



# Current Green Meeting Practices, Perceptions And Behaviours Of Participants Towards Green Meetings: A Case Study Of Bangkok

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## **Abstract**

*Tourism industry remains the main economic driver of many nations worldwide, particularly the case for Thailand. Increasingly, business tourism in Thailand or often called Meeting, Incentive, Convention and Exhibition (MICE) is gaining more recognition from both demand and supply side of the market. However, there are wider criticisms negative environmental impacts, overuse of resources by the MICE industry. Hence, attempts are made to reduce the impacts and motivate MICE operators to apply greener practices. Although there are potential benefits of being greener, there are mixed responses. Therefore, the main objectives of this study were to determine the current practices of event operators in terms of adopting greening practices, and identify delegates' perceptions and behaviours towards green meetings. Adopting quantitative approach, 374 questionnaires were completed by participants of international conferences in Bangkok. Findings indicated that use of the Internet and selecting the venue with good access to public transportation were the main greening practices. The participants also revealed supports to the green meetings; however notable differences between different groups of the participants were discovered. Implications for future research were also provided.*

**Keywords:** *Green meeting, MICE, Practices, Behaviours*

## **Introduction**

Tourism industry continues to play a vital role in economic development of many nations around the world. In addition to leisure tourists, business tourism is also expected to play more increasing role as Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) mentioned that business tourism (Exhibitions / Expositions or Conventions, etc.) has and will continue to receive more recognition (TCEB, 2011).

However, this industry is criticised of producing negative impacts on the environment because of large amount of resources usage (Laing and Frost, 2010). For example, an organiser usually uses lots of papers in both of the preparation and implementation stages. The papers are made from trees, and more trees will be cut. Moreover, imported food and beverages are ordered to serve to attendees leading to economic leakage. For some events, money is spent on providing shuttle bus services which could also affect the atmosphere as a result of the release of the Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) gas to the air and worsening Greenhouse Effect (Webster, 2000).

Recently, meeting professionals have started to realise the importance of adopting environmentally friendly practices (Fenich, 2012). Furthermore, there is an increasing number of environmental conscious people who seek eco-friendly activities in order to help

preserving the environment (Thai Hotels Association, 2010). However, there are mixed responses toward this concept (Guterman, 2009). Hence, the objectives of this study include:

- To determine the current practices of event operators in terms of adopting greening practices.
- To identify delegates' perceptions and behaviours towards green meetings.

## **Literature review**

### ***MICE (Meeting, Incentive, Convention, and Exhibition) in Thailand***

Event tourism is one of the tourism segments for a few decades ago but it plays very important role in increasing destination competitiveness (Getz, 2008). McCartney (2010) defined events as an assembly or reunion of people for both of private and public celebration, ritual or remembrance. Business events form integral part of this sector. Business events include conferences, exhibitions, incentive travel, and corporate events (Bowdin et al, 2006). Currently, this industry is also called "MICE", which stands for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions. Occasionally, the letter "E" can be referring to Events, and the letter "C" can be referring to Conventions. MICE is a particular tourism that is a large group of tourist normally planned in advance and come together with a specific purpose (MICEpoint, 2010).

MICE industry is one of the tourism businesses that generates a large amount of income for Thailand (TCEB, 2011). Moreover, the event industry has potential to distribute high revenue to the local destination due to its ability to attract the out-of-region visitor (Raj et al, 2009). Consequently, event industry directly generates the income to other sections involved in hospitality and tourism, for example, accommodations, restaurants, event companies, convention centres, transportation services, souvenir shops, telecommunication, etc. (Chon and Sparrowe, 2000; PCMA, 2006; Rogers, 2008).

Several factors that influence the growth of event business in Thailand are excellent facilities that can respond to the need of the MICE market such as venues and accommodations with the international standard. Furthermore, there are many world class convention centres that serve the standard service to the customers, for instance, Queen Sirikit National Convention Centre, Bangkok International Trade and Exhibition Centre, IMPACT Arena Exhibition and Convention Centre, Pattaya Exhibition and Convention Hall.

