

Business Ethics and the Effectiveness of Sustainability Reporting on Firm Performance

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of sustainability disclosure in strengthening company performance, particularly in emerging markets, is still contested in the literature. The objective of this research is to analyze the effect of sustainability reporting on company performance, and the moderating effect of business ethics on this effect. Secondary data was gathered from Bloomberg Terminal and MSCI Sustainability Analytics on 300 non-financial companies listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange during the period 2020-2024. The analysis employed a model for moderated regression analysis utilizing the PROCESS Hayes Model. The test results demonstrate that sustainability reports have a considerable positive impact on corporate performance and business ethics have been proven to strengthen the impact significantly. This result is robust to both accounting and market-based performance measurements. This study confirms that the effectiveness of sustainability reports as a value creation instrument is conditionally determined by the quality of the corporate business ethics that underpin them.

Keywords: Business Ethics; Corporate Performance; Sustainability Reporting; Stakeholder Theory

Etika Bisnis dan Efektivitas Pelaporan Keberlanjutan terhadap Kinerja Perusahaan

ABSTRAK

Efektivitas pengungkapan keberlanjutan dalam meningkatkan kinerja perusahaan masih diperdebatkan dalam literatur, khususnya pada konteks pasar berkembang. Penelitian ini bertujuan menguji pengaruh sustainability report terhadap kinerja perusahaan serta peran moderasi etika bisnis pada hubungan tersebut. Data sekunder diperoleh dari Bloomberg Terminal dan MSCI Sustainability Analytics pada 300 unit sampel pada perusahaan sektor non-keuangan di BEI dengan rentang waktu 2020–2024. Analisis menggunakan moderated regression analysis melalui PROCESS Hayes Model. Hasil pengujian menunjukkan pelaporan keberlanjutan dapat memengaruhi kinerja perusahaan secara positif dan signifikan, dan etika bisnis terbukti memperkuat pengaruh tersebut secara kondisional. Temuan ini konsisten pada ukuran kinerja berbasis akuntansi maupun pasar. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa efektivitas sustainability report sebagai instrumen penciptaan nilai ditentukan secara kondisional oleh kualitas etika bisnis korporasi yang menopangnya.

Kata Kunci Etika Bisnis, Kinerja Perusahaan; Pelaporan Keberlanjutan; Teori Stakeholder

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INTRODUCTION

Global pressure is mounting on public firms to adopt responsible business practices, integrating environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations into their company objectives. The Financial Services Authority (OJK) has issued POJK No. 51/POJK.03/2017, which mandates financial services institutions and public corporations to publish sustainability reports. This makes ESG disclosure a regulatory duty rather than an option in Indonesia. Although compliance with sustainability reporting in Indonesia reached 94% in 2024, the quality and substance of disclosures across companies remain highly fragmented, as most reports tend to be symbolic and fail to reflect actual sustainability practices. This condition underscores a fundamental challenge in the implementation of sustainability reporting in Indonesia, specifically the corporate tendency to engage in greenwashing practices (Arjaliès & Mundy, 2013; Mulyani & Hadiyati, 2026; Rismawati et al., 2025; Sukaryono & Tasrim, 2025). Because superficial ESG disclosures are not supported by substantive ethical business practices, they fail to foster investor confidence or reduce information asymmetry, which ultimately prevents firms from achieving expected performance advantages. Consequently, companies risk facing a legitimacy discount from the market whenever stakeholders detect a divergence between reporting claims and operational reality (Boulhaga et al., 2023; Hichri, 2023; Marzouki & Ben Amar, 2026). This research is motivated by fundamental inquiries into the actual efficiency of sustainability disclosure in enhancing corporate performance, along with the specific conditions that underpin such effectiveness. Thus, the present study aims to test whether the influence of sustainability reporting is conditional on the quality of the ethical environment of a company as a management control mechanism.

The link between ESG disclosure and firm's financial performance has been extensively examined in prior research, with inconclusive empirical results. Yet, the prevalent opinion is that ESG reporting will probably have a positive and substantial influence on overall firm's performance. ESG scores have a beneficial effect on Return on Asset and Return on Equity of US and Indian technology enterprises (Okafor et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2023; Zarefar et al., 2022). The distinct dimensions of ESG are commonly shown to affect corporate value. The disclosure of economic factors in the sustainability reports has a significant and positive impact on the financial performance proxied by ROA in Indonesian banking and mining firms. The result shows that there is a considerable positive association between ESG performance and market performance evaluated by Tobin's Q in Indonesia (Melinda & Wardhani, 2020; Rahim et al., 2023; Rahmadini & Hartanti, 2025; Ronaldo & Handayani, 2023).

