

Thai Generation Y Tourists' Perception of Hotel's Environmental Roles, Green Hotels and Green Practices

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ABSTRACT

‘Going Green’ has become an important issue for people and industries including hotel business. This preliminary study examined Thai Generation Y tourists’ perception of hotels’ environmental roles, green hotels and green practices. It also explored the interest of Thai Generation Y tourists in green hotels and their intention to stay at green hotels. For the research methodology, this study employed a survey method and accidental sampling technique to collect primary data from Thai Generation Y tourists (aged 21 – 41 years old) whose residences were based in Bangkok. Usable 387 questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. According to the findings, majority of respondents recognized green hotels. They considered that hotel business should establish policies and missions regarding environmental conservation and energy-efficiency. They also had a high level of positive perception towards most green hotel practices proposed in this study, especially “using automatic lighting system in guest rooms” and “encouraging employees to participate in energy saving and environmental conservation”. Among those practices, however, “room linen reuse for a multiple night guest” was the only one that was valued at moderate level. The respondents presented their interest as well as intention to choose green hotels as their accommodation.

KEYWORDS: Generation Y, Tourists, Green hotels, Green practices, Sustainability

Introduction

Over decades, sustainability and green practices have received a significant focus in the tourism and hospitality industry. According to United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2021), tourism sustainability involves the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and establishing the balance of those three aspects to ensure long-term sustainability. To support sustainability, green hotels have

been developed and green practices have been implemented (Abdou et al, 2020).

Hotels that implements eco-friendly activities are likely to gain favor from tourists, especially those who are environmentally concerned. A study by Ogbeide (2012) showed that more than 50% of consumers surveyed would choose a green hotel over one that lacked green attributes. Environment was one of three influencing factors that tourists considered when choosing a hotel (Kucukusta et al,

2013). To respond travelers' expectation on environmental conservation, the world's leading hotel operators have increased green practices such as having waste recycling program and energy-efficient lighting, while some of them have set sustainability issue as one of their priorities (Kang et al, 2012).

As stated in United Nations' World Population Prospect 2019 (MSCI, 2021) , Generation Ys or Millennials were about 1.8 billion people or 23% of total populations worldwide in 2020. In Thailand, Gen Y people have currently become the majority among 67 million populations. This generation counts around 19 million people or 28% of total population (Thansettakij, 2017). According to their age (about 21 – 41 years old) , Generation Ys have made up a major manpower in the country with the estimated proportion of 50% of the entire workforce. They have also formed the largest consumer market that has potential purchasing power for all businesses including tourism and hospitality.

The reasons to conduct this research were as follows. First, as global warming problem has become more severe, environmental sustainability is now an urgent issue that all sectors must be

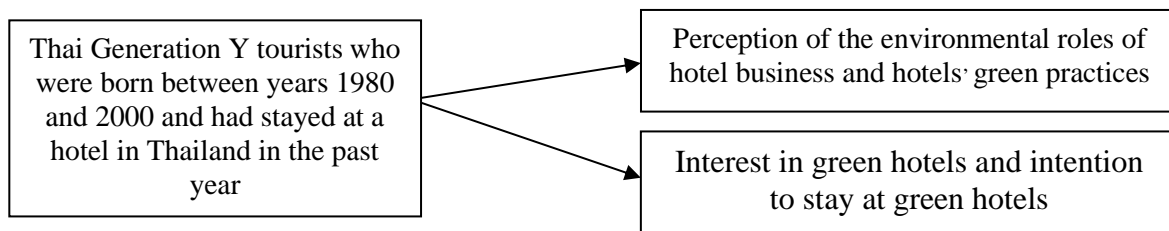
concerned. Secondly, many hotels in Thailand are certified as green hotels and implement green practices, but a few studies have been carried out to examine what people think about those green practices. Lastly, the study on Thai Generation Y tourists' perception of environment is still limited particularly in the area of hotel business. Thus, this preliminary study aimed to explore what Thai Generation Y tourists perceive of the environmental roles of hotel business, green hotels and green practices. The result of the study would be beneficial to hotels in Thailand for planning the implementation of green practices and promoting them to the public.

Research objectives

The objectives of this research were

1. To examine Thai Generation Y tourists' perception of the environmental roles of hotel business and hotels' green practices
2. To explore Thai Generation Y tourists' interest in green hotels and their intention to stay at green hotels

Research Framework



Literature Review

Definition of Green Hotel

The definition of a green hotel slightly varies across authors and has not exactly been settled. ASEAN Green Hotel Standard (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016, p. 3) defined a green hotel as “ a hotel which is environmentally-friendly and adopts energy conservation measures” . Also called eco-friendly hotels and environmental-friendly hotels, green hotels are perceived by consumers to be about resources and energy saving, using eco-friendly materials and not using single-use or individually packed products (Han & Chan, 2013) . Green practices that a green hotel can conduct are various, ranging from simple steps such as setting linen reuse program and waste separation to advanced steps such as installing occupancy sensor system (Abdou et al, 2020).

