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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Communicating Sustainability Responsibility in Vietnam's MICE Sector: A Conceptual Framework of CSR Message Elements

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| ABSTRACT

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication has become an important strategic tool for enhancing trust, destination image, and sustainable competitiveness in the meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) industry. In Vietnam, the rapid growth of MICE activities has created opportunities for economic development, destination branding, and community engagement. However, these activities also generate environmental pressure, cultural impacts, and stakeholder expectations. This conceptual qualitative paper aims to propose key CSR communication elements for the MICE industry in Vietnam. Based on CSR theory, stakeholder theory, the triple bottom line, and CSR communication literature, the study proposes three major communication elements: environmental responsibility, socio-cultural and economic contribution, and stakeholder engagement. Each element consists of three sub-elements. Environmental responsibility includes resource efficiency, green food and beverage practices, and waste and carbon management. Socio-cultural and economic contribution includes legal compliance, preservation of Vietnamese culture and local identity, and contribution to local economic development. Stakeholder engagement includes local communities, employees, and suppliers/service partners. The paper suggests that Vietnamese MICE stakeholders, including convention centers, hotels, event organizers, destination management companies, and tourism authorities, should communicate CSR content clearly, credibly, and consistently to strengthen sustainable MICE development.

| KEYWORDS

CSR communication; MICE tourism; sustainable events; stakeholder engagement; Vietnam

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### 1. Introduction

The meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE) sector, which includes meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions, has become a strategic segment of contemporary tourism because it attracts high-value visitors, connects business networks, stimulates investment, and strengthens destination reputation. Unlike conventional leisure tourism, MICE activities combine tourism services with professional events, trade promotion, knowledge exchange, and corporate hospitality. As a result, destinations that develop a competitive MICE sector can increase tourism revenue while enhancing their position in regional and global business networks (Getz & Page, 2016; Mair & Jago, 2010).

Vietnam has increasingly recognized MICE tourism as a promising direction for tourism upgrading. Major destinations such as Ho Chi Minh City, Ha Noi, Da Nang, Nha Trang, Phu Quoc, and Hoi An have advantages in accommodation capacity, cultural resources, business connectivity, and destination attractiveness. Vietnam's

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tourism development orientation also emphasizes quality, professionalism, national identity, and competitiveness, which are directly relevant to MICE development (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2020; Viet Nam National Authority of Tourism, 2023). Recent national MICE events, including Vietnam MICE EXPO 2024 and Vietnam MICE EXPO 2025, further show that heritage, technology, and business networking are being used to strengthen Vietnam's MICE positioning (Viet Nam National Authority of Tourism, 2024, 2025).

However, the growth of MICE activities also creates sustainability challenges. Conferences, exhibitions, incentive tours, and corporate events often require intensive use of venues, electricity, water, air conditioning, printed materials, booth construction, food and beverage services, transport, and temporary facilities. These activities may generate waste, food surplus, plastic consumption, carbon emissions, traffic pressure, and social disturbance if they are not managed responsibly. Previous studies on events and tourism have shown that sustainable event management requires systematic attention to environmental impacts, social outcomes, stakeholder relationships, and long-term destination value (Mair & Laing, 2012; Jones, 2018).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is therefore highly relevant to Vietnam's MICE sector. CSR emphasizes that businesses should not pursue profit alone but should also consider legal, ethical, social, and environmental responsibilities (Carroll, 1991; Schwartz & Carroll, 2003). In tourism and hospitality, CSR is closely linked to sustainability because tourism firms depend on destination resources, cultural assets, employees, suppliers, and host communities (Coles et al., 2013; Font & Lynes, 2018). For MICE businesses, CSR may be reflected in green event design, responsible food services, waste reduction, employee welfare, compliance with safety standards, local supplier engagement, community support, and respect for cultural identity.

Nevertheless, CSR practices can create value only when stakeholders understand and trust them. CSR communication is the process through which organizations inform stakeholders about their responsibilities, actions, and impacts (Du et al., 2010; Podnar, 2008). In the MICE context, CSR communication is particularly important because event clients, delegates, exhibitors, sponsors, suppliers, employees, local communities, and public authorities all have different information needs. If CSR communication is too general, inconsistent, or exaggerated, it may create skepticism and be interpreted as symbolic promotion or greenwashing (Morsing & Schultz, 2006; Seele & Gatti, 2017).

