GREEN EXHIBITION VENUE: THE CASE STUDY OF THAILAND

by

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Abstract

With the trends of green practices and environmental concerns, most organizations adopted environmentally friendly policies. In the current study, the focus is on exhibition venues and their attempts to promote and support green practices for the exhibitors. Data were collected from 394 exhibitors, including the companies from various industries, such as textile and jewelry, book and printing media and electrical and electronic appliances. The results indicated that there are differences in green practice policy and implementation in different exhibition venues, regarding the aspect of communication and public relations. Furthermore, there are many areas for improvement for exhibition venues, including reduction of paper usage and printing materials, and increase in the use of electronic registration and websites. Discussions, practical guidelines, and directions for future research are also provided.

Keywords: Green practice, communication, public relations

1. Introduction

The significant growth in the number of events has lead to the emergence of a global event industry ranging from festivals, meetings, conferences, exhibitions, incentives, sports, to a range of other types of events (Rogers, 2008). Business events, also known as the MICE sector (meetings, incentives, conferences/conventions, and exhibitions), engage all segments of the hospitality and tourism industry, consisting of lodging, food and beverage, transportation, attraction, entertainment, and shopping (Fenich, 2012).

Exhibition, also known as trade show or exposition, is a subset of the business events (Fenich, 2012). In organizing the exhibitions, literally tons of materials are incorporated into the exhibition including exhibit booths, carpeting, collateral materials, give-away and souvenirs, etc., which becomes large amounts of waste after exhibitions (Kellen Meetings, 2011). In fact, the exhibition industry is the second largest producers of waste, behind the construction industry, which generates 600,000 tons of garbage every year, especially the exhibit booths, unread brochures and useless souvenirs (Kim, Terazawa, Huruya, & Shiraishi, 2002; Schueneman, 2012).

With growing concerns about environmental issues, many organizations attempts to improve their practices in several areas in order to support the sustainable business performance. Consequently, the exhibition industry tries to reduce that huge amount of yearly waste because the environmental issues have become a core value for many business sectors, and paper and plastic are the most obvious first line for attacking. Schueneman (2012) noted that many exhibitions increasingly used eco-friendly booths made from recycled material and increasingly offered electronic information instead of distributing pamphlets and brochures advertising exhibitors' products and services.

The objective of this current study is to examine green practices of exhibition venues in Thailand, according to their characteristics, including types of business, size and age of the organization.

2. Literature Review

According to Shrum, McCarty, and Lowrey (1995), the term green is referred to being environmentally friendly. Lee, Choi, and Breiter (2011) suggested the concept of green meetings to include all aspects of an event such as the meeting site, provision of catering, provision of transportation services, and procurement of meeting materials. The concept of green meetings will embrace three elements of sustainability (responsibility towards the environment, society, and economy) (Lee, Choi, & Breiter, 2011). Meanwhile, the core of green concept in MICE industry falls into five major categories including waste, carbon emissions, transportation, food and beverage, and communication, where paper and electricity usage are addressed as consistently as other two categories (Linden, 2010).

The green concept is applied by convention and exhibition venues, organizers and other players, and implemented into their management strategies (Katzel, 2007). They apply the environmentally best practices in the areas of selection of destination, accommodations, event venue and transportation, food and beverage, convention and exhibition production, and communication and marketing, which intend to eliminate or reduce waste, pollution, chemicals, and increase the utilization of resources (Convention Industry Council, 2004; DeSilets & Dickerson, 2008; Laing & Frost, 2010; Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2009a). Davidson and Rogers (2006) suggested that green meeting procedures can overcome negative impacts on the environment; for instance, air pollution, emissions, opportunity costs, and accumulated waste. At the same time, implementation of green practices could save money saving (economical responsibility), protect the natural sources and wealth (social responsibility), reduce greenhouse gases emission and water usage, reuse of recycled products like paper (environmental responsibility), increase profit, and improve the destination's reputation (Davidson & Rogers, 2006).

The exhibition venues are very important stakeholders in exhibition industry because they are the necessary for holding the exhibitions (Yichen, 2010). They provide the space and facilities that are necessary for organizing the exhibitions such as audio-visual, IT and communication technology, and other support facilities (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2011e). Because of the increasing number of exhibitions, the venues need to have unique selling points such as size, facilities, location, or CSR policies to attract the consumers (Yichen, 2010). Liu and Feng (2014) suggested that exhibition venues and organizers are supposed to restrict and persuade the contractors to recycle the building materials during the event. Moreover, human resources who implement the operation policies and have professional experiences in exhibition management, like venue manager and operation staff, are needed (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2011e).

