

Determinant factors of information disclosure on sustainability reporting in Vietnam

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Abstract

Purpose: Sustainability reports in recent years have always received significant attention from stakeholders because of the benefits that stakeholders bring. This examination explores the factors that impact the sustainability of the firm's disclosures in Vietnam's stock market.

Design/methodology/approach: This research used the systematic literature review method to construct the theoretical model and investigated the levels of impact of determinants on information disclosure and transparency to achieve business sustainability in Vietnam's setting.

Findings: The expected result has recognized three elements that influence the disclosure category: Company size, company type, corporate governance committee, and audit committee meeting. However, two factors do not impact the group of information disclosure: financial leverage, the number of members of the board of directors, and the leader & general manager.

Practical implications: This outcome will propose recommendations to help companies enhance the quality of social responsibility and sustainability reporting.

Originality/Value: In Vietnam, although the work of the sustainability report independently of the annual report brings more credibility than integrated reports, most businesses integrate this information into their annual reports. Therefore, to have a clearer view, in this study, the author will clarify the degree of influence of factors on the publication of independent sustainable development reports.

Keywords: Information disclosure, sustainability report, corporate governance committee, Vietnam listed companies

Introduction

Environmental sustainability is currently a pressing global issue. Gray (2001) assessed the need for environmentally sustainable development by providing estimates of human overexploitation of natural resources. When the environment is increasingly affected by damaging effects, the ozone layer is severely affected, leading to global warming and climate change; businesses need to change how they do business.

As a result, corporate sustainability has evolved into a competitive advantage for businesses (Ojo et al., 2015). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2002) has represented corporate sustainability as a responsibility that company activities donate to sustainable economic expansion and enhance employees' quality, families, the regional community, and culture.

Current reality in Vietnam background shows that listed companies in stock exchange also have to report on sustainable development activities in addition to financial information. Sustainability reporting (SR) complements financial statements to fully inform the business concerning related parties when conducting business activities. In addition, SR is information of enterprises about their commitments to sustainable development and activities to fulfill these commitments.

The author will present an overview of SR content. From there, the article will evaluate the decisive factors affecting the disclosure of this report. The article desires to fulfill the following goals: Deliver a summary of corporate social responsibility, environmental responsibility, sustainability, and sustainability reporting. Therefore, this study examines the factors influencing the disclosure of sustainability reporting in Vietnam's stock market.

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Corporate sustainability reporting in Vietnam

In Vietnam, Circular No. 155/2015/TT-BTC dated October 6, 2015, was developed and issued by the State Securities Commission to guide information disclosure on the stock market with general information about the environmental, social, and corporate governance annual report template. This document has raised awareness among businesses about the need for sustainability reporting. Enterprises publish sustainability reports to prove that they operate following the National Green Growth Strategy and international standards for environmental protection and maintaining social stability. Therefore, from January 1, 2018, listed companies began to publish information related to sustainable development in their annual reports. However, enterprises' level and manner of information disclosure are not as expected. Specifically, the research results of Pham (2016) show that, although the situation of making sustainability reports of enterprises has improved, the level is still sketchy and not up to standards. In addition, in the poll of listed companies in 2018 together classified by the Vietnam stock exchange and the Investment journal, it was found that the majority of enterprises put their content on environmental and social topics in the Annual Report. However, primarily, listed firms publish sustainability reports according to the latest GRI standards with high reliability only at "10".

A review of previous studies (Kuzey et al., 2017; Nguyen, 2020; Sonia and Khafid, 2020) shows that motivates companies to publish or not publish sustainability reports. The reasons companies publish sustainability reports are: (1) increased control over the process of achieving specific goals; (2) supporting the performance of the environmental approach; (3) raising understanding of environmental problems; (4) conveying the message to the business; (5) improve transparency; (6) improve standardization; (7) operating license; (8) reputation, improve development opportunities. Meanwhile, the reasons why enterprises do not publish sustainability reports are: (1) uncertainty about the benefits of information disclosure; (2) competitors do not disclose information; (3) the customer is not interested; (4) has a good reputation in protecting the environment; (5) there are other ways to communicate environmental issues; (6) high publication costs; (7) it is difficult to collect data synchronously from all business activities; (8) may damage the reputation of the business.

