

Impact Of Corporate Sustainability Learning On The Perceptions Of Undergraduate Management Students Towards Fast Fashion

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Abstract

Corporate sustainability ensures long-term business success by balancing economic headway with environmental conservation and responsibility in social context, fostering trust, efficiency, and resilience. Corporate sustainability accredits students with skills for ethical leadership and creates career opportunities in socially and environmentally responsible businesses. The study investigates how undergraduate management students' views of the fast fashion industry are influenced by their learning in corporate sustainability. The study analyzed awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and ethical intentions among 62 students from higher education institutions in Mumbai using an online Google form questionnaire. Post completion of the course, students' ethical and sustainable preferences significantly surged, despite the fact that their initial knowledge of corporate sustainability had minimal impact, as per the analysis of the data gathered. The results demonstrate that sustainability education in a business context can positively aid in responsible perceptions and the adoption of sustainable business practices, while also increasing awareness of greenwashing.

Keywords: Corporate Sustainability, Student Perception, Fast Fashion industry, Greenwashing

INTRODUCTION

Quote: "The greatest threat to our planet is the belief that someone else will save it."

- Robert Swan ⁽²⁴⁾

In recent years, the growing socio-economic challenges such as climate change, poverty, underemployment, food insecurity, etc. have surged and along with other challenges in global businesses have realised to shift their mindset from being solely a traditional profit driven company to also focusing on integrating corporate sustainability in their long term strategies and core functions of their business operations. Corporate Sustainability is an alternative to the traditional revenue maximizing model. It focuses not only on the company's growth but also societal goals, specifically development related to economic, governance, social, environment, etc. The concept of corporate sustainability has unfolded from a wider term sustainable development which emerged from 1987 Brundland Report, "Our Common Future" in a book published by World Commission for Environmental Development (WCED) where it emphasized meeting present needs without compromising the future generations. The term corporate sustainability has risen from the concepts Triple Bottom Line (TBL) and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In the 1990s. By 2000's companies commenced using corporate sustainability as a part of their strategic vision to incorporate in their core business operations and practices. ⁽¹⁶⁾

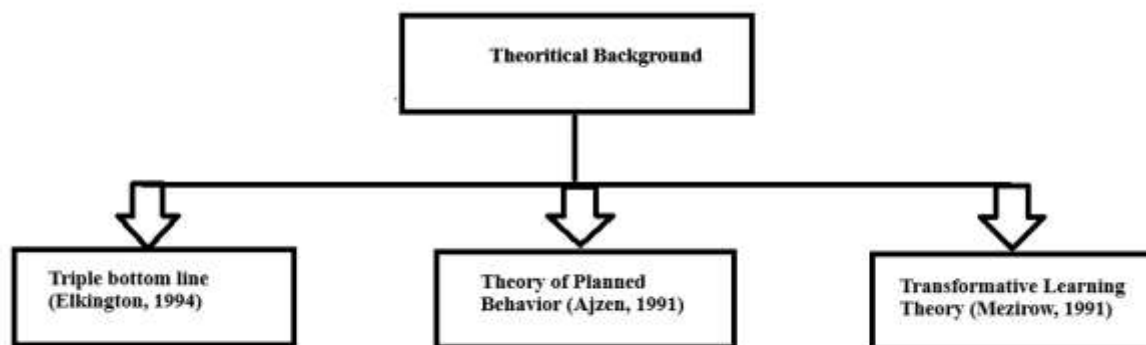
Corporate sustainability and Corporate social responsibility (CSR) are similar in nature however they have differences in the approach and scope in their respective implementation. One of the key difference between Corporate social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Sustainability is that corporate sustainability focuses majorly on three categories of any business operation i.e. environment, social, and economic by adopting sustainable practices with a lasting impact by including a wide range of stakeholders; whereas Corporate social responsibility (CSR) focusses on a business's responsibility towards society by fulfilling philanthropic, community engagement, etc. activities which is for an id interim period having voluntary participation.

Corporate Sustainability learning is important for students because it provides an extensive and collaborative learning where it integrates theoretical concepts along with real world, case analysis and transformative approach-based learning which enables students to connect with sustainability challenges and practices. The learning of corporate sustainability compels students to be economically feasible, environmentally responsible, and socially ethical while being aligned with global sustainability goals. Learning about corporate sustainability builds sustainable innovative technologies like circular economy models, ethical sourcing, green

technologies, etc. among students which in turn gives them a competitive advantage to stand in the market and helps businesses to implement clean and sustainable business practices.