Other studies have found that sustainability reports in aggregate have a positive but insignificant relationship with company performance (Buallay, 2022; Ebaid, 2023; Ronaldo & Handayani, 2023; Sukaryono & Tasrim, 2025). The inclusion of environmental and social aspects in sustainability reports frequently demonstrates no substantial effect on financial performance (Irma & Lestari, 2021; Rahim et al., 2023; Ronaldo & Handayani, 2023). Buallay (2022) explains that ESG score has a significant relationship with ROE, but is not significant with operational performance proxied by ROA and market performance proxied by Tobin's Q. Several previous studies have found that sustainability report

disclosure, particularly in sensitive sectors, exerts a detrimental and substantial effect on corporate value (Ariasih & Dewi, 2026; Qurniasih et al., 2024). Such inconsistent empirical findings indicate that internal conditional factors affect how sustainability reporting influences firm outcomes. Therefore, this study offers novelty by examining business ethics as a moderating factor in the relationship between sustainability reports and corporate performance. Under this framework, business ethics shifts from being a superficial governance disclosure to a critical behavioral control mechanism that validates the empirical substance and strategic utility of sustainability reports.

Business ethics is the knowledge of business management procedures that adhere to universal norms and morality. Ethics is a fundamental pillar of good corporate governance and social responsibility (Farhani et al., 2024; Hichri, 2023; Vărzaru et al., 2021). Business ethics acts as a behavioral control instrument within a governance system, serving to mitigate opportunistic motives, prevent executive fraud, and manage reputational risk. The existence of a strong internal ethical environment is considered to elevate the credibility of published sustainability information, transforming the report from a mere compliance tool to a true signal of corporate integrity (Hichri, 2023; Marzouki & Ben Amar, 2026). Corporate virtues rooted in business ethics significantly improve corporate sustainability performance. This suggests that companies committed to ethical values are more likely to produce sustainability reports that reflect their social responsibilities, such as tax transparency (Mio et al., 2025). Sustainability reports underpinned by ethical business practices enhance openness on environmental, social, and governance performance. This helps companies meet stakeholder expectations and reduce information asymmetry. Ethical business practices help companies avoid controversies that could damage their reputation. Conversely, companies committed to business ethics tend to be more valued by stakeholders, ultimately improving overall company performance (Abidin et al., 2017; Aravind & Shashidhar, 2020; Liu, 2024). Although the influence of sustainability reporting and business ethics on company performance has been widely studied separately, several significant gaps remain in the literature. First, there is limited exploration of the role of business ethics as a moderating variable. Second, there are limited studies on public companies in Indonesia that simultaneously integrate sustainability reporting and business ethics data with company performance. To address this literature gap, the present study investigates how business ethics moderates the relationship between sustainability disclosure and financial performance among firms listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) from 2020 to 2024. Grounded in a theoretical framework that merges legitimacy and stakeholder theories, the analysis focuses on a sample of enterprises listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) over the 2020–2024 timeframe.

Stakeholder theory and legitimacy theory are the main foundations of this study to explain the influence of sustainability on company performance. Stakeholder theory states that a company is not merely an entity operating for its own benefit, but must also provide benefits to all stakeholders. A company's survival depends heavily on the support of shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, creditors, and the community (Irma & Lestari, 2021; Rahim et al., 2023). Grounded in stakeholder theory, companies bear responsibilities toward a diverse

spectrum of constituents, ranging from internal staff to public communities and environmental organizations, rather than focusing solely on shareholders. Sustainability reporting facilitates the alignment of these multifaceted expectations through transparent corporate communication, which ultimately strengthens the firm's reputational capital and trustworthiness (Purnami & Dewi, 2025; Qureshi et al., 2020; Ronaldo & Handayani, 2023). Stakeholder engagement through transparent ESG reporting drives organizational efficiency and better financial results. Companies that balance the Triple Bottom Line aspects tend to have more sustainable performance (Dutt et al., 2025; Naibaho & Raudhotuzanah, 2025; Ronaldo & Handayani, 2023). Despite short-term costs, investing in sustainability practices creates a foundation for long-term viability and competitive advantage. Ethical business practices and social responsibility are considered moral obligations that, if implemented consistently, will increase profitability and shareholder value in the long term (Abdi et al., 2022; Sukaryono & Tasrim, 2025; Wulandari & Saleh, 2025). Sustainability reporting enables companies to identify challenges and opportunities, manage non-financial risks such as environmental or social risks, and mitigate costs that may arise from irresponsible actions in the future (Rahim et al., 2023; Suwarno et al., 2026; Wulandari & Saleh, 2025). By meeting social and environmental expectations, companies gain legitimacy and operational support from their environment. A favorable reputation among key constituents, particularly consumers and investors, functions as a powerful driver that enhances corporate image, elevates market valuation, and optimizes long-term financial outcomes (Irma & Lestari, 2021; Rahmadini & Hartanti, 2025; Zarefar et al., 2022).