Currently, sustainability reports are mainly published voluntarily. Therefore, businesses are flexible in providing sustainable development information. Sustainability reports can be provided in a multi-pronged or integrated form but can also be provided unidirectionally as an environmental report or a social responsibility report. Within the scope of this research, an SR is a report that analyzes factors affecting the sustainable development of an enterprise, including environmental, social, and economic impacts. Therefore, to have a more precise outlook, in this work, the author will examine the degree of impact of factors on the public of the sustainable development report independent of the AR of the large enterprises on the Vietnam stock market.

Research gap

Recent studies in Vietnam on the Sustainability Report are few. Typically, Nguyen (2020) researches, summarizes and proposes future research models, or Karaman et al. (2018) clarify definitions, trends, content issues, and theories. So why is sustainability reporting needed? Most recently, Dang & Pham (2022) studied the status of information disclosure on sustainable development and social responsibility in the annual reports of firms in Viet Nam. While the publication of the sustainability report independently of the annual report provides credibility, most businesses incorporate this information into their annual reports, as mentioned above. Therefore, to have a clearer view, in this study, the author will clarify the degree of influence of factors on the publication of the sustainable development report independent of the AR of the large companies on the Vietnam stock market.

Theoretical Background

Operational definitions

Definition of Corporate Sustainability

Eccles and Krzus (2010) found that there has been worldwide concern around the long-term adverse effect of mechanical exercises on the environment, diminishing businesses and countries' financial execution. Environmental impacts incorporate the greenhouse impact, harmful substances, contamination produced amid generation, and ozone layer exhaustion. Require businesses to publicize data on environmental impacts, illustrating their commitment to natural maintainability. Numerous analysts have appeared that supportability is assembly wants of the display era without compromising the capacity of future eras to meet their claim needs.

According to Elkington (1998), sustainability comes from an adjustment of three angles, counting profit (financial), people (society), and planet (environment). Hence, SR is an unavoidable result for businesses to declare and be responsible to partners for their exercises towards sustainable development. Enterprises that create and distribute SRs assess and uncover data around their commerce execution concerning natural and social perspectives and financial and administration execution data. SR may be another way to construct and evaluate business esteem. SR makes a difference businesses and organizations unveil sustainability information additionally to financial statements.

Through transparent, accountable, and responsible report, businesses reinforce stakeholder certainty within business and the economy. The announcing handle at the same time promotes changes in numerous aspects of production and commerce exercises. At a most basic level, sustainability repors could be a device to move forward an enterprise's mindfulness of new corporate dangers and chances. From this point of view, SR makes a difference in businesses getting ready for new advancement patterns, decentralizing obligations, and making strides in administration frameworks to move operational productivity steadily.

Disclosure of sustainability report

Circular Number 155 of the Vietnam Ministry of Finance is the first legal document requiring listed firms on the Vietnamese market to disclose sustainable development reports. Listed companies can make their SR or make an integrated representation in the AR. The substance that companies must report on the impact on the environment and society incorporates unequivocally six issues:

1. Administration of crude materials
2. Vitality utilization and water utilization
3. Comply with the law on natural assurance
4. Approaches related to workers
5. Detailing related to the obligation to the neighborhood community
6. Report related to the green capital market

After more than four years, Circular No. 155 has come into force so far, and the SR of listed companies has significantly developed. The financial year 2016 is the initial year that businesses have to report on sustainable development information, so many businesses are still passive, the content of the report is sketchy, and some businesses even ignore this content. However, by 2017, only a few listed companies had not shown the content of sustainable development in the report.

In the fiscal year 2020, the SR situation of listed companies has gradually stabilized. Most of the enterprises presented the content of SR integrated into the annual report, and the presented content complied with the requirements of Circular No. 155/2015/TT-BTC. Some businesses present their SR with rich report content.

Typical high-quality SR suppliers are Baoviet Group, FPT, Vincom, Vinamilk, Vingroup Corporation, and Securities section. Ho Chi Minh City, PetroVietnam Fertilizer and Chemicals Corporation, Hoa Sen Group, Gemadept Joint Stock Company (Nguyen, 2020). Many enterprises have prepared reports under the guidance of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) such as Baoviet Group, FPT, Vingroup, Vietjetair (Dang, 2022). International organizations have highly appreciated these reports, even being honored through awards for sustainability reports.