### ***Green Meetings***

"Green" is referred as actions to minimise the bad impacts that are going to be harmful to the environment (Wolfe and Shanklin, 2001). The word "Green" can be called by other names such as "eco-friendly", "environmentally friendly", or "sustainable" (Pizam, 2009). There are various groups in U.S. such as The Convention Industries Council (CIC) and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) who developed the standards for having a greener meeting. Also, Laing and Frost (2010) defined the term "Green event" as "an event that has a sustainability policy or incorporates sustainable practices into its management and operations". Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) (2006) defined Green Meetings as an encompassment of all aspects of the strategic planning process by making choices at every level of meeting management, from site selection to serving condiments like ketchup, mustard, and sugar from bulk containers, the environmental impact of the event can be significantly reduced.

At the present, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB) also launched "Go Green Exhibition" to encourage stakeholders to realise on the essentials of "Green Concept"

in order to reduce the impacts to the environment and enhance the potential competitiveness of the investors. (TCEB, 2011). Green Meeting is a strategic policy and makes standard for the Thai MICE industry. In Thailand, TCEB is a centre of supporting and encouraging operators in order to meet the standard of environment conservation. Green Meetings policy is an opportunity for Thailand as an additional tool to compete in an international market (TCEB, 2010).

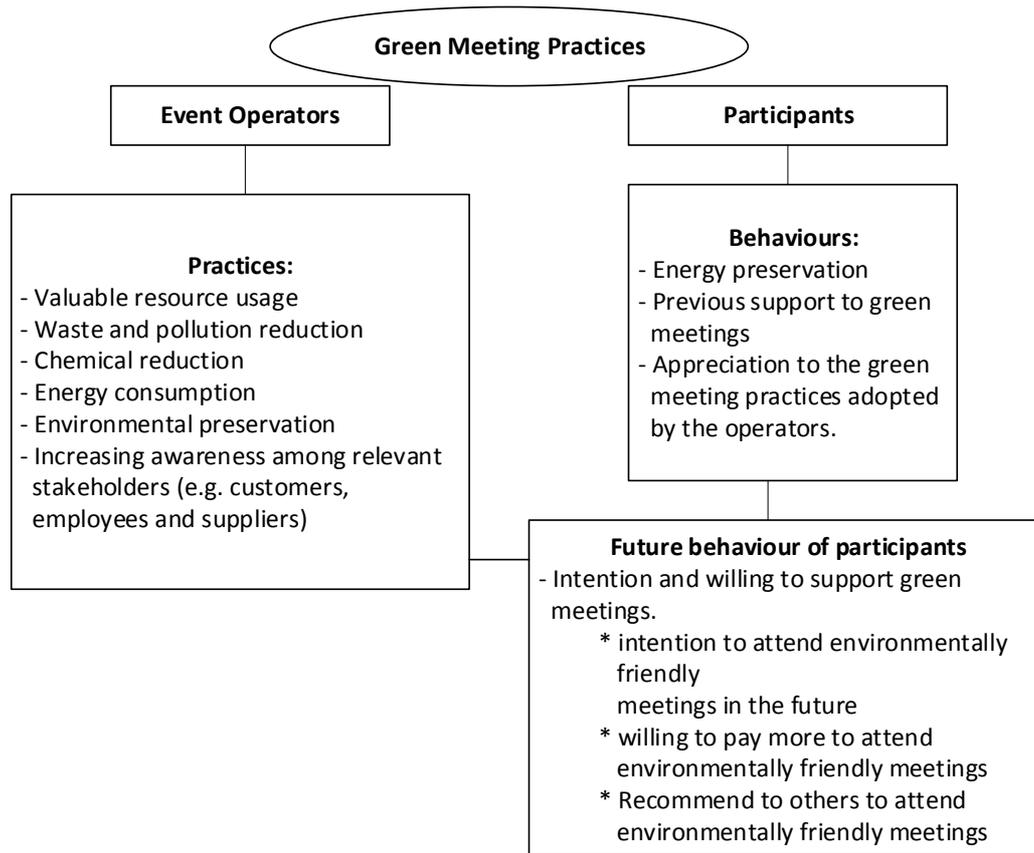
Thus, if the meeting or event organisers follow greening practices, they can minimise many negative impacts on environment and, at the same time, can save considerable amount of money on their budget. Laing and Frost (2010) mentioned that, in order to run the green event, not every stakeholder needs to be involved but at least event planners. Event planners need to research for the information of a green event. Essentially, the green meeting goal will be a success, if the visitors understand and aware of its concept. Then, adapting environmental measures are gradually becoming a part of event planning considerations (McCartney, 2010).

