

# Factors Influencing Adoption of Green Practices by Small and Medium Sized Hotels in Thailand

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## Abstract

*This article investigates factors that influence hotel owner-managers' perception toward green practice adoption in Southern Thailand. The driving factors in research consisted of owner-manager attitudes, environmental awareness, perceived benefits, green consumers, and competitors. A quantitative research design was employed in conducting this study. A total of 236 questionnaires were distributed to hotels ranging from mid-scale hotels to budget hotels. A sample of 145 hotel owner-managers completed questionnaires, which were used for the analysis. This study found that owner-manager attitudes, environmental awareness, and competitors have significantly influenced the adoption of green practices. However, the effect of perceived benefits and green consumers is not significant. This article provides practical implications for small and medium sized hotels (SMHs) to adopt more green practices.*

**Keywords:** Green practices; Small and medium sized hotels; Thailand; Tourism; Environmental awareness

## 1.0 Introduction

Today, tourism keeps growing. More than 980 million people travelled internationally in 2011 and by 2030, it is estimated that the figure will increase to about 1.8 billion (UNWTO, 2012). It is an essential economic engine, making a vital and significant contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP). Thailand considers tourism as a major economic driver. The hotel industry, being a subsector of the tourism industry, is thus recognised as a great part of Thailand's economy. Hotels and accommodation are businesses directly related to the source of employment growth and can generate country revenues (Leonidou et al., 2013). Interestingly, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) account for 98.5% of all enterprises in Thailand, employ 11.78 million people representing 80.4% of the country's total employment, and contribute 40% of Thai GDP (Government Public Relations Department, 2013). Thailand is one of the world's top tourist destinations. There are more than 15.5 million tourists who visit every year and this trend continues to grow. The increase in tourism has boosted to an increment of hotels and an expanse of the service sector over to small-scale tourism development. The expansion of hotels continuously leads to wider environmental and social impacts. Many hotels are damaging the environment due to their growing consumption of natural resources. These include air, water, and noise pollution, natural resource depletion, and environmental degradation, the loss of biodiversity, labour issues, encroachment, and huge overbuilding (Bohdanowicz, 2005; Dodds, 2005; Graci, 2009; Rodríguez & Cruz, 2007).

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This opinion is shared by Ball et al. (2007, p.107), who stated that “environmental impacts are often exacerbated as tourism expands, and these impacts in turn are likely to adversely affect the tourism product and demand”. Increasing focus on environmental concerns can be seen as an indication that consumers, governments, and non-governmental organisations are putting more pressure on the industry to implement green practices, and the development of voluntary codes of conduct, certification schemes, eco-labels, awards, and self-help guides and manuals, and green alliances (Font & Buckley, 2001; Honey, 2002). To grasp the need for change in the market environment, it is important how a hotel improves its green image and reputation, gains advantage over the competition, and how quickly it responds to the growing call for environmental concern. The hotel is an important part in environment protection in tourism activities. Hence, it is imperative that hotels should adopt green practices.

Although surveys and case studies of SMEs have been more conducted in manufacturing industries of developed countries, there had been relatively little study on this issue in developing nations like Thailand, especially in tourism. This current study thus attempted to fill this gap by investigating the factors influencing the adoption of green practices among SMHs in Thailand.

## **2.0 Research Objectives**

The objectives of the research were:

- to explore the relationship between drivers and SMH’s adoption of green practices,
- to attract the attention to SMHs and other third parties, including policy-makers, academics and researchers to green issues in Thailand and other countries, and
- to actively contribute to developing better environmental awareness and promoting more green practices in Thailand.

## **3.0 Literature Review**

### *3.1 Green Practices*

Green practices are becoming an increasingly important focus of many companies. Green practices will help hotel operators to understand about what makes a hotel green, and also help hotels assess their environmental commitment and performance. There are many green practices that hotels can implement from changing a light bulb and using recyclable products to installing energy efficient equipment and systems. Green practices are also those related to Environmental Management Systems (EMSs). However, it may undergo substantial barriers to environmental behaviour change of SMEs. From the perspective of the SME owner-managers, three main barriers in preventing them from engaging in good environmental practices are the characteristics of SMEs in general, resource availability (including financial, human, and time), and their owner-manager’s knowledge, interest, and motivation involving good environmental management.