Under the tenets of legitimacy theory, companies must ensure their business practices remain congruent with the social contracts and ethical standards of the community in order to maintain their social license to operate and ensure long-term viability. Sustainability reports are used as a strategic instrument to gain public approval, recognition, or acceptance. By disclosing social and environmental activities, companies demonstrate that their operations comply with applicable norms. By disclosing non-financial information, companies seek to convince the public that their operations are legitimate and align with social expectations (Irma & Lestari, 2021; Ronaldo & Handayani, 2023). Sustainability disclosure is used as a strategic reporting mechanism to secure corporate legitimacy and minimize potential political costs from various external pressures. By providing comprehensive disclosures on sustainability and governance performance, enterprises can effectively reduce the information gap between management and investors. This reduction, in turn, minimizes financing costs and enhances internal operational productivity (Qurniasih et al., 2024; Rismawati et al., 2025; Suwarno et al., 2026). By publishing sustainability reports, companies attempt to minimize the risk of rejection, boycotts, or political pressure from the public. This helps maintain stable financial performance by preventing operational disruptions due to legitimacy crises (Mulyani & Hadiyati, 2026; Triwacananingrum et al., 2024; Wulandari & Saleh, 2025). Sustainability reports are used as a strategic communication tool to inform the public about a company's social and environmental activities. This transparency aims to gain recognition, approval, or acceptance from the public and stakeholders. Disclosure of non-

financial information that aligns with social expectations can enhance a company's image and reputation. When the public provides legitimacy, it becomes a potential resource for a company's long-term survival (Mulyani & Hadiyati, 2026; Rismawati et al., 2025; Sukaryono & Tasrim, 2025).

Prior studies consistently establish a positive link between ESG reporting and corporate profitability. Research conducted by Ronaldo & Handayani (2023) showed that disclosures regarding aggregate sustainability and economic performance significantly enhanced banking ROA during the 2020–2022 timeframe. A congruent pattern is evident in the work of Zarefar et al. (2022) which confirms that sustainability reporting actively bolsters financial metrics for both market-driven and accounting-focused enterprises over a multi-year horizon (2014–2020). Corroborating this positive trajectory internationally, Dutt et al. (2025) expanded this empirical consensus to India, revealing that ESG disclosure scores positively dictated the ROA and ROE of NSE 500 enterprises throughout 2020–2024. Further support is provided by Rahim et al. (2023) whose analysis of Indonesian mining enterprises from 2018 to 2022 revealed that disclosures focused on economic sustainability actively enhanced ROA, ROE, and ROS. These insights imply that transparency regarding economic indicators elevates institutional trustworthiness, which subsequently translates into bolstered corporate reputation and superior financial returns. Grounded in these theoretical frameworks and supporting empirical literature, this research formulates the hypothesis that heightened sustainability reporting acts as a positive driver of corporate performance.

H₁: Sustainability disclosure has a positive impact on firm performance.

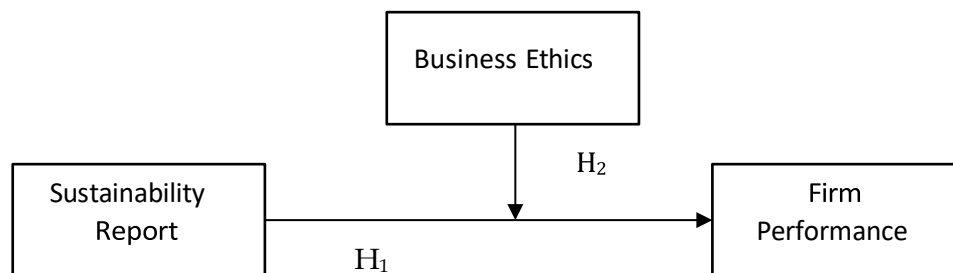
Embedded ethical business practices serve as a pivotal catalyst that amplifies the positive impact of sustainability disclosures on corporate outcomes by cultivating an institutional climate grounded in transparency and accountability. When sustainability reporting is anchored in robust ethical principles, it enables firms to communicate their socio-environmental impacts genuinely, which is vital for securing stakeholder trust. Consequently, organizations that strategically internalize ethical standards are better positioned to generate credible, decision-useful sustainability reports, thereby optimizing their corporate reputation and financial performance (Ghoniya et al., 2024; Gigauro & Gabelaia, 2025). Relying on stakeholder theory, ethical business conduct is vital for cultivating institutional trust and stakeholder loyalty. Studies utilizing ethical indices demonstrate that a robust ethical commitment significantly enhances financial performance, including both ROA and ROE (Abidin et al., 2017; Simoni et al., 2020). Crucially, this established trustworthiness simultaneously solidifies the organization's social license and legitimacy from the perspective of its broader constituents.