Significance of Green Hotel and Green Practices for Tourists

Customers of hotel business are currently more aware of sustainability and seek for hotels that conduct environmental practices (Karavasilis et al, 2015; Mehta & Sharma, 2019) . Having green brand positioning becomes important in the hotel business because environmental issues have gained attention from hotel guests. To attract certain customer groups, hotels advertise their conducted sustainability as corporate social responsibility practices (Goh et al, 2017). The study of Chang and Fong (2010 in Mehta & Sharma, 2019) reported a positive impact of green corporate brand on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Cometa (2012) identified that consumers with strong beliefs of environmentally friendly practices had positive perceptions about the value green hotels offered and willingness to participate in environmentally friendly activities while staying at green hotels. Chan

(2013) found that customers are pleased to pay more to buy green hotel products and services such as green rooms.

Generation Y Tourists

Despite some variations of literature in classifying specific start and end years of Generation Ys, also known as Millennials or Internet Generation, Gen Ys can be defined as people who were born between years 1980 and 2000 (Department of Mental Health, 2020). Generation Ys are discussed to possess unique characteristics in common. As they grew up in the era of technological development, they are strongly influenced by high technology and the Internet, using websites and social media to gain information, communicate to the others and entertainment (Bolton et al, 2013; Goh et al, 2017; MSCl, 2021) . The Internet Users Profile conducted by Electronic Transactions Development Agency (2020) found that Thai Generation Ys have been the most frequent Internet users for five consecutive years, spending in average 10 hours 36 minutes per day in 2019.

Generation Ys are more educated, with college or higher degrees, than previous generations (Powers & Valentine, 2013; Kubickova, 2014; Goh et al, 2017; Department of Mental Health, 2020; MSCl, 2021). Other common characteristics of Gen Ys include being individualistic, independent, dynamic and self-confident (TAT, 2016). Although Gen Y people have some attributes and behaviors in common, their preferences may diverge as per their culture, gender, stages of life and personality types (Franzidis & Hritz, 2014).

With regards to sustainability area, this generation is seen to have high environmental concern. From the research of Karavasilis et al (2015) , Generation Ys in Greece have a high environmental concern and positive attitude towards eco-friendly

activities. Similarly, the study of Goh et al (2017) showed that half of the interviewed Gen Y students did eco-friendly activities particularly in the areas of water and energy conservation, waste reduction and recycling. Some of them had sustainable lifestyle such as using public transportation and had a strong viewpoint towards sustainability practices. The study of Tang & Lam (2017) also showed that the Gen Y respondents in Macao had positive attitude towards green hotels and attributes and tend to willingly pay to stay at a green hotel. However, tourists' perception of environmental significance may vary in countries. A high positive level of environmental awareness was found among the Swedish, Croatians and Turkish whereas studies showed that customers in India are not much active about green culture and practices (Mehta & Sharma, 2019).

Research methodology

Population

The population in this study were Thai Generation Y tourists who were born between years 1980 and 2000 (aged 21 – 41 years old) and had stayed at a hotel in Thailand in the past year.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire used as an instrument for the survey was developed from a review of previous studies such as Cometa (2012) , Kang et al (2012) and Karavasilis et al (2015) and identified the content validity by three tourism academics. The Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) used to evaluate the questionnaire items was 0.8. The pilot test was then conducted with 30 respondents to obtain feedbacks on the relevance and clarity of questions. Cronbach' s coefficient alphas were calculated and exposed the value of 0.92, showing a high level of reliability.

The first part of the questionnaire compiled respondents' demographic data including age, gender, marital status, education and income. This part also examined the respondents' awareness of green hotels and the sources of green hotel recognition. The second part of the questionnaire contained 16 items that used a five-point Likert scale, ranging from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree'. It identified Thai Gen Y tourists' perception of hotels' environmental roles, as well as green hotel practices. The last part comprised three questions asking respondents whether they were interested in green hotels and intended to choose a green hotel for their trip accommodation.

Data Collection

This study collected quantitative data from a survey in Bangkok from September to October 2021. Accidental sampling technique was employed, in which the respondents were approached and asked their age to assure that they were in Generation Y. They were also asked whether they had stayed at a hotel in the past year.