Corporate Sustainability learning and its impact on students has been backed by various theories. The Triple Bottom theory highlights three main core components i.e. People, Profit and Plant which recommends that business should not imbibe orthodox practices of solely earning profits but also focus on the environmental, ecological and social impact of business. (IBM, 2023)⁽¹⁹⁾ Triple bottom line (TBL)⁽²⁰⁾ ensures innovation, gives a competitive advantage, creates long term value by incorporating sustainable practices into corporate practices along with a focus on future focused strategies such as transparency, gender diversity, etc.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)⁽²²⁾ and Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991)⁽²³⁾ help to understand how corporate sustainability learning influences students' perceptions. From the viewpoint of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), when applied to understanding learning of corporate sustainability, the impact on students' perceptions are shaped by their attitudes toward sustainability, the influence of social categories such as peers and staff, and their belief system and its ability to act sustainably. As students learn more about corporate sustainability, they begin to adopt responsible and ethical practices. Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991) further explains how students undergo more profound alterations in their thought process when they critically reflect on their existing beliefs and are exposed to new ideas. The theories discussed show that sustainability learning in a corporate context not only creates awareness, understanding and knowledge among students but also transforms their perception towards business practices and their involvement within it.



This paper aims to understand the effectiveness of the corporate sustainability curriculum by exploring students' opinions towards the fast fashion industry and studying their insights on awareness, understanding, attitudes, and ethical considerations molded through the course. The study aids to evaluate whether the implementation of the curriculum encourages students to develop critical thinking, responsible, sustainable decision making, offering valuable feedback to deepen sustainability learning in a real-world business context.

Need of the Study

The researcher wanted to figure out the Impact of Corporate Sustainability learning on the Perceptions of Undergraduate Management Students towards the Fast Fashion industry, as the researcher taught the subject to these students and aimed to assess the impact of their learning and views on sustainability in a business context and ethical decisions.

The researcher also felt the need to get the answers to the following questions: -

- 1) What is the level of awareness and attitude of Undergraduate Management students towards corporate sustainability practices in the fast fashion industry?
- 2) How has corporate sustainability learning influenced Undergraduate Management students' perception and ethical intentions towards the fast fashion industry?
- 3) How do Undergraduate Management students view greenwashing practices in the fast fashion industry?

Aim of the study

To study the impact of corporate sustainability learning on the Perceptions of Undergraduate Management Students towards Fast Fashion

Objectives of the study

- 1) To understand the level of awareness among Undergraduate Management Students towards corporate sustainability practices towards fast fashion business practices.
- 2) To investigate Undergraduate Management Students' attitudes towards the fast fashion industry's sustainability practices.
- 3) To assess the influence of corporate sustainability learning on students' perception in the context of fast fashion businesses.
- 4) To analyze whether Corporate Sustainability learning helps students develop ethical or sustainable intentions towards buying fast fashion products and services.
- 5) To investigate Undergraduate Management Students' perception towards greenwashing in fast fashion marketing.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

M.A., S., Agrawal, R., Syed, R.T., Arumugam, T. and K., P. ⁽²⁾ (2025), conducted a research on "Impact of sustainability education on senior student attitudes and behaviors: evidence from India", International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education study highlighted that students' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior toward sustainability are positively affected by Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). This relationship is frequently explained by the Knowledge-Attitude-Behavior (KAB) framework, which demonstrates how knowledge frequently influences attitudes, which in turn influence behavior. Although the concept has been backed by research conducted worldwide, little is known about it in India, particularly among undergraduate students. Previous research also shows that sociocultural dimensions of sustainability are frequently neglected by Indian students, indicating the need for curriculum changes that are in line with the ESD for 2030 objective.