In Thailand, Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), as the official organization responsible for Thailand's MICE industry, launched the Go Green Exhibition Campaign to encourage exhibition venues and other players to make environmental accountability part of their business practices. Moreover, TCEB also provided Green Exhibition Guideline for exhibition venues and other players to conduct the green exhibitions as well (Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau, 2009c).

In terms of communication and public relations, it means the methods of promoting and advertising the events to the public in pre-event process or distributing the information regarding exhibitors to visitors during the events. Based on Green Meeting Guidelines of American Institute of Architects (2007), promotion and public relations should encourage recycling and other environmental planning efforts at every opportunity prior to the event through newsletters, e-mail, and Web sites, press releases, and press conferences. In this area, TCEB recommends the exhibition venues to, for instance, design an environmental friendly medium to promote the event; consider a plan to reduce paper usage; and promote using recycled paper for handbills and brochures. Moreover, TCEB also encourages the exhibition venues to use information technology (IT) to promote the event. For examples, TCEB guides the exhibition venues to promote the event through the use of event's website, emails to members, e-newsletter through the organization, and SMSs to mobile phones; and use LCD screens as a medium for public announcements to avoid using handbills and brochures as well.

According to the study of Mykletun, Bartkeviciute, and Puchkova (2014), the stakeholders of MICE industry intended to implement environmental practices, follow the environmental codes of conducts guidelines required by the convention business, and encourage environmental benefits. However, other studies have found that some exhibition venues still lacked of the necessary awareness to implement green policy into their operations, and overlooked the importance of consistency in implementing green concept (Laing & Frost, 2010). Some organizations perceived the implementation of green policy as a cost of operation because they needed to hire or train a staff with specific skills to implement green policy (ShMILE, 2006). Additionally, the staff implementing green policy might not have sufficient knowledge regarding environmental preservation and might not understand the green policy clearly (Despretz, 2001). These could be factors that affect the green level of exhibitions and may also affect the green policy implementation of exhibition venues.

Therefore, this study intends to examine the green practice level of Thailand's exhibition venues on the dimensions of communication and public relations by using the TCEB's Green Exhibition Guideline as the basis.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach and used the established measurement scales as an instrument for conducting survey. The established measurement scales was constructed relating to TCEB's Green Meetings Guideline to assess the level of environmental policies implementation of exhibition venue, specifically in the area of communication and public relations. The second part was developed from previous studies that aimed to assess the key elements of environmental policies implementation process.

The survey was conducted at Queen Sirikit National Convention Center (QSNCC) and IMPACT Arena, Exhibition and Convention Center, which 400 established measurement scales were contributed to convenience samples (exhibitors) from four exhibitions. Finally, 394 completed measurement scales were returned and used in this study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Exhibitors' Demographics

Table 1: Statistics of exhibitors' demographics

		Frequency	*Percentage*
Venue	QSNCC	203	51.5
	IMPACT	191	48.5
Time exhibited	Once	77	19.5
	2-5 times	126	32
	6-10 times	48	12.2
	More than 10 times	143	36.3
Type of business	Food and Beverage	41	10.4
	Textile and Jewelry	77	19.5
	Home and Furniture	24	6.1
	Book and Printing media	91	23.1
	Electrical and Electronic appliance	64	16.2
	Health and Beauty	40	10.2
	Others	57	14.5
Size of company	Small (< 50 employees)	233	59.1
	Medium (50-200 employees)	85	21.6
	Large (> 200 employees)	76	19.3
Age of organization	1-2 years	37	9.4
	3-5 years	46	11.7
	6-10 years	86	21.8
	More than 10 years	225	57.1
Type of organization	Government/State enterprise	54	13.7
	Association/Club/Foundation	46	11.7
	Private enterprise with local funding	219	55.6
	Private enterprise with partial or full foreign funding	25	6.3
	Local chain enterprise	34	8.6
	International chain enterprise	16	4.1
The company has green policy	Yes	318	80.7
	No	76	19.3
Familiarity with green exhibition guideline	Yes	113	28.7
	No	281	71.3

As show in Table 1, this study sampled 394 exhibitors which more than half of the respondents (51.50%) were exhibitors at QSNCC and the rest (48.50%) were exhibitors at IMPACT. The respondents were categorized into several types of business, including book and printing media (23.10%), textile and jewelry (19.50%), electrical and electronic appliance (16.20%), other businesses (14.50%), food and beverage (10.40%), health and beauty (10.20%), and home and furniture business (6.10%). Moreover, 36.30% of respondents had exhibited more than 10 times and more than half of respondents (59.10%) came from small-sized company with less than 50 employees.

