


UNDERSTANDING GREEN HOTEL SELECTION IN THE REAL-WORLD SITUATION THROUGH A DECISION-MAKING THEORY: A CASE OF THAILAND

Abstract

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Purpose – Most green hotel studies are dominated by quantitative approaches, which are limited in their ability to understand the complexity of consumers' choice of green hotel. This research note employs a qualitative method to examine the entire consumers' decision-making process in regard to green hotel selection.

Methodology/Design/Approach – This study utilises an interview approach, using the five-stage consumer decision-making model as a framework. Data is analysed through content and thematic analysis.

Findings – In the real world, respondents are motivated to travel by their personal needs rather than the attractiveness of a green hotel. To plan for traveling and hotel selection (including a green hotel), they usually search for hotel information from various sources, and it is not necessary for them to choose a green hotel, depending on their personal reasons. Before making a purchase decision, the respondents will compare and evaluate several factors in order to choose a hotel (including green and non-green hotels) which mostly matches their preference and budget. Their decision may be either self-decision or joint decision which may be influenced by other people. In the post-purchase stage, the respondents would evaluate overall hotel services with their expectations, and are likely to revisit a hotel which meets their expectations, rather than concerning environmental obligation. These findings are the reflections from consumers' actual decision-making process which may challenge the selection of a green hotel, particularly the process of comparison and evaluation of hotel choices.

Originality of the research – This is a first study that provides a different perspective on consumers' choice of an eco-friendly hotel based on the real-life situation using Thailand as a case study.

Keywords green hotel, environmental-friendly hotel, consumers' decision-making process, Thailand

Research note

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INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, a word 'green hotel' has been widely discussed in the international literature due to the increasing awareness of business sustainability and social responsibility (Jiang & Gao, 2019; Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023). Conceptually, a green hotel (sometimes called environmentally friendly hotel) is generally defined as a lodging property that takes responsibility to minimise environmental impacts by implementing pro-environmental practices in its operations such as energy conservation, water reduction, and waste management (Chia-Jung & Pei-Chun, 2014; Green Hotels Association, 2012). The main concept of green hotels is to encourage the lodging properties to establish a program or a measure that helps to reduce the negative impact of their operations on the natural environment (Green Hotels Association, 2012; Rahman & Reynolds, 2016). In practice, a green hotel may initially implement one or more programs (measures) to save water and energy resources. Moreover, many green hotels may implement several green measures to save the environment, for example, reducing water usage (e.g. guestrooms), using durable service items (e.g. towel and linen reuse, use of refillable bathroom amenities), and using energy-saving equipment (e.g. guestrooms and hotel facilities). Some green hotels may find more approaches for better environment management, for example, food waste management from restaurants or using solar energy or technology to save energy and natural resources within a hotel (Chen & Tung, 2014; Rahman & Reynolds, 2016). These practices are the major attributes (characteristics) of green hotels that make them different from other hotels. Today, the current practices of green hotels mainly focus on four important areas: energy, water, waste, and recycling/reusing durable items (Chen & Tung, 2014; Sultana et al., 2022). Typically, a lodging property, which has a measure to reduce the negative impact of its operations based on one or more of the four areas, is likely to help to promote a green hotel concept. Importantly, green hotels need to communicate their policies and practices to hotel employees and customers to gain their support and cooperation (Rahman & Reynolds, 2016; Sultana et al., 2022). In a country like Thailand (for example), a green hotel can distinguish itself from other hotels by receiving a certificate and a logo to promote a green hotel image, through examination process in regard to the efficiency in managing energy and resources (Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023).

Being a green hotel may help the business to gain competitive advantages (e.g. product positioning, product speciality), customer awareness & support, media recognition and public support (Rahman & Reynolds, 2016; Sultana et al., 2022). In particular, the practices of green hotels not only benefit the hotels in terms of energy and cost savings, but they also attract the consumers who care the environment (Chen & Tung, 2014; Rahman & Reynolds, 2016). Research indicates that today there is an increasing number of consumers who are likely to support and stay at green hotels (Chen & Tung, 2014; Sultana et al., 2022). Past studies indicate that there are some factors that may influence consumers' intention to visit green hotels. These may include social and psychological factors like environmental concern, awareness of social responsibility, attitudes, subjective norm, and moral obligation (Chen & Tung, 2014; Rahman & Reynolds, 2016). For example, consumers with high environmental concern and high moral obligation seem to be interested in green hotels, and they may be likely to visit them. Meanwhile, certain green hotel attributes such as green hotel image (saving the earth), green practices (e.g. energy saving, waste management), and hotel environment (e.g. open-air areas or natural areas) may attract green consumers, who care the environment, to visit green hotels (Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023).