Corporate sustainability information disclosure is in response to the needs and requirements of society for a responsible business enterprise (Frost et al., 2005). In the 70s, society experienced unusual changes from the effects of business activities on enterprises, and enterprises have published social impact reports to inform stakeholders about the influences of business movements on the social situation. In the 80s, the issue of environmental pollution was a topic of great interest, so businesses published environmental impact reports instead of social impact reports to inform the community about the impacts of pollution business activities on the surrounding environment. The social impact report, environmental impact report, or sustainability report together demonstrate the link between the enterprise's development plan and the obligation to the sustainable development of the global economy in which social and environmental issues are focused on protecting and maintaining stable development. According to Hahn and Kühnen (2013), sustainability reporting and social responsibility reporting are similar concepts.

Fundamental Theories

Disclosure or non-disclosure is one of the critical decisions for businesses because the results from this can be positive, or it can be harmful. Specific theories also explain the act of disclosing or not disclosing business-related information of managers.

Agency Theory

The theory of agency (also known as the theory between the principal and the agent), a classical theory in organizational economics, was first proposed by Ross (1973). This theory explains economic relationships between two parties (such as between owners and employees, between executives and shareholders, between buyers and sellers) that have heterogeneous goals. The purpose of agency theory is to define contracts and optimal contract performance conditions to minimize adverse consequences. Based on the core assumption that humans are self-interested and risk-averse, this theory can be applied at the individual or organizational level.

The two parties in this theory are the owner and the management agent; An employer hires a representative to perform specific tasks on his or her behalf. While the employer's goal requires the fast, efficient completion of assigned tasks, the agent's goal is to work at his or her own pace, avoid risks, and seek personal gain (as personal income) among the interests of the company. Therefore, their targets are not compatible. Therefore, agency theory recommends building employment contracts based on performance (output), such as commissions or bonuses paid based on job performance. Alternatively, they can enter into a mixed contract based on both behavior (working time) and work results. Employee authorization contracts are an example of an outcome-based contract, while employee pay is a behavior-based contract.

Signalling Theory

Signal theory has been mentioned since the early 70s of the twentieth century; until 1973, Spence conducted research on the labor market and came up with the theory of signals through the research results. To get a job, it is necessary to signal, that is, to provide personal information to the labor market to reveal one's ability.

Then, Bini et al. (2010) suggested that firms with high profitability would provide explanations to increase their competitiveness. Thus, the theory of signaling is based on asymmetric information; when there is information asymmetry, the information holder needs to send a signal to the party that needs the information to achieve a particular goal. In a joint-stock company, asymmetric information appears in the relationship between managers and shareholders and in the relationship between the enterprise and its stakeholders. Concurring to the same theory, the more critical the firms, the more prominent the data asymmetry. Moreover, firms with higher productivity tend to reveal more data to provide optimistic signals to financial specialists almost development prospects, subsequently affecting the company's stock price (Moratis, 2018).

Political corporate social responsibility theory

The theory of political power assumes that state administration creates rules and judgments related to the company's interests (tax policy, restriction of monopoly, competition, and so on) based on information obtained announced by companies. As a result, firms will be more aware of information disclosure to limit this political cost. As a result, large, highly profitable firms incur more political expenses and willingly disclose information (Frynas & Stephen, 2015).

Proprietary Cost Theory

The theory was formulated by Carl Watner (1982) and developed in 1983. According to this theory, costs will be incurred when there is a decrease in future cash flows due to the disclosure of business information. For example, when a business provides terrible news, there will be a cost as investors will reduce investment in that business because of reduced attractiveness. However, providing insufficient information can prevent competitors from entering the market, resulting in future cash flows that can also increase. This also happens in the opposite case when the business has good information; of course, future cash flows will increase. Therefore, increasing the cost of ownership is considered a limitation of information disclosure. These disadvantages will cause managers to consider the information when making it public.

The aim of this paper is exploring the influence of factors on the preparation of sustainability reports in companies in the group of 500 large enterprises (VNR500) listed on the Vietnamese Stock Exchange.

Methodology

A review of previous studies shows that, although there is evidence that sustainability reporting has always received significant interest from stakeholders (Serrano et al., 2007, Ettredge et al., 2002; Oyelere et al., 2003), however the quantity and quality of information disclosure is still limited (Prado & Garcia-Sanchez, 2010). Furthermore, these studies have shown inconsistent results when tested in emerging markets.

Most of the previous studies used one or few mechanisms in the model, such as firm size, firm performance, company industry, and other corporate governance mechanisms to assess the quality of sustainability reporting.

