



ORIGINAL ARTICLE | Received: 04<sup>th</sup> February, 2026 | Revised: 18<sup>th</sup> March, 2026 | Accepted: 02<sup>nd</sup> April, 2026 | Published: 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2026

# LGBTQ+ Inclusion and ESG Performance in Indian Startups: A Mixed-Method Analysis of Sustainability Outcomes

Kashish Dua<sup>1</sup>, Satyam Ranjan<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices have become increasingly important for organizational sustainability and responsible entrepreneurship. While diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are widely recognized as drivers of innovation and employee wellbeing, limited research has examined the relationship between LGBTQ+ inclusion and ESG performance within startup ecosystems, particularly in emerging economies such as India. This study investigates the role of LGBTQ+ inclusion in enhancing ESG and sustainability performance among Indian startups using a mixed-methods research design. Quantitative data were collected through surveys administered to startup employees, founders, HR managers, and ESG officers, while qualitative insights were obtained through semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that LGBTQ+ inclusive workplace practices positively influence employee wellbeing, organizational commitment, innovation capability, ethical governance, and sustainability outcomes. Regression analysis further demonstrates a significant positive relationship between LGBTQ+ inclusion and ESG performance indicators. Qualitative findings highlight the importance of inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and diversity-oriented organizational culture in strengthening sustainable entrepreneurial development. The study contributes to ESG and sustainability literature by extending the discussion of workplace inclusion to startup ecosystems in developing economies. The findings also provide practical implications for entrepreneurs, policymakers, investors, and organizational leaders seeking to improve sustainability performance through inclusive and socially responsible workplace practices.



**Keywords:** LGBTQ+ inclusion; ESG performance; sustainability; Indian startups; diversity and inclusion; sustainable entrepreneurship; inclusive leadership.



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## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

The importance of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) practices has increased significantly in the contemporary world of businesses as companies aim at being sustainable and socially responsible while maximizing profits. The importance of ESG business models for the competitiveness, attractiveness to investments, and organizational reputation of companies has been increasingly recognized by startups over the last few years. In addition, the role of sustainability practices has increased as an important determinant of innovation, stakeholders' trust, and business resilience within entrepreneurial ecosystems (Torelli, 2021; Jung et al., 2025).

Among all three aspects of ESG, social sustainability has gained much importance, especially when it comes to DEI. It became widely understood that organizational inclusion is an important resource that can help enhance creativity, engagement, and performance in the organization (Cho et al., 2021). In this way, LGBTQ+ inclusivity has emerged as a critical benchmark of social sustainability and ethical management in firms. Academic literature highlights the

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Scholar, Jaypee Institute of Information Technology, Noida. [2404130004@mail.jiit.ac.in](mailto:2404130004@mail.jiit.ac.in), 0009-0007-2863-3925

<sup>2</sup> Independent Researcher, India, <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1327-8422>

benefits of LGBTQ+ inclusivity to employee well-being, organizational commitment, and firm performance (Pichler et al., 2018; Webster et al., 2018). In addition, being an inclusive firm contributes to a more socially responsible image and innovative image, enhancing ESG performance (Demiralay et al., 2025).

### **Indian Startup Ecosystem Context**

In matters concerning technological development, innovation, digitalization, and entrepreneurship, India has emerged as one of the rapidly growing startup environments. In addition to that, ESG practice has also been rising in India due to increasing investor demands and compulsory sustainability reporting for corporations. DEI policy implementation is becoming more relevant within Indian organizations due to increasing awareness about workplace equality and LGBTQ rights.

Despite all these advancements, there exist certain socio-cultural barriers, and workplace discrimination continues to prevail in Indian organizations against LGBTQ community members. The factors that have contributed to such an occurrence are a conservative social structure, lack of awareness, and inadequate inclusion policies for the LGBTQ community. Large corporations have taken steps in implementing inclusive policies at their organizational level, but there have not been many actions undertaken in addressing LGBTQ+ inclusion in India's startup ecosystems and sustainability research.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite many developments in the area of research on ESG and sustainability, there has been very little focus on the relationship between inclusion and diversity of the LGBTQ community and sustainability performance in entrepreneurial ventures. The existing literature has focused mainly on environmental performance, strong corporate governance, and gender diversity within organizations but there is a lack of research on issues related to LGBTQ communities.

### **Research Objectives**

The main purpose of conducting this research study is to explore the significance of LGBTQ+ inclusiveness in improving the ESG performance of startups in India. More specifically, this study aims to explore the contribution of inclusiveness practices toward sustainable performance, employee wellness, and ESG performance within Indian startups. The following research objectives have been formulated to achieve this research purpose:

**RO1:** To assess the extent and type of LGBTQ+ inclusion practices used in startups in India.

**RO2:** To explore the impact of LGBTQ+ inclusion on the performance of Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) dimensions of startups in India.

**RO3:** To determine the impact of inclusivity in the workplace on sustainability, innovation, and performance.

**RO4:** To identify the barriers to implementing LGBTQ+ inclusivity practices within startups.

### **Research Questions**

This research aims at examining the correlation between inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals and sustainability performance among startups in India. Considering the objectives of this study, the research will be conducted based on the below mentioned research questions.

**RQ1:** What is the effect of LGBTQ+ inclusion on ESG performance in startups?

**RQ2:** What is the relationship between inclusive practices and organizational sustainability outcomes?

**RQ3:** What are some barriers faced in implementing LGBTQ+ inclusive ESG practices in organizations?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **ESG and Sustainability in Startups**

In the context of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), the concept has progressed from being voluntary activities of companies towards becoming a framework for assessing sustainability, ethical management, and

resilience in an organization. While at first the focus of ESG was limited to big multinational firms and institutional investors' portfolio decisions, ESG has gradually become applicable in the startup ecosystem owing to the need for accountability and sustainable corporate activities (Paolone & Bitbol-Saba, 2025). The increasing global interest in issues of climate change, social justice, ethical management, and innovation has expedited the incorporation of ESG-driven corporate models in the startup sector (Kumar et al., 2025).

In relation to startups, sustainability is linked with innovation, market legitimacy, and competitiveness. For this reason, sustainable startups have been urged to include environmental considerations, inclusivity in management, and social sustainability in their strategy in an effort to enhance legitimacy and appeal to socially-minded investors (Jung et al., 2025). In addition, Shivani et al. (2025) revealed that green entrepreneurial orientation has an effect on the sustainable performance of firms since the combination of innovation and socially-responsible business operations is more beneficial. Consistently, Zheng et al. (2022) concluded that green innovation has an impact on ESG rating and financial performance. The evolution of ESG frameworks has also influenced startup sustainability measurement systems. The use of the ESG criteria to measure the effectiveness of environmental performance, corporate governance, well-being of workers, diversity, and social projects has become widespread in modern companies (Xuan et al., 2025). Environmental indicators may include metrics related to the adoption of carbon-reducing strategies, development of green innovations, and efficient resource use, whereas governance indicators focus on such aspects as ethical leadership, compliance with regulations, and transparency in operations. Meanwhile, the social dimension is often measured through indicators assessing diversity, equity, inclusion, worker wellbeing, and equal treatment in the workplace (Cho et al., 2021).

To put it simply, inclusive cultures started playing an increasingly important role as the factors determining sustainability and success in the business environment. Another equally important aspect is sustainable innovation since, according to Yang and Chi (2023), both green innovations and sustainability transformations significantly contribute to the resilience and environmental performance of companies in the long run. Meanwhile, Choudhary et al. (2025) suggest that innovation strategies based on the concept of sustainability contribute to business adaptability and resilience.

**Table 1.** Key ESG Dimensions and Startup Sustainability Indicators

ESG Dimension	Startup Indicator	Sustainability Impact
<b>Environmental</b>	Green innovation, carbon reduction	Environmental sustainability
<b>Social</b>	Diversity, inclusion, employee wellbeing	Social sustainability
<b>Governance</b>	Ethical leadership, transparency	Organizational accountability
<b>Innovation</b>	Sustainable product development	Long-term competitiveness
<b>Workplace Equality</b>	LGBTQ+ inclusive policies	Employee engagement and retention

The key ESG dimensions and startup sustainability indicators are presented in Table 1. The table highlights the role of environmental responsibility, social inclusion, ethical governance, innovation, and LGBTQ+ inclusive workplace practices in promoting sustainable startup development.