Given the contributions of green hotels as mentioned above, during the past decades, consumers' green hotel selection has been an important research issue in tourism literature as it has provided a better understanding of why consumers select a green hotel and the factors influencing their intentions to select a green hotel, for example, awareness of energy conservation, environmental problems, and moral obligation (Chen & Tung, 2014; Hays & Ozretić-Došen, 2014). However, the in-depth analysis of green hotel literature finds some critical arguments which need to be addressed.

First, most studies about consumers' green hotel selection have been heavily based on questionnaire surveys (quantitative methods). By nature, questionnaire surveys have some limitations of respondents' open expressions by allowing the respondents answer the questionnaires based on what are given (Nayak & Narayan, 2019). In the real-world situation, consumers may not be interested in a green hotel due to their personal reasons. In addition, most prior studies seem to focus on consumers' intentions to choose a green hotel (one-side perspective) but there is a lack of research to find out another side of a coin pertaining to why consumers not choose a green hotel. Second, some findings of past studies may be less valid as they were conducted based on mass surveys. For example, some studies collected data from international tourists at the airports or some collected data through online surveys (Mohd Noor & Kumar, 2014; Sultana et al., 2022). Past studies (Barber, 2014; Mugiarti et al., 2022) reveal that marketing green hotels should be segmented to reach the potential customers (niche market) rather than the mass market because not all tourists are interested in staying at green hotels because of various reasons, for example, lifestyle, personality, different product sought, and different hotel preferences (Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023; Schuckert et al., 2015).

Third, researchers may overlook to consider certain factors influencing consumers' decision-making on green hotel selection in the real-world situation. Past studies indicate that many consumers select hotels for tourism purposes based on several factors, for instance, great offers by hotels, marketing promotion of online travel agencies (OTAs), tourists' reviews, and the influences of social media (Baruca & Civre, 2012; Sangpikul, 2021). Consequently, many consumers may consider a green hotel as not important or essential for them but they may be more likely to choose a hotel that corresponds to their personal needs. Fourth, the selection of green hotels, based on past literature, should not be regarded as a simple decision due to consumers' complex buying processes (Palalic et al., 2021). In the real-world situation, consumers may choose or not choose green hotels because they usually make their comparisons of hotel choices before making a final decision. Prior studies indicate that consumers usually compare several factors when selecting a hotel, for example, prices, hotel features, accessibility, service quality, hotel facilities, and image (Kim et al., 2019; Wong & Chi-Yung, 2002). Finally, the existing literature indicate that there are some factors influencing consumers to select a green hotel such as attitude, norm, and moral obligation (Chen & Tung, 2014; Mugiarti et al., 2022; Yan & Chai, 2021). However, it may be doubtful that in the real-world circumstance with the influences of OTAs, tourists' reviews or social media, would consumers really consider such factors when selecting a green hotel? Unfortunately, the existing literature seems to be inadequate to give appropriate answers regarding these complicated issues in the real setting.

Given the above arguments, one approach to understand the complexities of consumers' green hotel selection may be the decision-making theories to fully understand their purchase decisions as these theories may help to explain why consumers buy products or services (Kotler et al., 2006). One of the popular decision-making theories is the consumer decision model which is widely known as Engel-Blackwell-Miniard Model or EBM Model (Engel et al., 1986). This model is generally known as the model of consumer buying process which is argued to be appropriate and useful in this study with the following reasons. First, the EBM model can help to explain consumers' decision-making process of a green hotel in the real-world situation due to its five elements (stages): needs recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behaviour (Engel et al., 1986). These five elements can be modified to provide a thorough understanding of why consumers travel and how they select a hotel. Second, selecting a hotel (including a green hotel) for tourism purposes is a complex process because many consumers may choose a hotel they like and usually compare several factors before making a final decision (Baruca & Civre, 2012; Sangpikul, 2021). The framework of the EBM model, particularly the stage of alternative evaluation, may provide a better understanding of how consumers select and compare hotel choices as well as the reasons why they may not select a green hotel. Third, scholars argue that the studies about environmental behaviours such as green hotel selection may not always be driven by environmental or social concerns, there is a need to integrate other theories or novel perspectives in systematically explaining consumers' intentions to choose green hotels from wider viewpoints (Rahman & Reynolds, 2016; Yadav et al., 2019). The EBM model, therefore, may be integrated to provide another perspective about the complexities of