Finally, only a few studies (Khanh and Tuan, 2018; Oanh et al., 2021) in Vietnam have applied a more comprehensive tool to measure and score the quality of corporate sustainability reporting.

We used a systematic literature review to build our theoretical model. The result is a basis for stakeholders to take appropriate actions to promote the publication of this type of report in the future.

Literature review

Company size and Disclosure of Sustainability Report

There is quite evident that large enterprises often disclose more information about sustainability and social responsibility than the rest (Salehg et al., 2011; Jitaree, 2015; Platonova et al., 2016). This conclusion is that large companies are receiving more attention from the public, as these companies are more likely to diversify geographically and products. This company may have more extensive and diverse stakeholder groups. This is consistent with the fact that, according to the agency theory, the separation of the roles of the owner and the direct manager will lead to several types of costs, called monitoring costs, link costs, and other costs (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Meek et al. (1995) assessed firm size, regional geography, and international listing status as the most important factors explaining voluntary disclosure. Fathi's study (2013) also shows the multi-dimensional influence of company size and information disclosure level. It can therefore help them prepare and publish an independent sustainability report.

H1. Size of the company is positively related to sustainability disclosure

Industry type and Disclosure of Sustainability Report

Karlina et al. (2015) argue that different industries will have different features depending on growth prospects, number of workers, rivals, and state intervention. Fernandez et al. (2014) define an industry as an economic activity that manages raw materials and uses industry resources to produce higher value or benefit goods, including services. An example of a high-risk company would be a mining business whose characteristics use high-tech equipment nearly 24 hours a day and involve multiple vehicles and infrastructure. As a result, it has driven many tragic accidents, even loss of life. So different

types of industries reveal the quality of information. For example, businesses with a more elevated level of risk disclose better information in their sustainability reports.

Sinaga & Fachrurrozie (2017) argue that manufacturing companies disclose better information than non-manufacturing companies. Meanwhile, Reverte (2009) found that firms in the environmentally sensitive industry have high ratings. Therefore, the company hopes to communicate information on the implementation of economic, environmental, and social responsibility through sustainability reports to build confidence among stakeholders.

H2. Industry type is positively related to sustainability disclosure

Sustainability Report Disclosure and Governance Committee

The Corporate Governance Committee is a committee established and accountable to the Trustees to assist in the performance of the Commission's duties and responsibilities in reviewing corporate governance policy and assessing the integrity of the Company. Consistency in applying corporate governance, including those related to business ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The Board of Directors is a committee consisting of several members of the Board of Directors (Mitchell & Hill, 2009) and forming good, solid, and sustainable corporate governance, carrying out regular activities and appointing independent directors, conducting regular board meetings corresponding to the Board of Directors or appointing independent audit committee member. It requires additional committees to be established. An additional committee was established as the governance committee. The Sustainability Governance Committee report, known as the Nominations and Compensation Committee, is tasked with helping accountable directors and their trustees support good corporate governance. The application of sound corporate governance principles by the Company creates harmonization of the efficiency and effectiveness of corporate governance, which can be achieved by establishing governance committees (Buniamin et al., 2011).

When looking at the corporate governance practices of a company, for a good, sustainable and robust operation, it is not only necessary to consider whether the Company is operating normally or not. For example, the appointment of independent directors or not, whose implementation, such as board meetings, the percentage of the Board of Directors, or the appointment of the independent Audit Committee, can also be found through the establishment of company establishment committees as an expression of establishing good corporate governance is vital. The committees formed include the governance committee, the nomination committee, the remuneration committee, the CSR committee, the risk management committee, the budget committee, the investment committee, or other functions. However, more committees can also be seen as a form of business enterprise in which good corporate governance practice is critical.

The Company has developed a sustainability committee, or corporate social responsibility, as a component of its corporate governance structure to address sustainability risks and opportunities (Sonia & Khaid, 2020). In addition, the presence of committees increases sustainability reporting levels because these committees will highlight sustainability problems. Therefore, the presence of a committee can help to integrate sustainability issues better, thus being included in a higher level of concern related to sustainability reporting (Novitaningrum & Amboningtyas, 2017).

H3. The corporate governance committee has a positive impact on the sustainability disclosure level

Liquidity and Disclosure of Sustainability Report

As the company's liquidity level accumulates, so will the publication of sustainability reports. Firms with high levels of liquidity demonstrate a significant ability to pay their short-term obligations on time. In addition, a stable financial condition will encourage companies to disclose more information to ensure the safety of their stakeholders. Sonia & Khafid (2016) argue that liquidity has a considerable positive effect on sustainability declarations.