In this study, 57.10% of respondents were from organizations with more than 10 years old and the most respondents (55.60%) were private enterprise with local funding. The majority of respondents (80.70%) were from the company having green policy. Besides, most of respondents (71.30%) were not familiar with any green exhibition guideline.

Table 2: Chi-Square test on types of business and green policy of company

Type of Business	Does the company have green policy?		Total
	Yes	No	
Food and Beverage	27 (65.90%)	14 (34.10%)	41 (100%)
Textile and Jewelry	71 (92.20%)	6 (7.80%)	77 (100%)
Home and Furniture	22 (91.70%)	2 (8.30%)	24 (100%)
Book and Printing media	65 (71.40%)	26 (28.60%)	91 (100%)
Electrical and Electronic	51 (79.70%)	13 (20.30%)	64 (100%)
Health and Beauty	31 (77.50%)	9 (22.50%)	40 (100%)
Others	51 (89.50%)	6 (10.50%)	57 (100%)
Total	318 (80.70%)	76 (19.30%)	394 (100%)

Pearson Chi-Square = 22.356 (6), p = .001

According to Table 1.2, the study revealed that the majority of respondents from group of food and beverage business (65.90%), textile and jewelry business (92.20%), home and furniture business (91.70%), book and printing media business (71.40%), electrical and electronic appliance business (79.70%), health and beauty business (77.50%), and other businesses (89.50%) came from the companies having green policy.

Table 3: Chi-Square test on types of business and the familiarity with green exhibition guideline

Type of Business	Are you familiar with green exhibition guideline?		Total
	Yes	No	
Food and Beverage	15 (36.60%)	26 (63.40%)	41 (100%)
Textile and Jewelry	15 (19.50%)	62 (80.50%)	77 (100%)
Home and Furniture	8 (33.30%)	16 (66.70%)	24 (100%)
Book and Printing media	19 (20.90%)	72 (79.10%)	91 (100%)
Electrical and Electronic	24 (37.50%)	40 (62.50%)	64 (100%)
Health and Beauty	7 (17.50%)	33 (82.50%)	40 (100%)
Others	25 (43.90%)	32 (56.10%)	57 (100%)
Total	113 (28.70%)	281 (71.30%)	394 (100%)

Pearson Chi-Square = 18.699 (6), p = .005

The results indicated that most of respondents from group of food and beverage business (63.40%), textile and jewelry business (80.50%), home and furniture business (66.70%), book and printing media business (79.10%), electrical and electronic appliance business (62.50%), health and beauty business (82.50%), and other businesses (56.10%) were not familiar with any green exhibition guideline.

Table 4: Chi-Square test on sizes of company and green policy of company

Size of Company	Does the company have green policy?		Total
	Yes	No	
Small	173 (74.20%)	60 (25.80%)	233 (100%)
Medium	73 (85.90%)	12 (14.10%)	85 (100%)
Large	72 (94.70%)	4 (5.30%)	76 (100%)
Total	318 (80.70%)	76 (19.30%)	394 (100%)

Pearson Chi-Square = 17.313 (2), p = .000

According to Table 1.4, the study found that the major respondents from group of small-sized company (74.20%), medium-sized company (85.90%), and large-sized company (94.70%) came from the companies having green policy.

Table 5: Chi-Square test on sizes of company and the familiarity with green exhibition guideline

Size of Company	Are you familiar with green exhibition guideline?		Total
	Yes	No	
Small	56 (24.00%)	177 (76.00%)	233 (100%)
Medium	31 (36.50%)	54 (63.50%)	85 (100%)
Large	26 (34.20%)	50 (65.80%)	76 (100%)
Total	113 (28.70%)	281 (71.30%)	394 (100%)

Pearson Chi-Square = 6.117 (2), p = .047

The results indicated that more than half of respondents from group of small-sized company (76.00%), medium-sized company (63.50%), and large-sized company (65.80%) were not familiar with any green exhibition guideline.