However, there are mixed reactions towards green meeting concept. Some scientists believed that the best way to reduce the environmental impacts from the meetings is to avoid travelling and attend teleconference or videoconferences. Some scientists agree to have a videoconference because they can promote discussion and collaboration among scientists. On the other hand, there are many scientists do not agree with the videoconferences because this kind of meeting does not allow people to meet each other and to across barriers into new fields (Guterman, 2009).

Also, although it seems that many people have realised the importance of supporting “greener” meetings, the reality does not always match with perception. Based on the report of Guterman (2009), at one conference, attendees were asked to donate money to support the programme of carbon offset. At the end, the donation failed to meet the expected amount. Also, Kim et al (2006) found that people who have higher environmental values are more likely to attend the greening events because the environmental issue oriented programme of the event than other perceived motivating attractions.

Hence, it is the ultimate aim of this study to determine the current practices of the event operators in applying the green concepts as well as investigate the participants’ perceptions and behaviour towards this concept. The conceptual framework that guide the overall research design is portrayed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 Conceptual Framework**



## Methodology

In this study, green meeting is operationally defined as the activities that help the meetings planners to reduce, reuse, and recycle the meeting materials and resources, and they include environmental considerations to minimise the negative impact on the environment in both of management and operation stage (Convention Industry Council's Green Meetings Report, 2004; PCMA, 2006; Aase, 2009; Laing and Frost, 2010).

Participants who participated in international conferences in Bangkok were the main populations of this study. Bangkok was the target destination for data collection because this province is one of major MICE cities (Bangkok, Pattaya, Phuket and Chiang Mai) in Thailand (TCEB, 2009<sup>c</sup>). Once key conferences were identified, cooperation were sought to obtain permission to distribute questionnaires.

Data was collected in June to July 2012. Initially, 400 questionnaires were distributed to the participants in the international conferences by convenience selection and 374 were returned and usable representing 93.5% of response rate. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, Percentages, and Means), One-Way ANOVA, Independent Sample T-Test were the main data analysis techniques.

## Results

### *Demographic profiles of the conference participants*

A total of 374 valid questionnaires were subject to data analysis. Table 1 reports demographic profiles of the respondents

**Table 1 Demographic profiles of the respondents**

Demographic profile		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	118	31.6
	Female	256	68.4
Age	Under 20	8	2.1
	20-29	109	29.1
	30-39	147	39.3
	40-49	74	19.8
	50-59	36	9.6
Nationality	Asian	275	73.5
	African	29	7.8
	European	13	3.5
	North American	12	3.2
	South American	5	1.3
	Australian	40	10.7
Status	Single	174	46.5
	Married	190	50.8
	Divorce	7	1.9
	Separated	3	0.8
Occupation	Student	115	30.7
	Government Officer	41	11.0
	Academic	123	32.9
	Business	30	8.0
	Medical	3	0.8
	Employee or company officer	62	16.6
<i>Total</i>		<i>374</i>	<i>100</i>

From Table 1, most of the respondents were female (68.4%) and 31.6% of the respondents were male. Most of the respondents were in age range of 30-39 years old (39.3%) and 20-29 years old (29.1%). The majority of the respondents were Asian 73.5 % and 10.7% of Australian. Many of the respondents have a status of married (50.8%) and single (46.5%). Most of the respondents were 32.9 % of academic and 30.7% of students.



**Table 2 Other behaviours and their profiles**

Type of the conference attended	Percentage
Education	34.80
Environment	22.70
Science	16.00
IT	14.40
Business	12.00

Opinions about attending conferences and environment	
Trying to save the environment	14
Not trying to save the environment	86

Type of Transportation	
Stay at the venue's accommodation	33.70
Provided transportation	30.70
Public Transportation	25.90
Own vehicle	4.80
Others	4.50

Majority of the respondents were attending the educational conference (34.8%) and environmental management conference (22.7%). Largest proportion of the respondents were first-time participants (57 %). About 86% of them believed that the conference they were attending was trying to save the environment. Most of the respondents stayed at the venue's accommodation so that they did not need to commute to the meeting venues (33.7%).