A previous study on the MICE industry in Thailand identified three major CSR communication components: environmental impact, society and economy, and stakeholders. These components are useful because they shift attention from CSR as a broad concept to the specific messages that MICE businesses should communicate. However, Vietnam's MICE context has its own features, including rapid destination development, strong cultural heritage, emerging green tourism expectations, service capacity constraints, and the need to improve international competitiveness. Therefore, a Vietnam-specific CSR communication framework is necessary.

This paper aims to develop a conceptual framework of CSR communication message elements for Vietnam's MICE sector. The central research question is: What CSR message elements should Vietnamese MICE businesses communicate to support sustainable MICE development? By answering this question, the paper contributes to CSR communication and sustainable tourism literature and provides practical guidance for hotels, convention centers, event organizers, destination management companies, tourism authorities, and MICE service partners.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Corporate social responsibility and tourism sustainability**

CSR refers to the responsibilities of businesses toward the economy, the law, ethical standards, society, and the natural environment. Carroll's (1991) CSR pyramid remains one of the most influential frameworks, suggesting that firms should be economically viable, legally compliant, ethically responsible, and socially contributive. Schwartz and Carroll (2003) later refined CSR into economic, legal, and ethical domains, emphasizing that business responsibility is not a single action but a set of interrelated obligations.

In tourism and hospitality, CSR is especially important because business operations are embedded in destinations. Tourism firms depend on natural landscapes, cultural heritage, infrastructure, labor, local communities, and public services. Therefore, tourism CSR must address environmental protection, cultural respect, local economic benefits, employee welfare, and guest safety (Coles et al., 2013; Font & Lynes, 2018). In the MICE sector, CSR becomes more complex because events are temporary, resource-intensive, and multi-stakeholder activities. A single conference or exhibition may involve hotels, venues, restaurants, transport providers, booth contractors, technology suppliers, local authorities, and community actors.

Sustainable event management literature also suggests that responsible event design should minimize negative impacts while maximizing social and economic value. Mair and Laing (2012) argued that greening events requires not only operational changes but also stakeholder collaboration and communication. Jones (2018) further emphasized that sustainable events should consider energy, water, waste, procurement, accessibility, inclusion, and legacy outcomes. These insights are relevant to Vietnam's MICE sector because sustainability must be communicated as part of event quality and destination competitiveness.

### **2.2. Triple bottom line and sustainable MICE development**

The triple bottom line perspective argues that business performance should be assessed through economic, social, and environmental dimensions rather than financial results alone (Elkington, 1997). This perspective is widely used in sustainability research because it provides a balanced way to understand how businesses create value and manage impacts. In the MICE sector, the economic dimension includes event revenue, hotel occupancy, local purchasing, trade connections, and destination promotion. The social dimension includes community participation, cultural preservation, employee development, and visitor-host interaction. The environmental dimension includes resource efficiency, waste reduction, low-carbon mobility, and responsible procurement.

For Vietnam, the triple bottom line approach is particularly appropriate because tourism development must be aligned with national priorities of quality growth, cultural identity, and sustainable competitiveness. The Tourism Development Strategy to 2030 emphasizes professional, high-quality, competitive, and sustainable tourism development (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2020). MICE tourism can contribute to this orientation if it is developed not only as a revenue-generating segment but also as a platform for responsible destination branding. Therefore, CSR communication in MICE should communicate how events contribute to all three dimensions of sustainability.

### **2.3. Stakeholder theory in the MICE sector**

Stakeholder theory argues that firms must consider the interests of groups that affect or are affected by business activities (Freeman, 1984). In the MICE sector, stakeholders include event clients, delegates, exhibitors, sponsors, venue operators, hotels, restaurants, employees, suppliers, local communities, public authorities, tourism organizations, and destination residents. Each group has distinct expectations. Corporate clients may require professional standards and sustainability credentials. Delegates may expect safety, accessibility, and meaningful destination experiences. Employees may expect fair work conditions and training. Local communities may expect benefits, respect, and reduced disruption.

Because MICE events are delivered through networks rather than by a single firm, stakeholder engagement is essential. Foster and Jonker (2005) argued that stakeholder relationships require dialogue rather than one-way information transfer. In CSR communication, this means that MICE businesses should not only announce responsible practices but also listen to stakeholder concerns and provide credible evidence. Stakeholder-oriented CSR communication can reduce conflict, build trust, and support long-term destination competitiveness.

### **2.4. CSR communication and message credibility**

CSR communication refers to the way organizations present CSR values, policies, activities, and outcomes to stakeholders. Du et al. (2010) argued that CSR communication can strengthen stakeholder relationships and business returns when it is relevant, credible, and aligned with stakeholder expectations. Podnar (2008) similarly

emphasized that CSR communication is part of corporate transparency and accountability. However, CSR communication is also sensitive because stakeholders may question whether CSR claims are genuine.