Table 6: Chi-Square test on ages of organization and green policy of company

Age of Organization	Does the company have green policy?		Total
	Yes	No	
1-2 years	25 (67.60%)	12 (32.40%)	37 (100%)
3-5 years	34 (73.90%)	12 (26.10%)	46 (100%)
6-10 years	62 (72.10%)	24 (27.90%)	86 (100%)
> 10 years	197 (87.50%)	28 (12.50%)	225 (100%)
Total	318 (80.70%)	76 (19.30%)	394 (100%)

Pearson Chi-Square = 16.344 (3), p = .001

The study revealed that most of respondents from group of the organizations with 1-2 years old (67.60%), 3-5 years old (73.90%), 6-10 years old (72.10%), and more than 10 years old (87.50%) came from the companies having green policy.

Table 7: Chi-Square test on types of organization and green policy of company

Type of Organization	Does the company have green policy?		Total
	Yes	No	
Government/State enterprise	48 (88.90%)	6 (11.10%)	54 (100%)
Association/Club/Foundation	44 (95.70%)	2 (4.30%)	46 (100%)
Private enterprise with local funding	165 (75.30%)	54 (24.70%)	219 (100%)
Private enterprise with partial or full foreign funding	23 (92.00%)	2 (8.00%)	25 (100%)
Local chain enterprise	28 (82.40%)	6 (17.60%)	34 (100%)
International chain enterprise	10 (62.50%)	6 (37.50%)	16 (100%)
Total	318 (80.70%)	76 (19.30%)	394 (100%)

Pearson Chi-Square = 18.484 (5), p = .002

According to Table 1.7, the results showed that the major respondents from group of government/state enterprise (88.90%), association/club/foundation (95.70%), private enterprise with local funding (75.30%), private enterprise with partial or full foreign funding (92.00%), local chain enterprise (82.40%), and international chain enterprise (62.50%) came from the companies having green policy.

Table 8: Chi-Square test on types of organization and the familiarity with green exhibition guideline

Type of Organization	Are you familiar with green exhibition guideline?		Total
	Yes	No	
Government/State enterprise	25 (46.30%)	29 (53.70%)	54 (100%)
Association/Club/Foundation	7 (15.20%)	39 (84.80%)	46 (100%)
Private enterprise with local funding	50 (22.80%)	169 (77.20%)	219 (100%)
Private enterprise with partial or full foreign funding	13 (52.00%)	12 (48.00%)	25 (100%)
Local chain enterprise	12 (35.30%)	22 (64.70%)	34 (100%)
International chain enterprise	6 (37.50%)	10 (62.50%)	16 (100%)
Total	113 (28.70%)	281 (71.30%)	394 (100%)

Pearson Chi-Square = 23.914 (5), p = .000

The study found that more than half of respondents from group of private enterprise with partial or full foreign funding (52.00%) were familiar with green exhibition guideline. Whereas, most of respondents from group of government/state enterprise (53.70%), association/club/foundation (84.80%), private enterprise with local funding (77.20%), local chain enterprise (64.70%), and international chain enterprise (62.50%) were not familiar with any green exhibition guideline.

Table 9: Chi-Square test on green policy of company and the familiarity with green exhibition guideline

Does the company have green policy?	Are you familiar with green exhibition guideline?		Total
	Yes	No	
Yes	106 (33.30%)	212 (66.70%)	318 (100%)
No	7 (9.20%)	69 (90.80%)	76 (100%)
Total	113 (28.70%)	281 (71.30%)	394 (100%)

Pearson Chi-Square = 17.450 (1), p = .000

Table 9 demonstrates that 66.70% of respondents from group of company having green policy and 90.80% of respondents from group of company did not have green policy were not familiar with any green exhibition guideline.

4.2 Green Practice Level of Exhibition Venues

Table 10: Statistics of green level of exhibition venues on communication and public relations

Communication and Public Relations	*Mean*
1. The venue provides relevant information for exhibition via exhibition's website and/or e-mail.	4.96
2. The venue promotes the exhibition through the use of exhibition's website, e-mail, and/or SMS on mobile phone.	4.92
3. The venue provides a place to collect any unwanted printing materials from visitors upon exit for waste separation before recycling.	4.86