In spite of these barriers, it was found that greening of the hotel industry spotlights benefits of a reduction in energy use to lower operational costs, a company’s image and reputation enhancement, coping with government regulation, and earning positive public attention (Han et al., 2009), possibly creating good results and consequent competitive advantage that this is a hotel with the willingness to change (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007).

### 3.2 Green Practices Categories

Although hotels do not create huge amount of wastes and consume huge amount of resources individually, collectively they cause substantial impacts on the environment (Kirk, 1996; Webster, 2000). It has been estimated 75% of hotels' environmental impacts are directly associated with excessive consumption (Bohdanowicz, 2006). This is wasteful in terms of resources and it increases operational costs unnecessarily. Hotels often seek economic opportunities by adopting green practices in three areas, namely energy saving, water conservation, and recycling and waste management (Kirk, 1995; Stipanuk, 1996). Green practices also are those related to EMSs.

*Energy Efficiency* – Excessive energy use is extremely costly. Even minor adjustments can result in massive cost savings. Energy-saving measures can lead businesses to lower the carbon footprint while also cutting down on costs. By savings, it can be passed on the guests. Such measures include reuse of linens, installation of motion sensor lighting in public areas, and utilisation of fewer light bulbs or low-energy light bulbs ([www.tourismthailand.org](http://www.tourismthailand.org)).

*Water Conservation* – Water conservation practices in hotels are able to conserve precious resource while minimising costs of water. Green hotels and resorts implement measures that include drinking water in restaurants only upon request, low-flow showerheads, low flush composting toilets, and reduced flow dishwashing valves. Instituting linen-and-towel reuse programmes can help reduce the number of loads of laundry washed. Significantly, it not only can reduce energy and detergent use, but also save water ([www.tourismthailand.org](http://www.tourismthailand.org)).

*Waste Management* – Paper and food waste represent the biggest amount of waste sources generated by hotels. An efficient approach to manage solid waste in hotels is recycling and reuse. Waste can be minimised up to 80% by working with green vendors to ensure minimal wrapping materials. Also, products are delivered in one day and packaging is collected the following day for recycling ([www.tourismthailand.org](http://www.tourismthailand.org)).

*Environmental Management System (EMS)* – An Environmental Management System (EMS) is a set of processes and practices that enable an organisation to reduce its environmental impacts and increase its operating efficiency ([www.epa.gov/ems](http://www.epa.gov/ems)). The EMS provides a framework that helps a company achieve its environmental goals through consistent control of its operations. The EMS itself does not dictate a level of environmental performance that must be achieved; each company's EMS is tailored to the company's business and goals.

## 4.0 Factors Influencing Green Practices

Based on previous research, five key drivers of green practices have been identified. These are owner-manager attitudes (Bohdanowicz, 2005), environmental awareness (Roberts & Tribe, 2008), perceived benefits (Nicholls & Kang, 2012), green consumers, and competitors (Le et al., 2006). The following section discusses each of the five mentioned factors as an important component that influences green practices. However, the findings were mixed and sometimes contradictory.

#### *4.1 Owner-Manager Attitudes*

Environmental attitudes are broadly defined by Gifford (1996) as “an individual’s concern for physical environment as something that is worthy of protection, understanding or enhancement”. Attitudes are frequently used to predict green behaviour (Kaiser et al., 1999; Laroche et al., 2001). Environmental concern as well as the willingness to act on this concern is strongly dependent on hoteliers’ attitudes toward change and the environment, knowledge regarding the benefits of green practices, perception of and relationship with the external environment, and organisational variables such as size, company location, and financial situation (Bohdanowicz, 2005; Dewhurst & Thomas, 2003; Le et al., 2006). Prior studies revealed differences in attitudes toward the implementation of green practices among small business owners and managers (Battisti & Perry, 2011; Tilley, 1999). On the bright side, SME owner/managers are worried regarding their impact on the environment (Roberts et al., 2006; Tilley, 1999). Tsai et al. (2014) found that hoteliers have significantly high attitudes on eco-friendly hotels. Also, Park and Kim (2014) showed that more positive attitudes from hotel executives toward green practices adoption bring greater involvement in environmental management for their organisation.

Conversely, Schaper (2002) found no relationship between positive personal environmental attitudes and positive environmental performance. Tilley (1999) reported a gap between small business owners’ attitudes and their environmental behaviour. Furthermore, environmental management practices were perceived as an excess burden on business by some hotel managers/owners (Rutherford et al., 2000). Similarly, other studies reported no relationship between environmental attitudes and behaviour (Gamba & Oskamp, 1994; Lansana, 1992; Oskamp et al., 1991). Hence, this research tested the following hypothesis:

H1. There is a positive and significant relationship between owner-manager attitudes and the adoption of green practices.