consumers' green hotel selection. Whereas other decision theories, for example, consumer decision journey model or theory of planned behaviour may provide certain constructs which may be irrelevant to the purpose/scope of the current study such as involvement construct (consumer decision journey) or attitude/norm factors (theory of planned behaviour).

Therefore, employing a qualitative approach (interview method), together with the 5 stages of EBM Model, is argued to be an appropriate approach to provide another novel perspective (another side of a coin) to obtain the in-depth understanding of the entire buying process of consumers' green hotel selection (why consumer select and not select a green hotel) rather than just the purchase intentions as documented in the literature (e.g. Chen & Tung, 2014; Mugiarti et al., 2022; Yan & Chai, 2021). However, limited efforts have employed a different approach to gain a better understanding of consumers' green hotel selection. Importantly, studies about consumers' green hotel selection as documented in western literature may not be necessary to provide similar results within the Asian context (e.g. Thailand) as the research samples have different cultures, behaviours, and product preferences (Schuckert et al., 2015; Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023).

To fulfil the research gaps, this research note employs the model of consumer buying process as a framework with the objective to examine consumers' decision-making process in selecting a green hotel by using Thailand as a case study. As the existing literature, mostly quantitative methods, have limitations to fully understand the complexities of consumers' green hotel selection in the real-world situation, this study thus employs a qualitative approach to find out more appropriate answers regarding consumer buying process of green hotels in the real setting. In addition, the current findings will help to supplement the quantitative studies to deeply understand consumers' green hotel selection from a different context (another side of a coin). Theoretical and practical contributions are discussed.

1. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach through the interviews by using EBM Model as a framework. As it aimed to obtain the in-depth information about consumers' green hotel selection, it was necessary to set the criteria for selecting appropriate participants to provide the required information through a purposive sampling method. Based on the literature, past studies about green hotels had set certain criteria to recruit appropriate participants such as green hotel knowledge (Mugiarti et al., 2022), hotel booking experience (Chen & Tung, 2014), occupation (Chen & Tung, 2014), age (Mugiarti et al., 2022), education (Barber, 2014), green activity experience (Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023), and hotel stay (Baruca & Civre, 2012). Considering these criteria with the current study's objectives, the four criteria, namely, green hotel knowledge, green activity experience, hotel stay, and education seemed to be adequate to provide the research answers with the following reasons.

First, the participants should have some knowledge about green hotels. It is important for the participants to have some knowledge about green hotels so that they can understand research objectives and can provide required information about green hotel selection (Mugiarti et al., 2022). Second, they should have at least one green activity experience during the past one year to ensure that they concern or care about the environment. Research indicates that people who participate in green activities are likely to care the environment and may be interested in selecting a green hotel (Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023). Third, the participants should have at least one tourism trip and stay overnight at hotels/resorts during the past 6 months. This criterion would help the participants to recall their recent memory about hotel stay and hotel selection (Baruca & Civre, 2012). Fourth, past studies indicate that education has been found to be associated with green hotel selection as people with higher education are more likely to care the environment and are likely to support green business than those with lower education (Barber, 2014). Consequently, the current study would recruit participants with higher education as well. Given these four criteria, this study thus recruited the participants from the researchers' university to find out the qualified participants as the purposive sampling method allows the researcher(s) to select the participants based on his/her judgement to provide the required research answers (Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023). In addition, data triangulation was employed to increase the credibility of the study by interviewing different groups of people such as graduate students (Master and Doctorate levels) and university employees (instructors, researchers and administrative staff).