Stakeholder trust and loyalty are essential elements of stakeholder theory. A commitment to ethical business practices helps companies build stronger relationships with stakeholders, which in turn improves financial performance and corporate sustainability (Abidin et al., 2017; Liu, 2024). A high-quality sustainability report reflects a company's commitment to transparency and accountability, which are essential for meeting stakeholder expectations. By integrating ethical elements into its sustainability report, companies can enhance

positive stakeholder perceptions, ultimately strengthening the company's legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Aravind & Shashidhar, 2020; Prakash et al., 2026; Simoni et al., 2020). Ethical business encourages companies to focus more on the ESG dimension, which is the core of sustainability reporting. This not only improves sustainability performance but also creates added value for stakeholders. Companies that demonstrate a commitment to ethics through transparent ESG reporting tend to gain greater trust from investors and the public (Aravind & Shashidhar, 2020; Mio et al., 2025).

Prior literature by Marzouki & Ben Amar (2026) demonstrated that business ethics functions as a positive moderator that mitigates corporate corruption risk through enhanced ESG reporting transparency. Similarly, Hichri (2023) observed that an organizational commitment to ethical conduct reinforces the value relevance of integrated reports, thereby bolstering investor confidence and market valuation. Triwacananingrum et al. (2024) confirmed that business ethics significantly moderates the interaction between ESG disclosures and firm value, amplifying the favorable impact of sustainable practices on market capitalization. In essence, ethical business behavior amplifies the strategic utility of sustainability disclosures by reinforcing public trust, transparency, and corporate reputation. Grounded in stakeholder theory, enterprises that systematically align their operations with stakeholder expectations via ethically driven sustainability reports achieve superior financial and social outcomes (Abidin et al., 2017; Liu, 2024; Talha, 2026). Driven by these theoretical tenets and empirical insights, this study advances its second hypothesis:

H₂: Business ethics strengthens the influence of sustainability reports on firm performance



Source: Research Data, 2026

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODS

Adopting a quantitative research design, this study utilizes an unbalanced panel data approach to evaluate how sustainability reporting affects corporate performance, specifically examining the moderating influence of business ethics. The empirical analysis relies on secondary data extracted from two prominent international databases. More specifically, the Bloomberg Terminal is accessed to retrieve financial variables and ESG disclosure scores, which operationalize the sustainability reporting construct, whereas the business ethics metrics are compiled from MSCI Sustainability Analytics. The selection of these two data

sources was based on the consistency of the measurement methodology and the completeness of company coverage. The study population includes all non-financial companies listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) in the 2020–2024 period. Firms within the financial sector were omitted from the population because their unique accounting frameworks and ratios prevent direct comparison within a standardized statistical model. This sector is subject to specialized regulatory oversight that uniquely shapes its disclosure patterns and financial performance (Naibaho & Raudhotuzanah, 2025; Rahmadini & Hartanti, 2025). Specifically, financial institutions exhibit non-traditional capital and income structures, where operational revenue stems from interest margins and leverage denotes customer deposits rather than structural debt. This structural variance invalidates the comparison of standard proxies like Leverage and ROA against non-financial firms. Furthermore, net-loss companies were excluded to avoid distorting the financial ratio analysis, particularly profitability indicators that act as the core dependent variables. The selection criteria utilized to construct the final sample through a purposive sampling framework are systematically detailed in the following table.

Table 1. Sample Selection Criteria

No.	Information	Amount
1	Non-financial companies listed on the IDX consistently during the 2020–2024 research period.	5.040
2	Non-financial companies that do not have complete information regarding the research variables during the 2020–2024 research period.	(4.950)
3	Non-financial companies that experienced losses during the 2020–2024 research period.	(90)
Number of observations during 2020 – 2024 (5 years)		300

Source: Research Data, 2026

To quantify firm performance as the dependent variable, this study employs Return on Assets (ROA), calculated as net earnings divide to total assets (Alfalih, 2023; Naibaho & Raudhotuzanah, 2025; Rahim et al., 2023; Zarefar et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the independent variable of sustainability reports is captured using the ESG Disclosure Score compiled from the Bloomberg Terminal. This specific index reflects the depth and execution of a firm's environmental, social, and corporate governance transparency, rated on a 0–100 spectrum throughout the 2020–2024 period (Alfalih, 2023; Kusno & Novita, 2026; Malik & Kashiramka, 2025; Yu & Luu, 2021). The moderating variable, business ethics (BE), is measured via the business ethics theme score indicator. Specifically, this metric gauges the severity and frequency of organizational controversies, including corporate fraud, executive misconduct, bribery and corruption, money laundering, antitrust breaches, and tax evasion disputes. Apiece company begins the assessment with a perfect score of 10, which is then reduced based on the fulfillment of key indicators across the Business Ethics and Tax Transparency dimensions. The measurement scale for this variable ranges from 0 to 10 (Hassine & Francoeur, 2024). Several key control variable are embedded within the regression model to ensure robust internal validity. Firm size (SIZE) is accounted for by computing the natural

logarithm of the company's total assets, whereas leverage (LEV), representing the financial risk profile, is measured as the ratio of total debt relative to total assets.