#### *4.2 Environmental Awareness*

Environmental awareness is defined by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002: 253) as “knowing of the impact of human behaviour on the environment”. The awareness of environmental management in terms of cost reduction, production efficiencies, best practice, and meeting legislative requirements can contribute to business success. Organisations can benefit significantly from efficient resources and effective waste management, and from improved environmental management practices. Resource efficiency means using the amount of resources (i.e., water and energy) and even the staff more efficiently (Studentforce, 2006). It also lessens impacts on the environment.

Prior studies revealed a positive relationship between environmental awareness and environmental practices for SME owner/managers (Peters & Turner, 2002; Williamson & Lynch-Wood, 2001, as quoted by Gadenne et al., 2009). The differences in awareness of environmental issues and adoption of initiatives between types of hotels (chain and independent hotels) were examined by Bohdanowicz (2006). The managers of chain property hotels were more disposed to take an interest in and proactively manage environmental matters, and worked to build up and sustain a positive brand image.

In contrast, a survey by Erdogan (2007) revealed that there was no concern to implement sustainable development and resource preservation in daily business practices of such facilities. This may indicate that they do not recognise that sustainable behaviour can make good business sense. Hence, it was hypothesised that:

H2. There is a positive and significant relationship between environmental awareness and the adoption of green practices.

#### *4.3 Perceived Benefits*

Implementation of environmental management can provide several monetary and non-monetary benefits for organisations. The benefits of implementing environmental management include increased profits (Gerrans & Hutchinson, 2000; O'Laoire & Welford, 1998), costs saving (Tzschentke et al., 2004), gaining competitive advantage (Biondi et al., 2000; Hillary, 1999; Huybers, 2003; O'Laoire & Welford, 1998; Petts et al., 1998; Taylor et al., 2001; Vercajsteren, 2001), increased organisational efficiency (Hillary, 1999), improved regulatory compliance (Graci & Kuehnel, 2010; White & Stewart, 2008), improved community satisfaction (Gerrans & Hutchinson, 2000; Smith et al., 2000), enhanced company reputation (Bohdanowicz, 2005; Jenkins, 2004; Park & Kim, 2014; Rangel, 2000), and greater employee retention (Fleischer, 2010; Jenkins, 2004; McKeiver & Gadenne, 2005; Nicholls & Kang, 2012; White & Stewart, 2008). Other benefits that can be generated through the implementation of environmental management may include cleaner and safer working environment and reduced emissions, and water and energy consumption (Claver Cortes et al., 2007).

On the other hand, Simpson et al. (2004) found in their survey that environmental practice adoption or environmentally sensible development does not help most SMEs to the way they can achieve a competitive advantage. In the service industry, SMEs are relatively less capable of handling environmental problems effectively. Accordingly, it was hypothesised that:

H3. There is a positive and significant relationship between perceived benefits and the adoption of green practices.

#### *4.4 Green Consumers*

Consumers are widely cited as a key influencer for improving the environmental management practices of tourism businesses (Bohdanowicz, 2005; Claver Cortés et al., 2007; De Burgos-Jiménez et al., 2002; Hobson & Essex, 2001; Kasim, 2009; Mahilič, 2000; Rodríguez & del Mar Armas Cruz, 2007). Environmental issues are now receiving more attention from customers because of the global environmental crisis and an increased awareness of climate change (Follows & Jobber, 2000). Prior studies revealed that demand of environmentally compatible products and services from consumers continues to grow (Clark, 2009; Environmental Leader, 2009; The Star, 2010). Customers today prefer to purchase environmentally friendly products (Henriques & Sadorsky, 1996; Khanna & Anton, 2002). Han et al. (2009) also found that customers prefer green hotels and are willing to pay more for green hotel products. On the contrary, Buysse and Verbeke (2003) found no link between customer pressure and environmental pro-activeness. Hence, this research tested the following hypothesis:

H4. There is a positive and significant relationship between customers and the adoption of green practices.

