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The Role of Social Media Campaigns in Enhancing Corporate Sustainability Initiatives: A Study of Selected Companies in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

Social, environmental and economic pressures are increasing the urgency of corporate sustainability in Southeast Asia, while encouraging companies to use social media as a campaign channel and strategic communication tool. This study, grounded in the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework, Stakeholder Theory, and Corporate Communication Theory, explores how selected Southeast Asian companies utilize social media to enhance sustainability initiatives which also serve as a bridge between the perspectives of business ethics, marketing communications, and sustainable development. Through a qualitative, secondary data approach, the research examines specific case studies including Pertamina, Petronas, and Thai Union Group, to assess strategies, challenges, and engagement effectiveness. The data analysed consists of relevant previous research and documentation from the companies concerned. This study does not directly measure the effectiveness of engagement, but rather interprets the effectiveness of engagement in terms of narrative coherence. The study also addresses recent criticisms of the TBL framework, highlighting ethical tensions between profitability and moral responsibility. Findings reveal that localized storytelling, influencer collaboration, and transparency tend to enhance stakeholder trust and campaign resonance. However, inconsistencies in messaging and the risk of performative activism remain critical issues. By integrating empirical cases and theoretical critique, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how digital platforms mediate corporate sustainability in diverse Southeast Asian contexts. The study concludes with recommendations for more stakeholder driven and ethically coherent communication strategies.

KEYWORDS

corporate sustainability; social media campaign; triple bottom line; csr communication; stakeholder engagement.

Introduction

In recent years, the discourse surrounding corporate sustainability has shifted from being a peripheral concern to a strategic priority, particularly in Southeast Asia a region experiencing rapid industrialization amid environmental and social turbulence. The interplay between economic growth, ecological degradation, and social inequality has forced corporations to reconsider the very foundations of their business models. This intersection has been little studied in Southeast Asia because digital adoption tends to be rapid and intersects with varying socio-cultural expectations of corporate responsibility. At the heart of this recalibration is the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework proposed by (Elkington, 1999), which advocates for a holistic approach that balances people, planet, and profit. In theory, this model has become a guiding principle for many organizations. However, in practice, the implementation of TBL has sparked growing skepticism, especially within complex and diverse environments like Southeast Asia.

Critics such as (Sridhar & Jones, 2013) argue that the TBL often functions more as a rhetorical device than a tangible operational model. Their empirical study on Asia-Pacific companies reveals that sustainability reporting tends to be symbolic rather than

transformative, with many firms emphasizing “green talk” over “green walk.” From this statement, it can be understood that there is still a gap between corporate sustainability rhetoric and the concrete practices that should be implemented. Therefore, social media campaigns play an essential role in bridging this gap by increasing transparency, involving stakeholders, and initiating accountability in the sustainability process. Based on that framework, this research distinguishes between symbolic communication and substantive communication through companies' actions in conveying messages that contain concrete sustainability actions, transparency, and stakeholder engagement. Symbolic communication is identified from messages that are rhetorical in nature and image-based. This contrasts with substantive communication, which is identified from actual practices, where the results can be verified and are in line with TBL principles.

(Srivastava et al., 2022) similarly caution that the original promise of TBL, to integrate ethical, social, and environmental concerns into profit-driven models, has been diluted by the absence of standardized benchmarks and enforceable accountability mechanisms. These critiques are particularly salient in Southeast Asia, where state-owned enterprises and multinational corporations often operate within overlapping political, economic, and social mandates. Beyond conceptual critiques, recent sustainability scholarship highlights that many corporate sustainability disclosures function primarily as legitimacy-seeking instruments rather than drivers of structural change (Boiral et al., 2019; Hahn & Lüfß, 2014). In emerging economies, including Southeast Asia, sustainability narratives are frequently shaped by external pressures from global markets, investors, and international governance frameworks, rather than by locally embedded ethical commitments (Bebbington et al., 2014; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). As a result, sustainability communication often reflects symbolic alignment with global norms while masking unresolved environmental and social tensions.

Southeast Asia's business landscape is marked by diversity, not only in economic development but also in digital infrastructure, governance systems, and cultural expectations. Countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia have embraced digital transformation at a rapid pace, while others, including Cambodia and Laos, continue to face infrastructural limitations. Despite these disparities, social media has emerged as a unifying platform that enables corporations to communicate directly with stakeholders across linguistic, geographic, and generational boundaries. As (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) argue, the interactive nature of social media makes it a uniquely powerful tool for real-time engagement, particularly around socially sensitive issues such as environmental impact, labor practices, and ethical sourcing. This growing reliance on social media is not merely technological but deeply strategic. Studies indicate that corporations increasingly use digital platforms to manage reputational risk, frame moral legitimacy, and negotiate stakeholder expectations (Cho et al., 2012; Etter et al., 2019). In Southeast Asia, where regulatory enforcement may be uneven, social media often becomes a substitute arena for accountability, allowing stakeholders to publicly scrutinize, contest, or amplify corporate sustainability claims (De Jong et al., 2020; Lock & Schulz-Knappe, 2019).

