then blame those changes entirely on Mother Nature, on natural evolution. The research they offer as evidence of their beliefs has been widely ridiculed, but to no avail. Evidence from far and near illustrates yet again the nexus between big business and the corridors of power. The usual combination of old money and old thinking prevails across the highest echelons of the human race.

But the vested interests promoting inaction have no answer to the most timid of questions asked by the fence-sitters on this debate: What if the threat is real, what if the planet is heading for eco-disaster, what if we could in fact change course by taking corrective action? Is the risk of inaction worth taking? While the big boys attempt to whitewash the available evidence behind the scene, they air their greenwash to keep in tune with popular concern. Everywhere, among rich and poor nations, among the most educated to the most illiterate, the overwhelming majority have seen the signs, and are urging action. This is equally true in Indonesia. It is not a frivolous pre-occupation of the affluent few.

Eight out of ten Indonesians, relatively steady for three years, believe “if we don’t act now we’ll never control our environmental problems”. That’s 80 per cent of men and women, urban and rural, rich and poor, equally. The young are even more anxious than their elders. They are neither bomb-throwers nor clerics, not sheep nor shepherds. They are the silent majority. Is anybody listening?



They are the average men and women on the street who ride a motorcycle or take a bus to work in the cities, their mouths covered with masks, handkerchiefs or hands. They are the fishermen watching their catches dwindle in darker waters, they are the farmers who can see changing weather patterns wreak havoc on their harvests. They need little convincing, they need lots of help. At least half the population is consciously doing what they can, as they “try to recycle everything I can”. It matters little whether such actions are taken out of economic necessity or eco-consciousness, it is reassuring to know that the effort is being made by a large number of people. This with little incentive or reward from political or business leaders to date. The worrying sign is the diminishing percentage of the population, down from 54 in September 2006 down to just over 50 today.

Almost half of the people, and growing, believe that “environmentally friendly products are over-priced”. If ever there was a need in today’s world for business and politics to work together, acknowledging public opinion and then acting together for the common good, it is in this very domain. Ironically, this is where they have fallen apart. Big media, owned primarily by big business, has successfully tarred every version of ‘cap-and trade’ as nothing but a tax-grab by governments promoting such schemes around the world. The incentives have either been inadequate in reality, or poorly promoted. The fact that green jobs would open a whole new frontier of employment, akin to the telecommunications revolution, has all but been ignored. That money can be made without raping and pillaging the planet seems to be an unbelievable prospect for too many of the rich and powerful.

They pay no heed to the diminishing numbers of people who believe that “threats to the environment are exaggerated”. Yesterday’s 40 per cent has dipped to 37 per cent and continues to slide, indicating growing concerns among an ever-growing number of people. Despite their best efforts, those in denial of the effects of carbon pollution are a withering breed. If the vast majority are indeed sheep, they have the instinct to vote with their convictions, time and again. In neighbouring Australia, where climate change is already an election issue, an early poll looms over an opposition that isn’t listening to the electorate. They are ignoring public opinion at their peril. On the other hand, the party in power has realised it has done a poor job of selling their intentions to the voter. When climate becomes, or is made an election issue in Indonesia, greater signs of action will soon become visible.

Now, business in Indonesia is at a crossroads. It can either take the lead on the issue voluntarily, or it will be taken there kicking and screaming one day not too far away. As usual, the consumer is ready and willing for positive action, a change for the better. As usual, most marketers are still dragging their feet, paying lip service at best to this burning issue of our times. Only a handful of marketers have realised that there is a big opportunity lurking behind this big problem.

These opinions are based on Roy Morgan Single Source. It is Indonesia’s biggest syndicated consumer survey with over 25,000 respondents 14 years and older interviewed each year. Almost 90 per cent of the population is covered, from the cities, towns and villages around the country. The data is updated every 90 days.

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