Module 2: CSR, Strategy, and Partnerships

Module Description:

Module 2 focuses on how CSR functions inside organizations, and whether it operates as surface-level reputation management or as a driver of real value creation. Through Vietnamese and Southeast Asian cases, students learn to assess the authenticity of CSR initiatives, evaluate their alignment with SDGs, and understand the role of partnerships in turning commitments into impact. The activities emphasize evidence, stakeholder trade-offs, and the strategic consequences of CSR decisions.

This module builds directly on Module 1's stakeholder and materiality thinking and prepares students for deeper critique in later modules. By learning how CSR becomes credible or fails at the strategic level, students are better equipped to identify greenwashing risks in Module 3 and to design ethical, partnership-driven sustainability communication strategies in Module 4.

Learning Objectives:

- Differentiate between CSR as peripheral marketing vs. CSR as strategic value creation.
- Critique CSR initiatives for authenticity and SDG alignment.
- Design partnership models that enhance credibility and impact.

Module 2 Pre-class activities

Purpose: To prepare students to analyze CSR programs in Vietnam and Southeast Asia for their strategic alignment, credibility, and stakeholder relevance.

Pre-class Activity 1: Choose one article from the list below:

Carroll, A. B. (2021). Corporate social responsibility: A review of concepts, research, and practice. *International Journal of Corporate Social Responsibility*, 6(1), 14. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40991-021-00062-9

Kim, R. C. (2020). Interpretation and integration of "creating shared value" in Asia: Implications for strategy research and practice. *Asian Business & Management, 19*(3), 187–206. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41291-019-00064-4

Kane, V. L., Akbari, M., Nguyen, L. L. H., & Nguyen, T. Q. (2022). Corporate social responsibility in Vietnam: Views from corporate and NGO executives. *Social Responsibility Journal, 18*(2), 316–347. https://doi.org/10.1108/SRJ-10-2020-0434

Kono, V. R., Restuningdiah, N., & Juliardi, D. (2023). Corporate sustainability reporting in Southeast Asia: A scoping review. *Journal of Applied Business, Taxation and Economics Research, 3*(2), 182–199. https://doi.org/10.54408/jabter.v3i2.249

Pre-class Activity 2: Short written response

Write 200–250 words total and post to the online class discussion forum before the session.

Pick one real-world case:

- Vinamilk's sustainability program: integrating community health and supply-chain improvements.
- Grab Vietnam's plastic reduction initiative*:* pledges to reduce single-use packaging with merchant partners.

Apply concepts from the readings and share:

- What insight does the reading give students about authenticity or shared value?
- Does the case show CSR as core business strategy or reputation management?
- Which stakeholder group (employees, customers, regulators, community) is most affected?
- Which SDGs are claimed or genuinely advanced? How do you know?

Module 2 In-class activities

CSR "Authenticity Audit" Workshop

Goal: Use pre-class work to evaluate CSR initiatives for credibility and SDG alignment.

- **In groups,** each student should share their answers.
- **Identify overlaps.** Teams select one local CSR initiative to audit.
- **Audit questions:**
    - Does the program address a real local problem or just polish image?
    - What evidence shows impact?
    - Which SDGs are meaningfully advanced, which are superficial?
- **Output:** Teams rate initiative authenticity on a 1–5 scale and deliver a 2-minute presentation with justification.

Stakeholder Role-Play: "The CSR Boardroom"

Goal: Explore competing priorities in CSR decision-making.

- **Scenario:** A Vietnamese company must decide whether to expand an existing CSR program or pivot to a new sustainability initiative.
- **Roles:** CEO, sustainability manager, NGO partner, government regulator, journalist.
- **Task:** Each role argues for or against program decisions using stakeholder priorities and SDG alignment.
- **Debrief:** Whose perspective dominated? Were decisions aimed at long-term value or short-term PR?

SDG Mapping Challenge

Goal: Connect CSR programs to specific SDGs and improve them.

- **Group task:** Teams take one CSR case from pre-class work, map it to 2–3 SDGs, and identify alignment gaps.
- **Output:** A one-page SDG chart with 1–2 recommendations to make the program more impactful and authentic.

Post-class Reflection

Students respond to the prompt: "How can Vietnamese or Southeast Asian companies move from CSR as 'image repair' to CSR as genuine value creation? Give one concrete step."

Students write one key insight and one lingering question for the next module.