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Sustainable HRM through Aesthetics Embodiment and Emotional Dynamics in Higher Education

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Abstract

Purpose: The study investigates the experiential dimensions that focus on aesthetics, embodiment and emotions in higher education institutions (HEIs). Its objective is to bridge the gap between sustainability and sensory engagement in organizational contexts.
Design/Methodology/Approach: This study uses a quantitative research design and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to explore the interplay among aesthetics, embodiment, emotions, and sustainability among employees in HEIs.
Findings: The results show that aesthetics, emotion and embodiment significantly influence sustainability. Emotional responses mediate the relationship between aesthetics and sustainability, fostering deeper commitment to sustainable practices in higher education.
Practical Implications: This research offers actionable insights for HEIs to design aesthetically enriched environments and promote experiential learning. It helps in aligning individual behaviours with organizational sustainability goals.
Originality/Value: By emphasizing on human-centric dimensions, this study contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of sustainability as a lived experience rather than an abstract concept.

Keywords: Sustainability, Aesthetics, Embodiment, Emotion, Higher Education, Experiential Learning

Introduction

In the evolving debate on sustainability within organizations, the focus has largely been on domains that have quantitative matrices, such as energy efficiency, waste reduction or carbon footprints (Delmas & Toffel, 2004; Epstein & Roy, 2001). These metrics are crucial for understanding and assessing the impact on the environment from the organisation, setting reduction goals for metrics, and improving overall operational efficiencies and have been studied abundantly. While quantitative metrics that could be measured deal with the ecological outcomes of sustainability practices, they often overlook the experiential dimensions that include how individuals perceive, engage with and embody sustainability in their work environments (Boyer et al., 2016; Kolb, 2014; Tilbury, 1995; Purvis et al., 2019; Wahl et al., 2012). Research often overlooks qualitative metrics that are not directly measurable or captured through perception. Generally, these are captured through stakeholders, for example, employees. This creates a critical gap in understanding how employees experience sustainability on a more personal and sensory level that could be captured through the perceptions of individuals or employees in ‘Higher Educational Institutions’ (HEIs). In the case of HEIs, again, the role of experiential dimensions becomes even more important due to the twin responsibility: firstly, to encourage sustainable practices within its operations and secondly, to embed it as a core value that is to be taught for sustainable development for forthcoming generations. This is going to be an area wherein investigation into how HEI employees and students experience sustainable practices could provide a comprehensive description of how sustainability is internalized and perceived

within these institutions. This is vital for encouraging long-term commitment to sustainable initiatives in academia, especially HEIs, which serves as a model for broader societal change (Wu et al., 2018). Therefore, there is a great requirement for research in the field that do need to study subjective experiences, as they are important to HEIs' long-term commitment to projects or approaches that are linked to sustainable goals. As per Sammalisto, Sundström & Holm, (2015), important stakeholders like faculty and non-teaching administrative staff are involved in sustainable activities not just through policies and programs but also through their everyday lives or activities, which influence how these values are emulated and conveyed to students. Studies that investigate the experiential dimensions can provide a holistic and comprehensive understanding of how sustainability works; not just through operational efficiencies, but also through the lived experiences of individuals in HEIs (Wu et al., 2018). This is a great chance to explore an experience scope to improve sustainable initiatives in firms, which will use Green HRM Practices to improve organisations' performance with special reference to HEIs. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), are two global sustainability frameworks that are aided by green HRM (Nogueiro & Saraiva, 2023) which can be implemented in HEIs. By accenting the human-centred, sensory and emotional engagement of individuals through literature, researchers can gain deeper insights into how employees interact with and incorporate sustainability values. Gaining an understanding of experiential elements in any organization can help workers to develop emotionally absorbing sustainability plans that match personal commitment with organisational objectives (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2011). To accomplish sustainable development goals within HEIs and promote green HRM practices, the study of experiential dimensions seeks to offer a model from the current research.

The Concept of Experiential Learning

Unlike traditional methods of passive learning, which rely on the memorization of information, experiential learning concentrate on the active participation of learners, allowing them to apply and relate theoretical knowledge with practical

application (Wooding, 2019). It is a learning through direct experience and involves reflection, in-depth analysis and application. It allows the learners to have practical hands-on experience and apply theoretical concepts in real world contexts. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model is one of the most widely recognized frameworks in this area. The above model describes a four-step process that learners go through to generate new knowledge: Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation, and Active Experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Effective learning happens when people actively engage with a concept, think about it, develop abstract concepts, and then test these ideas in novel contexts. According to Joy and Sherry (2003), learning is not simply an individual journey but is also influenced by the social context in which it takes place. This is reflected in the various other experiential learning frameworks, which, in addition to Kolb's model (Morris, 2019), that place an emphasis on the important role of interaction and group dynamics in the learning process (Kaminstein, Stevens & Forst, 2022). According to these models, learners' ability to understand is enhanced when they are given opportunity to reflect and modify their behaviour after engaging in practical situations. Therefore, the core of experiential learning models is on active learning and personal involvement, which offers a comprehensive perspective on the creation, retention, and reflection of information (Wooding, 2019).

Dimensions of Experiential Learning

As experiential learning has evolved with time, and it has become evident that learning is not merely a cognitive process but involves multiple dimensions. These dimensions include emotional involvement, physical interaction, and aesthetic experience with the environment (Burns, 2015). These dimensions make experiential learning a holistic process that helps the learners to understand the concept clearly. Physical interaction, or embodiment, refers to the way in which human use his/her body and physical movements for interacting with the world, shaping experiences, and cognition (Kirsh, 2013). Embodiment plays an important role in experiential learning as it allows individuals in an organization to connect conceptual ideas to tangible actions and reinforce learning (Jelić et al., 2016). As per Uhrmacher, 2009, aesthetic experience on the other hand, refers

to how the visual and sensory qualities of the environment, such as design, colour, and texture, affects the learning process. Aesthetics includes beauty in the atmosphere, or uniqueness of the environment in which learning is taking place. This makes aesthetic experience, an important element associated with experiential learning, as it shapes how individuals feel and engage with the learning environment and influence their willingness to participate actively (Fredricks & Blu, 2009). For say, in a classroom setting, where learners do participate physically with materials, such as in practical or interactive workshops, tend to have a deeper understanding of the subject matter compared to those who only study theoretically . Similarly, an Emotional engagement and involvement, such as the joy or pride felt after successfully completing a challenging task, or curiosity, excitement, or even frustration reinforces learning and makes it more memorable and intensified. Emotional involvement includes the role of feelings and emotional responses and makes learning experiences meaningful (Lehman, 2006). All the above-mentioned dimensions show that experiential learning is a multi-dimensional concept, as it engages the whole person's body, mind, emotions, and aesthetic appreciation. By connecting and interlinking these dimensions, particularly aesthetic experiences, emotional involvement, and embodiment, experiential learning can effectively contribute to sustainability practices (Lehtonen, Österlind, & Viirret, 2020; Kokkos, 2010; Bentz, do Carmo, Schafenacker, Schirok, & Corso, 2022; Østergaard, 2017).