The main analysis was conducted using moderated regression analysis (MRA) through PROCESS Macro Hayes Model 1, which allows for direct testing of the moderating effect of business ethics variables on the influence of sustainability reports on company performance. A regression equation was developed to estimate both the direct impact and the interaction effect, the following empirical specification was constructed:

$$ROA = a + \beta_1 SR + \beta_2 BE + b_3(SR*BE) + \beta_4 SIZE + \beta_5 LEV + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

SR is the sustainability report score, BE is the business ethics score, SR*BE is the interaction term between the two representing the moderating effect, SIZE is company size, LEV is leverage, and ε is the error term. The significance of the moderating effect was tested using the F-change test on the addition of the interaction term, with a significance threshold of $\alpha = 5\%$. The reliability of the OLS estimator and the stability of the empirical results were validated through rigorous diagnostic tests encompassing normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. The diagnostic outputs verified that the chosen panel data regression architecture was perfectly aligned with the underlying data structure. Additionally, the robustness of the findings was cross-examined by deploying Tobin's Q as an alternative market-based performance metric, ensuring that the documented relationships remain stable across different operationalizations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive statistics for the 300 firm-year observations compiled from 2020 to 2024, focusing on non-financial corporations listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange, are systematically presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Statistic Descriptive

Variable	N	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
ROA	300	0.062	0.0633	0.001	0.293
SR	300	49.243	11.308	23.980	74.065
BE	300	4.118	2.028	0.00	7.704
LEV	300	0.233	0.178	0.00	0.702
SIZE	300	31.844	1.386	29.037	35.217

Source: Research Data, 2026

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for ROA, which operationalizes the dependent variable of financial performance. The sample demonstrates a mean ROA of 0.062 (6.2%) with a standard deviation of 0.063, indicating that non-financial IDX-listed corporations generally generated a 6.2% net profit from their asset utilization during 2020–2024. The performance boundaries, ranging from a minimum of 0.001 (0.1%) to a maximum of 0.293 (29.3%), reflect significant operational variations among the sampled entities. The standard deviation close to the average value indicates substantial performance heterogeneity, which is reasonable considering that the sample covers various non-financial sectors with varying profitability characteristics.

For the independent variable operationalized through the ESG Disclosure Score, the analysis reveals a mean value of 49.243 within a 0–100 spectrum. This outcome demonstrates that non-financial enterprises listed on the exchange

generally maintain an intermediate threshold of sustainability reports. A standard deviation of 11.308, with a range of 23.980 to 74.065, indicates significant differences in disclosure between companies. This means that some companies are still very limited in their ESG disclosure, while others are quite comprehensive. This condition is relevant to the Indonesian context, where the sustainability reporting obligation through POJK 51/2017 is still in the gradual implementation stage, resulting in highly variable levels of compliance and disclosure quality.

The Business Ethics Moderation variable shows an average business ethics score of 4.118 with a standard deviation (SD) of 2.028 within range of 0.00 to 7.704, manifesting a very wide variation in the quality of the corporate ethics environment across sample companies. A minimum value of 0.00 indicates a company with no measurable business ethics record at all in the MSCI database, while a maximum value of 7.704 reflects a company with a highly structured corporate ethics program. The average, which is in the lower-middle range of the scale, indicates that in general, the business ethics practices of Indonesian public companies are still in the developing stage, this is relevant to the conditions of developing country capital markets that still face governance challenges.

Evaluation of the control variabel shows that the sample features an average leverage of 0.233 (23.30%) with an upper boundary of 0.702 implying most observed firms adopt a moderate approach to debt utilization, although outliers with heightened financial risk, where debt finances up to 70.2% of total assets, are present in the cohort. The associated standard deviation of 0.178 underscores a reasonable and expected degree of volatility in capital structures within the Indonesian non-financial sector. For company size, the average SIZE of 31.84 with a range of 29.037 to 35.217 reflects a sample dominated by medium to large-sized companies, consistent with the characteristics of companies that have ESG data available on Bloomberg Terminal, generally large companies that have the resources to make sustainability disclosures.

