

Research Proposal

Introduction:

Having immigrated to Canada at five, I created my Filipino identity through my Grandfather's enthused updates of his hometown. In 2019, Manila's bright-eyed mayor, Isko Moreno, made it his goal to rid the city of pollution, and became the star of my *Lolo's* dinner talks, sparking my research into the nation's waste.

The "sachet economy" is a marketing strategy used by multinational corporations to infiltrate the "bottom of the pyramid" market constituting many developing countries (Sy-Changco et al., 2011). By offering amenities in sachets with smaller price tags, corporations give impoverished households access to the same goods as their higher-income counterparts (Ang & Sy-Changco, 2007). Their Philippine success can be attributed to the Filipino's piecemeal mentality, satisfied by the sachet's dosage controllability and the virtual omnipresence of *sari-sari* (variety) shops: the sachet's primary distributors (Sy-Changco et al., 2011). While the sachet economy plays a dominant role in Filipino life, it contributes significantly to plastic waste, with sixty billion sachets used in the Philippines annually, comprising ten percent of all waste (GAIA, 2019; Paler et al., 2019).

While watching documentaries showcasing pollution in Philippine cities, I felt compelled to get to know the Filipinos living in plastic towns, and improve their lives. Yet, there was a joy to them that was equally compelling. Because of pollution, disposing of the sachet economy seems an obvious necessity to outsiders like myself, but the narrative is wildly different for Filipinos who grew with the sachet as part of their life's fabric.

My literature review of the sachet economy revealed a gap in research of the sachet-consumer's perspective on the strategy (Sy-changco et al., 2011; Jambeck et al., 2015). Thus, through participatory action research and interviews, this study fills the gap by garnering

how the sachet economy is ingrained in Philippine life, and gives consumers a voice in suggesting viable solutions by Filipinos, for Filipinos. Ultimately, the study's goal is to inform the creation of a new "sachet economy" through policy changes which serve Filipinos as they see fit. Studies of this sort are paramount because waste management systems in the country cannot compete with the increasing rate of plastic production (Pena, 2017).

Research Question:

My research question is the following, "According to Filipino consumers, how can the sachet economy's prevalence in the Philippines be dismantled and its environmental impacts mitigated without destroying their social/financial fabric and livelihoods?"

Outcomes:

This work would inform future policy changes mitigating environmental damages of the sachet economy by highlighting the voice, knowledge and experience of its main stakeholders, thereby avoiding disrupting their cultural and economic dependence on affordable sachets. Thus, my study's key achievement would be application of its findings to the real-world and collaboration with policymakers to establish a framework for the sachet economy which caters to the fulfillment of Filipinos' needs and wants. I hope to accomplish this in the second summer of the program by going to the Philippines and pressuring policymakers directly to address the study's findings and improve the current waste management system. I would like to help develop the infrastructure necessary to accomplish this through various sustainability initiatives concerning the sachet economy. The foundation for these improvements would be the statements provided by participants in the interviews. If they would like, I would also like to have some of the participants involved in this process, as well as, the Philippine Reef and Rainforest Conservation Foundation, Inc. (PRRCFI). The PRRCFI hosts the "Wala Usik" initiative in the

Philippines, one of the first projects of its kind which is specifically developing campaigns to mitigate the impacts of the sachet economy on plastic pollution.

Through this entire program, my biggest goal in terms of improving the world and the local communities of Filipinos would be exactly that I outlined above. In terms of personal achievements, I hope to develop as a cultural relativist by fostering my understanding for the opinions and statements made by participants in this study. As a researcher, I have been working for the past several months to minimize my expectations as an outsider as much as possible. For example, I may want all the participants to abhor the sachet economy and dismiss it outright for the plastic pollution it creates, but this may not be the case. Cultural relativism requires that I be as open-minded as possible during my research, which is a skill I think all researchers should have. Thus, I surely hope to grow in my cultural relativism in preparation for future works I may be a part of/conduct.

References

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