Jung, Y., Park, K., & Ahn, J. ⁽³⁾ (2019) studied "Sustainability in Higher Education: Perceptions of Social Responsibility among University Students". The study found that students who had taken sustainability courses in construction-related programs exhibited lower levels of environmental concern compared to those who had not. In terms of knowledge, both objective knowledge (factual understanding of sustainability concepts) and subjective knowledge (students' self-perceived understanding) were generally low across both groups. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in objective knowledge between the two groups, but subjective knowledge was significantly lower among those who had taken the course. Students who had completed the course scored lower compared to their peers, showcasing a potential disequilibrium between the course content and its real-world impact on students' perceptions and behaviors.

eixeira, A., Ferreira, M.R., Correia, A. ⁽⁴⁾ (2018) et al. conducted a research on "Students' perceptions of corporate social responsibility: evidences from a Portuguese higher education institution". The study looked at how Polytechnic of Porto students perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) and whether or not gender, age, experience, and academic degree had an impact on these opinions. Pro, resistive, and secondary CSR were identified and categorized into three dimensions respectively by the findings; however, there were no visible variations according to sociodemographic factors.

Friberg, S., & Tu, F. (2017) ⁽⁵⁾ explored "Students' Attitude-Behaviour Gap: And the Effect of Corporate Social Irresponsibility in the Fast Fashion Industry." The thesis explores how young consumers (aged 18–35 years) view and respond to greenwashing in fast fashion industries and their advertisements, along with how the respondent's brand perception and buying decisions are impacted. The research consists of discussions on respondents' behavior as consumers, realising the consequences of fast fashion on the environment, brand image, and greenwashing, along with an empirical study based on a quantitative online survey that collected 747 valid responses. The findings indicated that greenwashing has a deleterious impact on brand perception and purchase behavior, although many respondents acknowledged that other elements also play a role in their buying choices. These results provide valuable information into fashion brands regarding the harms of greenwashing and emphasize the importance of genuine and sustainable marketing approaches.

Gazzola, P., Pavione, E., Pezzetti, R., & Grechi, D. ⁽⁶⁾ (2020) carried out research on the “Trends in the Fashion Industry. The Perception of Sustainability and Circular Economy: A Gender/Generation Quantitative Approach.” The research studies how much the fashion industry has undergone a significant amount of change due to an increase in competition and changing consumer choices, reinforcing the importance of reanalyzing business models with an emphasis on sustainability and the circular economy. The locus of the study was Generation Z's growing interest in sustainable practices, which shows how novel trends are impacting the industry. A poll of Insubria University students took place to gauge their attitudes and actions towards non-fast fashion industries and the concepts of the circular economy. With discernible variations seen from a gender viewpoint, the descriptive and quantitative study demonstrates that sustainability plays an important role in influencing Gen Z's fashion preferences. The inferences of the results support the theoretical framework and emphasize how sustainability and the circular economy impact people's buying choices.

Sobczak, A., Debucquet, G. and Havard, C ⁽⁷⁾ (2006), investigated "The impact of higher education on students' and young managers' perception of companies and CSR: an exploratory analysis". The exploration was on how students' perspectives towards businesses and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are molded by higher education for pupils and aspiring managers. The analysis and statistical techniques used to interpret responses from an online questionnaire that was provided to the students and alumni from several academic institutions in Nantes, France. Results show that respondents' perceptions of companies and their application of CSR concepts and resources are strongly impacted by the sort of academic school or college they attend. The study being exploratory in its nature highlights the fact that educational culture may be just as important in influencing how people view CSR as the curriculum itself. To increase knowledge, the report recommends more studies with seasoned experts and a qualitative methodology.

Wang, L., & Juslin, H. ⁽⁸⁾ (2012) conducted research on “Values and corporate social responsibility perceptions of Chinese university students.” The investigation explored the relationship between personal values and perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR), in addition to how demographic factors alter the values and perceptions of CSR within Chinese university students. The study, which is based on a survey of 980 students, where findings of the result showed that students' ethical values and views of corporate social responsibility (CSR) are influenced by their gender and academic major, with female students displaying more ethical values and more analytical views of CSR performance. The results also highlighted that the Chinese corporations tend to perform better in economic and social aspects than in environmental responsibility; and humanitarian ideals are negatively associated with CSR perceptions, while self-centered values show an upward correlation.

