

Plastic bags and the impact on our lives

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More than half of metropolitan South Africans did NOT believe that the new plastic bag legislation would result in cheaper food prices for consumers. This feeling was expressed by consumers in all income groups, and from all walks of life.

Does the new legislation affect shoppers personally?

- *Fifty-three percent* of respondents in the seven major metropolitan areas in South Africa felt that the new plastic bag legislation¹ has *affected them personally*. Figures for blacks, whites and coloureds are in line with the national average, but *Indians feel even more strongly*. Sixty-one percent feel it has affected them.
- Women claim it has *affected them* to a greater extent than do men – 56% of women versus 49% of men claim it has affected them, possibly influenced by the fact that more women do the shopping than men.
- Interestingly, results do not differ significantly across the various income groups. However, Gautengers feel slightly more 'put out', scoring 55%, followed by Durbanites and residents of Eastern Cape and Bloemfontein who both scored in the region of 50%. Capetonians adopted the most carefree attitude – only 47% felt it affected them.

Are shoppers changing their behaviour ?

- With 60% of shoppers generally *forgetting to take bags with them*, one would expect shoppers to have to buy new bags every time. In fact only 42% of respondents *usually buy new bags* every time. Clearly, some people who have forgotten to take their bags are either shopping without bags and packing directly into their cars, or even returning to fetch their bags after having forgotten them.
- Women seem to be less inclined to *purchase new bags each time* (39%) compared to men (44%). Indians are the most likely to buy new bags each time (60%) followed by blacks (47%), coloureds (29%) and whites (25%).
- Fifty-four percent claim to *take their own bags* to the shops. This is heavily skewed towards women – 61% take their own bags, compared to 48% of men. Contrary to what one might think, older people (those 50 years +) are less inclined to forget to take their own bags – 53% claim to forget, which is significantly lower than the trends for other age groups.
- People's propensity to *take their own bags* with them seems to *increase with age*, with only half of respondents below the age of 34 years taking their own bags to the shops. This figure increases to 57% for those between 35 and 49 years of age, and increases to 63% for those who are 50+.
- The fact that 44% of people find it *embarrassing to take their own bags into a store* ties in strongly with those who buy new bags every time. Indians are the most embarrassed (66% feel this way), and whites are the least embarrassed (31%). Older people (those over 50 years) tended to be less embarrassed – scoring 37% compared to an average of 45% across all other age groups.
- Capetonians who appeared least affected by the legislation scored highest for *taking their own bags to the store* – 62%. Fifty-seven percent of Gautengers claim to take their own bags, compared to 50% of Durbanites and 45% of both Eastern Cape and Bloemfontein residents.
- Surprisingly, as household income increases, fewer people claim to *buy new bags every time*. Durbanites claimed to

buy new bags every time (51%) to a much greater degree than Capetonians (30%).

Which bags are preferred ?

- Overall, 64% of respondents felt that the bags are *too expensive*, with Indians agreeing to the greatest extent (83%), then coloureds (68%), followed by blacks (65%), and whites (57%). There appears to be a similar pattern along racial lines between those who purchase new bags each time, and those who regard them as being too expensive.
- It follows that with almost two-thirds of people being concerned about the price of bags, that they could possibly feel it is worth their while to *buy the biggest bag and squeeze everything in*. Fifty-two percent of respondents claim to do this, with the skew being towards females – 55% as opposed to 50% of males. Forty-nine percent of people *prefer non-plastic bags made out of fabric or hessian*, with older consumers being more partial (57% of those aged 50years +).

What are the benefits ?

- Half of respondents acknowledged the fact that the new legislation would *reduce litter and contribute positively towards the environment*. This opinion was most strongly held by coloured metropolitan dwellers (64%), and the youth aged 18-24 years (57%).
- Fifty-five percent of all respondents did NOT believe that the saving in the cost of bags would result in *cheaper food prices for consumers*. This feeling was expressed by consumers in all income groups and from all walks of life. To add to this, 62% of people canvassed said that this was *just another ploy by retailers to increase their profit margins*. Indian consumers felt most strongly about this (75%), followed by blacks (65%). Coloureds and whites were far less critical at 59% and 49% respectively.

Is retail therapy losing its allure ?

- Almost six out of ten respondents (59%) claimed that the *shopping experience had become less enjoyable* because of the new ruling. Indians felt most strongly about this (70%), followed by blacks (62%), coloureds (57%), and then whites (48%). These results mirror those relating to people purchasing new bags every time. This purchasing of new bags is becoming a grudge purchase and is no doubt contributing to people no longer enjoying shopping to the same extent.

Research Surveys interviewed 2000 respondents from all race groups, within the seven major metropolitan areas of South Africa in June 2003. These results formed part of a syndicated study, Omnichek, where respondents were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements regarding the new plastic bag legislation.

Editorial contact

Research Surveys
Kim O'Hagan
(011) 712 - 9722

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