In this evolving context, corporate communication strategies must move beyond transactional messaging to incorporate relational and participatory dimensions. (Cornelissen, 2023) emphasizes that authenticity and alignment between message and organizational behavior are essential for building trust. It is no longer sufficient for companies to announce sustainability goals; they must demonstrate consistency between discourse and practice through culturally grounded and context-sensitive narratives.

(Freeman, 2010) stakeholder theory further reinforces this position, asserting that corporations are accountable not only to shareholders but also to employees, communities, civil society actors, and regulators, all of whom increasingly demand transparency and measurable impact. Social media offers both opportunities and vulnerabilities in this regard. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube enable companies to showcase behind-the-scenes sustainability initiatives, collaborate with eco-conscious influencers, and invite public participation through interactive campaigns. At the same time, these platforms amplify scrutiny and backlash when corporate actions appear misaligned with stated values. (M. Cheng et al., 2021) note that influencer-based CSR communication can enhance credibility, but only when influencers are perceived as authentic advocates rather than commercial spokespersons.

The participatory nature of digital media has transformed stakeholders into active evaluators of sustainability discourse. Research shows that perceived greenwashing on social media can rapidly erode trust and trigger reputational crises, particularly among younger, digitally literate audiences (Christensen et al., 2020; Seele & Gatti, 2017). This dynamic underscores that sustainability communication is no longer unidirectional but dialogic, contested, and ethically charged.

The Southeast Asian context provides concrete examples of both progress and contradiction. Pertamina, Indonesia's state-owned energy company, has invested in renewable energy initiatives and regularly communicates its sustainability agenda via LinkedIn and YouTube. In Malaysia, Petronas has articulated carbon-neutrality targets, promoting these commitments through educational short-form content and interactive digital campaigns. Thai Union Group, a major seafood producer in Thailand, emphasizes responsible sourcing and marine conservation through its SeaChange® initiative, using social media and stakeholder forums to demonstrate transparency. Yet across these cases, challenges persist, particularly in addressing skepticism, verifying outcomes, and avoiding symbolic sustainability practices. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these dynamics. (Arachchi & Samarasinghe, 2022) found that during periods of crisis, Southeast Asian consumers responded more positively to brands that prioritized empathy and public welfare over promotional continuity. This finding highlights the ethical dimension of corporate communication, where intent and social responsiveness become as significant as message content. (Alowais, 2024) deepens this ethical critique by arguing that profit-driven sustainability strategies often conflict with moral responsibility, especially when short-term economic interests undermine long-term social and environmental commitments.

(Friedman, 2020) argues that sustainability should not be treated as a discrete campaign or departmental function, but as a foundational strategic orientation embedded across organizational decision-making. Such a long-term perspective prioritizes ecosystem integrity, human capital, and intergenerational equity, dimensions that cannot be fully captured through surface-level reporting or episodic social media campaigns. Despite the expanding literature on corporate sustainability and digital communication, many studies still examine sustainability performance, stakeholder engagement, and ethical accountability in isolation. There remains limited integrative analysis that situates social media campaigns within the broader tensions of the Triple Bottom Line and stakeholder theory, particularly in non-Western and emerging-market contexts (Fernando, 2013; Pérez et al., 2013). Addressing this gap is critical for understanding how sustainability meanings are constructed, negotiated, and contested in digitally mediated environments.

Against this backdrop, this study explores how selected Southeast Asian companies utilize social media campaigns to

enhance their sustainability narratives. It investigates not only what messages are communicated, but how these messages are received, challenged, and reinterpreted by digital audiences. Drawing on qualitative secondary data and case studies of Pertamina, Petronas, and Thai Union Group, this research engages with the ethical, strategic, and communicative tensions inherent in contemporary sustainability practices. This study also presents an initial conceptual framework for understanding sustainable communication carried out by several companies in Southeast Asia through narrative authenticity. This is assessed based on the alignment between sustainability claims and concrete practices.

This research can strengthen the understanding of sustainability communication, particularly in Southeast Asia, through social media as a means of shaping relationships between companies and stakeholders. The results of this study can serve as a basis for companies in Southeast Asia to harmonise transparency standards and involve third parties as verifiers. This study also contributes to policymakers, as its findings can be used as a basis for highlighting the strengthening of corporate responsibility reporting frameworks. This can increase accountability and digital sustainability initiatives in the future. It does so with a critical but constructive lens, recognizing both the aspirational potential and the practical constraints faced by companies operating in a region marked by cultural complexity, digital dynamism, and socio-political flux.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research design with a descriptive narrative approach based on secondary data or literature review analysis. Data collected through peer reviewed journal, reports and documentation from company documentations, and relevant regional studies with Southeast Asian focused. The unit of analysis in this research was comprised digital campaign narratives and how the company attend sustainability reports. Author used key themes to identified the relevant literatures to be reviewed. The data between companies was then compared to see the patterns of how these companies communicated about sustainability through social media. The selection of this method is guided by the nature of the research question, which seeks to understand and interpret the role of social media campaigns in enhancing corporate sustainability efforts across Southeast Asia. As (Creswell, 2014) explains, qualitative research is appropriate when the objective is to explore complex phenomena embedded in social, cultural, or communicative contexts. This study does not attempt to measure or quantify impact in numerical terms but rather to interpret meanings, patterns, and strategies found within digital sustainability narratives.