Experiential Learning to Sustainability

Experiential learning plays a significant part in promoting long-term engagement with sustainable practices (Tomlinson & Rhiney, 2018). Education with sustainable premise often includes abstract concepts like carbon footprints, renewable energy, or waste reduction and focuses on such concepts (Martínez-Borreguero et al., 2020). However, without experiencing these concepts, they may remain detached from learners and do not provide consolidated results. By infusing experience into it, education for sustainability will exceed mere theoretical knowledge in driving and motivating emotional and physical involvement in people for sustainability (Horvath et al., 2023). For example,

employees in organizations are more likely to understand and incorporate sustainable values when they are physically involved in sustainability initiatives, such as participating in awareness sessions, activities like recycling programs or using eco-friendly materials and engaging in energy-saving behaviours (Thomas & Lamm, 2012). As per Mangas, Prieto, Cuesta, Argüelles & Martínez, (2021), this hands-on approach or learning by doing do make sustainability substantial and allows individuals to see the impact of their actions by using sustainable practices. This reinforces a sense of personal responsibility. Also, the emotional dimension means that employees who feel pride or satisfied by contributing to the sustainability goals of their organization are more likely to remain committed over time and continue with such efforts repeatedly (Kokkos, 2010). It is emotional engagement, therefore, that drives long-term behavioral change toward sustainability.

Aesthetics, Embodiment, and Emotions as Dimensions of Experiential Sustainability

To understand and comprehend the experiential dimensions of sustainability, it is important to study and analyse how aesthetics, embodiment, and emotions interact to shape the sustainability experience in organizations (Küper, 2016; Joy & Sherry, 2003; Shrivastava, Schumacher, Wasieleski, & Tasic, 2017). These three dimensions are the most critical ones of the experiential framework and contribute to a focused understanding of how people perceive and validate sustainability in the workplace.

Aesthetics

Perceptions of sustainability in the organization are very much influenced by the visual and sensual aspects of the workplace: its design, materials, beauty, atmosphere, or uniqueness. Aesthetics inspire and engage learners, thereby create emotional responses and shape how employees feel about their environment. Green office designs, such as the use of natural materials and biophilic elements (natural elements), can foster positive emotional reactions in the employees, that when aligned with sustainability values makes them more engaged in eco-friendly practices (Michailova & Wilson, 2008). Studies have shown that aesthetically pleasing workspaces enhance employees' emotional

connection to sustainability initiatives, making the experience of sustainability more tangible, immediate and long lasting (Gentry, 1990).

Embodiment

Embodiment is how learners engage with their environment with movement, touch and physical action, thus embedding sustainability in their body experiences. A strong bond toward sustainable goals can be developed with hands on experience where employees can be involved with sustainable practices, recycling, gardening, building with sustainable materials, conserving energy and even using eco-friendly materials. It is a lived experience that shapes practice on a day-to-day basis as sustainability is embodied; that is, when people engage with sustainable values through their biometrics (Kolb, 2014). We reinforce and deepen emotional and cognitive commitment to sustainability through embodied actions, which makes it a part, not just of the underlying philosophy but also practice, of organizational life.

Emotions

Emotions play a central role in how individuals connect with sustainability goals. Emotional responses, such as pride, satisfaction, stress, curiosity, excitement, or even frustration is important to understand how sustainability is experienced. Emotional experiences at workplace are shaped by internal and external factors, which, when understood, help to enhance and foster employee well-being and organizational outcomes (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). Emotions are described as complex reactions involving physiological arousal, expressive behaviours, and cognitive interpretations, all of which can drive behaviour in organizations (Mann, 1999). Organizations that create positive emotional climates, through sustainability values or through recognition of employees' sustainable behaviours, are more likely to strengthen a deeper, long-lasting commitment towards sustainability. High levels of emotional engagement towards sustainability efforts can motivate employees to take ownership of eco-friendly practices, thereby transforming sustainability from a corporate mandate into a shared emotional experience (Wu et al., 2018).

Literature Review

Sustainability and Aesthetics

A. Daugelaite & Ivory-Vileniske (2016) examined the association between aesthetics and sustainable architecture in their research. According to the study, sustainable practices that traditionally prioritize ecological and technical efficiency are increasingly based on aesthetic factors. In Embodied Multi-Discursivity (Poldner, Shrivastava & Branzei, 2017), an aesthetic approach is suggested to alleviate the difficulties associated with sustainable development by lessening the impact of fiction. Steiner, 2019 notes that the use of natural materials and their harmonious form towards nature is a crucial aspect of aesthetic design, which contributes to environmental sustainability and emotional engagement. The study demonstrates that aesthetics can enhance the emotional connection people have with sustainable environments, making sustainability more appealing and encouraging long-term commitment to sustainable practice (Maragno, 2023). The book authored by Lehtinen, S. (2021) explores the concept of aesthetic sustainability and suggests that everyday aesthetic choices can lead to sustainable behaviors. According to Di Fabio (2017), the engagement of workers with sustainability can be enhanced by emphasizing sustainable practices. The author suggests that aesthetics can foster a sense of well-being and cultural attachment to sustainability among workers, which can lead to more sustainable practices. Both investigations reveal a positive impact of aesthetics on sustainability. According to Willerding, Silveira, Berchin, Lapolli, & Guerra (2016), organizational aesthetics can enhance competitiveness, effectiveness, creativity, knowledge acquisition, and a more harmonious relationship between organizational workers and the natural world. See also organizational culture. Above, it is clear that the aesthetics of an organization determine its organizational sustainability. According to Poldner, Dentoni, and Ivanova (2017) who use aesthetics as a mediating tool for translating individual creativity into sustainable messages within and beyond the organization, some studies have suggested that aestheticis plays. Knowledge and search reveal no evidence that sustainability plays a role in the aesthetics of an organization. This is

contradictory. A lot of research indicates that the attainment of sustainable goals in an organization can influence its aesthetic appeal.