### **LGBTQ+ Inclusion in Organizations**

Inclusiveness of LGBTQ+ employees is among the most critical topics in terms of workplace diversity and sustainable organizations. Contemporary organizations know the value of inclusiveness since an organization which includes its

employees can boost their health and psychological safety. Although diverse workplaces were thought to be associated with parameters like gender and ethnicity, contemporary organizations have taken into consideration parameters such as sexual orientation and gender identity when talking about social inclusion ([Díaz-Leyva & Cascón-Pereira, 2026](#)). Consequently, LGBTQ+ inclusiveness has become an important part of socially responsible organizations.

A socially inclusive organizational culture is characterized by respect towards employees regardless of their identities. Researchers claim that employees of organizations with socially inclusive cultures are more engaged and cooperative and innovative as well ([Zeng et al., 2024](#)). According to [Webster et al. \(2018\)](#), supportive workplace environments can lead to better psychological well-being and organizational commitment of LGBTQ+ workers. Besides, the findings of research conducted by Pichler et al. (2018) demonstrate that supportive organizational policies towards LGBT employees positively affect organizational performance because of the satisfaction and trust of employees.

Furthermore, the LGBTQ+ equality policy framework has been extended across the globe as a result of adopting anti-discrimination, diversity hiring, gender neutrality policy, and health services initiatives. According to [Chindasombatcharoen et al. \(2025\)](#), organizations that have adopted LGBTQ+ inclusiveness policies have higher ethics governance and improved business reputation. Furthermore, according to [Hossain et al. \(2026\)](#), these practices promote perceptions of ethical leadership in organizations. Employee satisfaction and employee engagement have continued to be factors linked to workplace inclusivity practices. Workplace inclusiveness leads to increased retention of talent in organizations, reduced work stress, and increased employee commitment because of favorable working environments ([Clasen & Conrad, 2026](#)).

However, socio-cultural factors, identity concealment, and workplace discrimination have continued to affect the lives of LGBTQ+ individuals in many emerging economies like India. As such, the inclusion of LGBTQ+ in start-up organizations is crucial for the accomplishment of sustainable development goals.

### **Diversity and Organizational Performance**

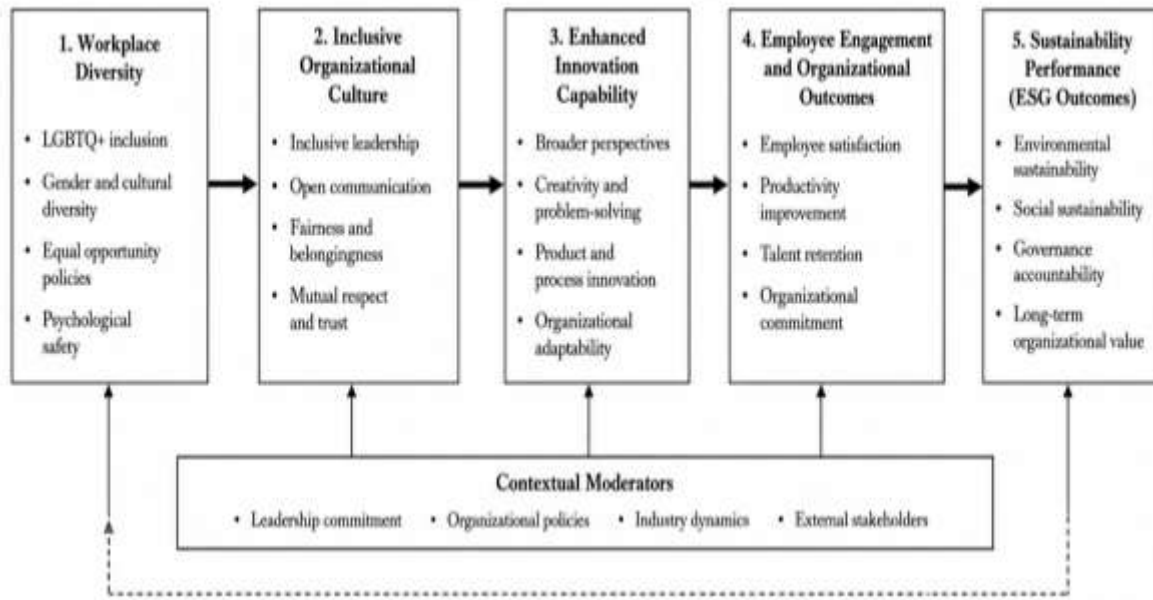
On the other hand, diversity and inclusion are recognized as strategic organizational resources that may be utilized to promote innovation, creativity, and organizational effectiveness. Organizational diversity and inclusiveness lead to enhanced levels of problem-solving capabilities and innovation success rates ([Li et al., 2025](#)). The organizational environment characterized by diversity encourages creativity, collaborative learning, and organizational adaptability, thus promoting sustainable innovations.

The topic of innovation becomes particularly relevant when discussing startups. It is obvious that startups depend to a large extent on creativity and organizational adaptability. As noted by [Foster et al. \(2025\)](#), investment in LGBTQ+ diversity had a positive influence on organizational resilience and corporate relative performance during times of economic turbulence. Similarly, based on the research carried out by [Demiralay et al. \(2025\)](#), a relationship was established between LGBTQ+ workplace inclusiveness and organizational environmental performance, indicating that socially inclusive organizations are inclined to implement sustainable innovations.

In addition to that, diversity is instrumental when it comes to encouraging creativity and effective teamwork. A diversified workplace setting is able to enhance communication, knowledge sharing, and involvement of employees in decision-making processes ([Cho et al., 2021](#)).

Diversity is essential for improving talent retention and employer branding. Companies with a diversified image are more likely to attract skilled talents while enhancing their image at the same time ([Pinheiro et al., 2024](#)). Diverse employer branding is critical in today's world, especially for startups recruiting talent globally.

The conceptual framework shows how there is an interlinkage among workplace diversity, organizational inclusivity, innovation, employee engagement, and sustainable performance in startups. This conceptual framework highlights how the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people, together with other diversity practices, enhances creativity and collaboration, resulting in organizational commitment and sustainable performance with an ESG focus.



**Figure 1.** Relationship Between Diversity, Innovation, and Sustainability Performance

**Source:** Adapted from [Cho et al. \(2021\)](#); [Li et al. \(2025\)](#); [Demiralay et al. \(2025\)](#); [Zeng et al. \(2024\)](#); [Foster et al. \(2025\)](#).

The proposed framework demonstrates how workplace diversity and inclusive organizational culture contribute to innovation, employee engagement, and sustainability performance. Figure 1 further highlights that contextual factors such as leadership commitment and organizational policies strengthen these relationships.

**LGBTQ+ Inclusion and ESG Performance**

LGBTQ+ inclusion and ESG performance have been gaining more academic interest over the past few years. Under the ESG model, LGBTQ+ inclusion is closely related to the social component, focusing on employee welfare, equality, diversity, and ethical labor practices. Organizations which have greater degrees of LGBTQ inclusion are regarded as socially and ethically responsible organizations, hence increasing stakeholder confidence and organizational legitimacy ([Federo & Aguilera, 2025](#)).

Another vital aspect to consider here is that of corporate governance, which is one of the other key factors that contribute to work equality and inclusiveness. The organizations with governance practices based on inclusiveness are linked with ethical governance, transparency, accountability, and organizational policies which are fair ([Korngold, 2023b](#)). As suggested by the research conducted by [Kotiloglu \(2023\)](#), LGBT inclusion acts as a moderator for organizational performance and CSR.

The ethical business practices in connection with LGBTQ+ inclusion have an increasingly important impact on investor attitudes and corporate reputations. The investors are currently integrating the aspects of diversity and inclusion into their ESG assessments and socially responsible investments ([Birindelli et al., 2026](#)). The companies that cultivate an inclusive organizational culture can be regarded as low-risk organizations with a socially responsible approach to business and innovation capabilities for sustainable growth.

Although there has been an increasing amount of interest in the topic on a global scale, there has not been much research done on how including members of the LGBTQ community influences the ESG performance of startups and developing countries.

### Literature Gap

While there have been numerous advancements in the field of ESG, sustainability, and diversity, a number of important research gaps continue to exist. Firstly, the current body of research lacks mixed-method research studies that explore the connection between LGBTQ+ inclusion and ESG performance. Most of the earlier studies have used quantitative data obtained from corporations while neglecting qualitative information regarding workplaces.

Second, current research primarily focuses on multinational enterprises but pays relatively little attention to startups and entrepreneurs. Since the organization of every startup varies due to its own culture, there can be significant implications of such factors on the sustainability performance and inclusiveness.

Third, empirical research related to India is relatively rare, despite the fact that the country keeps developing when it comes to startups and their ESG initiatives. Empirical studies concerning Indian enterprises generally concentrate on topics of environmental sustainability, ESG, and sustainable investments without addressing LGBTQ+ concerns ([Gidage, 2025](#)).