Table. 3 Pearson Correlation

Variable	ROA	SR	BE	LEV	SIZE
ROA	1.000	0.145	-0.044	-0.280	-0.412
SR	0.145	1.000	0.429	-0.133	0.209
BE	-0.044	0.429	1.000	-0.275	0.324
LEV	-0.280	-0.133	-0.275	1.000	-0.141
SIZE	-0.412	0.209	0.324	-0.141	1.000

Source: Research Data, 2026

The Pearson correlation matrix presented in Table 3 indicates that ROA is positively associated with SR ($r = 0.1446$), yet exhibits a negative relationship with BE ($r = -0.044$), leverage ($r = -0.280$), and firm size ($r = -0.412$). The relationship between SR and BE is found to be positively moderate and statistically significant ($r = 0.429$, $p < 0.01$). This pattern indicates that robust ESG disclosures typically align with stronger ethical benchmarks, reinforcing the view that informational transparency reflects internalized ethical operations. The correlation between SR and SIZE ($r = 0.209$) implies larger companies tend to have more extensive ESG disclosure, consistent with the literature that larger companies face higher legitimacy pressures from stakeholders. LEV and ROA shows negative correlation ($r = -0.280$) indicates that companies with higher debt burdens tend to

have lower profitability, a common finding in the financial literature. The negative correlation between SIZE and ROA ($r = -0.412$) is noteworthy because it contradicts the common assumption that larger companies tend to be more profitable. Because the correlation coefficients between all independent constructs are strictly less than the 0.80 benchmark, the data exhibit no critical signs of multicollinearity. This acceptable level of correlation confirms that the specified econometric framework is structurally sound and appropriate for subsequent hypothesis testing.

The statistical estimations executed through the Hayes Process Macro for Moderated Regression Analysis are documented in Table 4. The model displays high empirical feasibility, generating an F-value of 30.814 ($p < 0.001$). Furthermore, an R-squared of 0.344 implies that 34.40% of the fluctuations in corporate ROA can be explained by the combined effects of sustainability reporting, business ethics, their interaction product (SR×BE), and the structural controls (SIZE and LEV), leaving 65.60% attributable to residual factors. The control variable SIZE negatively dictates ROA, illustrating that larger corporate scales significantly diminish ROA. Similarly, financial leverage (LEV) exerts a significant negative influence on ROA, with a coefficient of -0.126 ($p = 0.000$), which demonstrates that heightened debt exposure systematically erodes firm profitability

Table. 4 Regression Results

Dependent Variable:		N		=	300	
ROA		F-statistic		=	30.814	
		R		=	0.586	
		R-square		=	0.344	
Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	0.792	0.073	10.789	0.000	0.647	0.936
SR	0.002	0.000	5.003	0.000	0.001	0.002
BE	-0.002	0.002	-1.195	0.233	-0.006	0.001
Int_1	0.000	0.000	2.340	0.020	0.000	0.001
LEV	-0.126	0.018	-7.118	0.000	-0.161	-0.091
SIZE	-0.022	0.002	-9.649	0.000	-0.027	-0.018

Source: Research Data, 2026

The first hypothesis posits that sustainability reporting exerts a positive influence on corporate performance proxied by ROA. Based on the empirical estimations detailed in Table 4, sustainability reports, operationalized via the ESG disclosure score, demonstrates a positive and statistically significant impact on ROA, yielding a regression coefficient of 0.002 with a significance value of $p = 0.000$ (p less than 0.05), thereby validating the first hypothesis. This directional finding implies that, *ceteris paribus*, a single-unit enhancement in the ESG disclosure score translates into a 0.002 increase in ROA. Substantively, this pattern underscores that enterprises exhibiting greater transparency in communicating their environmental, social, and governance milestones systematically achieve superior profitability thresholds. This outcome aligns with the prior empirical documentation of Abubakr et al. (2026); Dutt et al. (2025); Zarefar et al. (2022), which consistently report that ESG disclosure contributes positively to improving company performance. These findings are consistent with theoretical predictions

built on the frameworks of stakeholder theory and legitimacy theory, which together explain the mechanisms by which sustainability can generate measurable performance benefits.

Stakeholder theory posits that systematic, proactive engagement with all corporate constituents allows firms to unlock and maintain a long-term competitive edge. Sustainability reports are strategic communication instruments that enable companies to simultaneously demonstrate their commitment to the interests of diverse stakeholders (Hassine & Francoeur, 2024; Triwacananingrum et al., 2024; Wulandari & Saleh, 2025). Companies with higher ESG disclosure scores provide more complete and transparent information to all stakeholder groups, thereby reducing information asymmetry, building trust, and strengthening long-term relationships that ultimately contribute to operational efficiency and asset profitability (Kusno & Novita, 2026; Triwacananingrum et al., 2024). Legitimacy theory offers an integrative explanation by emphasizing that sustainability disclosure serves as an essential strategic instrument for aligning an entity's operational activities with social norms and expectations. Companies that increasingly emphasize social and environmental accountability face strong institutional pressure to demonstrate alignment between their business operations and social expectations (Mulyani & Hadiyati, 2026; Ronaldo & Handayani, 2023). Transparency in sustainability reporting acts as a vital strategic tool for corporate entities, facilitating the acquisition, maintenance, and enhancement of institutional legitimacy among societal constituents and oversight bodies. Companies that successfully build and maintain social legitimacy through consistent sustainability reporting reap concrete benefits in the form of reduced regulatory pressure, reduced litigation risk, and increased goodwill, which indirectly reduce operational costs and increase return on assets (Ronaldo & Handayani, 2023; Triwacananingrum et al., 2024).