Sustainability and embodiment

Sustainability in organizations is significantly influenced by the concept of embodiment, which emphasizes integrating sustainable practices into everyday routines and workflows (Bentz et al., 2022). By linking employees' physical activities with broader organizational goals, embodied design fosters stronger connections to sustainability (Küper, 2016). Embodied design can increase the result of sustainable practices in organizations by integrating bodily beings with dynamic, material, social, and systemic embodiments (Küper, 2016). Embodied practices help employees affect sustainability at positive side, making sustainable goals more tangible and actionable in employees' daily work . The concept of embodiment, which highlights how cognition and behaviour are prepared in bodily practices, enhances the integration of sustainability into both individual and organizational actions (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010). Embodiment promotes sustainable actions through experiential learning (Moyer et al., 2014). Leadership of an organization plays a pivotal role in embedding sustainability through embodiment (Marshall, 2011). As also, noted by Metcalf and Benn (2013), effective leaders address the complexities of sustainability by modeling and promoting embodied practices, transforming sustainability from an abstract concept into a practical, integrated element of organizational life (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010).Hence, embodiment significantly contributes to attaining sustainable development goals by integrating sustainable practices into the physical and cognitive actions of employees and leaders (Küpers, 2016; Moyer et al., 2014). By developing a culture where sustainability is encouraged and embodied in daily practices, organizations can enhance employee commitment to sustainable development goals (Eisenberger et al., 2010), ensuring that sustainable development objectives are met not just in policy but in practice (Metcalf & Benn, 2013).

Sustainability and Emotions

Emotions play an important role in the effective implementation of sustainability initiatives and practices within organizations. They influence how employees feel

about and behave toward sustainability goals (Yin, Ma, Gong, Chen, & Zhang, 2021). Emotional experiences have a significant impact on decision-making processes related to sustainability, as individuals' emotions often guide their behaviors in ways that shape sustainable practices (Kals & Maes, 2002). Positive feelings like pride, joy and fulfillment could be useful in motivating employees to accept and maintain sustainable practices, since they have a feeling of satisfying towards contributing to larger ecological aims (Rodriguez-Pomeda et al., 2018). On the contrary, according to Liang, Hou, Jo, & Sarigöllü, (2019) negative emotional appeal, like guilt, frustration or anxiety, can even influence in the way of sustainability efforts by making them avoid things which can create harmful impact on environment.

In the Thesis, Blomfield (2020) did show that emotional regulation is important for sustainability change mediators, as they navigate the complexities and challenges of driving environmental initiatives in corporate settings. Leaders who exhibit high emotional intelligence are more successful in promoting sustainability because they can effectively channel and use their emotions and the emotions of others toward green outcomes (Blomfield et al., 2016). These leaders are able to inspire employees by demonstrating their own emotional commitment to environmental causes, that results in promoting a sense of purpose within one's team .

In addition, emotion creates emotional connectors among employees (Gupta, Bakhru, & Shankar, 2022) contributing to a supportive organizational culture for sustainability. A working environment founded on mutual respect and positive emotion may allow colleagues to engage in sustainability in a more cohesive way, where shared positive emotion (e.g., positive effects such as pride in environmentally friendly initiatives) may facilitate collective action (Kim & Williams, 2022) and happiness in contributing towards sustainable goals. In fact, this emotional linkage is critical to support the development of long-term environmental goals as it creates a supportive environment in which employees will be more inclined to maintain their commitment and involvement with sustainability initiatives (Russell & Friedrich, 2015) and to feel more connected to organization.

Therefore, one can draw the conclusion that emotions play a huge role in sustainable organizational behavior. Not only positive but also negative emotions can trigger pro-environmental behavior, and emotional regulation as well as leadership are important for organizations to successfully implement sustainability initiatives. Emotions can act as a motivator of behavior and therefore have both direct and indirect implications for sustainability (Gupta, Bakhru, & Shankar, 2022). For example, positive emotions resulting from meeting sustainability goals (like pride and fulfillment as a result of an hourly contribution) can cumulatively lead to an increase in engagement with those practices by employees. Research found emotion to play a role, with people motivated to engage and maintain sustainable behaviors due to pride in green actions (Russell & Friedrich, 2015). Additionally, emotions like guilt or anger about environmental issues can compel employees and leaders to prioritize sustainability, directly affecting decision-making toward more sustainable outcomes or emotions like frustration in employees at workplace (which can happen due to misuse of resources , harming the environment) can directly channelise sustainable efforts in an organisation.

Further, emotion impacts sustainability indirectly through culture in shaping the setting where perceptions of and reactions against corporate conduct to realize sustainability are shared or sculpted organization-wide (Isensee, Teuteberg, Griese, & Topi, 2020). For example, emotionally competent or high emotional willingness leadership has a corresponding advantage in the realm of persuasiveness regarding the enabling of cultural emergence to influence sustainability understanding within a firm through effective emotional appeals and expression. Moreover, emotional regulation of the change agents of sustainability has allowed morale and continuity for those supporting the sustainability initiative, hence indirectly promoting sustainability in the long term since these agents are more effective when their practice of sustainability within the organizations is enhanced. Therefore, emotions may facilitate organizational sustainability directly and indirectly through induced pro-environmental action and building supportive culture that fosters sustainability at all levels of the organization.

Aesthetics and Emotions

Menninghaus et al. (2019) indicated that emotions directly feed into aesthetic evaluation, centred on intrinsic pleasantness, familiarity, and novelty. According to Bjerke, Ind, and De Paoli, (2007), aesthetics within organizations can have a positive impact on employee happiness, satisfaction, identity, mood, creativity, and motivation. In one the study done for hotel employees; it has been found that front end workers who are more exposed to superior aesthetics have its positive impact on their emotions as compared to back-end employees who are exposed to lesser quality aesthetics . The study found that an aesthetically appealing environment, in aspects like colour, lighting, design of the workspace, and brightness, greatly increases job satisfaction and emotional well-being. Employees will prosper in settings that are well-organized with considerations of beauty, colour, and layout (Barton & Le, 2023). A survey conducted among university personnel revealed that aesthetically enriched workspaces improved their satisfaction and provided a sense of comfort, demonstrating how physical environment aesthetics facilitate emotional responses (Barton & Le, 2023). A study of organizational aesthetics in Norwegian companies showed that well-designed spaces create identity and pride, thus improving positive social

interactions among employees (Bjerke et al., 2007). Thus, aesthetics in the workplace has a great impact on employees' feelings, which subsequently drive improvements in job satisfaction, social interaction, and well-being.