Finally, a clear link between LGBTQ+ inclusiveness and ESG performance remains unestablished in sustainability and entrepreneurship studies. In this regard, the present study aims to address the gaps revealed above through the application of a mixed-methodology approach.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research paper uses the lens of multiple theories to elaborate on the ways in which LGBTQ inclusion leads to ESG performance and sustainability among Indian startups. Through the application of Stakeholder Theory, Resource-Based View (RBV) and Social Identity Theory, a full perspective can be offered for understanding the connection between inclusiveness, wellbeing of employees, ability to innovate, and overall sustainability performance.

#### Stakeholder Theory

According to Stakeholder Theory, an organization succeeds sustainably when it creates value not only for its shareholders but also for other stakeholder groups comprising employees, customers, investors, communities, and society in general ([Torelli, 2021](#)). In ESG-related business environments, an increasing expectation is placed on organizational ethics, equality, and social sustainability to foster stakeholder relationships.

Concerning LGBTQ+ inclusion programs, Stakeholder Theory explains the role of inclusion within organizations in the process of creating stakeholder value through improving the well-being of employees, corporate reputation, and social responsibility programs' effectiveness. Diversity and inclusivity within organizations are perceived as morally responsible and socially progressive, increasing investor and stakeholder trust in such firms ([Federo & Aguilera, 2025](#)). Moreover, diversity and inclusion lead to improved employee well-being, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, making organizations more productive and sustainable.

Finally, current research reveals that stakeholders assess organizations based on social sustainability indicators, among others. For example, equality, inclusivity, and good governance are the main indicators of stakeholder assessment ([Xuan et al., 2025](#)). Therefore, it is evident that LGBTQ+ inclusion may be viewed as a component of ESG stakeholder strategy.

### Resource-Based View (RBV)

In particular, RBV posits that organizations gain competitive advantage through building up valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable capabilities. Within current business environments, human capital, organizational culture, and diversity become increasingly viewed as important strategic intangibles that can lead to innovation and competitiveness ([Li et al., 2025](#)).

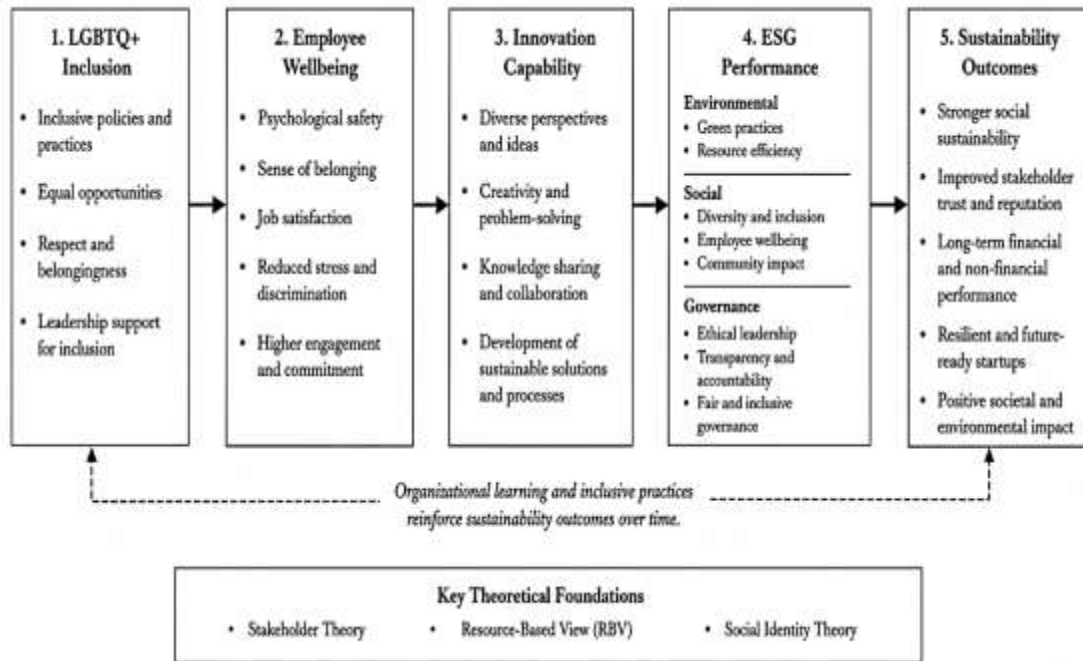
From an RBV standpoint, workforce diversity and LGBTQ+ inclusivity are examples of strategic organizational resources that help promote innovation capability by providing the foundation for creative thinking, knowledge sharing, flexibility, and adaptive capacity. Diverse groups can offer a variety of perspectives, extensive experiences, and high problem-solving skills that make it possible to come up with innovations such as products and solutions ([Cho et al., 2021](#)). Additionally, innovation plays a key role in ensuring the survival of startup companies, which makes inclusiveness an element contributing to organizational effectiveness within such environments. In addition to this, inclusiveness within firms regarding the LGBTQ+ community leads to the availability of skilled staff members as well as a good reputation, which will attract other talented individuals who may join the firm ([Pinheiro et al., 2024](#)). According to [Foster et al. \(2025\)](#), there is evidence showing that LGBTQ+ diversity is associated with organizational performance during difficult periods.

### Social Identity Theory

The theory of social identity helps to identify how an individual derives an identity or a sense of belongingness based on his or her membership to a certain group or organization. Employees in workplaces who experience acceptance, respect, and value tend to be more engaged and collaborative due to increased organizational commitment ([Webster et al., 2018](#)).

In case of LGBTQ+ organizations, the culture of an organization is central in helping the employees experience identity and psychological wellbeing. The culture of equality, respect, and non-discrimination helps create an environment in which an employee feels psychologically and socially comfortable. This not only leads to an improvement in the mood, engagement, and productivity of the employees but also decreases stress and identity concealment ([Clasen & Conrad, 2026](#)).

Besides that, the inclusion of individuals in organizations helps create an open and cooperative work environment for innovation and sustainability within organizations. According to [Zeng et al. \(2024\)](#), the inclusion of individuals in organizations has led to positive outcomes in sustainable development because of increased employee engagement and organizational commitment. Social identity theory can, therefore, be used to explain the relationship between LGBTQ+ inclusion and employee engagement and ESG sustainability performance.



**Figure 2.** Proposed Theoretical Framework Linking LGBTQ+ Inclusion to ESG and Sustainability Performance

*Source:* Adapted from [Li et al. \(2025\)](#); [Webster et al. \(2018\)](#); [Federo and Aguilera \(2025\)](#); [Zeng et al. \(2024\)](#); [Foster et al. \(2025\)](#).

This model provides an overview of the relationship between LGBTQ+ inclusiveness and sustainability performance in the startup ecosystem at a theoretical level. Figure 2 illustrates how inclusive workplace practices contribute to innovation, employee engagement, and long-term ESG outcomes. The reason behind this is that there is a direct relationship between inclusion in the workplace and good wellbeing, safety, and productivity among employees, which results in innovation potential, ESG performance, and sustainability performance. Both diversity and inclusion have been considered very strategic elements for organizations in this framework.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**Research Philosophy and Design**

The current study makes use of the pragmatism research philosophy to analyze the association between LGBTQ+ inclusion and ESG sustainability performance among start-ups operating in India. The appropriateness of pragmatism in relation to this research is justified due to its ability to allow the combination of both quantitative and qualitative techniques, thus leading to an adequate investigation of a socially and organizationally complicated issue. According to the chosen research philosophy, emphasis should be placed on practical actions and approaches to problem solving, as well as on flexible use of diverse evidences. Workplace inclusion, ESG performance, and sustainability represent both organizational factors and human experience elements.

The selected research technique is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, making it an explanatory design. Quantitative research is applied in order to conduct a statistical analysis of the relationships existing between LGBTQ+ inclusion and ESG sustainability indicators; the qualitative part of the research is aimed at examining experiences of employees and the general atmosphere of start-ups in terms of LGBTQ+ inclusion.

### Quantitative Method

Quantitative research design in this phase will involve the use of a survey questionnaire that will be administered among employees, entrepreneurs, HR and ESG personnel within selected Indian startups. The survey is expected to capture perceptions regarding LGBTQ+ inclusion, equality in the workplace, wellbeing of the employees, innovation capability, and organizational practices regarding environmental, social, and governance performance. Quantitative survey method is ideal since it facilitates the collection of reliable data that is statistically analyzable due to its standardized nature.