#### *4.5 Competitors*

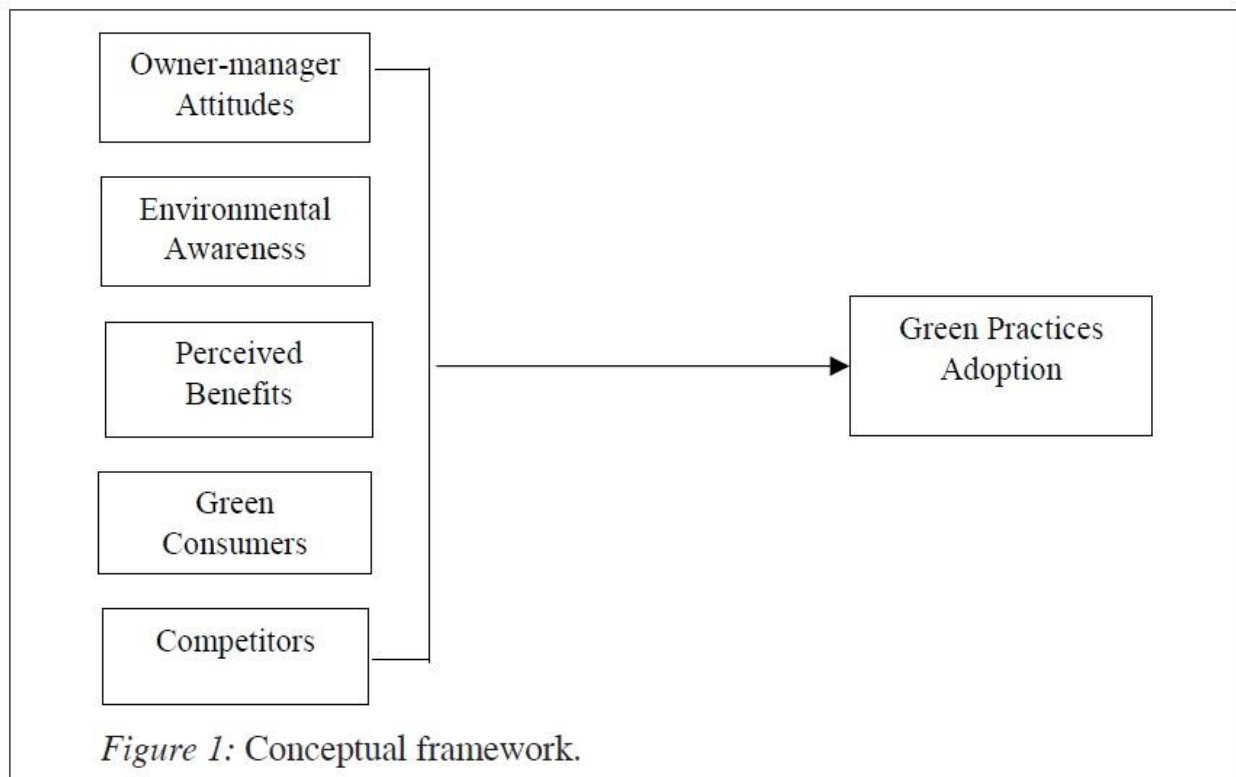
Green practices adoption can also be shaped by pressure from competitors (Bremmers et al., 2007). One study discovered that companies with small competitors were less apt to minimise their impact on the environment than companies in more competitive markets (Darnall, 2009).

Empirical studies discovered that companies tend to increasingly adopt an innovation from competitive pressure (Sigala, 2006). Due to competitive pressure, these programmes (e.g., environmentally friendly programmes, green products, and green marketing programmes) have been rapidly adopted by companies without careful study of the impact (Jennings & Zandbergen, 1995). Companies may facilitate mimetic isomorphism. For instance, multinationals are broadly recognised as key agents in the diffusion of practices across national borders by transmitting core organisational techniques to subsidiaries and other organisations in the host country (Arias & Guillen, 1998). In practice, eco-friendly hotels can encourage a large number of rivals to adopt their greening practices (Dieleman & De Hoo, 1993). Companies may also simply mimic what they regard as the best practices of successful leading companies to achieve added value. This leads to the hypothesis that:

H5. There is a positive and significant relationship between competitors and the adoption of green practices.

## 5.0 Conceptual Framework

The proposed framework was based on a comprehensive literature review covering the factors (owner-manager attitudes, environmental awareness, perceived benefits, green consumers, and competitors) and the adoption of green practices. The proposed framework for this study is presented in Figure 1 below.