Interview questions were developed from prior studies regarding green hotel selection for tourism purposes (e.g. Baruca & Civre, 2012; Mugiarti et al., 2022; Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023). The respondents were asked about hotel selection in general, and later they were asked more specific regarding green hotels based on the five stages of customers' decision-making model. For example, in the real-world situation, what motivates you to travel or when selecting a hotel (including a green hotel), what channel or source of information do you use to select a hotel. They were also asked about what factors they would consider and compare when selecting a hotel. Additional specific questions were, for instance, do you consider a green hotel as one of your hotel choices? If you have several hotel choices including a green hotel, how would you make your decision? Finally, they were asked regarding the evaluation of a hotel after the trip, and what factors would make them return to the same hotel (including a green hotel). The researcher informed the participants regarding the research objectives and asked for their consent to collect data during August 2023. The researcher stopping the interviews with 25 participants as they seemed to provide sufficient data, and no new information was received, suggesting saturation (Cohen et al. 2000). Among 25 participants, 21 people had no experience of green hotels while 4 people had experience of green hotels. For education level, 9 people held PhD degree, 12 people had Master degree, and 4 people had Bachelor degree. The interviews lasted approximately 15-20 minutes for each person.

Content analysis was used in this study because the data were collected through the interview approach with textual information. It is, therefore, suitable for this study because context analysis is a systematic coding and categorising approach used for exploring textual information to determine the patterns of words, sentences, and their relationships (Salem et al., 2022; Stemler, 2001). Since the data in this study were small (25 participants), the interview messages were analysed by a manual-based method, through the thematic analysis (one form of content analysis), by transcribing the interview data through coding, categorising, and developing themes (Bowen, 2008; Salem et al., 2022). Several scholars (e.g. Memarzadeh & Chang, 2015; Ronzani et al., 2020; Salem et al., 2022) argue that conducting the content analysis through a manual approach is still a useful method in the qualitative studies, particularly when the data (participants) are small. Data were analyzed based on the framework of the EMB model and its elements. For example, similar words or statements were identified and grouped into similar codes, then they were analysed to determine the patterns of the information. Later, they were categorised to establish the factors associated with green hotel selection, and finally they were interpreted and grouped into appropriate themes.

2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1: Consumers' buying process in regard to green hotel selection

Process	Categories	Themes
1. Needs recognition (why you travel)	1.1 Psychological factors (escape from stressful environment, change of atmosphere, rest & relaxation, desire to see something different/new) 1.2 Human factors (family members, couples, friends) 1.3 Holiday & vacation	Internal stimuli
	1.4 Destination factors (beautiful beaches, islands, high mountains, attractive cities, charming culture, festivals, gastronomy) 1.5 Marketing factors (advertising, special package, attractive offers, hotel discount) 1.6 Social factors (green environment, green hotels, nature environment)	External stimuli
2. Information search (what sources of information you search for a hotel)	2.1 Personal sources (consumers' own memories, experience, awareness)	Internal source
	2.2 Commercial sources (OTAs, hotel websites/Facebook, hotel advertising, travel websites)	External sources
	2.3 Social media sources (influencers' Facebook, bloggers, tourists' reviews)	
	2.4 Human sources (co-workers, colleagues, family members)	
3. Evaluation of alternatives (what factors you consider and compare before making a decision)	3.1 Hotel attributes (hotel characteristics, room decoration/features, facilities, environment, new hotel, big hotel)	Physical factors
	3.2 Hotel accessibility/location (town area, city center, convenient accessibility)	
	3.3 Hotel image/reputation (international hotel chain, local hotel chain, well-know/famous hotel)	
	3.4 Hotel worthiness (good value, worth for paying)	
	3.5 Marketing factors (hotel offers, affordable prices, sales promotion, special packages)	
	3.6 Service quality (helpful employees, hotel cleanliness, new facilities)	
	3.7 Green practices/appeals (green activities, local involvement, green products/food)	Environmental factor

4. Purchase decision (how do you make purchase decision)	4.1 Personal decision/self-decision (a consumer make purchase decision by himself/herself)	Self-decision
	4.2 Joint-decision (a consumer make purchase decision together with other people (e.g. his/her couple, family members, friends))	Joint decision
5. Post-purchase behaviour (how would you judge the hotel after the trip)	5.1 Hotel satisfaction (hotel services are greater than consumers' expectations)	Hotel satisfaction
	5.2 Hotel dissatisfaction (hotel services are lower than consumers' expectations)	Hotel dissatisfaction

Table 1 summarises the findings of consumers' buying process of green hotels based on the 5 stages of EBM Model. According to the first stage (**need recognition**), the respondents are asked why they travel because it involves hotel selection (including a green hotel). Most respondents indicate that they travel because of their personal needs or what we called *internal stimuli* which may involve psychological factors (personal needs), human factors (people around them), and holidays (people' free time). These are called internal stimuli because they are closely related to consumers themselves. For example, the respondents indicate that they travel because they want to rest and relax or to escape from stressful environment while many travel because of family members or some travel because of their holidays or vacations.