The questionnaire will mainly involve items in the form of statements that will be rated based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” The survey will adopt statements adapted from existing literature focusing on inclusion at the workplace, sustainability practices, and ESG performance ([Cho et al., 2021](#); [Webster et al., 2018](#)). Social sustainability practices, diversity, ethical governance, employee engagement, innovation capability, and organizational wellbeing will be among the ESG factors included in the survey.

Targeted startups are those involved in sectors of technology, sustainability, fintech, healthcare, and innovation within major startup ecosystems in India. An appropriate sample size will be 250–300 respondents.

### Qualitative Method

Semi-structured interviews are chosen as tools for conducting the qualitative part of the study. It is deemed appropriate because the process of conducting a semi-structured interview is flexible, encourages greater involvement of participants, and allows delving into issues that may arise as a result of working experiences associated with LGBTQ+ identities and inclusion.

In relation to the qualitative part of the study, founders, human resource managers, ESG officers, and LGBTQ+ people in selected firms will be invited to participate in interviews. Interview questions will encompass organizational culture, diversity management, wellbeing in the workplace, issues associated with inclusion, leader attitudes toward inclusion, sustainability, and ESG issues.

Information gathered during the qualitative phase will be analyzed through thematic analysis. It includes coding of answers received from interviewees and identification of common patterns in answers. Thematic analysis helps gain access to more complex experiences that might have remained unseen through quantitative data analysis ([Clasen & Conrad, 2026](#)). The study includes several important quantitative variables related to LGBTQ+ inclusiveness and organizational sustainability, all measured using a 5-point Likert Scale for consistency and accuracy. Table 2 further highlights that the measurement indicators were adopted from previously validated studies, ensuring the reliability and validity of the research constructs.

**Table 2.** Quantitative Variables and Measurement Indicators

Variable	Measurement Scale	Source
<b>LGBTQ+ Inclusion</b>	5-point Likert Scale	<a href="#">Webster et al. (2018)</a>
<b>Employee Wellbeing</b>	5-point Likert Scale	<a href="#">Zeng et al. (2024)</a>
<b>Innovation Capability</b>	5-point Likert Scale	<a href="#">Li et al. (2025)</a>
<b>ESG Performance</b>	5-point Likert Scale	<a href="#">Cho et al. (2021)</a>
<b>Sustainability Outcomes</b>	5-point Likert Scale	<a href="#">Demiralay et al. (2025)</a>

### Sampling Technique

The research methodology incorporates purposive sampling whereby participants knowledgeable and experienced in LGBTQ+ inclusion, ESG principles, and startups' sustainability are selected. Purposive sampling is relevant in this research since it provides an opportunity to sample individuals involved in organization management and initiatives geared towards diversity and workplace inclusiveness.

Moreover, stratification sampling techniques will be applied to obtain diverse startups by sector, organizational size, and their orientation in terms of sustainability. Stratification will involve classification of startups into various sectors such as financial technology (fintech), sustainable technology, healthcare, and other emerging technological innovations.

Geographically, the study focuses on the leading startup regions of India like Bangalore, Mumbai, New Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Pune. All these regions have high levels of entrepreneurship where there is active adoption of the ESG concept.

The flowchart above explains the order of mixed-methods explanatory research design used for this research. Figure 3 shows how both quantitative and qualitative research stages are integrated in the process starting from conducting surveys and analyzing data, followed by conducting interviews and performing thematic analysis. This approach helps to understand the connection between the studied phenomena using quantitative and qualitative results.

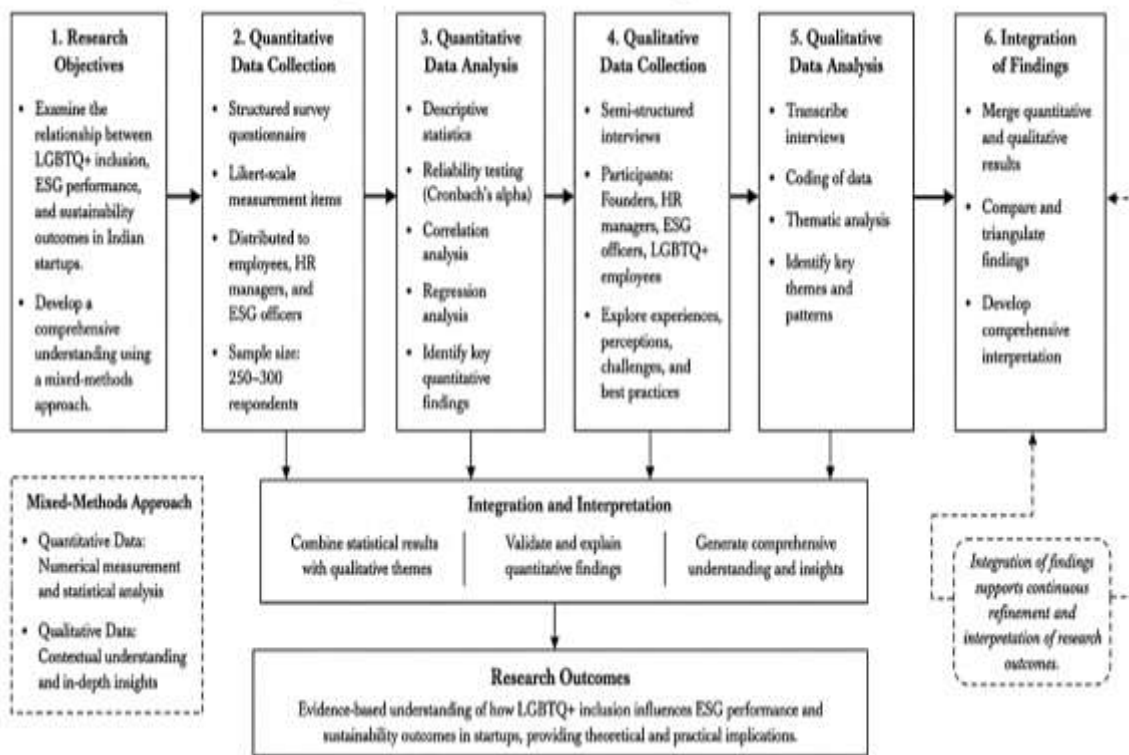


Figure 3. Mixed-Methods Research Design Flowchart

Source: Adapted from Shivani et al. (2025); Webster et al. (2018); Zeng et al. (2024); Li et al. (2025).

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The statistical analysis of the quantitatively generated data from the survey questionnaire will include techniques such as descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and reliability testing. In the correlation analysis, the relationship between inclusion and ESG will be tested. For the regression analysis, the extent of prediction of sustainability through inclusion practices will be identified. For the reliability analysis, techniques such as Cronbach's Alpha test will be used.

In the qualitative section, thematic analysis will be conducted on the data gathered from interviews. Thematic analysis is an approach that involves coding, theme generation and interpretation of findings as well as categorization of organizational experiences with regard to inclusion and sustainability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The issue of ethics becomes highly important due to the sensitive nature of LGBTQ+ and workplace issues. The research ensures that confidentiality and anonymity are maintained throughout the process. It makes sure that all personal data and information related to the organization remain anonymous and confidential. Participants are told that their participation is only for academic purposes and that their personal information remains confidential.

Since the topic of LGBTQ+ issues within particular workplaces is highly socially sensitive, extra caution is taken regarding the safety of participants and their mental well-being in this research. Discriminatory language is avoided, and participants are treated courteously. Informed consent from all the respondents is taken prior to conducting the research.

It should be noted that participants have the freedom to withdraw themselves from the research at any time and that there would be no penalty for doing so. Furthermore, the study maintains high standards of academic ethics concerning data handling and result reporting.

## **RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

### **Demographic Analysis**

In total, 286 participants were recruited in this research from the selected start-ups which are located in one of the important entrepreneurial hotspots in India including Bengaluru, Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Chennai, and Pune. These participants included founders, human resource officers, ESG officers, as well as employees working in technological, sustainability, fintech, healthcare, and innovation industries. The demographic information in Table 3 revealed that there are various respondents who participated in this research.

Most of the respondents came from firms operating for three to seven years. From the results of the study, it can be said that most of the respondents have been working in firms that have diversity, equality, and inclusion policies although the degree of LGBTQ+ inclusion policy varies among the firms. These results further reinforce findings of earlier studies indicating that there is an increasing trend toward institutionalizing diversity in emerging start-up settings ([Białas & Wróbel, 2025](#)).

### **Quantitative Findings**

The quantitative analysis was conducted to examine the connection between LGBTQ+ inclusion practices and ESG and sustainability performance within Indian startups. Based on the correlation analysis, there is a significant positive correlation between the levels of LGBTQ+ inclusion and ESG performance metrics, meaning that organizations with more inclusive work environment are expected to have better sustainability practices, employee engagement, and governance structures.