Embodiment and Emotions

Studies show that emotional states, such as enthusiasm and joy, lead to more open and engaged postures, enhancing positive social interactions and collaboration (Niedenthal et al., 2005) within the organisation. This shows how emotions can affect physical expressions and bodily involvement in work-related activities, influencing the dynamics and elements of embodiment.

When emotions like anger or frustration surface, they often show up in physical ways, such as tense or closed-off body language. This kind of posture can reduce collaboration among coworkers and lead to more frequent interpersonal conflicts (Price et al., 2012). Studies on embodied cognition show that emotions affect more than just physical gestures—they also shape how people think and behave at work. For example, acting out emotions physically can amplify those feelings, which in turn influences how employees interact with one another (Niedenthal, 2007). Something as simple as a smile or a frown can intensify the emotion behind it, showing just how strongly physical expressions are linked to emotional triggers in workplace environments (Carr et al., 2018).

Embodiment and Aesthetics

The design of a workplace, i.e., its architecture, artwork, and overall environment, can have a big impact on how employees feel and engage in their daily tasks (Chugh & Hancock, 2009). When spaces include thoughtful touches like comfortable furniture, good lighting, sustainable materials, and appealing colours, they create a more welcoming atmosphere that employees connect with. Workspaces that include attractive designs or interactive features can make employees feel more involved in their work and improve their overall mood and well-being (Xiaobo & Yuelin, 2014). These design elements often encourage natural behaviours, like taking a more relaxed posture, moving around more, or collaborating with coworkers, which adds to a more positive and enjoyable workday (Kirsch et al., 2015).

Hence, It could be concluded that workplace aesthetics primarily act as the independent variable shaping the embodied responses of employees, the relationship is dynamic. But, in research, it has also been found that emotions play a mediating role between aesthetics and embodiment. Thus, when employees interact with an aesthetically appealing environment, it is their emotional states like calm, excitement, or joy, which could function as an amplifier or a modifier for their embodied responses, using bodily movements, in relation to how they regard this environment (Thüring & Mahlke, 2007). For example, emotions such as awe and wonder, brought forth by the aesthetically amazing design of the workplace, enhance embodied experiences where one develops attachment and connection to the place (Fingerhut & Prinz, 2020).

Table 1: Summary of Literature

Influencing factor	**Mediating factor**	**Influenced factor**	**References**
Aesthetics		Sustainability	1. 2. (Lehtinen, S. 2021) 3. (Willerding, Silveira, Berchin, Lapolli, & Guerra, 2016)
Aesthetics	Emotions	Sustainability	1.
Individual Creativity	aesthetics	Sustainability	2. (Poldner, Dentoni, & Ivanova, 2017)
Sustainable Goals	Aesthetics	Sustainability	1. (Daugelaite, Dogan, & Grazuleviciute-Vileniske, 2021) 2. (Lehtinen, 2021) 3. (Zafarmand, Sugiyama, & Watanabe, 2003)
Embodiment		Sustainability	1. (Küper, 2016) 2. (Poldner, Shrivastava, & Branzei, Embodied Multi-Discursivity, 2017)

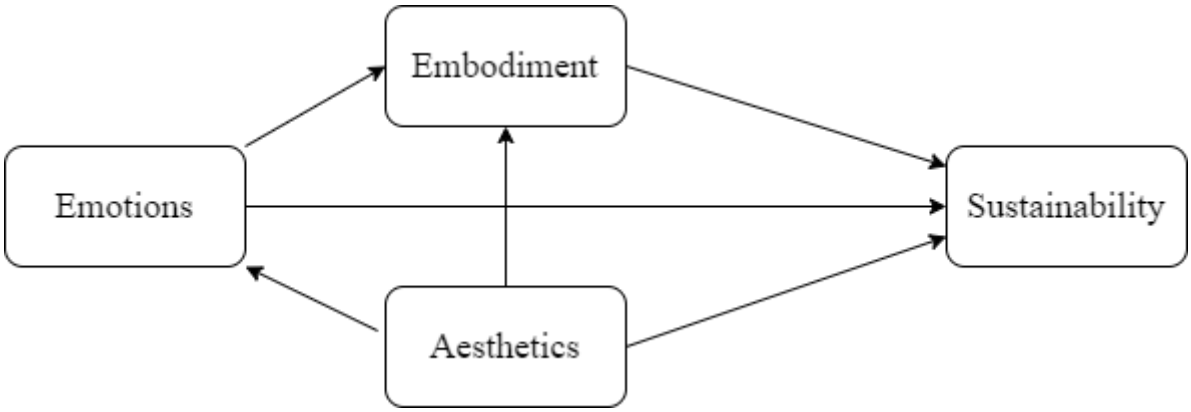
			3. (Bentz, Carmo, Schafenacker, Schirok, & Corso, 2022) 4. (Küper, 2016) 5. (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010) 6. (Moyer et al., 2014) 7. (Eisenberger et al., 2010) 8. (Metcalf & Benn, 2013)
Sustainable Goals	Emotions	Sustainability	1.
Emotions	Decision Making Process	Sustainability	1. (Kals & Maes, 2002)
Emotions	Motivation	Sustainability	1. (Rodriguez-Pomeda et al., 2018)
Emotions		Sustainability	1. 2. (Blomfield, 2020) 3. (Blomfield et al., 2016) 4. . 5. (Gupta, Bakhru, & Shankar, 2022) 6. (Kim & Williams, 2022) 7. (Russell & Friedrich, 2015) 8. (Schneider, Zaval, Weber, & Markowitz, 2017)
Emotions	Organizational Culture	Sustainability	1.
Emotions		Aesthetic evaluation	1. (Menninghaus, et al., 2019)
Aesthetics		Emotions	1. (Bjerke, Ind, & De Paoli, 2007)