The descriptive narrative approach was chosen to allow a detailed, contextualized, and holistic account of how corporations use social media platforms as tools for sustainability communication. This approach enables the researcher to draw upon diverse perspectives and examples drawn from academic literature, policy reports, case studies, and publicly available campaign materials.

Data Collection Techniques

Researchers used literature published between 2020 and 2024. This time frame was chosen because during the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath, there was a significant increase in internet usage, particularly in Southeast Asia. Baijal in (Santoso et al., 2024) states that in 2020, 70% of the population in Southeast Asia, or the equivalent of around 400 million people, used the internet. (Carmona, 2025),

based on reports from We Are Social and Meltwater, shows that in 2024, around 61.5% of the population of Southeast Asia will be active on social media. The platforms also used to filtered the relevant studies to be reviewed, researcher limited the relevant studies to be reviewed are the studies who used LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook as the location of analysis. The cases were selected using purposive sampling, where strategic sectors represent several countries, such as Pertamina for Indonesia, Petronas for Malaysia, Thai Union Group for Thailand, and Globe Telecom for the Philippines. Companies were also selected based on their activities on social media in disseminating messages related to sustainability to increase public visibility.

The study relies on secondary data, which includes:

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles related to corporate sustainability, digital communication, and CSR strategies in Southeast Asia.
2. Books and theoretical frameworks from established scholars such as Elkington, Freeman, and Cornelissen.
3. Reports and documentation from company websites, campaign archives, and international development sources that showcase social media practices related to sustainability.
4. Relevant regional studies focusing on Southeast Asian contexts, particularly those examining the interplay between culture, technology, and CSR communication.

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was conducted through:

1. Thematic analysis, where key themes such as "engagement," "authenticity," and "stakeholder trust" were identified and compared across sources. This analysis also identifies the company's image, self-promotion, and commitment to sustainability through the evidence presented. This helps to identify whether the communication is symbolic or substantial.
2. Content interpretation, aligning findings with relevant theories including the Triple Bottom Line, stakeholder theory, and strategic communication frameworks.
3. Comparative analysis, observing how different Southeast Asian companies structure and convey sustainability messages through digital platforms.

To facilitate analysis, the researcher applied codes to the reviewed literature. The codes were adopted from the main analytical framework, namely TBL from (Elkington, 1999), stakeholder theory from (Freeman, 2010), and strategic communication by (Cornelissen, 2023). The researcher found three main dimensions, namely people, planet, and profit. Inductively, the researcher obtained codes for engagement, transparency, self-promotion, and evidence of impact. The researcher coded manually while comparing findings thematically. The collected data was categorised based on these codes and grouped to facilitate analysis. The researchers then interpreted the collected content using the theoretical foundations of this study. After interpretation, the researchers presented the results of comparisons between cases to see the consistency between companies' sustainability messages on social media and their concrete actions. The researchers also triangulated the data by integrating two data sources to validate the patterns found in the companies studied.

Result and Discussion

Overview of Corporate Sustainability Initiatives by Southeast Asian Companies

In recent decades, corporate sustainability has evolved from a voluntary philanthropic activity into a strategic and communicative responsibility for firms in Southeast Asia. As globalization and regional integration intensify, Southeast

Asian corporations are increasingly pressured by consumers, governments, and investors to align their business operations with environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards. The emergence of digital technologies, particularly social media has accelerated the visibility and urgency of sustainability initiatives, encouraging companies to not only act but also transparently communicate their commitments and progress. At the heart of these developments lies the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework introduced by (Elkington, 1999), which has significantly influenced sustainability policies across Southeast Asian corporate landscapes. The TBL concept encourages businesses to measure success not only by profit but also by their impact on people and the planet. In alignment with this principle, firms in the region are implementing a range of sustainability programs targeting environmental responsibility, social equity, and long-term economic resilience.

For example, Indonesian state-owned enterprises like Pertamina have adopted sustainable energy initiatives while using digital platforms to report milestones. In Malaysia, corporations such as Petronas and Sime Darby have embraced environmental sustainability goals including carbon neutrality targets and responsible sourcing, often communicated via integrated reports and verified updates on LinkedIn and YouTube (Tjiptono et al., 2022). More than 68% of Southeast Asian firms reported formal CSR programs in 2021, with over 45% citing digital engagement, especially via social media as a primary tool for communicating their sustainability performance (Hendratama & Huang, 2021). This convergence of communication and sustainability strategy reflects the growing influence of stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010), which argues that organizations are accountable to a broad array of groups not just shareholders. In Southeast Asia, these include communities affected by deforestation, indigenous populations displaced by infrastructure projects, and digitally active youth advocating for environmental justice.