***Organiser's green practices perceived by the participants***

**Table 3 Organiser's green practices through participants' observations**

Practices	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Event organisers communicate with the attendees via emails and SMSs.	4.60	0.92
2. I have known the event information from event's website and e-newsletters.	4.58	0.86
3. The venue is easily accessed by public transportations.	4.32	0.88
4. There is refilled liquid soap available in the toilet at the event site.	4.19	1.26
5. Small bushes or potted plants are used to make the decor in this event.	4.12	0.95



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<b>Practices</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
6. I have to download event materials from the event's website.	3.86	1.04
7. Given documents were printed in double-sided.	3.84	1.46
8. In this event, water is served in glass rather than in bottles.	3.83	1.55
9. Food served in this event is made from local ingredients.	3.56	0.81
10. Delegate packs of this event are materials from natural materials.	3.37	1.16
11. Food and beverages in this event are served by the durable dishes and utensils.	3.35	1.18
12. Organisers encourage event attendees to use public transportation rather than own transportation.	3.32	1.47
13. Electric devices are always turned off or used the stand-by mode when not in use.	3.17	1.13
14. Food and beverages containers are made from natural material.	3.13	1.04
15. This conference uses eco-friendly equipment and materials.	3.07	1.08
16. Souvenirs of this event are made from recycled or environmentally friendly materials.	3.04	1.13
17. Cleaning products that the venue is using are able to be destroyed by natural chemical process.	3.00	1.12
18. Air-conditions at this event are set at 25 C.	2.76	1.21
19. There are shuttle bus services from my hotel to the event venue.	2.74	1.60
20. Stations for the participants to drop name badges, unwanted souvenirs or give-away premiums, unwanted printing materials (handbills and pamphlets) are set up upon the exit.	2.73	1.35
21. The organisers usually keep all leftover materials, notepad and stationary from the delegate's table and reuse them.	2.69	1.10
22. Electronic devices with an energy efficiency rating of 5 are used in the venue.	2.45	1.10
23. I have seen the announcement of the event via LED board.	2.44	1.32
24. I have done the sign-up form for meals on registration process.	2.43	1.71
25. 4 categories of garbage (paper, plastic, bottles, glass, and cans) bins are provided in this event.	2.17	1.30
26. I am discouraged to wear a formal business dress in order to decrease the temperature.	2.03	1.13

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Practices	Mean	Std. Deviation
27. This is an outdoor or opened air venue to reduce the use of air conditioner.	1.79	1.21

From Table 3, the top five green practices of the organisers that were perceived by the participants whilst attending the conference are *Event organisers communicate with the attendees via emails and SMSs* ( $M = 4.60, SD = 0.92$ ), *I have known the event information from event's website and e-newsletters* ( $M = 4.58, SD = 0.86$ ), *The venue is easily accessed by public transportations* ( $M = 4.32, SD = 0.88$ ), *There are refilled liquid soap available in the toilet at the event site* ( $M = 4.19, SD = 1.26$ ) and *Small bushes or potted plants are used to make the décor in this event* ( $M = 4.12, SD = 0.95$ ).

On the other hand, the least green practices implemented by the conference organisers included *This is an outdoor or opened air venue to reduce the use of air conditioner* ( $M = 1.79, SD = 1.21$ ), and *I am discouraged to wear a formal business dress in order to decrease the temperature* ( $M = 2.03, SD = 1.13$ ).

### **Participants' green behaviours and future intentions**

**Table 4 Participants' green behaviours**

Behaviours	Mean	SD
1. Recycling is important to save natural resources.	4.48	0.75
2. I feel good when supporting green meetings.	4.36	0.68
3. I prefer to attend conferences that apply environmentally friendly practices BUT I also consider other factors such as price, destination, facilities and others.	4.30	0.77
4. I like to go to a conference that is organised at an environmentally friendly hotel.	4.29	0.80
5. I always support a conference that is organised by a green meeting organiser.	4.17	0.84
6. I am considered myself as an environmental conscious person.	3.63	1.09
7. I choose to attend this conference mainly because of its promise to be a green meeting.	3.26	1.24

As presented in Table 4, the top behaviours were *Recycling is important to save natural resources* ( $M = 4.48, SD = 0.75$ ), *I feel good when supporting green meetings* ( $M = 4.36, SD = 0.68$ ), *I prefer to attend conferences that apply environmentally friendly practices but also consider other factors such as price, destination, facilities and others* ( $M = 4.30, SD = 0.77$ ). In contrast, they revealed low towards *I choose to attend this conference mainly because of its promise to be a green meeting* ( $M = 3.26, SD = 1.02$ ).