			2. (Kirillova, Fu, & Kucukusta, 2018) 3. (Barton & Le, 2023) 4. (Bjerke et al., 2007)
Emotions		Embodiment	1. (Niedenthal et al., 2005) 2. (Price et al., 2012) 3. (Niedenthal, 2007) 4. (Carr et al., 2018)
Aesthetics		Embodiment	1. (Chugh & Hancock, 2009) 2. (Xiaobo & Yuelin, 2014) 3. (Kirsch et al., 2015)
Aesthetics	Emotions	Embodiment	1. (Thüring & Mahlke, 2007) 2. (Fingerhut & Prinz, 2020)

Proposed Hypotheses with Research Framework

From the above discussion of literature, the following research framework is proposed for the study:

Figure 1: Research Framework of the study



Research suggests that aesthetically pleasing environments trigger positive emotions such as calmness, inspiration, and joy, which can enhance employees' engagement and satisfaction (Menninghaus et al., 2019). The design elements of the workplace (e.g., natural light, biophilic design, and visual appeal) evoke positive emotional responses such as calm, joy, and satisfaction, enhancing overall employee well-being (Menninghaus et al., 2019; Kirillova et al., 2018).

H1: Aesthetic elements at the workplace do influence the emotional states of employees.

The study of some of these literatures (Küper, 2016; Bentz et al., 2022; Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010) supports the fact that physical involvement of employees with regard to sustainable practices within an organization—for instance, recycling or energy conservation—these activities develop the potentiality of a person for becoming a habit; the habits reinforce sustainability within the organization, and this practice also becomes part and parcel of organizational culture.

H2: Embodiment at work does significantly affect sustainability at work.

Emotional involvement with the means of pursuing sustainability in an organization makes a lot of difference. When staff are proud of and fulfilled by their work in terms of contributing toward sustainability, they are compelled to continue in pro-environmental behaviour. An emotional link to this makes them not only more likely to hold on to commitment but also helps the effort of an organization toward sustainability through building up a culture in support of sustainability (Rodriguez-Pomeda et al., 2018; Russell & Friedrich, 2015).

H3: Emotions at the workplace have a direct impact on Sustainability.

The physical and sensory appeal of the workplace design encourages workers to be more physically active and engage in direct participation; this is enhanced through features such as ergonomic furniture and artistic elements that contribute toward the embodied experience of the employees (Gallese et al., 2021; Xiaobo & Yuelin, 2014).

H4: Aesthetics at workspace do impact the embodied behaviour of employees.

The positive feelings that might arise in employees, they naturally feed into their behaviour, making employees act more confidently and interact with others in a better way. This results in willingness to participate in activities concerning sustainability (Niedenthal, 2007; Price et al., 2012).

H5: Emotion at workplace directly influence embodied engagement of employees.

In this respect, the integration of green and visually appealing design features, including green architecture and natural materials, will align with sustainable

values and allow for a culture that supports sustainable development goals in general (Daugelaite & Grazuleviciute-Vileniske, 2020; Lehtinen, 2021).

H6: Aesthetic enhancements in the workplace have a direct impact on the organization's sustainability.

According to past research, the emotional responses affected by aesthetic experiences can alter the intensity and nature of embodied actions, leading to increased engagement and physical involvement in sustainable practices (Thüring & Mahlke, 2007; Fingerhut & Prinz, 2020).

H7: Emotions mediate the relationship between workplace aesthetics and the embodied actions of employees.

Research Design and Methodology

The present research has adopted a quantitative research design to empirically test the relationships proposed in the model. The proposed model discusses the interplay between aesthetics, embodiment, emotions, and sustainability within organizational settings. Therefore, based on the research questions and hypotheses, a covariance-based Structural Equation Modelling (CB-SEM) approach has been used in this study through SPSS AMOS 22. This above approach is appropriate for examining complex, multifaceted interactions among latent components (Hair et al., 2014). The study utilizes a deductive research approach, moving from theory to data (Hansen-Schirra, Czulo, & Hofmann, 2017; Haque, 2022)). The present study starts by studying present studies and then developing hypotheses followed by designing strategy to test hypotheses with empirical data. Then collecting data followed by analysis and based on the results, researchers propose a model that explains the phenomena under study. The hypotheses are formulated based on the extensive literature review and grounded theory related to experiential dimensions of sustainability. The population of the study composed of all employees (both, teaching and non-teaching) working in Higher educational Institutions (HEI's) in Rajasthan (India). A Convenience sampling method is employed due to its practical feasibility and accessibility in gathering responses from employees of Higher educational Institutions (HEI's) Institutes which are, may or may not, actively engaged in

sustainability practices. Data is collected through a structured questionnaire, designed to measure the constructs of aesthetics, embodiment, emotions, and sustainability. The questionnaire items are generated by the researchers. Total one thousand questionnaires are floated out of which four hundred and twenty-five received as properly filled. This sample size is adequate, since guidelines on CB-SEM have suggested at least a ratio of 5-10 respondents per indicator variable (Kline, 2015). The greater the sample size, the greater is the statistical power and reliability of the results. Each construct in the model is measured using a multi-item Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The analysis strategy in this research will be accomplished through multi-step approaches. First, there is preliminary data analysis which includes cleaning, handling missing values, and checking whether the data follows normality or outliers among the cases and variables, respectively (Hair et al., 2013). It subsequently follows that exploratory EFA will allow investigation of the structure of data through the validation of scales that are meant to understand the underlying factors of data (Byrne, 2016). Following EFA, CFA was carried out to confirm the measurement model. The CFA examined the goodness-of-fit indices including Comparative Fit Index, Tucker-Lewis Index, and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation that were seen to be important measures in the evaluation of the fitting of data to the hypothesized model. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), using a covariance-based SEM, was applied to the stated hypotheses and explored direct and indirect associations among the constructs. The method is beneficial because CB-SEM allows for comprehensive analyses of complex interrelationships and can control for measurement errors; hence, it stands as an applicable alternative for confirmation of theories and models (Kline, 2015). This method is well-suited to the study's aim of understanding multiple interconnections in a theoretical framework (Hair et al., 2013).

Data Analysis

The final sample size of the study is four hundred and twenty-five. Sample size should be greater than three hundred and in the present study, sample size is far more than three hundred (Joseph F. Hair, BLack, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). The

items (variables) in the data are twenty-two (total items of all four constructs). There are no null values in the data. Total twenty-three outliers are detected under multivariate analysis through Mahalanobis Distance; hence, they are removed from the dataset. A total of four hundred and two data points are considered for further analysis.