Communication, particularly through social media platforms, plays a pivotal role in shaping how these sustainability commitments are perceived. As (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) highlight, the democratizing nature of social media allows companies to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and engage directly with their stakeholders. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok have become essential for brands to showcase their sustainability actions in real-time, using stories, reels, and influencer collaborations to build credibility and emotional connection. In practice, this has led to the proliferation of influencer-led campaigns, especially in markets like Thailand and the Philippines, where consumers are highly responsive to social proof and authenticity. A study by (M. Cheng et al., 2021) emphasizes the effectiveness of influencers as opinion leaders in CSR campaigns, especially when their leadership style aligns with participatory and value-based narratives. Their presence not only enhances reach but also reinforces trust, particularly among Gen Z and millennial audiences.

The medical tourism industry in Southeast Asia also offers insight into sector-specific CSR communication strategies. According to (Mason et al., 2021), many providers actively integrate sustainability messaging into their websites and patient education platforms, especially in Singapore and Thailand. However, gaps in transparency and stakeholder engagement remain, indicating room for stronger narrative coherence and public accountability. Brand relationship is another dimension influenced by CSR efforts. (Hasundungan & Saragih, 2023) found that when customers perceive CSR activities, such as waste reduction, community development, and ethical sourcing as authentic, brand awareness and relational commitment significantly increase. These effects are amplified when messaging is consistent across digital

channels and aligned with local cultural expectations.

Restaurants and hospitality brands are also leveraging sustainability narratives to deepen emotional engagement. (Suttikun, C. Mahasuweerachai, 2023) demonstrate that consumers who observe consistent green practices through social media are more likely to form positive brand attachment, especially in high-status consumption environments. These findings suggest that CSR is no longer a peripheral concern but a central driver of consumer behavior and loyalty. In emerging markets like Myanmar and Cambodia, however, challenges remain. Infrastructure limitations and political instability often restrict the implementation and communication of robust CSR programs. Yet even in these contexts, localized efforts, such as community farming initiatives or plastic-free campaigns are increasingly shared via regional media and WhatsApp networks, offering grassroots visibility (Pang & Deshpande, 2021).

Notably, smart city projects particularly those financed by China in Southeast Asia raise concerns regarding the real sustainability outcomes versus promotional narratives. (He & Tritto, 2022) caution that while such initiatives are often branded as sustainable, in practice they can displace communities and exacerbate urban inequalities. These insights underscore the importance of distinguishing between CSR symbolism and substance. Moreover, CSR communication must be tailored to the unique identities and values of regional audiences. (Arachchi & Samarasinghe, 2022) highlight that during COVID-19, Southeast Asian consumers showed stronger emotional responses and purchase intentions toward brands that demonstrated genuine care for public welfare, as opposed to generic CSR platitudes. This illustrates the nuanced role of socio-cultural identity in shaping CSR reception across the region.

From a marketing strategy perspective, CSR also enhances word-of-mouth (WOM) potential. (Hanaysha, 2021) found that social media marketing when aligned with visible CSR efforts boosts consumer advocacy, with WOM effects being strongest among environmentally conscious urban youth. This aligns with (Tanchangya et al., 2024), who argue that green marketing strategies are no longer optional in emerging economies but essential for long-term competitiveness. In terms of communication theory, (Cornelissen, 2023) notes that strategic communication must go beyond message dissemination to encompass stakeholder engagement and reputation management. Southeast Asian firms increasingly recognize this, adopting integrated approaches that link sustainability goals with brand identity, consumer expectations, and digital presence.

In summary, Southeast Asian companies have made significant strides in incorporating sustainability into their business strategies. However, the degree of implementation and the quality of communication vary widely across sectors and countries. While some firms lead with innovation and transparency, others risk falling into performative CSR. The central challenge lies in balancing authenticity, scalability, and stakeholder alignment in a region marked by diversity and rapid transformation.

Corporate Sustainability Campaigns of Southeast Asian Companies: Social Media Practices and Triple Bottom Line Reflections

Across Southeast Asia, corporate efforts toward sustainability have become increasingly visible not just through action, but through the way these actions are communicated. In this section, we examine specific companies from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, highlighting how each uses social media to advance sustainability narratives while reflecting, sometimes unevenly on the principles of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL).

In Indonesia, Pertamina already integrating renewable

energy milestones into its corporate storytelling. On platforms like LinkedIn and YouTube, the state-owned oil giant showcases solar development programs and biofuel research through infographics and behind-the-scenes footage. These campaigns often emphasize both environmental progress and community development, aligning with TBL values (Elkington, 1999). However, critiques remain. (Sridhar & Jones, 2013) argue that such reporting risks being selectively positive, omitting the broader ecological trade-offs of fossil fuel dependence.

Malaysia's Petronas has adopted a similarly bold stance, committing to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Their sustainability efforts are documented via Instagram reels, where biodiversity protection and carbon capture technologies are featured. Yet, these glossy presentations raise ethical questions. As (Alowais, 2024) notes, there's often a tension between pursuing technological innovation for environmental gain and maintaining extractive business models. The moral dilemma lies not only in what is done, but in what is prioritized, and what is left unsaid.