In addition to the internal stimuli, the respondents also indicate that they travel because of *external stimuli* which may include destination factors, marketing factors and social factors. For instance, the respondents travel because of attractive destination attributes such as beautiful beaches, islands, mountains, or festivals while many travel because of marketing factors such as hotel promotion or discount. It is interesting to find out that most respondents do not travel because of a green hotel, given high awareness of it. In order words, the respondents (including those with experience of green hotels) travel because of either internal and/or external stimuli but not because of a green hotel. For example, one respondent said "I and my husband travel because we want to relax and escape from the busy work. We often choose a beautiful hotel with a reasonable price. For me, green hotel is not an important thing to consider when we travel even though I and my husband support green concepts because we can choose what we want for our life". However, only a few respondents indicate that they might travel and choose to stay at a green hotel when traveling to natural areas (e.g. beaches, mountain areas, natural parks) to experience natural environment but not a green hotel in town or city area. One participant indicated that "I will think about a green hotel when I travel to the rural area or the countryside to appreciate the beauty of the nature but not likely to stay at a green hotel in city areas because it is a different atmosphere". Personally, when I travel in big cities, a green hotel is often neglected". Based on these findings, it may suggest that a green hotel may not be respondents' main purpose for traveling, given awareness of environmental concern. Instead, the respondents would travel due to either internal and/or external stimuli, and later they would consider accommodation accordingly. The current findings in this stage (need recognition) may provide a new understanding in that, the image of green hotel (including environmental concern), in the case of Thailand, may not be sufficient to be a main stimulator or the factor influencing consumers' intention to stay at a green hotel as indicated in the literature (e.g. Chen & Tung, 2014; Mohd Noor & Kumar, 2014).

In the second stage, **information search**, the respondents are asked regarding what sources of information they use to select a hotel. According to the findings, the sources of information being used to select a hotel can be classified into two major sources. The first source is *internal source*. The respondents often select a hotel based on their memories or awareness while some may choose a hotel from their experiences or the recommendations from their colleagues or family members. However, they also use *external sources* to search for additional information such as prices and hotel attributes through commercial sources such as hotel websites/Facebook and OTAs. In addition, several respondents select a hotel based on social media sources and tourists' reviews. In this stage, most respondents indicate that although they find a green hotel (preferred hotel), they need to search for additional information about other hotels as well before making a final decision in order to make an appropriate purchase decision. For instance, one respondent said "When selecting a hotel for vacation, I usually search for hotel information and compare them. Even though I find a green hotel with a reasonable price, I still search for other hotels for comparison. Nowadays it is very easy to compare hotel features and prices from a mobile phone. Another participant added that "Every time I choose a hotel, I always search for several things about the hotels and also look at tourist reviews about the hotels". Based on these findings, it is suggested that, in the real-world situation, consumers usually search for hotel information regardless of what type of hotel (including green and non-green hotels). The findings from this stage (information search) may provide another perspective as it may be implied that selecting a green hotel in the real setting is not a simple task because consumers may not purposely select a green hotel just because of social or environmental concern as indicated in the quantitative studies (Chen & Tung, 2014; Jiang & Gao, 2019; Mugiarti et al., 2022). However, in the real setting, consumers usually search for hotel information from various sources before making a decision about where to stay. This process may be another challenging stage that may affect consumers' green hotel selection because they will receive various information of hotel choices and need to make the evaluation of alternatives in a later stage.