Gupta, M., & Hodges, N (2012) studied “Corporate social responsibility in the apparel industry: An exploration of Indian consumers' perceptions and expectations.” ⁽⁹⁾ The research investigates Indian customers' perception of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the apparel industry and how it influences their choice of products. A qualitative 26 in-depth interviews that were conducted. A conceptual framework demonstrated how different parameters affect buying decisions pertaining to corporate social responsibility. The study provides insightful information about ethical issues in the clothing supply chain. It emphasizes the growing importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) for customers as well as companies, and is one of the initial studies of its sort in India, being a significant garment market and sourcing hub.

Neha, Pradeep Joshi, Nishant Kumar ⁽¹⁰⁾ (2024) conducted a research “Sustainable Marketing Initiatives and Consumer Perception of Fast Fashion Brands” which looks at how customer behavior is impacted by ethical marketing in the fast fashion industry. As per the quantitative study and PLS-SEM analysis, buyers' perceptions towards sustainability are positively impacted by sustainable marketing because it improves brand image and trust. Consequently, this promotes sustainable buying and loyalty towards the brand. The study highlights that fashion firms can use to create sustainable marketing plans that work in regional marketplaces.

Dasgupta, H. and Pawar, S.K. ⁽¹¹⁾ (2021) carried out research "Impact of higher education imparted by Indian universities on the pro-sustainability orientation of students". The research compares first- and second-year MBA/PGDM learners in Indian higher education to examine pro-sustainability orientation (PSO). The study used structural equation modeling to test the PSO model using data from 425 learners at four Maharashtra

colleges and a structured survey. The findings demonstrated that the environmentally friendly mindset changed by year and by gender in the context of an equitable sense. Variations between institutes have been noticed in diverse affinities, concern for the environment, and humanitarianism. Based on the study's results, PSO and sustainable behavior (SB) are positively correlated, suggesting that pupil attitudes toward sustainability have been positively impacted by educational institutions in India. This study addresses the gap in understanding regarding PSO among emerging market learners in management.

Pratap Singh, T., Bisht, N.S. and Rastogi, M. ⁽¹²⁾ (2011) investigated "Towards the integration of sustainability in the business curriculum: Perspectives from Indian educators", which focuses at how the most prominent business institutions in India adopt sustainability into their educational programs and the obstacles that professors experience. Using electronic questionnaires, inquiries, and instructional material evaluations, the study gathered responses from 35 instructors from 17 leading colleges and universities. The results illustrate that although sustainability is growing ever more vital, educators find it challenging to strike an acceptable equilibrium between entertaining students, using innovative instructional approaches, and driven by profit content. The study stresses the value of combined case investigations and the necessity of dedicated leadership in order to promote long-term business learning. It contributes to the body of literature by highlighting the practical challenges of incorporating sustainability into management schooling.

Wong, A., Long, F., & Elankumaran, S. ⁽¹³⁾ (2010) conducted a study on "Business students' perception of corporate social responsibility: The United States, China, and India" using a questionnaire to examine how business pupils in the US, China, and India view corporate social responsibility (CSR). The results of the study show that Indian and American students emphasize CSR's non-economic factors more than the Chinese learners do. American students place more emphasis on their legal obligations, whereas Indian learners place philanthropy in the highest position. Facilitation payments were more acceptable to Chinese respondents. Notwithstanding these differences, all parties generally concurred on the two main objectives of the company that is safeguarding the interests of the shareholders and satisfying customer demands. The results provide information for policymakers, business schools, and businesses conducting operations.

Sharma, P. K., & Prashar, S ⁽¹⁴⁾ (2017) conducted a study "Understanding of Sustainability amongst Students of Management—A Case of Indian Institute of Management, Raipur, State of Chhattisgarh, India." where ninety Indian postgraduate business students' sustainability literacy was assessed in this study. Although students exhibited a favorable mindset toward the environment, they had little awareness regarding sustainability and were primarily concerned with preserving the environment. Important ideas like the societal aspect of sustainability and greenwashing were not well understood. Many prioritized growths in the economy, particularly reflected in commercial ideas influenced by the media. The research conducted suggests specific sustainability awareness exams and emphasizes the importance of embedding ecological and social ethics into business schooling.