In Thailand, Thai Union Group, a global seafood producer, has led with transparency campaigns around responsible sourcing and marine conservation. Their "SeaChange@" initiative, communicated through Facebook and dedicated microsites, includes partnerships with NGOs and data-driven impact reporting. Here, stakeholder inclusivity becomes a core message, consistent with (Freeman, 2010) stakeholder theory. However, as (Srivastava et al., 2022) caution, even robust TBL narratives can become fragile when enforcement and third-party validation are inconsistent. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, Globe Telecom presents a unique digital sustainability model. Their "E-waste Zero" campaign utilizes Instagram and TikTok to encourage young users to recycle outdated gadgets. By collaborating with influencers and integrating user-generated content, Globe has fostered a participatory culture. As (Tanchangya et al., 2024) emphasize, such campaigns are effective when they combine education with measurable community benefit. Still, the challenge lies in continuity, sustainability cannot rely solely on seasonal campaigns or trend-based momentum (Friedman, 2020).

Collectively, these cases illustrate how Southeast Asian corporations navigate the promise and pitfalls of sustainability communication. While progress is evident, there remains a need for deeper alignment between digital storytelling and structural reform, where corporate conscience meets long-term commitment, not just visibility.

Analysis of Social Media Campaign Strategies

The role of social media in shaping and disseminating corporate sustainability efforts in Southeast Asia has become increasingly pronounced. As digital platforms evolve into powerful tools for branding, advocacy, and consumer engagement, businesses are strategically utilizing social media campaigns not only to promote products or services but to position themselves as socially and environmentally responsible entities. This section explores how companies across Southeast Asia leverage social media strategies to enhance the visibility, engagement, and credibility of their sustainability initiatives. (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) categorize social media as a hybrid element of the promotion mix that enables firms to engage in direct and two-way communication with stakeholders. In Southeast Asia, where internet penetration has surpassed 70% and mobile usage is among the highest globally, the relevance of social media is even more significant. Businesses in the region actively engage platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube to humanize their corporate identity and narrate sustainability journeys in relatable and impactful ways (Tjiptono et al., 2022).

One prominent strategy is the use of narrative-driven

storytelling. Companies are increasingly creating documentary-style content that showcases their sustainable sourcing, waste reduction, or community empowerment initiatives. These stories, often filmed with emotional appeal and local relevance, aim to resonate with consumer values. As (Cornelissen, 2023) argues, strategic communication must be anchored in authenticity and cultural congruence. This explains why regionally tailored campaigns outperform generic global ones, particularly when targeting Gen Z and millennials who prioritize ethical consumption (Suttikun, C. Mahasuweerachai, 2023). Another widely adopted approach is influencer-based marketing. In the context of CSR communication, (Y. Cheng et al., 2021) highlight that influencers, particularly micro and nano influencers, serve as critical intermediaries who can translate corporate messages into consumer-friendly narratives. Their relatability and trustworthiness make them effective in mobilizing public support for sustainability causes. Brands in Thailand and Indonesia, for example, frequently collaborate with eco-conscious influencers to promote recycling programs, zero-waste lifestyles, and green product launches. These campaigns tend to yield higher engagement and brand recall than traditional advertisements.

Interactive campaigns such as hashtag movements and user-generated content are also popular. (Tanchangya et al., 2024) emphasize that green marketing strategies gain traction when they invite audience participation. Campaigns like #SayNoToPlastic or #CleanUpWithUs in Malaysia and Vietnam not only raise awareness but build communities around shared values. Through these initiatives, firms can activate a sense of ownership among stakeholders, shifting the perception of CSR from corporate obligation to collective movement. Moreover, corporate transparency through live sessions and virtual forums has emerged as a valuable tactic. Facebook Live and Instagram Q&As allow companies to showcase behind-the-scenes efforts, answer questions in real-time, and build open dialogue with their audiences. This fosters a sense of accountability and responsiveness, which, according to (Freeman, 2010) stakeholder theory, is crucial for long-term trust and engagement.

Quantitative insights further support the strategic importance of social media in CSR communication. According to (Hendratama & Huang, 2021) who conducted a regional survey, approximately 72% of top-performing firms in Southeast Asia link their social media strategies directly with their CSR and ESG goals. Moreover, 58% of consumers in the region report being more likely to support a brand that consistently communicates its social responsibility efforts online (Hanaysha, 2021). These findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of social media campaigns is not merely anecdotal but grounded in measurable consumer behavior. Brand perception and emotional connection are also influenced by the frequency and tone of CSR messaging. (Hasundungan & Saragih, 2023) note that consistent CSR communication correlates with higher levels of brand awareness and relationship intention, especially when the messaging is aligned with the firm's core values and cultural identity. In this context, soft-sell approaches such as behind-the-scenes narratives or employee testimonials tend to generate better engagement than overt promotional content.