Communication and Public Relations	*Mean*
4. The venue supports you to promote your display booth through the use of company's website, e-mail, and/or SMS on mobile phone.	4.85
5. The venue supports you to provide relevant information of your display booth via company's website and/or e-mail to avoid using handbills and brochures during the exhibition.	4.78
6. The venue supports you to use LCD screen and/or electronic sound distribution system of the venue as a medium for public announcements to avoid using handbills and brochures during the exhibition.	4.75
7. The venue encourages you to print double-sided when you use paper as media.	4.71
8. The venue encourages you to use recycled paper when you use paper as media.	4.69
9. The venue offers electronic registration via exhibition's website.	4.61
10. The venue encourages you to reduce paper usage such as handbills and brochures as media.	4.42

The results of this study showed a slightly difference of green practice level of exhibition venues on communication and public relations, which the highest mean score is 4.96 and the lowest mean score is 4.42. The study found that providing relevant information for exhibition via exhibition's website and/or e-mail was the first ranking of green practice level of exhibition venues on communication and public relations, while encouraging exhibitors to reduce paper usage such as handbills and brochures as media was the last ranking in this category.

Further grouping the green guidelines in this category by high and low mean score, the green guidelines consisting of promoting the exhibition through the use of exhibition's website, e-mail, and/or SMS on mobile phone; providing a place to collect any unwanted printing materials from visitors upon exit; supporting exhibitors to promote the display booths through the use of company's website, e-mail, and/or SMS on mobile phone; and supporting exhibitors to provide relevant information of the display booth via company's website and/or e-mail were grouped in high mean score of green practice level of exhibition venues on communication and public relations. Whereas, the green guidelines including supporting exhibitors to use LCD screen and/or electronic sound distribution system of the venue as a medium for public announcements; encouraging exhibitors to print double-sided; encouraging exhibitors to use recycled paper; and offering electronic registration via exhibition's website were grouped in low mean score of green practice level of exhibition venues in this category.

This result goes along with the industry study developed by EXPO Magazine, the Philadelphia Convention & Visitors Bureau, and the Pennsylvania Convention Center Authority (2011). The study found that emails and websites are used by nearly every producer and are the number one and two most common used mediums for attendance marketing. Nevertheless, according to the study of IMEX Global Data Exchange (2007), the respondents were asked to rank the importance of green initiatives that they felt suppliers attending exhibitions ought to introduce. The results showed that 'print brochures on recycled paper' was the first rank of total six green initiatives. The results contrast to this study which found that encouraging exhibitors to use recycled paper by exhibition venues was grouped in low mean score of green practice level of exhibition venues. Furthermore, Park and Boo (2010) also identified that one green practice that the convention hosts can actively influence is recycling of leaflets since the conventions generate a lot of recyclable waste, so it creating a major opportunity for this type of green practice.

Considered from the green practice level of exhibition venues on exhibition communication and public relations, it can notice that the exhibition venues focus more on the waste reduction than the chemical reduction as most of the guidelines that aimed to reduce the number of waste were grouped in high mean score.

This result is supported by the Expo Magazine (2010) which reported that the organizers are working on recycling and reducing waste at their events by 93 and 70 percent respectively which they require to work closely with the venues. At the same time, the organizers expressed that the recycling was the most important green venue practice as well. Furthermore the survey of current green practices in US's museums and private businesses conducted by American Institute for Conservation (2009) also revealed that waste reduction by performed recycling activities was the winner in this category.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

With increasing importance of green concept in MICE industry, exhibition organizers and venues, including related companies, are well-prepared for the changing in demand of their customers and social trends. The current study identified the green level of exhibition venues on communication and public relations and found that the exhibition venues succeeded in providing information about the exhibition and promoting the exhibition in the high level of green practices. In addition, using new media, such as SMS, email and websites, helped reducing waste, leading to the more environmentally friendly approach to exhibition management.

The findings presented here suggested that through this empirical study, exhibition venues have shown their awareness and capability about the green level, regarding communication and public relations. However, there are areas that the venues should improve and further develop including reduction of using handbills and brochures as well as encouraging the adoption of electronic registration.

Despite its contributions to exhibition industry, the study has a limitation in terms of cross-sectional study, which may not totally reflect the long-term generalization of the findings, especially in the concept of green or sustainable business development.

Regarding practical contribution, exhibition managers can improve their green practices by reducing the usage of paper and decreasing waste. Furthermore, the use of new technology, such as social media, can effectively help the organizations reduce costs and support sustainable business practices. For further research, new research topics can further investigate other green dimensions, including green implementation and process of exhibition management. Additionally, it is also crucial to explore the motivations, cost and benefits, and factors affecting the adoption of green practices among the exhibition venues.

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