In the third stage, **evaluation of alternatives**, this stage aims to understand what factors consumers consider when selecting a hotel including a green hotel. The respondents are asked to indicate what factors they use to make hotel selection. This is an interesting stage because it may yield new findings by helping to better understand why consumers select and not select a green hotel. According to the findings, most respondents indicate that they usually compare several factors before making a final decision. For example, most respondents would consider hotel characteristics and surroundings as well as hotel attributes (e.g. hotel atmosphere, room decoration, hotel facilities). In addition, they would consider hotel prices as one of the most important factors as well. Many respondents indicate that although they find a preferred hotel (including a green hotel) but if the price is high or expensive, they would be likely to neglect that hotel. Most respondents accept that they are likely to select a hotel with affordable price, and choose the one which matches their personal needs or preferences such as beautiful hotel environment, charming hotel decoration, lonely guestrooms or modern hotel facilities. Furthermore, many also consider hotel accessibility and hotel worthiness (worth for paying). In this stage, the respondents seem to have different criteria to choose a hotel. For example, one respondent said “For me, I use several criteria to choose a hotel such as price & value, hotel environment, and room features. Any hotel (including a green hotel) that matches my personal needs, I will choose it. Sometimes, it is quite subjective why I choose a particular hotel”. Another respondent indicated that “As I travel with a family (husband and kids), I will give the concern on room size, hotel facilities, price and location. In particular, hotel location is my main concern because we want everything to be convenient (even it is a slightly high price). Personally, I like a hotel that is close to everything”. Interestingly, many respondents add that vacation is a great time for them (time of happiness/relaxation), they are likely to select a hotel that best matches their preferences rather than concerning environmental obligation. However, only a few may consider a green hotel due to the natural environment and green activities. For example, one respondent indicated that “When I travel to beach areas or islands, I will choose a hotel that provides lots of trees or gardens. If it is a green hotel with lots of trees or green areas plus serving fresh local food, I may probably choose it”.

Also, it is interesting to learn that the respondents strongly agree and expect the hotels to be green for welfare of the environment as indicated in the literature (Chen & Tung, 2014; Rahman & Reynolds, 2016). However, they argue that being a green hotel does not necessarily attract them to choose it as it is a different context between social support (going green) and life enjoyment or happiness (choosing a preferred hotel) in the real-world situation. In general, the respondents indicate that they strongly support the concept of green products including green hotels because these businesses help to conserve global resources. However, in the real setting, the respondents pay a hotel by themselves and wish to have a happy time at a hotel, therefore, they have to choose the hotel that mostly matches their preferences rather choosing a hotel to support the social commitment. One respondent said that “We work here in an organisation that supports sustainability and also our work but when we travel, we choose and pay for a hotel by ourself, not the organisation. Thus, we will choose the hotel that matches our needs, no matter of hotel type. Any hotel (green and non-green hotel) that best matches our needs, we will choose it”. The respondents also argue that they would regard a green hotel as a common hotel which requires a comparison of hotel attributes and prices before making a final decision. If a green hotel accidentally matches their preferences, they would view it as a bonus or extra benefit with a good opportunity to stay at a green hotel. Based on these findings, it may suggest that selecting a green hotel in the real-world situation is a complex issue as customers may not intentionally choose it because of environmental awareness or social commitment as indicated in the literature (Chen & Tung, 2014; Mugiarti et al., 2022; Yan & Chai, 2021) but they are likely to choose a hotel which mostly responds to their personal needs or preferences, regardless of the hotel type. These are the new findings as they help to better understand the complexities of consumers’ green hotel selection in the real setting, which remains unanswered by the quantitative studies due to the lack of respondents’ open expressions.

In addition, the respondents are asked about the factors influencing the selection of a green hotel as indicated in the literature, for example, environmental concern, attitude, norm, and moral obligation, as these studies reveal that such factors have the influences on consumers’ intentions to visit green hotels (Chen & Tung, 2014; Mugiarti et al., 2022; Yan & Chai, 2021). In the real setting, they indicate that these factors may have little or small impacts on them because they have to compare hotel choices and other factors as mentioned above before choosing a hotel. The respondents are further asked about the factors they might not select a green hotel. Their answers may be grouped into 3 categories: unpleasant physical factors, high price, and unfavourable tourists’ reviews. For example, even though the respondents find a green hotel but if it is an old hotel (aged hotel) with unbeautiful environment or unpleasant atmosphere, they are likely not to select such a green hotel. Likewise, they would not select a green hotel if it’s over-priced (expensive), inconvenient location, or has many unfavourable tourists’ reviews about hotel environment, guestrooms, facilities or poor service quality. One respondent said that “I often find green hotels on the websites, I like them because they are perfect for me but their prices are relatively higher than common hotels. Some may be much higher. I think I cannot afford a green hotel with high price (even I like it), I better should save the money for my next trip to stay with a worthy hotel”. Given these findings, they help to fulfill the gap of the literature regarding why consumers may not choose a green hotel. Furthermore, the respondents are asked regarding their willingness to pay more to stay at a green hotel as indicated in the literature (Lee et al., 2010; Yadav et al., 2019). Most answers seem to be similar as indicated above since the respondents would view a green hotel as not essential or important for them, and would not be willing to pay more if the services of a green hotel is similar to others. Although they find a very good green hotel with relatively high price, they have to make comparisons of other hotel choices before choosing the one that most suits their preferences or budgets. Only a few indicate that if a green hotel is a preferred hotel (what I want), they might consider selecting it. Overall, the information from this stage provides major findings regarding the selection of a green hotel