The normality of all twenty-two items is checked through skewness and kurtosis. All item values are in the acceptable range. For collinearity, all items are checked through linear regression model. Table 2 shows the P values for exogenous constructs for endogenous construct sustainability. Endogenous constructs' scores are calculated by taking average of items in respective construct.

Table 2: Regression analysis for 'Sustainability' as dependent construct

	Coefficient	**P-Value**	**R-Squared**
Constant	1.105	0.000	0.225
Embodiment_Score	0.267	0.000	
Emotions_Score	0.213	0.000	
Aesthetics_Score	0.121	0.000	

For all items, Tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF), VIF values are below ten and Tolerance values greater than 0.1 have been found. As per Wang et al. (2012), any of the two variables from items under study should not have a correlation of more than 0.85 else, there could be an issue of multicollinearity. all values are less than 0.85, hence no issue of multicollinearity. No variance of any one of all items are more than ten times of the other item. Hence, no issue of excessive variance.

The homoscedasticity assumption has been assessed using the residual plot with a Loess line. The graph is produced by regressing all variables against the dummy variable as the dependent variable. Figure 1 denotes that there is no serious issue of heteroscedasticity.

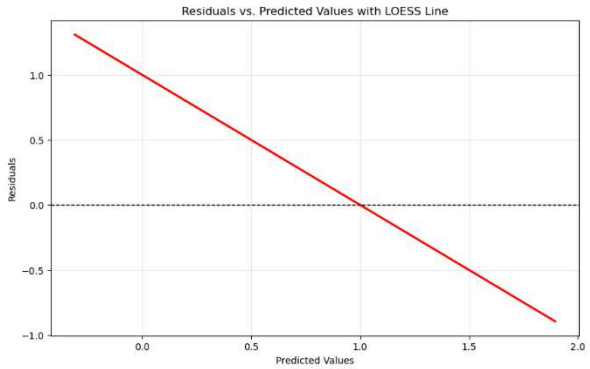


Figure 2: Residuals Vs. Fitted Values with Loess Line

For conducting SEM, model specification needs to be done. In this, data adequacy is checked through KAISER-MEYER-OLKIN (KMO) test. The result of the KMO test is '0.919', much more than '0.60', required for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) (Uddin, Zahan Lopa, & Md, 2014). Bartlett's Test is to show that at least two items in the data are correlated so that EFA can be done. Bartlett's Test Chi-Square value is '43.656' with a p-value of '0.003', hence, the research could go ahead for EFA. From the first Factor Analysis without rotation, all communalities are coming less than 0.4. Table 3 denotes variance explained by each Eigen Vector (in table 3, the first big eigenvalues are taken). First four eigenvalues are coming more than one. Hence, the number of factors in EFA is four.

Table 3: Variance Explained by Eigenvalues

Factor	**Eigenvalue**	**Variance Explained (%)**	**Cumulative Variance**
Factor 1	7.443864	33.83575	33.83575
Factor 2	3.290683	14.95765	48.7934
Factor 3	2.719721	12.36237	61.15576
Factor 4	2.27859	10.35723	71.51299
Factor 5	0.49234	2.237909	73.7509
Factor 6	0.465047	2.113849	75.86475

Table 4 shows the pattern matrix with Maximum likelihood method, rotation with varimax and with number of factors as four.

Table 4: Pattern Matrix

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
embodiment1			0.770117505	
embodiment2			0.749615287	
embodiment3			0.752473442	
embodiment4			0.785454231	
embodiment5			0.761809165	
emotion1	0.732852678			
emotion2	0.820574528			
emotion3	0.811631948			
emotion4	0.776536906			
emotion5	0.787277813			
emotion6	0.836568834			
aesthetics1				0.771464795
aesthetics2				0.814418755
aesthetics3				0.776835812
aesthetics4				0.783322867
aesthetics5				0.763156334
sustainability1		0.741758424		
sustainability2		0.812539541		
sustainability3		0.768746344		
sustainability4		0.775572762		
sustainability5		0.752644205		
sustainability6		0.772399324		

All values of items after rotation are going together well with any one factor. These factors and associated items are aligning well with the latent variables and their respective items. The Cronbach's Alpha, i.e., the reliability of constructs, is as follows: Embodiment 0.894, Emotion 0.910, Aesthetics 0.894 and Sustainability

0.916. Hence, all four constructs are having good reliability. All correlations among factors are less than 0.7; hence, as per table 5, discriminant validity is established.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix of Factors

	Factor_1	**Factor_2**	**Factor_3**	**Factor_4**
Factor_1	1	0.36744	0.331244	0.253085
Factor_2	0.36744	1	0.379458	0.213091
Factor_3	0.331244	0.379458	1	0.090879
Factor_4	0.253085	0.213091	0.090879	1

Table 6: Discriminant validity

Constructs	**Factor Correlation**	**Correlation Squared**	**AVE1**	**AVE2**	**Discriminant Validity**
Emotion & Sustainability	0.367	0.135012045	0.775	0.757	Established
Emotion & Embodiment	0.331	0.109722415	0.775	0.723	Established
Emotion & Aesthetics	0.253	0.06405182	0.775	0.741	Established
Sustainability & Embodiment	0.379	0.143988167	0.757	0.723	Established
Sustainability & Aesthetics	0.213	0.045407764	0.757	0.741	Established
Embodiment & Aesthetics	0.090	0.00825908	0.723	0.741	Established

In table 6, AVEs of constructs are greater than their respective correlations; Discriminant Validity is established. The study, there is no issue of ‘Common Method Bias’ as the biggest factor is explaining variance less than fifty. With

'Confirmatory Factor Analysis' through AMOS, the following model fit metrics are achieved: CMIN/DF is 1.109, RMR is 0.013, GFI is 0.953, NFI is 0.961 and RMSEA is 0.017. Under Structural Equation Modelling, the relation between 'Aesthetics' and 'Embodiment' is not coming significant. Hence, that relation is left out. Below, in Table 7, Regression weights are mentioned for relations under the proposed model.

Table 7: Regression Weights

Relationship	Estimate	P value
Emotion ß Aesthetics	0.332	0.000
Embodiment ß Emotion	0.314	0.000
Sustainability ß Aesthetics	0.133	0.008
Sustainability ß Emotion	0.199	0.000
Sustainability ß Embodiment	0.297	0.000

Model fit metrics are coming as following: CMIN/DF is 1.104, RMR is 0.013, GFI is 0.953, NFI is 0.961 and RMSEA is 0.016. all metrics are in acceptable range. Hence, we accept the model. Below in figure 2 is the output model from the IBM SPSS AMOS.