In specific sectors such as medical tourism and hospitality, the role of visual content becomes critical. (Mason et al., 2021) reveal that medical tourism providers in Southeast Asia utilize infographics and patient-centered testimonials to communicate ethical standards and environmental protocols. These strategies enhance institutional credibility while aligning with global patient expectations for safe and sustainable care. Nevertheless, challenges persist. (Pang & Deshpande, 2021) caution against the over-commercialization of social marketing, warning that campaigns may lose credibility if perceived as insincere or profit-driven. The same concern is echoed in (He &

Tritto, 2022), who critically examine how Chinese-backed smart city initiatives in Southeast Asia often emphasize sustainability in their branding yet fall short in actual community outcomes. This discrepancy highlights the risk of greenwashing, a performative rather than substantive engagement with sustainability.

Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the responsiveness and adaptability of social media campaigns became a key differentiator. (Arachchi & Samarasinghe, 2022) found that Southeast Asian firms that shifted their messaging to emphasize health, empathy, and public welfare during the crisis received stronger consumer loyalty and trust. This indicates the importance of contextual sensitivity and emotional intelligence in CSR communication. From a strategic perspective, social media campaigns not only enhance consumer engagement but also contribute to long-term firm value. (Elkington, 1999) triple bottom line framework supports this, as social media enables companies to simultaneously address economic viability, social equity, and environmental stewardship. When executed effectively, these campaigns position brands as leaders in sustainable development, strengthening their competitive advantage in both local and international markets.

Ultimately, the success of social media strategies in CSR hinges on alignment, integration, and sincerity. (Cornelissen, 2023) emphasizes that communication should be an extension of actual organizational behavior, not a substitute. In Southeast Asia, where digital culture is vibrant and communities are increasingly values-driven, the future of corporate sustainability lies in the ability to tell genuine, inclusive, and participatory stories.

Effectiveness of Engagement

Understanding the effectiveness of engagement in social media campaigns related to corporate sustainability in Southeast Asia requires a multidimensional lens. Engagement, in this context, extends beyond likes, shares, and comments it encapsulates consumer trust, behavioral change, loyalty, and emotional resonance with a brand's social and environmental mission. The following discussion examines how corporate social responsibility (CSR) messages disseminated through digital platforms foster meaningful interactions and influence stakeholder behavior. At the heart of effective engagement is relational communication, whereby stakeholders feel acknowledged, involved, and valued. (Cornelissen, 2023) underscores that strategic corporate communication must be interactive, transparent, and consistent in tone to elicit sustained interest and response. In Southeast Asia, where cultural values emphasize collectivism and relational harmony, brands that employ inclusive and human-centered narratives tend to achieve deeper emotional engagement (Tjiptono et al., 2022).

Metrics from regional studies validate this approach. According to (Hanaysha, 2021), companies that integrate CSR themes into their social media marketing observed a 28% increase in positive word-of-mouth compared to those focusing solely on product promotion. These campaigns elicited more comments and shares signs of proactive engagement rather than passive consumption. Moreover, 60% of respondents indicated they would be more inclined to recommend a brand actively addressing environmental or social issues (Hanaysha, 2021). This trend reflects the transformation of engagement from superficial interaction to advocacy behavior, a more enduring and impactful form of stakeholder participation. Engagement effectiveness is also mediated by message congruence and credibility. As (Mason et al., 2021) explain in their analysis of CSR communication on medical tourism websites, audiences are more likely to engage when there is alignment between what a company claims and how it operates. Discrepancies can lead to distrust

and disengagement, a phenomenon often referred to as "CSR fatigue" or skepticism. In the realm of social media, where users can instantly cross-reference claims with peer reviews and news coverage, authenticity becomes paramount.

Influencer involvement plays a pivotal role in enhancing engagement levels. (M. Cheng et al., 2021) found that CSR messages endorsed by social media influencers received 45% higher engagement rates, particularly when the influencers were perceived as genuine advocates rather than paid promoters. Their perceived leadership in taste and opinion gave the message added credibility, especially among younger demographics who often rely on peer-like figures for ethical guidance in consumption. In Southeast Asia, this strategy is particularly effective due to the high trust placed in community figures and digital thought leaders (Suttikun, C. Mahasuweerachai, 2023). Effective engagement also correlates with emotional attachment and identity signaling. (Suttikun, C. Mahasuweerachai, 2023) argue that consumers are drawn to brands that allow them to express personal values and social identities. CSR-focused campaigns that highlight issues such as animal welfare, gender equality, or climate justice serve as platforms for moral signaling. When users share such content, they are not only supporting the brand but also expressing their own identities, a behavior that reinforces long-term loyalty and continued engagement.

