

# Accounting Students' Perception of Corporate Social Responsibility: Evidence from Kuwait

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This study aims to explore the perceptions and knowledge of accounting students in Kuwait regarding corporate social responsibility (CSR). It further investigates whether sociodemographic factors, such as gender, academic phase and working during study, influence the students' perceptions of CSR. To examine the differences in CSR's level of attention and importance among accounting students, a survey questionnaire was developed and distributed in various accounting students' classes. The results of analyzing revealed that accounting students in Kuwait have a reasonable knowledge about key components of CSR. The analysis further indicated that improving public image, increasing customer loyalty and satisfaction, and increasing support from community are the most important motivations for a company to be a socially responsible entity. Moreover, the results provide some support for the three research hypotheses.

**Key words:** *corporate social responsibility, accounting, student, Kuwait*

## 1. Introduction

Classical economists argue that a company's only responsibility is to increase value for its shareholders. In line with this view, the key objective of most companies, especially in the private sector, is to grow profits. However, achieving this objective should not cause negative side effects for other stakeholders and society as a whole (Galant and Cadez, 2017).



Research results in the area of corporate responsibility have confirmed this view and concluded that corporations have a responsibility to various stakeholder groups other than shareholders, and that social responsibility (SR) is important in determining corporate efficiencies. Barnett and Salomon (2012) argued that the better a corporation manages its relationships with its stakeholders, the more successful it will be over time.

The widespread and growing interest in CSR practices and efforts by corporations worldwide motivates scholars to focus on conducting CSR research. To date, empirical research into CSR has largely focused upon English-speaking and Western contexts and Far East countries. It has been argued that culture and norms have a significant effect on the perceptions and opinions of individuals. Also, there is diversity in culture and norms among countries, so it is important to gain more insight into the perceptions of accounting students in developing countries such as Kuwait and to provide a good opportunity to contribute to filling the knowledge gap in the existing CSR literature.

In the Arab region, limited empirical research has been undertaken, but among it is the work of Ahmad and Mousa (2010), Al-Shammari (2008), Hewaidy (2016) and Alfraih and Almutawa (2017). None of these studies explores or investigates the perceptions of individuals, especially business students, regarding CSR.

Bearing in mind that social responsibility is a growing concern in the business environment, it is crucial to investigate the perceptions of future employees, that is to say of today's students, on this matter (Teixeira et al., 2018). The literature shows differences in CSR perceptions among students from different countries (Wong et al., 2010; González-Rodríguez et al., 2012; Fitzpatrick and Cheng, 2013). To the best of authors' knowledge, no empirical research has been undertaken in Kuwait to test for business students' perceptions of CSR. The present research aims to explore the perceptions and knowledge of accounting students regarding CSR, and to determine whether sociodemographic factors such as gender, academic phase and work experience influence their perceptions of CSR.

The remainder of the study proceeds as follows. The next section provides a review of the literature relating to the subject. This is followed, in Section 3, by an identification of the main objective of the research and development of the hypotheses. Section 4 discusses the research results. The final section summarizes the main research findings, its limitations, and direction for further research.

## 2. Accounting education in Kuwait

Official accounting education in Kuwait was instigated in the early 1960s, alongside the growth of the corporate environment and the development of public companies (Alfraih and Alanezi, 2016). In exploring the professional certification process and accounting education in Kuwait, Shuaib (1992) claims that the Kuwaiti government established the Secondary School of Commerce in 1963 to meet a growing need for bookkeepers in the public and private sectors. Currently, accounting education is well established and delivered through several public and private higher education institutions as follows:

Kuwait University (KU) is presently the only public university in Kuwait to offer a bachelor's degree in Accounting. All other educational providers of bachelor's degrees in Accounting are private universities. Kuwait University's College of Business Administration (CBA) was established in 1967. It offers a bachelor's degree in Accounting. Students must take courses in general education (64 hours), core business (33 hours), their major (27 hours), and an elective (6 hours). Minimum requirements for graduation are 130 hours. Since 2005, the programs have been accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) (CBA, 2019). The number of students majoring in accounting at CBA has significantly increased over time, as documented by Alanezi and Alfraih (2011), suggesting a significant increase in interest in accounting education. The other public institution is the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), which offers a two-year Diploma in Accounting.

The government of Kuwait provides various scholarship opportunities within Kuwait. Kuwaiti high school students and diploma students may apply for Private Universities Council (PUC) scholarships. These are fully funded government scholarships that cover all tuition fees and course enrollment up to the time of graduation at several licensed private universities operating in Kuwait (PUC, 2019). According to the PUC, in 2019, only three private universities are licensed to offer a bachelor's degree in Accounting: the American University of Kuwait (AUK); the American University of the Middle East (AUM); and the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST).

Since this study explores GUST's accounting students' perception concerning the major corporate responsibilities, as well as their awareness of CSR philosophy and activities, the focus is on the Gulf University for Science and Technology (GUST).