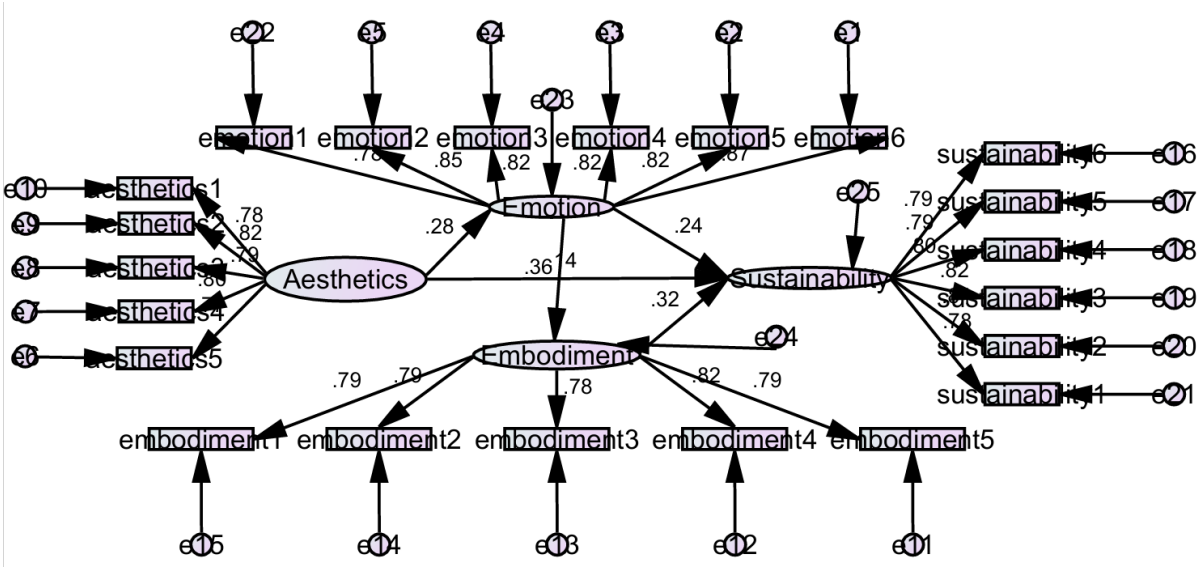


Figure 3: Final Model in the Study generated through IBM SPSS AMOS

As per the analysis hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H5, H6 and H7 are accepted and H4 is not accepted.

Discussion

The findings of this study create meaning into the experiential dimensions, especially how aesthetics, embodiment, and emotion interplay in organizational settings in the constitution of sustainability experiences. From the literature, there is evidence that aesthetics can positively influence the sustainability experience through the creation of spaces at work that may be connected to positive emotional responses and behaviours about sustainability. The use of natural materials, biophilic designs, and visual harmony in workspaces not only supports ecological goals but also stimulates employees' sensory and emotional engagement (Gonçalves, G., Sousa, C., Fernandes, M., Almeida, N., & Sousa, A., 2023). These design choices create a sense of well-being and connection to the environment, making sustainability feel more immediate and personally relevant (D'Anna & Cascini, 2016). Organizations are then able to make aesthetics palatable and visible by providing an environment in which the staff feel motivated to act towards sustainability, therefore aligning their personal actions with the organization's goals regarding sustainability. The including embodiment in sustainability brings sustainability from an abstract policy into concrete practice by embedding sustainable practices in employees' bodily performance of work. When employees engage directly with sustainability, such as through recycling, energy conservation or the use of eco-friendly materials, these actions become embodied experiences that reinforce cognitive and emotional commitment (Küper, 2016; Bentz et al., 2022). Embodied practices make sustainability a lived experience that integrates into daily routines, promoting long-term engagement and creating a culture where sustainability is second nature.

According to the extant literature, emotions directly or indirectly mediate sustainability experience and maintain sustainability in the workplace. Positive emotions (e.g., pride, fulfilment, and joy) associated with these situations can endorse sustainable action and greater willingness of employees to facilitate and

preserve such behaviours (Rodriguez-Pomeda et al., 2018; Kim & Williams, 2022). On the other hand, feelings of guilt or anxiety may serve as a catalyst for one to act in a corrective manner in line with the goals of sustainability. According to Rees, Klug & Banberg (2015) and Schneider et al. (2017), such aesthetics, embodiment, and emotion interrelate in that they do not work in isolation but interact with one another to provide a holistic experience of sustainability. Beautiful places can trigger positive feelings like awe and inspiration, which further increase embodied actions like engagement and participation in sustainability interventions (Thüring & Mahlke, 2007). Thus, this mediating role of emotions indicates that whereas aesthetics is essentially the independent variable informing embodied responses, emotions can further intensify and/or reconfigure these responses through sustained engagement with the intent of these practices—ultimately leading to a deeper and meaningful connection with sustainability practices at large (Barton & Le, 2023). Workers who work in an aesthetically rich workplace with touches of nature will feel comparatively relaxed and emotionally attached, fostering open and engaged body language conducive to teamwork and sustainable practices (Kirillova et al., 2018).

The resulting study demonstrates a useful conceptual model showing how aesthetics embodies an emergent relationship with emotions and sustainability that can be organized. This model suggests that these dimensions are not mutually exclusive but rather act together in a mutually beneficial way to influence how people experience sustainability in the workplace. The first sensory stimulus is aesthetics, creating an environment that directly affects both emotional and embodied responses. For instance, a workspace designed with biophilic elements will encourage positive feelings such as calm and inspiration that then inform and affect how employees interact on a physical level with their environment. This direct link between someone's aesthetic engagement and emotions is crucial because positive emotional states are known to increase satisfaction in the workplace and promote sustainable actions (Menninghaus et al., 2019; Kirillova et al., 2018). Embodiment is influenced by emotions, serving as the physical manifestation of how sustainability is enacted. When employees interact with aesthetically appealing environments, their bodily responses, such

as open postures or active participation, are shaped by their emotional state. For instance, emotions of joy or pride derived from aesthetically pleasing settings can lead to more enthusiastic engagement with sustainability initiatives (Niedenthal, 2007; Barton & Le, 2023). This interplay shows that emotions mediate this relationship by altering the intensity and nature of the embodied response (Thüring & Mahlke, 2007; Fingerhut & Prinz, 2020). Sustainability is influenced by how aesthetics, embodiment, and emotions work together. When these factors align, they create an environment where sustainable practices become more natural and meaningful. This idea suggests that sustainability isn't just about policies or goals—it's something people can truly experience through their senses, actions, and feelings. By understanding this connection, organizations can create spaces that inspire positive emotions, encouraging employees to actively engage in sustainability and stick with it over the long term (Bjerke et al., 2007; Küper, 2016).