Data Analysis

After the survey was completed, the usable 387 participants were selected. Then descriptive statistics including percentage distributions, mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. Mean scores were interpreted by a range of scores and levels as follows.

<u>Mean score</u>		<u>Level</u>
4.51 - 5.00	=	Very high
3.51 - 4.50	=	High
2.51 - 3.50	=	Moderate
1.51 - 2.50	=	Low
1.00 - 1.50	=	Very low

Findings

Profile of respondents

Of the 387 respondents, 57.62% were female and 42.38% were male. The age of respondents found 29.46% were 20-25 years old, followed by 28.68% were 31-35 years old and 23% were 26-30 years old. 51.2% of the respondents were single and 22.5% married and had kid(s). Regarding educational level, the highest category (62.5%) had Bachelor's degree, while lower than Bachelor's degree amounted to 30%. Those with Ph.D. level presented the minor group. In terms of income, 38.8% of the

respondents marked their monthly income of 15,000-19,999 Baht, followed by lower than 15,000 Baht and 20,000-24,999 Baht (25.6% and 12.1% respectively).

Green hotels awareness

Majority of the respondents (67.4%) replied they had recognized green hotels or environment-friendly hotels, whereas 32.6% did not know green hotels. The key source of green hotel awareness was the Internet, followed by word-of-mouth and hotel advertising. The sources of green hotel awareness were shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sources of Green Hotel Awareness

Newspaper	Internet	Television and radio	Word of mouth	Magazine	Hotel advertising	Education
10.1%	50.6%	12.9%	17.1%	8%	16.8%	12.4%

Perception of environmental roles and impacts of hotel business

This part examined Generation Y tourists' viewpoints on the environmental roles and impacts of hotel business. Shown in Table 2, most opinions gained high mean scores ranging between 3.14 and 4.36. The result highlights the point that

the hotel business should have energy efficiency and environment-friendly

policies ($\bar{x} = 4.36$) and green hotel operations can contribute to conserving the environment and saving the energy ($\bar{x} = 4.22$). Only the opinion "Hotel operations create impacts on the environment" gained the moderate mean level at 3.14.

Table 2. Perception of Environmental Roles and Impacts of Hotel Business

Item	Perception of Environmental Roles	\bar{x}	S.D.
1.	Hotel operations create impacts on the environment.	3.14	1.25
2.	Hotel business has a crucial role in environmental conservation.	3.98	0.94
3.	Energy efficiency and environment conservation is the mission of hotel business.	4.14	1.00
4.	Hotel business should have energy-efficiency and eco-friendly policies.	4.36	0.89
5.	Green hotel operations can contribute to conserving the environment and saving the energy.	4.22	0.91

Green hotel practices

The respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with 11 green practices that the hotel industry typically implemented, using energy-saving light

bulbs, water-saving devices and glass water bottles, to name a few. Shown in Table 3, the study identified green hotel practices in general were positively evaluated.

Table 3. Green Hotel Practices

Item	Green Practices	\bar{x}	S.D.
1.	Reusing bedding set or towels for a multiple night guest	2.64	1.36
2.	Using automatic lighting system in guest rooms	4.62	0.90
3.	Sorting and recycling waste	4.40	0.94
4.	Providing a recycling bin in guest rooms	4.00	1.36
5.	Replacing plastic water bottles with glass bottles	4.20	0.91
6.	Using energy-saving light bulbs instead of conventional bulbs	4.16	0.91
7.	Using shampoo and soap dispenser in place of plastic bottles in guest rooms	4.10	1.08
8.	Using water-saving devices such as showers and taps with low flow	3.76	1.36
9.	Being a 100% smoke-free hotel	4.38	0.85
10.	Encouraging employees to participate in energy saving and environmental conservation	4.50	0.74
11.	Organizing eco-friendly activities and engaging guests in those activities	4.06	0.98

Nine green initiatives received mean value higher than 4.00. Among them, “using automatic lighting system in guest rooms” had the highest mean (4.62), followed by “encouraging employees to participate in energy saving and environmental conservation” ($\bar{x} = 4.50$) and “sorting and recycling waste” ($\bar{x} = 4.40$). On the other hand, “using water-saving devices such as showers and taps with low flow” was rated moderate score ($\bar{x} = 3.76$). The lowest mean value of 2.64 fell to “reusing bedding set or towels for a multiple night guest”.

Interest and intention to choose green hotels

Exhibited in table 4, the respondents exposed their interest in green hotels and intention to stay at green hotels for their trips as per the mean of 3.70 and 3.59 respectively. The respondents also identified that they would consider whether the hotel was environmental-friendly before choosing an accommodation ($\bar{x} = 3.48$).