## **6.0 Methodology**

Self-administered questionnaires distribution was the employed method for collecting survey data for this research. Data were collected from hotels according to the following categories: 1) midscale hotels (1,000-1,499 Baht), 2) above budget hotels (500-999 Baht), and 3) budget hotels (below 500 Baht) in Phuket and Krabi, Thailand. All respondents were contacted by phone to arrange appointments. In total, 236 questionnaires were personally distributed to SMH owner-managers based in Phuket and Krabi. A total of 157 questionnaires were returned, giving an effective response rate of 66.5%, but 12 questionnaires were eliminated from the sample due to incompletely filled parts. The remaining number of valid questionnaires, a total of 145, was used for further analysis.

The questionnaire in this study was adapted from previous studies, which were designed to capture respondents' perceptions of factors that influence green practice adoption in hotels. The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The questionnaire was modified based on the comments by adjusting the details of the wording from the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and three academic experts, and was then pilot-tested to ensure the reliability and validity of the scales. The pilot study was performed on 30 hotel owner-managers during September 2015. After making the necessary corrections and deletions in the scale items, a 45-item questionnaire was used for the study. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, namely green practices, influencing factors, and demographics. The findings were organised, analysed, and presented according to these parts.

## **7.0 Statistical Data Analysis**

The data were analysed by means of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20. The analysis techniques used during this phase included descriptive statistics (such as mean and standard deviation), frequency distributions (percentages), factor analysis, reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha), correlation coefficients, and regression analysis.

## **8.0 Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis**

The validity and reliability tests were conducted on all questionnaires before the scales were used for further hypothesis testing. Content validity was examined before data collection by presenting the scale items to three academicians as well as TAT, who examined the scale items, and all necessary changes were made. To examine convergent validity, factor analysis was used. To test internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was used.

The exploratory factor analysis revealed six factors, which are owner-manager attitudes, environmental awareness, perceived benefits, green consumers, competitors and green practices. The items on the questionnaire revealed factor loading  $\geq 0.5$ . Only green practices (2 items) have factor loadings/communities of less than 0.5. These items were eliminated from the measures of green practices adoption. The final questionnaire consisted of 43 items and indicated that it is valid and reliable.

To confirm the internal reliability of the six factors, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for independent variables ranged from 0.788 to 0.938. The results showed the reliability of 0.788, 0.867, 0.938, 0.921, and 0.852 for owner-manager attitudes, environmental awareness, perceived benefits, green consumers, and competitors respectively, and 0.904 for green practices. These values are acceptable, being above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010) for all scales. None of the items were dropped from further analyses.

## 9.0 Findings

### 9.1 Demographics of Participants in the Study

A total of 236 questionnaires were sent out to hotel owner-managers in Phuket and Krabi. Of the 145 valid responses, 85 (58.6%) were females and 60 (41.4%) were males. The respondents' age ranged from 20 to 69 years old, where 47.6% of the respondents were between the ages of 30 and 39, and only 9.7% were younger than 29 years of age. The majority of respondents (72.4%) held Bachelor's degrees, while 16.6% possessed Master degrees. Meanwhile, 44.8% of respondents had more than 6 years of work experience in their current position, while approximately 11.7% had less than 1 year work experience. The mean number of employees was 47 employees, while the mean number of rooms was 71. In terms of the location, the largest number of respondents were located in Krabi city (37.9%), followed by Phuket city (30.3%), Kathu (22.8%), Koh Lanta (7.6%), and Thalang (1.4%). The results revealed that 22.2% of hotels are not certified with any green organisation, 0.9% of hotels are certified with International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO), and 1.7 % of hotels have green leaf certification.

### 9.2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the six variables examined in this study. The mean and SD scores of variables (highest rank to lowest rank) are as follows: owner-manager attitudes ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = .664$ ), environmental awareness ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = .670$ ), perceived benefits ( $M = 4.08$ ,  $SD = .621$ ), competitors ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = .890$ ), green practices ( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = .855$ ), and green consumers ( $M = 3.31$ ,  $SD = 1.009$ ). This study used the Pearson product moment correlation method. The results of the correlation among all variables ranged from -0.031 to 0.701, and are shown in Table 1. It appears that many of the variables comprising a construct show moderate positive relationships with each other (e.g., environmental awareness and competitors; green consumers and competitors) and none of the items is too high (above 0.8). Hence, multicollinearity does not appear to represent a serious problem in this study. The correlation matrix gives initial evidence of the hypotheses; owner-manager attitudes, environmental awareness, perceived benefits, green consumers, and competitors are associated with the adoption of green practices.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation Matrix of Study Variables*