The second hypothesis states that business ethics strengthens the effect of sustainability reporting on firm performance. The moderation framework was verified by assessing the coefficient of the interaction variable (SR×BE). Based on the statistical estimations, the interaction product (Int_1) exhibits a positive coefficient of 0.000 and is statistically significant at $p = 0.020$ ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the addition of the interaction effect significantly improves the model's predictive ability compared to the model without interaction. Thus, H2 is accepted.

These empirical insights demonstrate that business ethics functions as a critical moderating catalyst that intensifies the positive nexus between SR and ROA. It reveals that the impact of ESG disclosures on corporate returns is not absolute, but fluctuates based on the internal ethical infrastructure of the organization. Consequently, sustainability disclosure yields optimal performance returns only when embedded within a highly ethical corporate culture. This finding is entirely congruent with the academic consensus forged by Hichri (2023) and Triwacananingrum et al. (2024) which consistently found significant conditional role of ethical business in maximizing the performance outcomes of sustainability initiatives.

Table 5 shows the outcomes of a conditional effects analysis of sustainability reports at various levels of business ethics to further understand how business ethics moderates the influence of sustainability reporting on company performance. This analysis aims to determine whether the impact of sustainability reports on company performance differs significantly at low, medium, and high levels of business ethics.

Table 5. Conditional Effects Results

BE	Effect	with	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	Decision
-2.302	0.001	0.000	1.878	0.061	0.000	0.002	Not
0.182	0.002	0.000	5.053	0.000	0.001	0.002	Significant
1.882	0.002	0.000	4.593	0.000	0.001	0.003	Significant

Source: Research Data, 2026

When business ethics is at a low level (BE = -2.302), the conditional impact of SR on ROA is negligible, with a coefficient of 0.001 and a non-significant p-value of 0.061 ($p > 0.05$). These evidence prove that in companies with weak business ethics, sustainability reports doesn't have a significant ability to influence ROA, which means that when the company's ethical environment is low, ESG disclosure is unable to significantly increase profitability. At a moderate level of business ethics, namely BE of 0.182, the effect of sustainability reporting on ROA has significance level of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), implying that in companies with business ethics at an average level, SR has a positively able to give significant effect on ROA. At high level of business ethics, namely BE of 1.882, the effect of SR on ROA has significance level of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), indicates companies with strong business ethics, SR has a positively give significant impact on ROA with exceeding influence. This conditional effects finding strengthens the analysis that business ethics play the role of moderator that amplifying the nexus between SR and ROA. Specifically, the positive effect of SR on ROA becomes stronger as the company's business ethics score increases. Conversely, when business ethics is weak, the positive effect of sustainability reporting becomes statistically insignificant. This confirms that the existence of a strong ethical environment is an important prerequisite for the effectiveness of ESG disclosure in improving company performance.

Grounded in stakeholder theory, the moderating mechanism of business ethics illuminates that cultivating constituent trust transcends the mere formality of sustainability disclosures. More fundamentally, it hinges upon the strict alignment between a corporation's articulated commitments and its substantive conduct within daily operations, or applied ethics. Strong business ethics inform stakeholders that the company operates based on consistent and reliable principles, thus creating congruence between corporate behavior and the ethical demands of these stakeholders. In this context, transparency and ethical behavior become crucial strategies for increasing organizational trust and long-term financial results, especially since stakeholders tend to respond negatively to controversies that violate their rights (Berrone et al., 2007; Dutt et al., 2025; Hichri, 2023). Under these conditions, each additional unit of sustainability disclosure

gains significantly higher informative value in the eyes of stakeholders, as it is reinforced by consistent ethical behavior as its substantial validation. Conversely, in companies with weak business ethics foundations, extensive sustainability disclosures have the potential to worsen stakeholder perceptions if there is a detected misalignment between the reporting narrative and operational reality.

The baseline regression framework was subjected to a robustness reanalysis by altering the core operationalization of the dependent construct. Specifically, the accounting-driven ROA was replaced with Tobin's Q to evaluate the model's validity across market-based performance parameters. Tobin's Q was chosen because it reflects the capital market's assessment of firm value, which is not fully reflected in short-term accounting earnings (Abdi et al., 2022; Naibaho & Raudhotuzanah, 2025; Rismawati et al., 2025). This analytical step aims to validate the consistency of the direction of the relationship between variables while exploring how external investors respond to corporate sustainability reporting disclosures. The empirical outputs of the robustness reanalysis, utilizing Tobin's Q as the alternative dependent metric, are systematically documented in Table 6