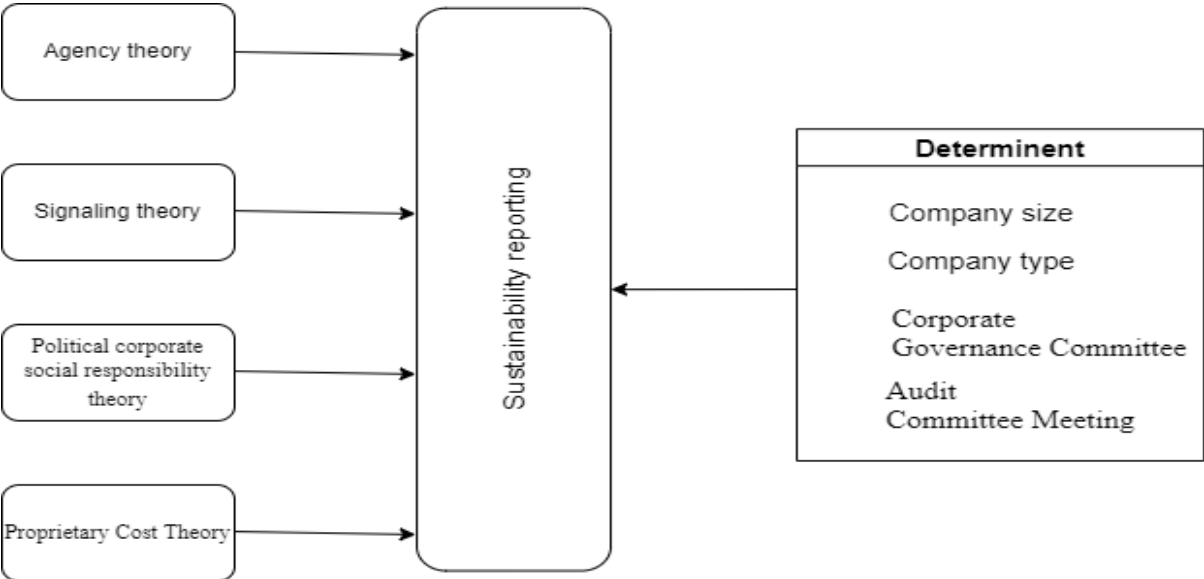
H4. Liquidity has a significant positive effect on sustainability reporting.

Integrative research model

This paper sought to answer two research questions: What are the factors influencing sustainability report publication? What is the influence of these factors on preparing sustainable development reports? Through an extensive review of the literature, we have developed an integrative research model that covers the theoretical elements, evidence from empirical studies and metrics for assessing quality of sustainability reporting. This model will be of use to researchers in this field, and practitioners in understanding the interrelationships, and key considerations from both reporting quality and governance perspectives.

Based upon our review of the literature, our assumption that are dependent variables to measure the firm’s financial performance, and the peculiarities of the Vietnamese environment, we propose the following research model:

Figure 1. Proposed integrative research model



Source: author’s own construction

Empirical results and discussion

Through a comprehensive review of the literature, the elements most suited to the context of Vietnamese listed companies were found to be those relating to the four elements covered in the above hypothesis. For our research question, we found that rather than selecting one particular measure, the most significant outcomes could be acquired through a blend of measures, especially in the context of Vietnam. Besides, we found that selecting a single theory may not be appropriate, primarily due to the coexistence of high ownership concentration and high state ownership unique to the Vietnamese environment and may offer potential new future research directions.

In this study, we have consolidated the theories in the framework alongside the key themes that arose in the literature. Although the hypotheses are intended for a Vietnamese study, it is perfectly feasible for the hypotheses found in this study to be tested in other countries, especially in emerging economies. In this way, our study adds to existing research by presenting a consolidated research model through which studies may impact the quality of sustainability reports in greater depth.