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. ATT	4.60	0.664	1					
2. AWA	4.08	0.670	0.132	1				
3. BF	4.08	0.621	0.155	0.701**	1			
4. GRC	3.31	1.009	-0.031	0.330**	0.216**	1		
5. COMP	3.64	0.890	0.251**	0.450**	0.412**	0.690**	1	
6. GP	3.41	0.855	0.230**	0.351**	0.226**	0.398**	0.476**	1

Notes: \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

ATT= Attitudes; AWA= Awareness; BF= Perceived Benefits; GRC= Green Consumers; COMP= Competitors; GP=Green Practices.



### 9.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses presented in this study. Multiple regression analyses were utilised to examine the effects of owner-manager attitudes, environmental awareness, perceived benefits, green consumers, and competitors on the adoption of green practices. Table 2 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis conducted to test the five driving factors as independent variables that explain the adoption of green practices (dependent variable). The overall regression model is significant ( $R^2 = 0.284$ ,  $F = 11.021$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Independent variables significantly explain about 28% of the variance in green practice adoption. The results indicated that owner-manager attitudes ( $\beta = 0.201$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), environmental awareness ( $\beta = 0.293$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and competitors ( $\beta = 0.246$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), are significant predictors of green practice adoption, thus H1, H2, and H5 are supported.

## 10.0 Discussion

The findings revealed that owner-manager attitudes, environmental awareness, and competitors are significantly related to green practice adoption. This reveals the

Table 2

### Regression Analysis Results

Predictor	$\beta$	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Owner-manager attitudes	0.201	2.013	0.046*
Environmental awareness	0.293	2.189	0.030*
Perceived benefits	-0.140	-0.982	0.328
Green consumers	0.146	1.642	0.103
Competitors	0.246	2.240	0.027*

Notes:  $R = 0.533$ ;  $R^2 = 0.284$ ;  $Adjusted\ R^2 = 0.258$

Significant levels at \* $p < 0.05$  and \*\* $p < 0.01$

influence of attitudes on the adoption of green practices thereby supporting the findings of Park and Kim (2014) in hotels. Environmental awareness significantly influences the adoption of green practices. Such awareness includes only an awareness to recognise the costs and benefits associated with environmental issues. This result supports the findings of Gadenne et al. (2009) who found a significant relationship between cost benefit environmental awareness and environmental conservative practices for SME owner/managers. Also, competitive pressure affects the decision to adopt green practices. This, thus, supports the findings of Al-Shourah (2007), and Khanna and Speir (2007). Additionally, the findings of this study showed that there is a non-significant relationship between perceived benefits and green practice adoption as well as between green consumers and green practice adoption. This result differs from the findings of Ramakrishnan et al. (2015) that perceived benefits were found to be positively and significantly influencing green purchasing adoption for SMEs. While most studies emphasised the importance of customer pressure on green practice adoption for manufacturing industries, the present study found that positive influence of customer pressure on hotel companies' green practice adoption is not significant. This implies that customer demand is low. This result supports the work by Weng et al. (2015) in service and manufacturing industries which established a relationship between customer pressures and green innovation practices, but differs from the findings of Etzion (2007) in manufacturing sectors, which found a significant relationship.

## 11.0 Conclusions and Implications

This study concluded that the factors of owner-manager attitudes, environmental awareness, and competitors, have positive influence on the adoption of green practices. This has implications for encouragement of sustainable tourism with regard to recognising, developing, and rewarding green tourism role models for present and future management of resources and the promotion of green practices. In particular, Thai Local Government Organisation and/or related agencies should have active involvement with SMHs and convince more owner-managers of SMHs to adopt by communicating and highlighting the competitive advantages. Through this method, a firm's market share will increase as the result of competitive advantage due to the growing appeal for green products and/or services, especially among young and eco-conscious consumers, which ultimately would lead to financial benefits as a result of reduced costs of production or services. Furthermore, environmental education guide is more effective in facilitating behaviour change. Although owner-managers were aware and engaged in green practices, those who adopted technical practices were not persuaded by EMSs. Only 1.7% of hotels had green leaf certification. Thus, third-party organisations must encourage more use of voluntary environmental programmes through seminars and training. This study hereby will serve as a guide for future studies through hotel familiarisation with the driving forces for adopting green practices in SMHs.

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