Table 6. Robustness Test Results

Dependent Variable: Tobin'Q				N	=	300
				F-statistic	=	20.364
				R	=	0.507
				R-square	=	0.257
Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	15.847	1.566	10.118	0.000	12.765	18.929
SR	0.017	0.007	2.496	0.013	0.004	0.030
BE	0.052	0.037	1.399	0.163	-0.021	0.126
Int_1	0.008	0.003	2.454	0.015	0.002	0.014
LEV	-1.442	0.377	-3.824	0.000	-2.184	-0.700
SIZE	-0.453	0.049	-9.263	0.000	-0.549	-0.357

Source: Research Data, 2026

The statistical estimations compiled in Table 6 validate the robustness of the empirical framework, yielding an F-value of 20.364 ($p = 0.000$) and an R-squared of 0.257, which confirms that the model captures 25.7% of the fluctuations in market appraisal. The independent impact of sustainability reporting remains positively significant at $p = 0.013$. Additionally, the moderating impact of business ethics yields a stable positive interaction coefficient of 0.008 ($p = 0.015$), confirming the high reliability of the moderation framework. Concurrently, the covariates of debt level and firm size consistently impose a significant inverse effect on the sample's market valuation.

The empirical consistency observed within this market-based proxy model fundamentally reinforces the conceptual framework constructed through the dual integration of legitimacy theory and stakeholder theory. The positive significance of the interaction variable indicates that market participants possess sharp evaluative rationality in processing non-financial information. Tobin's Q based market valuation is forward-looking, allowing it to immediately capture signals of corporate integrity. This characteristic differs from ROA, a proxy for accounting profitability, which is historical and requires a longer time to reflect the effectiveness of sustainability programs. Investors and other external stakeholders

view sustainability reporting supported by strong internal ethical governance as more than a mere attempt to seek symbolic legitimacy. Instead, it reflects a key indicator of a company's robust risk management capabilities. Consistency between revealed ethical commitments and actual behavior serves as a benchmark for stakeholders to assess whether a company truly operates based on reliable principles (Berrone et al., 2007; Naibaho & Raudhotuzanah, 2025; Rismawati et al., 2025). Based on stakeholder theory, a commitment to business ethics effectively mitigates market skepticism and confirms the validity of published sustainability information by creating congruence between written commitments and actual company behavior. This high credibility of information is then responded to by the market through premium valuations, confirming that an organization's moral integrity is an absolute catalyst in transforming environmental and social reporting disclosures into an economic competitive advantage widely recognized by external stakeholders (Berrone et al., 2007; Hichri, 2023; Triwacananingrum et al., 2024). The robustness outcomes validate that the institutionalization of business ethics significantly accentuates the positive impact of sustainability reporting on corporate performance. this empirical synergy is systematically reproduced across divergent performance operationalizations, spanning from internal accounting metrics like ROA to external market-driven assessments via Tobin's Q

CONCLUSION

This study examines the performance implications of sustainability reporting and the moderating function of business ethics. Based on 300 firm-year observations of listed non-financial IDX firms, the evidence reveals that sustainability disclosures exert a positive effect on both ROA and Tobin's Q. business ethics is shown to operate as an essential magnifying moderator that structurally strengthens this positive trajectory. This synergistic effect remains highly resilient, evidenced by robust and positive interaction terms across both accounting efficiency and market valuation frameworks. This finding implies that the effectiveness of sustainability reporting in improving company performance is not automatic, but rather depends on the existence of a strong business ethics environment as a control mechanism that increases the credibility of sustainability signals sent to market. Robustness checks using Tobin's Q verify that the main empirical conclusions are immune to alternative market-based performance measures. Additionally, the analysis reveals that the reinforcing role of business ethics is statistically stronger in the market appraisal model than in the primary ROA specification. Theoretically, this finding confirms that the effectiveness of sustainability disclosure as a value creation instrument is not independent, but rather conditionally determined by the quality of the corporate ethical environment that supports it, in line with the stakeholder theory perspective that stakeholder trust is only formed when reporting transparency is supported by verified consistency of ethical behavior.

Several inherent limitations of this empirical inquiry warrant careful acknowledgment. First, the utilization of business ethics scores from MSCI Sustainability Analytics is limited to large companies covered by MSCI Sustainability Analytics, so the results cannot necessarily be generalized to small

and medium-sized companies. Second, the relatively short study period of 2020-2024 may not adequately reflect the long-term impact of the combination of sustainability reporting and business ethics on company performance. Third, this study only uses two control variables: company size and leverage, so there is still the possibility of omitted variable bias that could affect the estimation results. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to expand the sample coverage by including more companies of various sizes and sectors, extend the analysis period to capture long-term dynamic effects, and add control variables such as institutional ownership, audit quality, assurance of sustainability reports, and other governance structures. Future research is also recommended to use dynamic panel data methods such as System GMM to address potential endogeneity issues in the relationship between sustainability reporting, business ethics, and company performance.

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