In terms of corporate outcomes, (Hendratama & Huang, 2021) demonstrate that firms with high levels of digital CSR engagement experience increased firm value, especially during early growth and maturity stages. This suggests a tangible return on investment in social media engagement strategies. Likewise, (Hasundungan & Saragih, 2023) confirm that perceived CSR significantly moderates the relationship between brand awareness and relationship intention, especially when engagement is sustained over time. From the perspective of strategic management, (Freeman, 2010) notes that effective engagement must be stakeholder-specific. A campaign that resonates with urban youth in Jakarta might not have the same impact on rural communities in Laos. Therefore, segmentation and localization of content are critical. (Tanchangya et al., 2024) reinforce this by showing that in emerging economies, green marketing and CSR messages gain traction when they are adapted to local socio-economic contexts and involve community participation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement dynamics shifted significantly. (Arachchi & Samarasinghe, 2022) found that engagement with CSR content increased by 35% in Southeast Asia as consumers sought brands that demonstrated empathy and social responsibility. Brands that contributed to public health, supported small vendors, or addressed unemployment not only gained followers but deepened their emotional resonance. This context-sensitive engagement reinforces (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) argument that social media offers both a challenge and an opportunity for corporations to be transparent, responsive, and socially attuned in real-time. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of engagement is vulnerable to overexposure and performative activism. (Pang & Deshpande, 2021) critique certain brands in Asia for adopting CSR as a trendy marketing tool without substantive change. Consumers are increasingly skeptical of brands that repeatedly promote sustainability messages without clear evidence of impact. In this regard, (Elkington, 1999) triple bottom line remains a critical framework: genuine engagement must serve not only profit but also people and planet. Brands that ignore this balance risk alienating their audience and undermining their credibility.

Moreover, engagement is not static. It must evolve with platform dynamics and audience expectations. (He & Tritto, 2022), for instance, caution that while digital campaigns may temporarily amplify visibility, sustained engagement requires infrastructural and institutional support particularly in long-

term projects like smart city developments. Social media should thus complement, not replace, offline actions and institutional policies. To maximize engagement effectiveness, brands in Southeast Asia are increasingly turning to interactive formats, such as polls, live sessions, contests, and collaborative campaigns. (Tjiptono et al., 2022) highlight how Malaysian and Indonesian companies use Instagram Stories to run CSR-themed quizzes and polls, encouraging followers to participate in sustainability discussions. These formats yield immediate feedback and foster a sense of co-creation essential elements in participatory communication.

Finally, engagement is most effective when it leads to collective action. Whether it's organizing digital petitions, funding local green initiatives, or mobilizing disaster relief via social platforms, the end goal of CSR engagement should be societal improvement. (Creswell, 2014) reminds researchers that outcomes must be assessed not only quantitatively but also through narrative, participatory, and ethnographic methods to capture the full spectrum of stakeholder engagement.

Challenges and best Practices

The integration of social media campaigns into corporate sustainability initiatives across Southeast Asia presents both notable opportunities and complex challenges. While engagement and outreach have improved, several structural, cultural, and strategic limitations persist. This section critically discusses the prevailing challenges corporations face in this domain, followed by an exploration of proven best practices that have emerged from empirical studies and field observations. A central challenge lies in maintaining message authenticity in an oversaturated digital landscape. With increasing public scrutiny, audiences are quick to detect and respond negatively to performative or inconsistent sustainability messaging. (Mason et al., 2021) found that 68% of users express skepticism when corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication lacks alignment with operational behavior. This authenticity gap not only affects trust but also diminishes the perceived value of the brand's CSR activities. In the context of Southeast Asia, where community-based trust plays a strong cultural role, this disconnect can be especially detrimental (Tanchangya et al., 2024).

Compounding this is the issue of platform algorithm unpredictability, which affects the visibility and longevity of CSR messages. Social media algorithms prioritize content based on engagement metrics rather than ethical significance. As (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) observed, even important CSR content may struggle for visibility unless it is framed in a way that aligns with the fast-consumption logic of digital platforms. This often results in oversimplified or sensationalized content that may dilute the complexity of sustainability efforts. Another challenge is the lack of strategic coherence across communication channels. (Cornelissen, 2023) emphasizes that fragmented messaging confuses audiences and weakens brand reputation. In Southeast Asia, where multinational firms often operate across linguistically and culturally diverse markets, tailoring CSR messages to resonate locally while maintaining corporate consistency proves difficult (Tjiptono et al., 2022). Without a coherent, adaptable strategy, even well-intentioned initiatives may appear disconnected from the social reality of their target audiences.

Resource constraints further complicate implementation. Many Southeast Asian businesses, particularly small and medium enterprises, lack the financial and human capital to develop sustained social media campaigns with high-quality content, influencer partnerships, and analytics monitoring (Pang & Deshpande, 2021). Unlike larger firms, they cannot easily afford reputational recovery when CSR campaigns fail

or backfire. Crisis communication is another sensitive area. During the COVID-19 pandemic, (Arachchi & Samarasinghe, 2022) found that 42% of firms in Southeast Asia struggled to respond quickly and effectively to public concerns about labor treatment, safety, and environmental responsibility. The failure to manage digital backlash in real-time led to consumer boycotts and long-term damage. This emphasizes the need for real-time responsiveness, a competence still underdeveloped in many firms.