The results have proven that LGBTQ+ inclusion has positive effects on innovation capability, psychological health, and employee retention of firms. Similar conclusions can be made based on previous researches which state that organizational diversity and inclusion lead to increased creativity, collaboration, and social responsibility performance

outcomes (Li et al., 2025; Demiralay et al., 2025). Furthermore, organizations with high levels of inclusion were also observed to perform better in social sustainability dimensions and stakeholders' trust level.

**Table 3.** Demographic Profile of Respondents

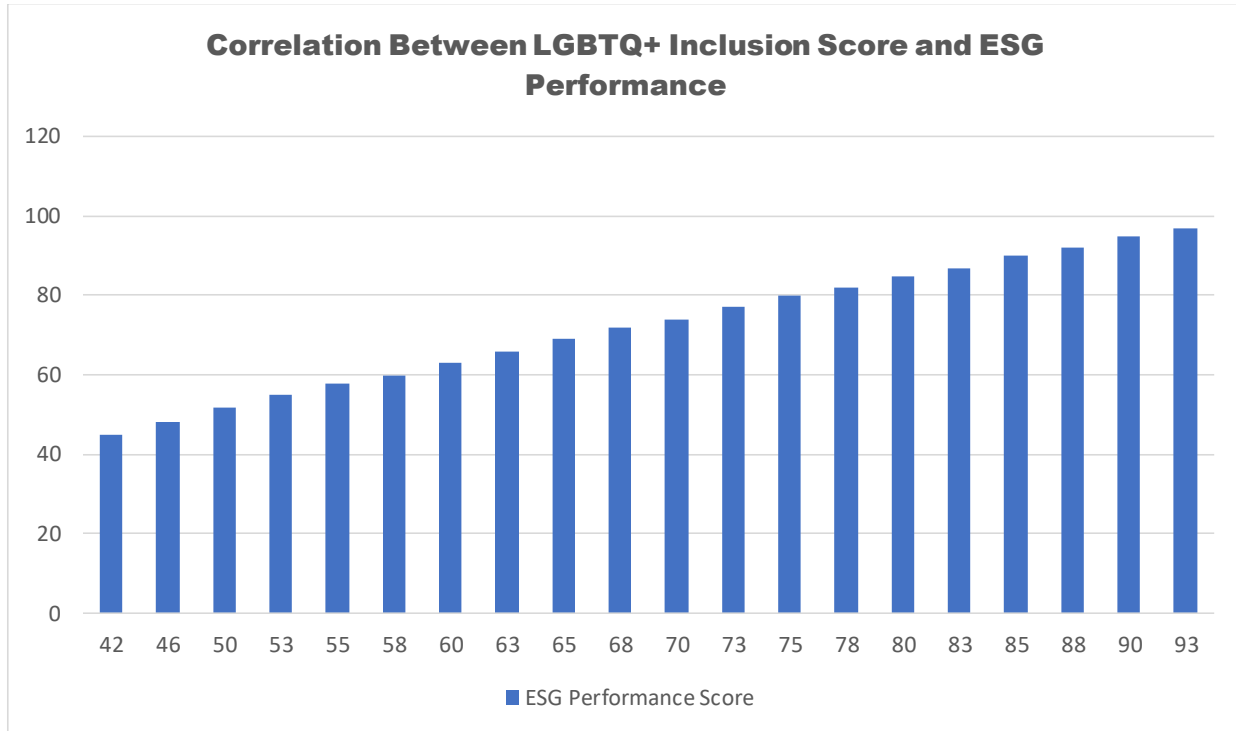
Category	Frequency	Percentage
Founders/Executives	48	16.8%
HR Managers	54	18.9%
ESG Officers	36	12.6%
Employees	148	51.7%
Male	154	53.8%
Female	102	35.7%
LGBTQ+ Participants	30	10.5%
Technology Sector	112	39.2%
Sustainability/Green Startups	64	22.4%
Fintech Sector	58	20.3%
Healthcare Sector	52	18.1%

Furthermore, it was revealed through regression analysis that there exists a significant positive relationship between LGBTQ+ inclusion and ESG performance in startups. It has been shown that LGBTQ+ inclusion has a positive effect on ESG performance regardless of factors such as company size, industry, and organizational age. This research proves the statement that organizational inclusion is one of the important capabilities for improving organizational performance (Mormile et al., 2026).

Moreover, employee well-being proved to be an important mediator connecting inclusion policies and sustainability performance. Start-ups that enjoyed psychologically secure and inclusive working conditions were found to have higher organizational commitment, better teamwork, and greater employee satisfaction rates. This conclusion is congruent with Social Identity Theory, as well as with the results of past studies on the association between belonging and engagement (Webster et al., 2018). The regression analysis shows that LGBTQ+ inclusion and related workplace factors positively influence ESG performance and sustainability outcomes. Table 4 further indicates that LGBTQ+ inclusion and innovation capability have the strongest impact.

**Table 4.** Regression Analysis of LGBTQ+ Inclusion and ESG Performance

Variable	Beta	Significance	Interpretation
<b>LGBTQ+ Inclusion</b>	0.61	$p < 0.001$	Strong positive influence on ESG performance
<b>Employee Wellbeing</b>	0.48	$p < 0.01$	Enhances sustainability outcomes
<b>Inclusive Leadership</b>	0.52	$p < 0.01$	Strengthens organizational commitment
<b>Innovation Capability</b>	0.57	$p < 0.001$	Improves sustainable competitiveness
<b>Workplace Equality Policies</b>	0.44	$p < 0.05$	Supports ESG governance performance



**Figure 4.** Correlation Between LGBTQ+ Inclusion Score and ESG Performance

The correlation between LGBTQ+ inclusion scores and ESG performance metrics among startups in India shows that greater inclusiveness is associated with better sustainability outcomes. Figure 4 further highlights this positive relationship. From the results above, it is evident that startups that score highly on LGBTQ+ inclusion perform relatively well in terms of employee wellbeing, corporate ethics, innovativeness, and sustainability performance. An inclusive environment is critical for social sustainability and competitive advantage in the startup sector.

*Source:* Developed from survey findings of the present study; supported by [Demiralay et al. \(2025\)](#), [Li et al. \(2025\)](#), [Webster et al. \(2018\)](#), and [Federo and Aguilera \(2025\)](#).

It was found that companies that practiced more inclusive policies performed better in terms of ESG performance. As regards social indicators, such as well-being, equality, and an ethical corporate culture, they had the highest positive correlation with the inclusion of LGBTQ+. The findings are consistent with the theoretical analyses provided by [Angeloni \(2026\)](#) and [Díaz-Leyva & Cascón-Pereira \(2026\)](#). They emphasized the importance of diversity and equality in enhancing organizational sustainability and social responsibility performance.

It is also evident that inclusivity within governance contributes to organizational transparency and accountability. This perspective can be validated through the ESG framework related to governance highlighted by [Corsalini \(2023\)](#) and [Bala et al. \(2025\)](#).

**Qualitative Findings**

Qualitative results brought more information about experiences at work, organizational culture, and sustainability dynamics in Indian startups. The thematic analysis allowed identifying five main themes, including inclusive leadership, psychological safety, innovation enhancement, challenges with workplace discrimination, and sustainability culture.

The first theme, that of inclusive leadership, was quite evident from interviews with startup founders and HR managers. Interviewees stressed that the commitment of leaders towards diversity and equality made a great contribution to workplace culture and staff motivation. Many people pointed out that leaders fostered communication, fairness, and collaboration in decision making, which resulted in high levels of trust and innovation capacity.

Psychological safety was identified as yet another vital topic raised by the participants. It should be highlighted that numerous LGBTQ+ employees employed in an inclusive organization felt secure when sharing their opinions, engaging in teamwork, and contributing to innovations. The aforementioned conclusion is consistent with previous research findings pointing to the importance of inclusivity in the workplace ([Clasen & Conrad, 2026](#)).

Innovation stimulation represented yet another important topic. Inclusion provided the organizations' employees with a fresh view of the issues connected with the development of a company. Moreover, startups were able to prove their innovativeness due to the exchange of information and sustainable innovations.