Conclusion

The present research highlights the importance of understanding the experiential dimensions and their impact on sustainability in organizational environments with special reference to HEIs. The impact of aesthetics, embodiment and emotion provides a framework that extends beyond traditional metrics of sustainability, offering a more novel approach to how sustainability is perceived and practiced within the workplace of any organization. The present study highlights that while quantitative data on sustainability, for say, energy efficiency and waste reduction remain vital, they often overlook the personal, sensory or emotional factors that could contribute to engagement with sustainability. The proposed Model, that is, 'Experiential Dimensions Model for Sustainability' (EDL), integrates the above-mentioned elements and illustrates how they collectively can impact sustainability within organizations. The model, under study, result emphasizes that for sustainability initiatives to be successful or more impressive, there must be experiences that resonate within individuals on emotional, sensory, and embodied levels. By implementing and fostering a positive emotional climate,

organizations can create environment that not only support sustainability in practice but embed it in their culture.

Implications of the study

Through the introduction of the Experiential Dimensions Model for Sustainability (EDL), which incorporates emotions, embodiment and aesthetics as fundamental experiential elements impacting sustainable behaviour in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs), the study advances grounded theory. This study suggests that workers' emotional and sensory interactions with their surroundings have a significant impact on how they internalize sustainability, in contrast to traditional sustainability frameworks that only consider metrics like waste reduction or carbon usage. For example, an employee who works in an office with natural light and visual stimulation may be more likely to support environmental initiatives because they feel more appreciated and connected there.

The present research also provides strategic insights for university administrators and HR leaders from a managerial standpoint. It emphasises how important it is to include green design and sensory elements in workspaces, like indoor plants, recycled materials and energy-efficient lighting, as these not only improve the aesthetics of the space but also have an impact on employees' emotional health and pro-sustainability sentiments (Kirillova et al., 2018; Ronda & De Gràcia, 2022). Administers should also acknowledge the role of emotions in sustainable engagement. Establishing "Green Corners" for informal gatherings or relaxation throughout campus, for instance, with eco-friendly décor and inspirational sustainability sayings, can improve spirits and foster favourable emotional connections with sustainable ideals (Thompson et al., 2023). Sustainable initiatives should be able to foster pride, joy or feeling of achievement through recognition programs in universities (Rodriguez-Pomeda et al., 2018).
The practical implications also include how HEIs can make sustainability a practice as well as a policy. Putting together "Green Thursdays" where employees participate in hands-on, environmentally friendly activities, such as energy-saving

challenges, zero-waste cooking demonstrations, or vertical gardening, makes sustainability a reality. Like this, recognising staff members' efforts with "Green Employee of the Month" awards or holding storytelling sessions about individual sustainability journeys can deepen emotional ties and integrate sustainability into the culture of the company.

Limitations of the study

One of the major limitations of the study is limit of population under study is limited to Rajasthan state of India. Proposed model could be generalized if population of other states are also taken. There is considerable scope for future research from the present study. One is to do longitudinal study that could be valuable, offering insights into how the relationships between aesthetics, embodiment, emotions, and sustainability get affected over time. This would capture the long-term effects of emotional and embodied engagement on the adoption and reinforcement of sustainable practices. Future studies could also broaden their scope by exploring additional mediators and moderators, such as ‘organizational culture’, ‘employee motivation’ or ‘leadership involvement’. These or other variables could reveal more complex relationships to show how aesthetics and embodiment contribute to sustainability, expanding the proposed model's explanatory power. Apart from this, by examining the other factors like cross-cultural perspectives could find out whether the findings could be generalized or require adaptation based on cultural differences.

Since this study only looks at HEIs in Rajasthan, India, one significant drawback is its geographic focus. The findings' applicability to other institutional or cultural contexts may be limited by this regional focus. Additionally, because convenience sampling may not fully represent the diversity of HEI employees, bias may be introduced. Additionally, the cross-sectional design makes it more difficult to record long-term emotional or behavioural changes. To increase the model's applicability and robustness, future research should take a longitudinal, multi-regional approach and investigate other factors like organisational culture or leadership styles.

Future Implications of the study

This model creates several opportunities for further study and application. First, long-term research could investigate how aesthetic and affective shifts in HEI settings affect sustainability practices over time. Second, cross-cultural validation of the model may provide insight into how various institutional cultures or geographical areas perceive and interact with experiential sustainability. Thirdly, moderating variables like leadership style, digital workplaces, or generational disparities in sustainability perception could be added to the model. Finally, the model could be used by institutions to create HR interventions like workshops on emotionally intelligent leadership, green mindfulness training, or sustainability-focused induction, opening the door for a comprehensive green transformation in higher education.

Statements and Declarations

Competing Interests: The authors declare no competing interests.

Funding: No funding support.

Author Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the study design, data collection, analysis, and manuscript.

Data Availability: Yes, The datasets generated and/or analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality concerns related to the participants but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Ethics approval & accordance:

The protocol for this study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee, Poornima University, Jaipur (Approval No. PU/HR/2026-27/130), as the lead

reviewing body for this multi-institutional study, following the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. The remaining institutions that participated gave permission for data collection before implementation.

Ethics Approval: “The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board/Ethics Committee of Poornima University, Jaipur, under protocol/reference number [PU/HR/2026-27/130], dated [28 September 2026].”

Ethical Accordance: “The study was conducted in accordance with the institutional research ethics guidelines and applicable ethical principles prescribed by Poornima University, Jaipur.”

Consent to Participate: “Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in the study. Participation was voluntary, and the data were anonymized and treated confidentially.**”**

Consent for Publication: Not Applicable

AI Tools : Generative AI-assisted tools were used solely to improve the language, grammar, and readability of the manuscript. All outputs were reviewed and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the final content.

Clinical trial number: not applicable

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