Ghosh, S. ⁽¹⁵⁾ (2025) carried out a research "Inclusion of Sustainability into Business Education: Understanding the Student's Awareness, Knowledge, Attitude, and Beliefs—A Study Based on India" which investigated how business students view sustainability and its incorporation into curriculum at higher education institutions. The results of 304 undergraduate and graduate respondents demonstrate a substantial amount of understanding and favorable sentiments regarding sustainability and the SDGs. The participants favored the incorporation of sustainability in projects, apprenticeships, and research papers, and they strongly endorsed the role that institutions perform in advancing sustainability. Although there was an intense devotion to sustainability, there was a disconnect between notions and modus operandi. Instead of making sustainability a mandatory subject, students suggested incorporating sustainability as a value-added subject.

Hypothesis:

- 1) There is a significant relationship between the level of awareness of corporate sustainability practices and the attitudes of Undergraduate Management students towards the sustainability practices of fast fashion businesses.

- 2) Corporate sustainability learning has a positive influence on the development of ethical and sustainable buying intentions among Undergraduate Management students with respect to fast fashion products and services.
- 3) Higher awareness of corporate sustainability among Undergraduate Management students leads to increased skepticism towards greenwashing in fast fashion marketing campaigns.

METHODOLOGY:

The investigator researches the impact of corporate sustainability learning on the perceptions of students towards the fast fashion industry by using simple random sampling techniques and distributed a Google form questionnaire to Undergraduate Management students from a college in Mumbai, India, collecting 62 responses from all participants of all genders. The questionnaire included a mix of 5-point Likert scale, multiple-choice questions, and checkbox-type questions. The questions were framed to focus on factors such as awareness, understanding, attitudes, and ethical intentions related to the fast fashion industry and business sustainability. Feedback-based questions were incorporated to gather students' suggestions for improving teaching practices and curriculum with the aim of shaping students' perception toward corporate sustainability and ethical considerations. The data was collected in a systematic manner, and the respondents were informed that their responses would be used for research purposes and would remain confidential.

Sample:

The researcher, with necessary permission from the principal of a deemed-to-be university school, shared the Google Form link directly with Undergraduate Management students, being. Clear instructions were given to the students on how to fill the google form, and 62 responses were collected from students of all genders.

Tool/Instrument:

The researcher aimed to study the impact of Corporate Sustainability learning on the perception of Undergraduate Management students towards fast fashion. A 16-item tool was developed for this purpose and validated by the Dean and faculty of the Undergraduate Management program. Content validity was also ensured, and necessary modifications were made based on expert feedback. The final version of the tool was then circulated among students as the primary instrument for data collection

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

The validated questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms online to Undergraduate Management students of a deemed-to-be university school. The researcher, along with the other faculty members, guided students on how to fill out the form. The investigator collected 62 respondents for the purpose of research. The analysis of the data collected is as follows:

H ₁ : There is a significant relationship between the level of awareness of corporate sustainability practices and the attitudes of Undergraduate Management students towards the sustainability practices of fast fashion businesses. Hypothesis	Test Used	Chi-square (χ^2) Value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	P-value	Conclusion
H1: There is a significant relationship between the level of awareness of corporate sustainability practices and the attitudes of Undergraduate Management students towards the sustainability practices of fast fashion businesses.	Chi-square Test for Independence	12.899	12	0.377	Fail to reject the null hypothesis. There is no statistically significant relationship.

Based on the Chi-square test for independence, with a calculated χ^2 value of 12.899 and 12 degrees of freedom, the resulting p-value of approximately 0.377 is greater than the conventional significance level of 0.05. This indicates that we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is no statistically significant relationship between the level of awareness of corporate sustainability practices before the course and the attitudes of Undergraduate Management students towards the sustainability practices of fast fashion businesses after the course, according to the provided data. In simpler terms, a student's prior knowledge of corporate sustainability does not appear to significantly influence how they perceive fast fashion brands after completing the course.

H₂: Corporate sustainability learning has a positive influence on the development of ethical and sustainable buying intentions among Undergraduate Management students with respect to fast fashion products and services.

Hypothesis	Test Used	Chi-square (chi ²) Value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	P-value	Conclusion
H ₂ : Corporate sustainability learning has a positive influence on the development of ethical and sustainable buying intentions among Undergraduate Management students with respect to fast fashion products and services.	Chi-square Test for Independence	29.267	12	0.0036	Reject the null hypothesis. There is a statistically significant positive relationship.