**Table 5 Differences between their green meeting behaviours compared by personal profiles**

No.	Behaviours	Personal profiles								
		Male	Female	Asian	Non-Asian	≤ 29 yrs (1)	30-39 yrs (2)	≥40 yrs (3)	Single and others	Married
1	I like to go to a conference that is organised at an environmentally friendly hotel.	4.36	4.25	4.35	4.10	4.30	4.08	4.55	4.14	4.43
		p = .236		p = .007		F= 11.29	p =.000	1,2≠3	p = .000	
2	I always support a conference that is organised by a green meeting organiser.	4.34	4.09	4.21	4.05	4.14	4.06	4.35	4.05	4.28
		p = .012		p = .096		F= 4.05	p =.018	2≠3	p = .008	
3	I am considered myself as an environmental conscious person.	3.65	3.63	3.72	3.40	3.56	3.39	4.04	3.49	3.77
		p = .820		p = .009		F= 12.24	p =.000	1, 2≠3	p = .011	
4	I feel good when supporting green meetings.	4.47	4.30	4.42	4.18	4.31	4.27	4.54	4.30	4.41
		p = .036		p =.007		F= 5.56	p = .004	1,2≠3	p =.134	
5	Recycling is important to save natural resources.	4.59	4.43	4.53	4.35	4.44	4.39	4.65	4.23	4.73
		p = .057		p =.044		F= 3.78	p =.024	2≠3	p = .000	
6	I choose to attend this conference mainly because of its promise to be a green meeting.	3.64	3.08	3.20	3.41	3.20	3.15	3.47	3.07	3.45
		p = .000		p =.149		F= 2.36	p = .096		p = .003	
7	I prefer to attend conferences that apply environmentally friendly practices BUT I also consider other factors such as price, destination, facilities and others.	4.24	4.33	4.37	4.11	3.60	4.32	4.32	4.29	4.31
		p = .331		p =.010		F= .86	p = .425		p = .777	

Table 5 reports the T-Test and ANOVA results of differences of the green meeting behaviour of participants as compared by personal profiles (gender, nationality, age groups, and marital status). Below is the summary of the key findings:

<b>Personal profiles</b>	<b>Findings</b>
Gender	I always support a conference that is organised by a green meeting. I feel good when supporting green meetings. I choose to attend this conference mainly because of its promise to be a green meeting.
Nationality Asian and Non-Asian	I like to go to a conference that is organised at an environmentally friendly hotel. I am considered myself as an environmental conscious person. I feel good when supporting green meetings. Recycling is important to save natural resources. I prefer to attend conferences that apply environmentally friendly practices BUT I also consider other factors such as price, destination, facilities and others.
Age groups	I like to go to a conference that is organised at an environmentally friendly hotel. I always support a conference that is organised by a green meeting organiser. I am considered myself as an environmental conscious person. I feel good when supporting green meeting. Recycling is important to save natural resources.
Marital status	I like to go to a conference that is organised at an environmentally friendly hotel. I always support a conference that is organised by a green meeting organiser. I am considered myself as an environmental conscious person. Recycling is important to save natural resources. I choose to attend this conference mainly because of its promise to be a green meeting.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

The findings highlighted that event organisers are seeking methods to handle the physical impacts of their events (Bowdinet at, 2006). The most common practices found in the study are discussed in the below sections.

### ***Use of the Internet as green practices***

The current study supports the wide use of the Internet, social media and emails as the ways of communicating and making the events greener. This is in line with Fenich (2012) who advocated that technology can be used to entice attendees to participate in events. This further provides evidence that the use of the Internet as one of the greening practices

has been generally well taken by event operators (TCEB, 2008). This may be due to two plausible explanations, its power to reach audience with no geographical border, and the cost-saving. This is consistent with Fenich (2012) who stated that the use of technology can attract attendees and can use it as a marketing tool to promote and communicate through the target. The Internet has been one of the most common tools people are using these days as the Internet World Stats (2015) reports that more than 42.4% of the world populations are now accessing the Internet in their daily lives, which represents more than 753% increase when compared to the figure in 2000.

Equally important, the study provides empirical support that event operators are striving to find ways of saving cost so that maximisation of profit can be achieved (Bowdinet at, 2006). The use of the Internet as a marketing tool is paperless, and requires merely E-brochures which subsequently leads to substantial cost saving on the organisers' sides.