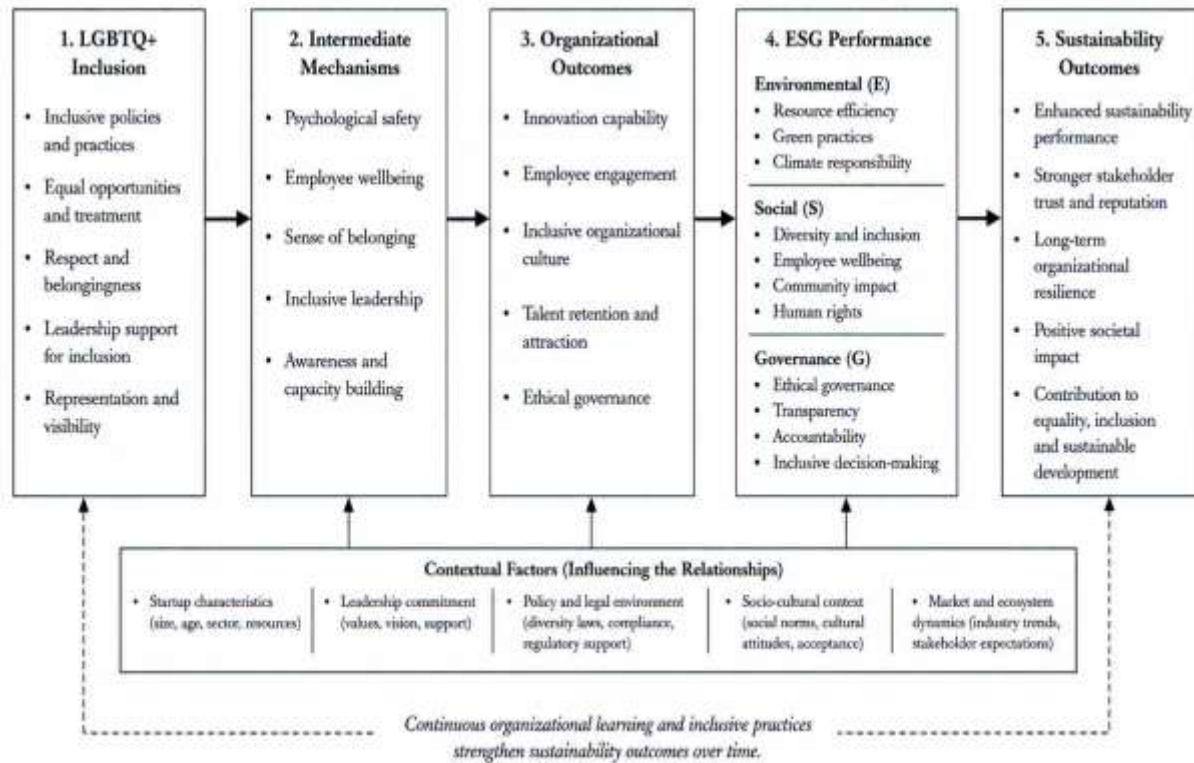
Finally, respondents experienced the problem of workplace discrimination, including hiding identities, exclusion, lack of awareness, and inefficient implementation of inclusion programs. Some participants identified problems connected with the application of inclusion programs for LGBTQ+ people due to various socio-cultural challenges, as well as the absence of organizational frameworks in startups. The stated problem may be considered within the scope of socio-political dilemmas associated with ESG and inclusion programs ([Crews, 2023](#)).

Lastly, sustainability culture became a prevalent organizational topic among participants. Respondents argued that startups incorporating inclusion in their sustainability strategies had higher levels of engagement and social responsibility orientation among employees.

**Table 5.** Major Qualitative Themes and Representative Responses

Theme	Description	Sample Response
<b>Inclusive Leadership</b>	Leadership support for diversity and equality	"Inclusive leadership improves trust and collaboration."
<b>Psychological Safety</b>	Employee comfort and workplace belonging	"I feel safer expressing myself openly at work."
<b>Innovation Enhancement</b>	Diversity-driven creativity and problem-solving	"Different perspectives improve innovation outcomes."
<b>Workplace Discrimination Challenges</b>	Identity concealment and exclusion concerns	"Some employees still fear workplace judgment."
<b>Sustainability Culture</b>	Inclusion integrated with ESG values	"Our sustainability goals include social inclusion."

The qualitative findings highlight the importance of inclusive leadership, psychological safety, innovation enhancement, workplace equality, and sustainability culture in promoting LGBTQ+ inclusion within startups. Table 5 further demonstrates how employees perceive inclusive practices as beneficial for trust, collaboration, creativity, and overall organizational sustainability.



**Figure 5.** Thematic Map of LGBTQ+ Inclusion and Sustainability Outcomes

**Source:** Developed from qualitative interview findings of the present study; supported by [Zeng et al. \(2024\)](#), [Clasen and Conrad \(2026\)](#), [Li et al. \(2025\)](#), and [Díaz-Leyva and Cascón-Pereira \(2026\)](#).

The Thematic Network Diagram (Figure 5) above depicts the intertwined connection that exists between the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community and the outcome of sustainability for startups in India. The diagram shows how the practice of inclusivity is a means through which the well-being of the employees, the ability of innovation, psychological safety, and organizational culture can be enhanced, leading to increased ESG outcomes and sustainability.

Qualitative analysis leads to the conclusion that inclusiveness is a key factor in the sustainability, innovation, and well-being of organizations and people within them. However, the existence of social and cultural barriers indicates that there has not been consistency in the attempts made towards inclusiveness in Indian startup ecosystems.

## DISCUSSION

### Interpretation of Quantitative Results

From the empirical study conducted, it has been noted that there is a very strong positive relationship between LGBTQ+ inclusion and ESG performance among startups in India. From the results of the empirical study, startups that embrace inclusivity and diversity policies perform better regarding sustainability performance and organizational performance. There was a significant predictive power associated with LGBTQ+ inclusion in ESG performance especially in the social and governance areas of ESG.

The results of this empirical study confirm the argument that the issue of diversity is a tool that organizations can use to create sustainable competitive advantages. The organizational culture associated with inclusiveness is one where the employees exhibit high levels of engagement and innovativeness. Consequently, there is improved sustainability performance. This result confirms the Resource-Based View (RBV) of the organization which posits that organizational competences such as diversity are valuable assets for competitive advantage.

Furthermore, from the above observation, it becomes evident that the sustainability of ESG sustainability through LGBTQ+ diversity is relatively stronger in the sub-domain of social sustainability. Psychological safety, employee satisfaction, ethical practices, and organizational transparency are some of the aspects in which improvements were observed during LGBTQ+ inclusion. From the above observation, it becomes evident that the research findings concur with the previous research conducted by researchers like [Demiralay et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Federo & Aguilera \(2025\)](#). The previous research findings showed that companies having good LGBTQ+ practices tend to be sustainable concerning ESG sustainability performance.

Furthermore, organizational inclusion is associated with enhanced environmental and governance performance via improved cooperation, innovative capabilities, and ethical leadership. This finding is associated with the ESG sustainability perspectives discussed in studies like that of [Corsalini \(2023\)](#). From Corsalini, it became clear that socially responsible organizations are effective in improving ethical capitalism and sustainability performance.

### **Interpretation of Qualitative Findings**

The results gained through the qualitative data collection and analysis methods add to the understanding of the effect of workplace inclusion on organizational culture, leadership practices, and sustainability performance in the case of Indian startups. The main topic identified based on the analysis of the conducted interviews related to the crucial role played by the creation of inclusive workplace culture in promoting psychological safety and collaboration at an organizational level.