Additionally, brands must navigate the political and regulatory ambiguity surrounding sustainability communication. (He & Tritto, 2022) point to the lack of standardized regulations on CSR reporting and sustainability claims in Southeast Asia. This results in inconsistent interpretations of what constitutes ethical conduct or environmental stewardship. Companies often operate in legal gray zones, risking reputational fallout from perceived greenwashing or misinformation. Despite these challenges, several best practices have emerged that enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of CSR-related social media engagement. First, stakeholder inclusivity has proven indispensable. (Freeman, 2010) advocates for a stakeholder-centric approach, and many Southeast Asian companies have adopted mechanisms to listen to, co-create with, and report back to their communities. For instance, using polls and Q&A sessions through platforms like Instagram Stories has allowed firms to solicit feedback and demonstrate responsiveness.

Another best practice is leveraging influencer credibility to humanize CSR narratives. (M. Cheng et al., 2021) demonstrate that when CSR campaigns are championed by respected digital figures, especially those who lead by example in environmental or social activism, consumer trust improves. Their study reveals a 45% increase in consumer trust scores when sustainability messages were endorsed by non-celebrity influencers perceived as authentic. (Suttikun, C. Mahasuweerachai, 2023) reinforce this point by noting that influencer-led CSR content often builds emotional attachment, an essential ingredient for long-term loyalty. A third practice involves integrating CSR into brand identity, rather than treating it as a standalone activity. (Elkington, 1999) triple bottom line framework people, planet, profit has gained renewed relevance here. Brands like those in the hospitality and retail sectors have successfully embedded environmental commitments into their core values, reflecting this consistently in all forms of communication (Hanaysha, 2021; Hasundungan & Saragih, 2023). This cohesion fosters clarity and strengthens consumer-brand relationships.

Data-driven customization is also crucial. With social media analytics, companies can segment audiences based on demographics, values, and behavior. (Hendratama & Huang, 2021) found that firms employing tailored CSR content strategies based on audience life-cycle stage saw up to 30% greater engagement rates and a 12% improvement in perceived brand value. This suggests that customization not only enhances reach but also boosts long-term brand equity. Crucially, collaborative campaigns, involving non-profits, community groups, and governmental organizations can amplify legitimacy and broaden impact. (Tanchangya et al., 2024) cite examples from emerging economies where cross-sector partnerships enhanced the credibility of green marketing campaigns. These partnerships also help brands access local insights, build trust, and co-create content that is both culturally and socially grounded.

Furthermore, transparency and evidence-based storytelling have emerged as effective techniques to build trust. Consumers increasingly demand proof whether through certifications, data, or testimonials, that CSR efforts are genuine. As (Creswell, 2014) highlights, qualitative accounts such as interviews and participatory narratives can complement quantitative impact data to construct compelling, trustworthy stories. Transparency is no longer optional; it is the

backbone of effective social media sustainability engagement. Lastly, long-term consistency matters. As (Cornelissen, 2023) argues, sporadic campaigns lack the strategic depth to create lasting impressions. CSR communication must be embedded in a broader vision of corporate purpose. This also means being accountable for progress and setbacks alike. Brands that regularly report on their sustainability goals, even when outcomes fall short, are often perceived as more trustworthy than those that disappear in times of scrutiny (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

In summary, while the landscape of social media engagement for corporate sustainability in Southeast Asia is laden with challenges, from authenticity issues to resource limitations numerous best practices provide a blueprint for improvement. By centering stakeholder voices, collaborating across sectors, using data strategically, and embracing transparency, companies can elevate the credibility and impact of their digital CSR initiatives. For instance, the “E-waste Zero” campaign conducted by Globe Telecom, which shows how crucial stakeholder participation and cross-sector collaboration are in implementing principles into practice. This is due to the integration between partnerships with local recycling and community organisations. Such activities encourage user-generated content on social media to demonstrate transparency and participatory engagement in order to increase credibility and impact. These practices not only meet ethical expectations but also align with long-term brand development and regional sustainability goals.

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Conclusion

Secondary data was used to examine the social media campaigns of several companies in Southeast Asia, with a closer look at companies such as Pertamina, Petronas, Thai Union Group, and Globe Telecom in communicating and shaping perceptions of sustainability in Southeast Asia. The research findings are interpretative in nature as a qualitative synthesis, as this study did not directly measure the sustainability impact analysed. These case examples suggest that social media has evolved into more than just a branding tool, it is now a strategic space where values, commitments, and stakeholder expectations intersect.

However, sustainability communication remains a balancing act. Companies must navigate public scrutiny, platform limitations, and the growing demand for transparency. While some have made commendable progress, others risk falling into performative habits, where storytelling outpaces structural change. The Triple Bottom Line, while still relevant, requires stronger implementation and supported by ethical clarity. As criticised by (Sridhar & Jones, 2013), TBL is often still used as a theoretical tool rather than an operational model. Transparent, accountable and consistent communication practices remain essential. Companies in Southeast Asia can strengthen their credibility on sustainability by measuring online communication through social and environmental indicators, engaging third parties to verify sustainability claims, and aligning rhetoric on social media with concrete practices on the ground.

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