Morsing and Schultz (2006) proposed that CSR communication should move from information strategies toward response and involvement strategies. This is especially relevant to tourism and MICE because responsible event practices require the participation of delegates, suppliers, employees, communities, and organizers. Communication should therefore be interactive, understandable, and evidence-based. Rather than relying on general claims such as 'green event' or 'responsible tourism', MICE businesses should communicate concrete actions, such as digital registration, local sourcing, waste sorting, employee training, accessible design, community participation, and responsible supplier standards.

The credibility of CSR communication also depends on consistency between claims and actions. Seele and Gatti (2017) noted that greenwashing occurs when environmental or social claims are not supported by credible evidence. For Vietnam's MICE sector, this risk is important because sustainability language is increasingly used in tourism marketing. To avoid symbolic communication, CSR messages should be specific, measurable where possible, and connected to actual practices.

### **2.5. Toward a CSR communication framework for Vietnam's MICE sector**

The reviewed literature suggests that CSR communication in the MICE sector should integrate sustainability, stakeholder, and communication perspectives. From the CSR and triple bottom line perspectives, the message should address environmental, social, and economic responsibilities. From stakeholder theory, the message should reflect the needs of affected groups. From CSR communication literature, the message should be clear, credible, and evidence-based.

In Vietnam, these principles can be translated into three major CSR message elements. The first is environmental responsibility, which focuses on resource efficiency, responsible food and beverage practices, and waste and carbon management. The second is socio-cultural and economic contribution, which focuses on legal and ethical compliance, preservation of Vietnamese cultural identity, and contribution to local economic development. The third is stakeholder engagement, which focuses on local communities, employees, and responsible supplier partnerships.

## **3. Methodology**

This study employs a conceptual qualitative approach to develop CSR communication elements for Vietnam's MICE sector. A conceptual qualitative design is appropriate because the objective is not to test statistical relationships but to synthesize theory and context into a coherent framework. The study follows an interpretive logic in which concepts are identified, compared, and reconstructed based on their relevance to the research question.

The study is grounded in four theoretical streams: CSR theory, the triple bottom line, stakeholder theory, and CSR communication. CSR theory helps define the responsibility domains of MICE businesses. The triple bottom line clarifies economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Stakeholder theory identifies the groups that should be considered in MICE communication. CSR communication literature explains how responsible practices should be communicated to build credibility and reduce skepticism.

The framework was developed through three analytical stages. First, relevant literature on CSR, sustainable tourism, event sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and CSR communication was reviewed. Second, the characteristics of Vietnam's MICE sector were examined, including the role of major MICE destinations, the emphasis on heritage and technology, and the need for professional and sustainable tourism development. Third, theoretical and contextual insights were synthesized to identify CSR message elements suitable for Vietnam's MICE sector.

The study adapts the structure of previous MICE CSR communication research but does not replicate it mechanically. Instead, the categories are refined to reflect the Vietnamese context. For instance, food and beverage

communication is linked not only to environmental responsibility but also to Vietnamese cuisine and local sourcing. Cultural preservation is emphasized because heritage and local identity are important destination assets in Vietnam. Supplier partnership is expanded because MICE events depend heavily on multi-actor service networks.

#### **4. Data Collecting Method**

Data were collected through document-based qualitative synthesis. This method is suitable for conceptual framework development because it allows the researcher to integrate academic literature, policy documents, and industry information. The documents used in this study include peer-reviewed literature on CSR, CSR communication, stakeholder theory, event sustainability, sustainable tourism, and MICE development; policy and strategic documents related to Vietnam tourism; and public information about Vietnam's MICE development activities.

The data collection process followed three steps. First, theoretical documents were reviewed to clarify the meanings of CSR, sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and CSR communication. Second, studies on tourism, hospitality, and event sustainability were examined to identify common CSR themes in service and event contexts. Third, Vietnam-specific documents and industry information were reviewed to contextualize the proposed framework for the country's MICE sector.

The collected materials were analyzed thematically. Concepts with similar meanings were grouped and compared. For example, energy saving, water saving, digital registration, and reduced printed materials were grouped under resource efficiency. Food safety, local ingredients, responsible sourcing, and food waste reduction were grouped under responsible food and beverage practices. Employee training, fair treatment, and occupational safety were grouped under employee responsibility.

To ensure conceptual consistency, each proposed CSR communication element had to meet three criteria. First, it had to be theoretically connected to CSR, sustainability, or stakeholder responsibility. Second, it had to be operationally relevant to MICE activities. Third, it had to be meaningful in Vietnam's tourism and socio-cultural context. Based on these criteria, the study proposes a framework with three major elements and nine sub-elements.