in the real-world situation. Past studies examining consumers' intentions to choose a green hotel (e.g. Chen & Tung, 2014; Mugiarti et al., 2022; Yan & Chai, 2021) may overlook to take consideration of this stage (comparison and evaluation of alternatives) which may challenge the selection of a green hotel in the real setting.

In the fourth stage, **purchase decision**, after the evaluation of alternatives, the respondents are asked how they make hotel selection (purchase decision). Based on the interviews, the respondents may make their purchase decision either by themselves (self-decision) or with other people around them such as family members, their couples or friends. In case of self-decision, if the respondents find a preferred hotel (including a green hotel), they would book it or pay it accordingly. However, in the case of joint decision, although they find a preferred hotel, they might change their mind later due to the influence of other people around them. For example, some respondents reveal that even though they already have a preferred hotel in their mind (including a green hotel) but when they discuss with their couples or family members or even friends, these people may sometimes persuade them to choose another hotel due to various reasons (e.g. bigger hotel, larger guest room, or new facilities). For instance, one respondent said, "When our family travel, I usually talk to my wife and sometimes my kids. Although I already have a few hotels in my mind but if my wife wants to change a hotel later, I would be happy to choose the one that she prefers. You know I have a family, sometimes we need to care our couple to make hotel selection". Overall, the findings suggest that consumers' purchase decision may be influenced by other people in the real setting, and it may happen in the case of green hotels as well. These findings suggest the complexities of consumers' buying process in regard to hotel selection by implying that choosing a green hotel may not be a simple task in the real-world situation. The current findings, by the interview approach, give another perspective of green hotel selection which may be unanswered by the quantitative approaches.

In the final stage, **post-purchase decision**, in a scenario of a green hotel, the respondents are asked if they would return to a green hotel or if they would have the intention to stay at a green hotel for next trip. Most respondents indicate that if they are satisfied with the green hotel (e.g. hotel services, hotel environment, or green activities), they may probably consider coming back or stay at a green hotel again on next occasion. Some may spread their word-of-mouth to other people (recommendation) if they are happy with the green hotel. However, most respondents indicate that being a green hotel, with environment-oriented policies/practices, does not guarantee that they would definitely return to the green hotel. Their revisit to the hotel (re-patronage) would mainly depend on how hotel services meet their expectations. The respondents are likely to return to the green hotel when hotel services meet their expectations. In contrast, if the hotel services are lower than their expectations, they are likely not to return to the green hotel. For example, one respondent indicated that "We will return to the same hotel when we are happy with its services. Yet, if we feel unhappy with a hotel, no matter of hotel type, we will not come back again. For me, coming back or not does not relate to the image of a green hotel. It totally depends on the services and our satisfaction". This suggests that customer satisfaction (service performance is great than customer expectation) is regarded as an important factor for the service industries to create customer satisfaction after the post-purchase. This principle also applies to the case of green hotels to make customers re-patronise.

CONCLUSION

Theoretically, first, this study has yielded another perspective, through a qualitative approach, to thoroughly understand consumers' green hotel selection based on the 5 stages of EBM Model. Most current findings may help to fulfil the existing literature, particularly the quantitative studies, because they lack the provision of respondents' free expressions/reflections. This suggests the usefulness of the EBM model to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexities of consumers' green hotel selection based on the real-world situation. In addition, most green hotel studies are examined through a few theories like theory of planned behaviour and theory of social exchange (e.g. Chen, & Tung, 2014; Jiang & Kim, 2015; Mugiarti et al, 2022). In order to increase knowledge about consumers' green hotel selection from various perspectives, the current study (through Thailand context) has added another useful theory (EBM model) to examine consumers' decision-making process and their purchase decision based a naturalistic inquiry method. The findings from table 1 have contributed to the existing green hotel literature by providing the in-depth insight into the entire consumers' decision-making process of green hotels in Thailand, thereby helping to strengthen knowledge development in the field.