Based on the Chi-square test for independence, with a calculated chi-square value of 29.267 and 12 degrees of freedom, the resulting p-value is 0.0036. Since this p-value is less than the conventional significance level of 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between the improvement in students' understanding of Corporate Sustainability after the course and their willingness to support brands that follow sustainable practices, even if they cost more.

Upon examining the contingency table, a discernible trend emerges: as students' understanding of Corporate Sustainability improves (higher scores on the 'Understanding Improvement' scale), there is an increasing inclination towards preferring sustainable brands (indicated by higher counts in the 'Yes' category and a decrease in the 'No' category). This pattern suggests a positive influence of corporate sustainability learning on the development of ethical and sustainable buying intentions among Undergraduate Management students concerning fast fashion products and services.

H₃: Higher awareness of corporate sustainability among Undergraduate Management students leads to increased skepticism towards greenwashing in fast fashion marketing campaigns.

Hypothesis	Test Used	Chi-square (chi ²) Value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	P-value	Conclusion
H ₃ : Higher awareness of corporate sustainability among Undergraduate Management students leads to increased skepticism towards greenwashing in fast fashion marketing campaigns.	Chi-square Test for Independence	14.310	16	0.5756	Fail to reject the null hypothesis. There is no statistically significant relationship.

Based on the Chi-square test for independence, with a calculated χ^2 value of 14.310 and 16 degrees of freedom, the resulting p-value is 0.5756. Since this p-value is considerably greater than the conventional significance level of 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis.

This indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between the initial level of awareness of corporate sustainability among Undergraduate Management students and their increased skepticism towards greenwashing in fast fashion marketing campaigns. In other words, a student's prior familiarity with corporate sustainability does not appear to significantly influence whether their perception of greenwashing changes after learning about the topic.

CONCLUSION:

The researcher conducted a study to investigate the impact of Corporate Sustainability learning on Undergraduate Management students' perceptions of the fast fashion industry. The findings revealed there was no significant relationship between students' initial awareness of sustainability business context and their attitudes and skepticism toward greenwashing in the fast fashion industry. However, after completing the course, students showed a significantly positive preference for sustainable fashion brands, showcasing that Corporate Sustainability learning positively influenced their ethical and sustainable buying intentions. The analysis demonstrated that strategic step by step learning plays a more key role than prior awareness in shaping ethical student.

DISCUSSION:

As per the analysis, inferences drawn are, that there is a need to integrate a more in-depth corporate sustainability curriculum at the undergraduate Undergraduate Management level. Since many students are already familiar with the basic sustainability concepts from earlier education i.e. schooling, a more comprehensive and advanced curriculum and teaching approach is important. This approach would build on their existing knowledge, enhance students' awareness, and constructively shape their attitudes and ethical considerations toward sustainable business practices specifically fast fashion industry.

Based on the feedback collected from student respondents, there was a strong suggestion to include more practical, experience-based learning to shape their perception of sustainability in a business context. Students recommended incorporating simulation games on ethical decision-making, role-plays, industry visits to sustainable businesses or startups, guest lectures workshops from sustainability experts, and real-life business case studies. Additionally, they proposed workshops on green entrepreneurship, inclusion of Sustainable Green Finance, mandatory internship programs in sustainable brands assessed by an external referee to track student's progress with regards to skill development in the existing Corporate Sustainability module to enhance their awareness, deepen their knowledge, and positively shape their attitudes through real-world exposure. Moreover, Business schools can provide access to living labs for sustainability projects and report (Access Master Article, 2023) ⁽¹⁸⁾ in the existing Corporate Sustainability module to enhance their awareness, deepen their knowledge, and positively shape their attitudes through real-world exposure.

FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The current study can be carried out on a wide scale, with a representative sample drawn from a large area.
- 2) An in-depth Corporate Sustainability curriculum model that integrates AI tools, incorporates student feedback, and includes an ethical policy framework for responsible decision-making.
- 3) A longitudinal study to assess the long-term impact of sustainability learning on students' perceptions and behavior.
- 4) A Comparative study to evaluate student perceptions pre and post-implementation of the sustainability curriculum.
- 5) A Region-wise study to understand geographical variations in corporate sustainability awareness and attitudes.
- 6) A Cultural study to examine how cultural differences shape students' understanding of sustainability and ethics.

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