Table 4. Interest and Intention to Choose Green Hotels

Item	Interest and Intention in Green Hotels	\bar{x}	S.D.
1.	To what extent are you interested to stay at green hotels?	3.70	0.91
2.	To what extent do you intend to stay at green hotels for your trips?	3.59	0.90
3.	To what extent do you consider whether the hotel you will stay is environmental-friendly?	3.48	0.90

Discussion

This research survey showed that more than half of respondents had known green hotels, however, the percentage of those who recognized the existence of green hotels was not very high (67.4%). This finding is similar to the study of Karavasilis et al (2015) that although Gen Ys in Greece

were environmentally concerned, they were not quite aware of green hotels.

Overall, the respondents agreed that environmental conservation and energy efficiency should be established as hotels' policy and mission, and green hotel operations helped create sustainability. This

finding indicated positive disposition of Thai Gen Y tourists towards environmental protection and was in line with previous studies reporting Generation Ys' high level of sustainability concern (Kubickova, 2014; Karavasilis et al, 2015; Tang & Lam, 2017; Goh et al, 2017).

Most green hotel practices received high mean values. "Automatic lighting system in guest rooms" was scored the highest, which could reflect the respondents' favor for green practices that make their life convenient. The respondents also agreed that hotels should encourage employees to take part in sustainability practices. Employees' engagement contributes to the success of hotel's green initiatives. Many studies showed that the level of employees' commitment in green practices is allied with the organization's sustainability culture and supervisors' support (Goh et al, 2017).

Among those green practices, "using water-saving devices such as showers and taps with low flow" was rated lower than 4.00 mean value. This could imply that Gen Y tourists did not want green practices to negatively impact their comfort of stay at the property. Karavasilis et al (2015) presumed their Gen Y respondents were not prepared for inconvenience occurred from green practices. The practice of "reusing bedding set or towels for a multiple night guest" gained the lowest mean value. This could suggest that during the Covid-19 pandemic, cleanliness has become a priority for tourists despite their awareness of environment and energy-saving. Concerned about health and hygiene, Gen Y tourists may require the linen and towels to be changed daily to guarantee the sanitation.

This study revealed that Thai Gen Y tourists were interested to stay at green hotels at high level, however their intension to stay at green hotels gained lower score.

This could indicate that besides green practices, tourists may consider other factors when choosing a hotel. There are many factors influencing tourists' hotel selection including safety and security, value for money, service quality, location, room and facilities (Tuan, 2019; Choorichom, 2011). The study of Bunrangsee & Pasunon (2018) also exposed that security, rooms and staff were rated the highest factors affecting hotel selection of Thai tourists in Bangkok.

Recommendation

Recommendation from this study

1. According to this study, Thai Generation Y tourists paid high attention to the environmental roles of hotel business. Hotel managers, therefore, should take action on energy-efficiency and eco-friendly policies as the organization's primary mission. This green culture should also be thoroughly communicated these to all levels of staff. The green policies will not only attract Gen Y and green tourists but also help the hotel business reduce operational costs such as electricity and water.

Moreover, related agencies, either government or public, should support the hotel business in various ways such as giving advice and incentives in order that hotels can achieve implementing green practices.

2. As level of consumer awareness on green hotels has an impact on attitude towards green hotels and intention to stay at green properties (Karavasilis et al, 2015; Mehta & Sharma, 2019), Thai hotel business should adopt green marketing strategies to create more awareness on green hotels. Hotel managers should have a greater increase in advertising green hotels and their practices to the public, particularly Generation Ys who are potential clients in the tourism industry. Also, communication

about benefits of eco-friendly initiatives to all stakeholders, especially customers, communities and the environment, should be boosted to attract Gen Y travelers and increase their intention to stay at green hotels. The Internet, websites and social media in particular, is suggested to be the major tool to promote green hotels and practices, as Gen Ys spend the most time online for both searching information and socializing. As reported by Franzidis and Hritz (2014), Generation Y tourists particularly in USA considered a prior-to-travel research of destination they would visit was important.

Recommendation for future research

Future studies are recommended to investigate other generations' perception especially Generation X tourists because they are high spending travelers (Munley, 2018). Understanding what Gen X tourists think about green practices is helpful for the hotel business to deliver what they need.

Besides, future research may examine tourists who stayed at green properties in order to understand their experience and perception towards eco-friendly practices implemented by green hotels. The hotel industry, therefore, will be able to enhance those practices to meet tourists' expectation and satisfaction.

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