#### **5. Research Context and Discussion**

CSR communication in Vietnam's MICE sector can be organized into three major components: environmental responsibility, socio-cultural and economic contribution, and stakeholder engagement. These components reflect the characteristics of MICE activities, which require intensive use of venues, accommodation, transportation, food and beverage services, event materials, technology, and human resources. The focus of this section is not CSR in general but the specific CSR messages that Vietnamese MICE businesses should communicate to customers, delegates, partners, public agencies, and local stakeholders.

##### **5.1. Environmental responsibility**

The first major component is environmental responsibility. MICE activities often gather a large number of participants within a short period of time. Conferences, exhibitions, incentive tours, and corporate events require electricity, water, air conditioning, lighting systems, printed documents, booth construction materials, catering services, and transport. If these issues are not properly managed, MICE events may create pressure on natural resources and urban environments.

The first sub-element is resource efficiency. MICE businesses should communicate how they reduce electricity, water, paper, and temporary event materials. Convention centers and hotels can provide information about energy-saving lighting, smart air-conditioning, water-saving equipment, digital registration, electronic invitations, mobile event applications, and reduced printed documents. Such messages help corporate clients understand that the event is not only professionally organized but also environmentally responsible.

The second sub-element is responsible food and beverage practices. Food and beverage services are essential to conferences, exhibitions, gala dinners, and incentive programs. In Vietnam, cuisine is also an important element of destination identity. Therefore, CSR communication should include information about food safety, local ingredients, seasonal menus, responsible sourcing, vegetarian options, and food waste reduction. Communicating these practices can strengthen both environmental responsibility and the cultural value of Vietnamese cuisine.

The third sub-element is waste and carbon management. MICE events may generate plastic bottles, paper, packaging, leftover food, banners, booth materials, and other types of waste. Organizers should communicate waste sorting systems, recycling practices, reusable or biodegradable materials, reduction of single-use plastics, public transportation information, and carbon-conscious event design. For international corporate clients, evidence of waste and carbon management can become an important factor in event destination selection.

### **5.2. Socio-cultural and economic contribution**

The second major component is socio-cultural and economic contribution. MICE tourism is not only a service activity but also a mechanism for promoting destination development. A successful MICE event can generate income for hotels, restaurants, transport providers, tour operators, local suppliers, and small businesses. At the same time, it can communicate the host destination's culture, image, and identity.

The first sub-element is legal and ethical compliance. MICE businesses should communicate their compliance with tourism regulations, labor laws, food safety standards, fire safety requirements, environmental regulations, tax obligations, and event organization procedures. Professional and transparent operation helps build trust among customers, government agencies, partners, and international clients. In CSR communication, legal compliance should be presented as the foundation of responsible business conduct.

The second sub-element is preservation of Vietnamese cultural identity. Vietnam has rich cultural resources, including traditional music, cuisine, handicrafts, festivals, historical sites, and local customs. MICE events can integrate these elements through cultural performances, local food experiences, traditional gifts, heritage tours, and cooperation with local artisans. However, these elements should be communicated carefully to avoid superficial commercialization. CSR messages should emphasize authenticity, respect, and cultural preservation.

The third sub-element is local economic contribution. MICE activities create opportunities for employment, local purchasing, business networking, and destination promotion. CSR communication should highlight how events support local suppliers, create jobs, promote local products, and generate income for surrounding communities. These messages demonstrate that MICE development can create shared value for both businesses and local economies.

### **5.3. Stakeholder engagement**

The third major component is stakeholder engagement. MICE events involve many stakeholders, including customers, delegates, exhibitors, sponsors, employees, suppliers, local residents, tourism authorities, venue operators, and service partners. Because these stakeholders are directly or indirectly affected by MICE activities, CSR communication should explain how their interests are considered and protected.

The first sub-element is community engagement. MICE organizers should communicate how their activities respect local communities and create benefits for them. This may include reducing noise and traffic disturbance, supporting community activities, purchasing local products, organizing responsible incentive programs, or involving residents in cultural experiences. Communication with local communities should be open, respectful, and transparent so that MICE development does not create tension between tourism growth and community well-being.

The second sub-element is employee responsibility. Employees play a central role in service quality, event coordination, customer experience, and destination image. CSR communication should include information about employee training, fair compensation, occupational safety, career development, gender equality, and professional

service standards. In Vietnam, where service quality is a key factor in tourism competitiveness, investment in employee development should be communicated as part of responsible MICE management.