Second, the current study has advanced the knowledge and provides a better understanding of consumers' green hotel selection in several issues. For example, past studies reveal that there are several factors influencing consumers' intentions to stay at a green hotel, for example, environmental concern, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived moral obligation (Chen & Tung, 2014; Mugiarti et al., 2022; Mohd Noor & Kumar, 2014). In addition to these factors, the current study finds that consumers also consider some factors when making the actual purchase decision such as hotel attributes, hotel discounts, OTAs' offers, or tourists' reviews. In other words, in the real setting, consumers may not only consider the environmental related issues alone when booking a green hotel but they are likely to consider other important factors as well (e.g. hotel features, guest room decoration, marketing factors) in order to choose a hotel that best matches their personal needs or preferences. Furthermore, several studies indicate that consumers with high environmental concern are likely to pay more to stay at a green hotel (Chia-Jung & Pei-Chun, 2014; Yadav et al., 2019). This argument is not always true in the case of green hotels as the current study finds that consumers have several hotel choices or options when traveling. In Thailand context, consumers are likely to consider and compare hotel attributes, hotel services and prices before making a final decision to find the best match for them

(given the high awareness of green hotels). These findings are the major contribution of the current study by suggesting that environmental factors alone may not be sufficient to fully predict consumers' green hotel purchase in the real-world situation because consumers also compare and make evaluation of hotel choices (including selecting a green hotel). This assumption may require more studies to further discuss and debate to provide wider perspectives from international contexts.

Third, the current study has provided new knowledge about the factors for choosing and not choosing a green hotel. Past studies mostly examine only one side of a coin by indicating that environmental and social factors are the key players influencing consumers' intentions to choose a green hotel. These factors may include, for example, attitude, norm, moral obligation, social values (Chen & Tung, 2014; Mugiarti et al., 2022; Yan & Chai, 2021). However, limited efforts have attempted to reflect another side of a coin to truly understand the overall factors influencing consumers to choose and not choose a green hotel. In addition to those environmental and social factors as documented in the literature, the current study has found some common hotel attributes which consumers mostly use to select a green hotel, for example, hotel features, guestroom decoration, hotel prices, service quality, and accessibility/location. Whereas, the factors consumers may not choose a green hotel may include, for example, old hotel, high priced hotel, unpleasant atmosphere, limited facilities, or small-area hotel. This is another important finding to fulfil the existing literature about green hotels from Thailand context.

Practically, there are several implications to promote green hotel visits. Based on the findings, many respondents may regard a green hotel as an ordinary hotel with additional policies/practices to reduce or save energy resources, and most of them usually make comparison of hotel choices before choosing a preferred hotel, regardless of the hotel type. This suggests that green hotels need to compete with other hotels in the market. To stay competitive in the market, green hotel managers should understand what customers expect and what attract them to select a hotel by providing the services corresponding to their needs and expectations (Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023). What customers expect and attract them to choose a hotel may include, for example, hotel environment, hotel atmosphere, guestroom decoration, cleanliness, service quality and facilities (Baruca & Civre, 2012; Sangpikul & Sivapitak, 2023). These are the common hotel attributes which need to be attended by the management team because past studies indicate that they are the important hotel attributes for consumers to select a hotel.

Furthermore, green hotel managers should make a green hotel image more appealing or special in the market by using their strength (green benefits) to communicate clearly to the target customers (e.g. niche market) about the extra benefits they may receive or experience when staying at a green hotel, for example, fresh air atmosphere, green area (more trees), natural environment, organic food, natural food, and green room amenities (Jiang & Gao, 2019; Mugiarti et al., 2022). Green hotel managers should create these attributes as product differentiation or product speciality as perceived by consumers. Furthermore, the findings regarding the factors consumers may not select a green hotel (e.g. old hotel, old guestroom decoration, unpleasant atmosphere, and limited facilities) should be attended by the management team in order to improve or develop them to be more appealing to the target customers.

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