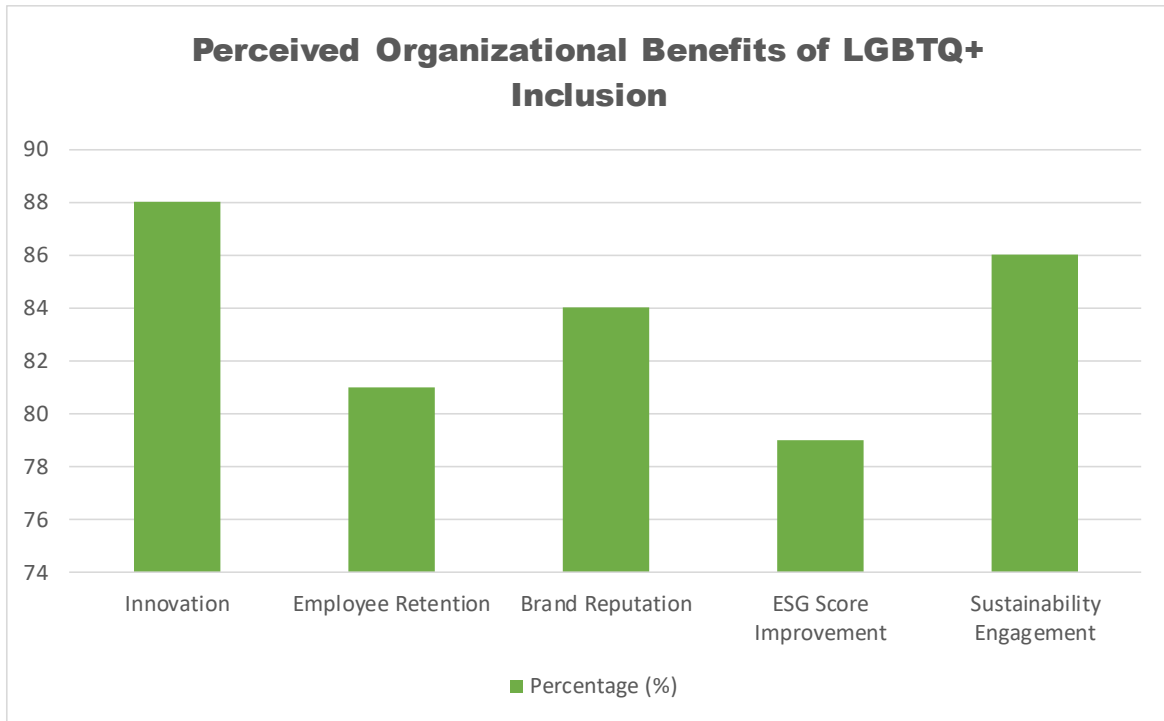
The research findings have shown that the organizational culture plays an important role for improving the wellbeing and organizational commitment of employees. LGBTQ+ employees working in organizations with positive cultures demonstrated increased levels of self-confidence and participation in organizational activities due to their sense of belongingness. These results are consistent with predictions of Social Identity Theory stating that people perform better when socially accepted and having strong organizational ties ([Webster et al., 2018](#)). Moreover, [Díaz-Leyva and Cascón-Pereira \(2026\)](#) pointed out that socially sustainable diversity management increases organizational cohesion and promotes employees' well-being.

Other important factors associated with leadership and its influence on inclusion practices and sustainability performance were discovered. The use of inclusive leadership contributed to increased fairness, transparency, and collaboration in decision-making processes. It helped develop trust within organizations and increased their accountability ([Kumar & Santra, 2025](#)).

Moreover, the research showed that having an inclusive organizational environment contributes to improving the innovativeness of organizations and making them more adaptable. Respondents clearly linked diversity with creativity. Teams working inclusively were expected to be innovative due to different experiences and perspectives. Such results confirm the position taken by [Li et al. \(2025\)](#) about the important role of diversity, equity, and inclusion for organizational sustainability and innovativeness.

However, many participants referred to problems associated with discrimination and socio-cultural problems hindering the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ population in startups ([Prakash & Tiwari, 2025](#)). Discrimination, identity

concealment, lack of inclusion practices, and inconsistency in implementing the strategy of diversity and inclusion were identified as some of the most common problems. Such evidence shows that despite an increasing number of Indian startups that apply ESG-based approaches, inclusion implementation remains inconsistent. The same conclusions were offered by [Crews \(2023\)](#).



**Figure 6.** Perceived Organizational Benefits of LGBTQ+ Inclusion

*Source:* Developed from survey findings of the present study; supported by [Li et al. \(2025\)](#), [Foster et al. \(2025\)](#), [Demiralay et al. \(2025\)](#), and [Angeloni \(2026\)](#).

The responses indicate that adopting an LGBTQ+ inclusive approach provides several organizational advantages, including improved innovation, employee wellbeing, and sustainability performance within Indian startups. Figure 6 further highlights the positive perceptions of respondents toward inclusive workplace practices. As is evident from the analysis conducted, an inclusive workplace setting has a very positive impact on organizations when it comes to their innovative capabilities, ability to retain employees, brand reputation, improvement in their ESG rating, and engagement with sustainable operations.

**Comparison with Existing Literature**

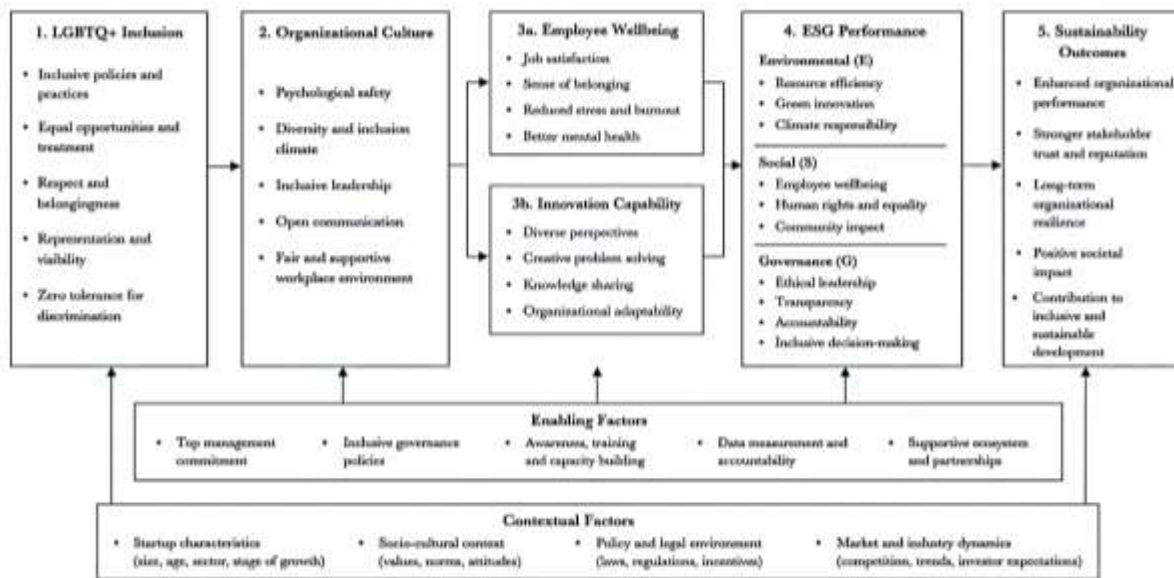
Results of this research corroborate the findings of global literature highlighting the importance of diversity, inclusivity, and social sustainability in organizational contexts. Similar to previous studies carried out in corporate organizations in the West, this study proves that LGBTQ+ inclusivity is good for well-being of employees, innovation within organizations, and ESG performance ([Pichler et al., 2018](#); [Foster et al., 2025](#)).

Moreover, results of the current study corroborate global DEI literature, where it is found that inclusivity of an organization makes it more legitimate, trustworthy by stakeholders, and competitive based on its sustainability. [Zeng et al. \(2024\)](#) found that organizational inclusion leads to sustainable developmental outcomes, as a result of increased

levels of engagement and social solidarity among employees. Likewise, [Białas and Wróbel \(2025\)](#) argue that HR practices oriented towards diversity improve organizational efficiency and equity in the workplace. There are some new elements introduced to the research that are worth mentioning. The first one is the fact that unlike the previous research which mainly focused on multinationals, the current analysis shows that the relationships described in this paper can also be identified among startups which are not structured and have less resources than regular organizations. Furthermore, it should be noted that the importance of the socio-cultural barriers and the inconsistencies of policy implementations is particularly vivid in the cases of startups.

In fact, one of the major contributions made by the current study is the incorporation of the concept of LGBTQ+ inclusion into the concept of ESG sustainability. Indeed, while previous studies concerning the issue of ESG sustainability were usually focused on environmental sustainability, governance mechanisms, and gender diversity, the current analysis contributes to this field by adding another dimension to the discussion. Thus, the relationship between the two identified concepts significantly contributes to sustainability studies ([Angeloni, 2026](#)). Summing up the discussion, one may conclude that the issue of LGBTQ+ inclusion should be regarded not only as an ethical necessity but also as a powerful organizational ability.

The integrated conceptual model shows the link between LGBTQ+ inclusiveness, organizational culture, the well-being of employees, the capacity to innovate, ESG performance, and sustainability outcomes in Indian startups. It emphasizes that a supportive work environment creates an atmosphere where psychological safety and innovation occur, which in turn improve ESG performance and sustainability outcomes. This model also shows the significance of inclusive leadership and diversity-oriented organizations in developing good governance, trust from stakeholders, and sustainable entrepreneurship in Indian startup ecosystems.



**Figure 7.** Integrated ESG Inclusion Impact Model for Indian Startups

**Source:** Developed from the findings of the present study; supported by [Demiralay et al. \(2025\)](#), [Li et al. \(2025\)](#), [Angeloni \(2026\)](#), and [Díaz-Leyva and Cascón-Pereira \(2026\)](#).

The integrated model demonstrates how LGBTQ+ inclusion and organizational culture influence employee wellbeing, innovation capability, ESG performance, and long-term sustainability outcomes in Indian startups. Figure 7 further highlights the importance of enabling and contextual factors in strengthening these relationships.

## PRACTICAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### Implications for Startup Founders

The conclusions of this research illustrate that the issue of the importance of LGBTQ+ inclusivity as an organizational approach that may improve the ESG performance, well-being of workers, innovation capability, and sustainable development outcomes in startup ecosystems needs to be considered. First and foremost, the findings for startup entrepreneurs suggest that inclusiveness should not be considered merely an ethically-oriented practice, but rather a strategic one that focuses on the competitive advantages and sustainability of the firm.

The first recommendation is connected to the necessity of applying inclusive leadership practices in the organization. According to [Angeloni \(2026\)](#), an inclusive leader fosters such values as equality, communication, psychological safety, and equal participation in decision-making processes. As it was found in qualitative analysis, respondents who operated in a positive organizational climate exhibited high levels of engagement, collaboration, and organizational commitment. Therefore, inclusive leaders must ensure equality, value diversity, and avoid discriminating others.

In addition, another important issue that should be taken into consideration by founders of startups is inclusive recruiting practices. By using these practices, organizations can create conditions for greater organizational creativity and encourage innovative entrepreneurship. It was proven in prior studies that diverse companies exhibit greater innovation capacity and organizational flexibility owing to a broader perspective and collaborative work towards solutions ([Li et al., 2025](#)). Also, [Bials and Wrobel \(2025\)](#) emphasize that inclusive HR practices are critical for achieving higher levels of employee satisfaction and retention within the organization.

It is also safe to presume that those start-ups which adopt LGBTQ+ inclusion into their business culture and ESG approach will be capable of fostering trust among their stakeholders, thus ensuring greater sustainability. Therefore, it is necessary for the founders of start-ups to include diversity and inclusivity within the sustainability agenda.

### Implications for ESG Investors

The study has equally yielded several implications for ESG investing and sustainability-focused investment institutions. Traditionally, sustainability analysis within ESG investment has mainly revolved around aspects of environmental sustainability, financial governance, and compliance with applicable regulations. The results from the current research indicate that workplace inclusion and diversity management of LGBTQ individuals substantially impact organizational sustainability, employee well-being, innovativeness, and effective governance practices.

Therefore, ESG investors need to embrace sustainability frameworks that consider aspects of DEI into their evaluations. Companies that have good LGBTQ inclusion strategies, ethical governance practices, and employee welfare programs could have better prospects for resilience and legitimacy among stakeholders. [Federo and Aguilera \(2025\)](#) made similar observations by establishing that governance practices of inclusivity positively affect firm value and ESG performances.

From the above results, it is evident that social sustainability measures ought to be given more consideration in ESG investing evaluation models. The existing ESG investment framework emphasizes environmental sustainability and fails to consider the aspects of workplace equality, diversity management, and psychological safety. The implementation of LGBTQ+ inclusion measures in the ESG scorecard could improve the accuracy of the sustainability

assessment. Furthermore, governance structures that emphasize diversity contribute towards higher accountability and sustainability practices in organizations, as indicated by [Bala et al. \(2025\)](#).

An inclusive investment model can encourage startups to embrace workplace equality and socially responsible governance models. Investors influence organizations' actions through their investments on the basis of sustainability factors and ESG scoring. Therefore, including LGBTQ+ inclusion within an investment model may result in sustainable practices.

### **Policy Recommendations**

As suggested by the outcomes of this study, there is a need for greater intervention policies to promote workplace inclusivity, social sustainability, and ESGs within startup ecosystems in India. While Indian startups have embraced ESG-oriented practices to some extent, there is inconsistent implementation of LGBTQ+ inclusivity policies in many organizations. Thus, policymakers and regulatory bodies need to formulate clear inclusion guidelines to promote organizational equality and accountability.

One key recommendation in this regard would be for the formulation of standard diversity and inclusion guidelines for startups. Diversity and inclusion guidelines can help startups incorporate anti-discrimination measures, inclusive recruitment practices, employee protections, and workplace equality training initiatives into their operations. In doing so, organizational awareness levels will improve, workplace discrimination will be reduced, and organizational employee wellbeing promoted.

It is recommended that DEI policy incentives be provided to promote inclusivity among startups. This can include certifications, grants, or tax-related advantages for startups that demonstrate effective diversity and inclusion policies. [Angeloni \(2026\)](#) claimed that equality certification systems can enhance organizational sustainability and accountability.

Moreover, the results underscore the necessity of broadening the scope of ESG reporting recommendations to incorporate the assessment of social sustainability and inclusion indicators. Current ESG reporting practices used by numerous organizations tend to emphasize environmental performance and corporate governance while ignoring workplace inclusiveness and LGBTQ+ inclusion. In this regard, it would be reasonable for policymakers and sustainability regulators to promote ESG report disclosure of diversity information, inclusion strategies, employee wellbeing efforts, and workplace equality practices.

In addition, awareness programs related to LGBTQ+ inclusion and workplace equality need to be developed at the level of entrepreneurial ecosystems. These recommendations could help mitigate socio-cultural stigma, increase organizational awareness, and enhance inclusiveness among startups. These suggestions reflect current sustainability research suggesting that inclusion in organizational systems contributes to governance ethics and responsible business ([Corsalini, 2023](#); [Díaz-Leyva & Cascón-Pereira, 2026](#)).

On the whole, the practical and regulatory recommendations discussed above can serve as additional evidence demonstrating that LGBTQ+ inclusion is both a social justice and sustainability issue since it helps enhance ESG performance, innovation capacity, organizational resilience, and entrepreneurial success.

### **CONCLUSION**

The present research considered how LGBTQ+ inclusion affects ESG performance and sustainability of start-ups operating in India. Based on the findings, LGBTQ+ inclusion positively affects ESG performance and sustainability, as well as well-being, culture, innovation, and sustainability of organizations that are involved in start-up ecosystems. In fact, both quantitative and qualitative data show that practices related to diversity and inclusion are vital for creating

psychologically safe workplaces, engaging employees in particular activities, practicing good corporate governance, and developing resiliency among firms. In its turn, the study demonstrates that, while diversity and inclusion are aspects of corporate social responsibility, they can be organizational competencies that enhance competitive advantage in sustainability.

Among the theoretical contributions of the research is an addition to the existing knowledge about the issues of ESG and sustainability. The contribution of the study is associated with its expansion of the existing discourse regarding organizational performance and sustainability activities in relation to startup businesses through the inclusion of the concept of LGBTQ+ inclusion into the discourse. The research provides important insights into Stakeholder Theory, Resource-Based View, and Social Identity Theory, as it looks into how an inclusive work environment generates stakeholder value, works as organizational resource, and engages employees.

The study may prove highly relevant not only from the perspective of its theoretical implications but also because of practical implications, which may make it beneficial for many parties involved in business activities. Firstly, according to the research results, there is a likelihood for organizations using inclusive leadership models, diversity-focused recruitment strategies, and equality-oriented HR policies to benefit from improved innovation abilities, better employee retention, and increased sustainability performance. Secondly, there is a need for ESG investors and regulatory institutions to assess organizational performance from the perspective of social sustainability and LGBTQ+ inclusion.

Nevertheless, there were a few constraints in terms of the research process itself. First, it can be stated that the research was primarily focused on examining experiences of companies in prominent Indian entrepreneurial clusters. There is a possibility that the obtained findings may not necessarily be extrapolated to cases where companies operate beyond the most prominent business centers. Second, one part of the research was performed via surveys. Self-reporting may be biased by some subjective factors including individual attitudes towards issues mentioned.

Therefore, further research can be focused on conducting longitudinal studies about LGBTQ+ inclusiveness and sustainability performance in various organizations. Conducting comparative studies in various business areas and countries can shed light on the topic. Intersectionality, digitalization, and leadership in the context of promoting sustainability practices can be examined by future scholars. On the whole, this paper highlights the importance of LGBTQ inclusiveness viewed as an essential element of social sustainability and ethical leadership for successful startups.

## **AUTHOR DECLARATIONS**

### **CRedit Author Statement / Author contributions**

**Kashish Dua:** Kashish Dua: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing — original draft, Visualization, Software, Data curation, Formal analysis, Visualization, Writing — review & editing.  
**Satyam Ranjan:** Conceptualization, Writing — review & editing.

**Acknowledgement:** The authors would like to state that no specific funding or support was received for this study.

**Conflict of Interest:** Nil

**AI Statement:** No artificial intelligence tools were used in the preparation of this work, apart from Grammarly which was employed solely for grammar and language enhancement.

**PUBLISHER'S NOTE:** All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. This journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published institutional affiliation.

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