The third sub-element is responsible supplier partnership. MICE events rely on catering companies, booth contractors, transport providers, hotels, technology firms, design agencies, and local product suppliers. CSR communication should show how MICE businesses select responsible suppliers, encourage quality standards, reduce environmental impacts in the supply chain, and support local enterprises. The sustainability of a MICE event depends not only on the organizer but also on the behavior of all service partners involved in the event.

**6. Findings**

The findings of this conceptual synthesis indicate that CSR communication in Vietnam's MICE sector should be structured around three major components and nine sub-elements. These components represent the key CSR messages that MICE businesses should communicate to clients, delegates, partners, public agencies, and the wider community.

The first major component is environmental responsibility. It includes resource efficiency, responsible food and beverage practices, and waste and carbon management. The second major component is socio-cultural and economic contribution. It includes legal and ethical compliance, preservation of Vietnamese cultural identity, and local economic contribution. The third major component is stakeholder engagement. It includes community engagement, employee responsibility, and responsible supplier partnership.

**Table 1. Proposed CSR communication framework for Vietnam's MICE sector**

<b>Major element</b>	<b>Sub-elements</b>	<b>CSR communication message focus</b>
Environmental responsibility	Resource efficiency; responsible food and beverage practices; waste and carbon management	Energy and water saving, digital materials, local and safe food, food waste reduction, recycling, plastic reduction, and carbon-conscious practices.
Socio-cultural and economic contribution	Legal and ethical compliance; preservation of Vietnamese cultural identity; local economic contribution	Compliance with regulations, labor and safety standards, cultural authenticity, heritage promotion, local employment, local purchasing, and destination value creation.
Stakeholder engagement	Community engagement; employee responsibility; responsible supplier partnership	Community benefits, reduced negative impacts, employee training and welfare, responsible supplier selection, local partnerships, and service quality standards.

These findings suggest that CSR communication in Vietnam's MICE sector should move beyond general claims such as 'green event', 'sustainable tourism', or 'responsible business'. Instead, communication should provide concrete, observable, and verifiable information. For example, MICE businesses should report specific practices such as energy-saving systems, digital event materials, local food sourcing, waste sorting, community participation, employee training, and supplier standards. Such communication can help reduce stakeholder skepticism and strengthen the credibility of CSR activities.

The proposed framework also suggests that CSR communication should be integrated into the entire MICE value chain. Environmental messages should be connected to event planning and operation. Socio-cultural messages

should be connected to destination identity and local development. Stakeholder messages should be connected to dialogue, participation, and partnership. In this sense, CSR communication is not only a marketing tool but also a governance mechanism for sustainable MICE development.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper develops a CSR communication framework for Vietnam's MICE sector by synthesizing CSR theory, the triple bottom line, stakeholder theory, CSR communication literature, and the Vietnamese tourism context. The proposed framework consists of three major elements: environmental responsibility, socio-cultural and economic contribution, and stakeholder engagement. Each major element includes three sub-elements, forming a nine-element framework for communicating CSR in MICE activities.

The first component, environmental responsibility, emphasizes resource efficiency, responsible food and beverage practices, and waste and carbon management. These elements are important because MICE events often require intensive use of resources and generate significant waste. The second component, socio-cultural and economic contribution, focuses on legal and ethical compliance, preservation of Vietnamese cultural identity, and local economic contribution. These elements reflect the role of MICE tourism in promoting destination identity, cultural values, employment, and local business opportunities. The third component, stakeholder engagement, highlights the importance of communities, employees, and suppliers in sustainable MICE development.

The paper offers both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it extends CSR communication literature by contextualizing CSR message elements in Vietnam's MICE sector. Practically, it provides guidance for convention centers, hotels, event organizers, destination management companies, tourism authorities, and service providers. These stakeholders can use the framework to design clearer CSR messages, improve transparency, and communicate sustainability practices more effectively to target customers and partners.

For Vietnam's MICE sector to develop sustainably, CSR communication should be specific, consistent, and evidence-based. Businesses should not only conduct CSR activities but also communicate them in a way that stakeholders can understand and verify. By doing so, Vietnam can strengthen its image as a responsible MICE destination, enhance stakeholder trust, and improve its competitiveness in the regional and international MICE market.

Future studies may empirically validate this framework through interviews with MICE experts, surveys of MICE customers, or content analysis of CSR communication materials used by hotels, event organizers, and convention centers in Vietnam. Comparative studies between Vietnam and other ASEAN MICE destinations may also provide deeper insights into how CSR communication contributes to sustainable destination development.

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