According to the analysis results, the publication of sustainability reports of companies listed on stock exchanges is influenced by the following variables: company size, the field in which the company is operating, and company growth opportunities. Return on total assets ROA has no impact on sustainability report publication. In addition, there are differences in the preparation of sustainability reports between state-owned companies and non-state-owned companies. These results partly show that the publication of the sustainability report will help businesses gain external recognition and gain public and investors' trust in the business's sustainable development. For internal businesses, publishing this report helps enterprises control and contribute to cost reduction and emphasizes the

relationship between financial and non-financial activities. Moreover, it helps enterprises formulate strategies to improve brand value. Publishing sustainability reports help businesses build trust, reach consumers, and promote their brands to outside businesses. Besides, it also helps businesses transmit information to shareholders, investors, and management agencies. This is the basis for business managers to have more motivation to publish sustainability reports shortly. It is also a source of information for state agencies to have appropriate policies in promoting enterprises to publish sustainable development reports.

Company size

Firm size has a significant adverse effect on the sustainability report. This suggests that more prominent firms are not essentially responsible for disclosing corporate social, environmental, and economic sustainability reports. This condition indicates that large companies do not always publicize their economic, environmental, and social responsibility reports to obtain legitimacy from stakeholders. This is because the Company's duty is no longer just the activities but the Company's obligation to sustain the Company's viability; On the other hand, even small firms must disclose their responsible corporate events substantially and reasonably. Firms with an upsurge in total assets show a growth in the Company's assets to contribute more to social activities to gain public legitimacy with more and more public social activities. Thus, more information can be revealed in sustainability reporting. In conclusion, large companies with social legitimacy can sustain or improve it. The results of this study support the study of Adhipadana & Daliono (2014), which argues that the size of the Company's significant adverse impact on sustainability reporting does not support previous studies conducted demonstrated by Alinar and Wahuy (2017) that the firm size does not significantly affect the publication of the sustainability report.

Company type

High-risk companies and low-risk categories do not significantly influence sustainability claims. This is due to the lack of specific classifications of industry sectors and the various regulations that have resulted in companies disclosing information unevenly, even within one sector type. Therefore, this study agrees with the previous research but does not support study of SemBires (2005) that the type of industry classified as low-risk and high-risk industries significantly affects SR publishing.

Corporate Governance Committee

The Corporate Governance Committee has no significant influence on the Sustainability Report, Audit Committee, Board of Directors, and Trustees (Lucia & Panggabean, 2018). The Governing Body is solely tasked with supporting directors and trustees, responsible for supporting good corporate governance practices and publishing corporate sustainability reports.

Audit Committee Meeting

The results of empirical processing analysis on a number of studies have shown that the Audit Committee meeting has a significant positive influence on the publication of SR. The results of this study are supported by preceding studies conducted by Dwita & Sri (2017) and Sari & Marsono (2013) but differ from the study by Nasir (2014), affecting sustainability reports. This suggests the presence of an audit committee that supports ensuring the correct functioning of the disclosure and control systems. The more satisfied the audit committee is and communicates with each other regularly, the audit results will be assessed and informed to management to inspire management to provide well disclosure. In addition, to lead to high quality and fair disclosure of the financial statements, the Audit Committee will propose to the Board of Directors for disclosure of information in supplementary reports, especially sustainability development reports.

Summary and conclusion

The finding of this paper is the first crucial positive effect on liquidity (current ratio) on corporate sustainability statement disclosure. The higher the liquidity, the more increased the disclosure level of the sustainability report is. Second, company size has a significant adverse impact on corporate sustainability reporting. This suggests that more well-known organizations are not necessarily responsible for disclosing their financial, environmental, and social information, which would also be more comprehensive. The third type of company does not significantly affect the disclosure of information by companies in Vietnam. The type of company, both low-risk and high-risk, should still publish sustainability reports. However, the specific category and company regulations do not require the company to disclose the SR. The fourth corporate governance committee has no significant influence over publishing a company's sustainability report. It is not the duty of the corporate governance committee to support the policy of trustees and the boards only in determining disclosure SRs. Finally, the audit committee meeting had a significant positive impact on the release of the company's sustainability report. The more often the audit committee meets, the more decisions are made, and the company must be represented through the sustainability report.

This study also has some limitations that need to be considered. The sample size of the study only focuses on companies listed on the Vietnam exchange with full disclosure, so generality is not high. In addition, this is only a theoretical study, so it partially affects the assessment of the impact on the dependent variable (sustainability reporting). Therefore, future studies may extend models that influence sustainability reporting, such as concentration (showing the level of competition or monopoly in a company's field operations). in the industry in which the company operates. It is even possible to use a qualitative research method to look at the problem as it will analyze and deepen the information for the decision-making procedure of managers for the establishment and disclosure of information.

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