### ***Choice of venue***

From the study, the most influential factors that influence participants on hotel selection are "convenience" and "length of time". So, organisers have to choose the venue which is convenient for participants such as variety of food shops, accessibility of public transportations, variety of attractions, with a short distance to the meeting venue. This is supported by Allen et al. (2010) and TCEB (2014) who stated that the conference venue should be accessible by the public transportations and availability of restaurants and attractions.

Likewise, Guterman (2009) suggested that the shortage distances for the participant to access the conference site is one of environmental sustainability practices. When the conference is in short distance to participants, the shuttle bus will not be required. Thus, the organisers can reduce the Greenhouse Effect or global warming situation since the Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) gas from the shuttle bus is not released to the atmosphere, and also can minimise the traffic congestion during the event's period (TCEB, 2014; Webster, 2000). Moreover, the meeting venue or hotel within walking distance can eliminate the cost of event management (PCMA, 2006; Wilson and Spatrisano, 2010; GMIC, 2012).

### ***Use of correct bins (paper, plastic, bottles, glass and cans)***

Separation of waste at the event will encourage people to get into the recycling habit (Allen et al, 2010). Separating the garbage can benefit the organisers in reducing waste by using the recyclable materials (TCEB, 2014). The study revealed that the use of correct waste containers is rarely perceived in the conferences. Since not every hotel in Bangkok is green, the four categories of garbage bins are not always available as there are only 53 hotels in Bangkok are on the list of Green Leaf Foundation (Green Leaf Foundation, 2015). Most of the bins in the hotels might not be appeared in the public area so that the participants could not see any action of this (Kleangtaopong, 2011).

### ***Strong participants' willingness to support green meeting***

As global warming is a big issue at the moment, event or meeting is one of activities that produce the causes of this problem - fuel combustion by vehicles and an increase in electricity production (TCEB, 2014). The study revealed that the respondents are willing to participate in an environmentally friendly conference as they rated very highly on five-point Likert scale. This is consistent with the study by Thai Hotels Association (2010) who confirmed that number of environmental consciousness people are increasing and look for

eco-friendly activities in order to help preserving the environment. Additionally, Rao (2011) investigated that people who are in developing and developed countries are realising the issue of global warming and its seriousness. This is also in line with Klengtapong (2011) who found that the environmentally friendly practices influenced the tourists to re-visit green hotels in the future.

### ***Effects of personal factors on behaviours and future intentions to attend green meetings***

The study found that differences on gender and nationality factors had a statistical significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) to the future intentions in “I do not mind attending a conference that may not be friendly to the environment”. As supported by Guterman’s (2009), there is still a mixed feeling among attendees towards greening meetings.

Age is another key factor that can affect the possibility of attending future green meetings. In this study, it was found that the elderly people are most likely to attend green meetings than younger people. This result is similar to Kostakis and Sardianou (2012) who reported that people in the middle-age and older expressed higher positive intention to the environmentally friendly practices. This may be explained by the fact that older people have accumulated more conference experiences thereby forming much more sophisticated expectations and intentions than younger individuals.

Furthermore, this study found that behaviours of participants also affect the future intention to attend the green meetings. On a broader perspective, the relationship between behaviour and intention is in line with one of the most widely cited theory, Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein 1980 cited in Peter and Olson, 2004). The major proposition of this theory is that the attitude toward the behaviour and subjective norms determine the behaviour intentions, and intentions subsequently affect the behaviour. This may infer that the positive attitude leads to positive behaviour as well as favourable attitude towards eco-friendly behaviour and positive images of green practices influence people’s willingness of joining green venues and recommending their colleagues (Han et al, 2009; Han and Kim, 2010; Han and Yoon, 2015).

### **Future implications**

Theoretically, the current study provides useful inputs to fill in gaps pertaining to the areas greening practices in the business tourism in Thailand as there has not been much research that focused particularly on MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) Industry (Laing and Frost, 2010).

From the findings of this study, the important issue is about the green practices that have high power to influence the participants’ future intentions. This information is very useful for the event organisers to review so, they can implement the practices that can impact the future intentions of the participants. Note that for some practices that are not visibly noticed by participants, organisers may make them be more visible by informing the participants of what the organisers have been done or implemented. Moreover, the organisers can communicate to the attendees through the website of conference or emails about the green practices adopting.

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