GUST is the first private university in Kuwait. In 2017, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) University Rankings ranked GUST in the top 50 Arab region universities out of nearly 1000 universities and colleges (GUST, 2019a). The College of Business Administration is a private college that offers five four-year programs: Accounting, Business Administration, Finance, Marketing, and



Management Information Systems (MIS). The Department of Accounting and Management Information Systems at GUST offers a Bachelor of Science in Accounting. As the largest department in the College of Business Administration, the department provides irreplaceable and unique learning opportunities designed to lead students to successful careers in the accounting field. The majority of faculty members in the Department of Accounting hold terminal degrees in their fields from top universities in the USA, Canada, the U.K., Europe and Australia, and some are professionally qualified (GUST, 2019b). In 2014, the College of Business Administration received its accreditation from AACSB.

### **3. Stakeholder theory and CSR**

Stakeholder theory focuses on the relationship between two sides: a corporate on one side and various stakeholder groups on the other side. The extant literature offers many definitions for stakeholder theory. Freeman (1984:46), who is considered to be a pioneer in emerging stakeholder theory (Windsor, 2001; Post, 2003), defines stakeholders as “*any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organisation’s objectives*”. Stakeholder theory suggests the corporation’s survival and continuing success depends upon the behavior of any stakeholder groups who have an interest in the corporate’s operations (Parmar et al., 2010). Thus, corporates must be responsible and contribute to the society in which they operate (Moorthy et al., 2010). From the perspective of stakeholder theory, corporates work to satisfy the financial and non-financial demands of multiple sets of stakeholders (Pirsch et al., 2007).

The scope of stakeholder theory focuses on the ability of stakeholder groups to influence the company’s direction and the process of making decisions. Stakeholder theory is a comprehensive approach in terms of company relationships, since it concentrates not just on the association between managers and shareowners but also on the company’s relationship with all its stakeholder groups. Such groups as customers, shareowners, employees, suppliers, competitors, lenders, and community. Companies have relationships with all these groups, which can be divided into parts inside and outside the organization, as well as those who have an interest in it (Van der Putten, 2005). However, scholars usually prefer to classify stakeholders, based on their involvement and engagement in transactions with the corporate, as either primary groups (e.g. customers, employees, shareholders, suppliers) (Freeman, 1984; Waddock and Smith, 2000) or secondary stakeholder groups (e.g. non-governmental organizations, future generations) (Waddock and Smith, 2000). Overall, companies concentrate on prominent stakeholder groups and pay little attention to other interest groups; thus, it can be stated that the identification of stakeholder groups would enhance their visibility and lead to their greater prominence within the organization; as a result, a corporate is more likely to consider them part of an integrated stakeholder strategy (Freeman and Emshoff, 1979). It can be noted that corporates have relationships and interaction with various stakeholder groups, so it is expected that each group

has its own demands, requirements, and expectations that need to be satisfied. Freeman and Reed (1983) point out that the concept of corporate responsibility extends to include the views of all stakeholders who are able to affect the corporate's practices and policies.

CSR issues have received a great deal of interest from international bodies (e.g. the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) issued standard ISO 26000). International standard 26000 provides guidelines on SR for corporates and the public. In this sense, KPMG's survey in 2017 stated that more than two thirds of the leading corporates in the world had adopted assurance services in their SR reports, whereas, in 2005, the degree of adoption was only 30% (KPMG, 2017). This result reflects a high level of awareness among companies regarding the importance of the SR concept.

CSR is defined by The Commission of the European Communities (2001:6) as "*a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis*". In this sense, Nazari et al. (2012:555) give a broad definition of CSR as "*the activities making companies good citizens who contribute to society's welfare beyond their own self-interests*". It has been argued that the concepts of stakeholder and CSR are closely interrelated (Pirsch et al., 2007). Consequently, the success of CSR initiatives and programs depends on the ability of corporates to build strong and permanent relationships with their stakeholder groups (Clarkson, 1995; Waddock and Smith, 2000). Different aspects of corporate CSR performances target various stakeholder groups (Van der Putten, 2005).

A wide range of studies in the CSR literature, conducted in different countries, used stakeholder theory (for example, see Asemah et al., 2013; Vázquez et al., 2013; Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015; Elobeid et al., 2016). The current research, as an exploratory study, employed a stakeholder approach, as a theoretical framework, to analyze the perceptions of university students as a stakeholder group – future accountants/employees – regarding awareness of CSR. Using the perspective of this theory could also help to interpret the views of accounting students regarding the motivations for and benefits of corporates investing in corporate social activities and programs.

#### **4. Literature review**

As mentioned, CSR is a concept whereby organizations consider the needs of all stakeholders when making decisions. CSR extends beyond legal compliance to include voluntary actions that satisfy stakeholders' expectations. As such, it becomes crucial to investigate the perceptions of future employees, that is to say of today's students, on this matter (Teixeira, et al., 2018). In the same way, Ham et al. (2015) stated that business students represent future business leaders who



will, through their knowledge and business decisions, create the economic future of their country. It is important for companies as well as for academia to consider students' perceptions of CSR and to evaluate how prepared are they for this type of business environment.

Previous research into students' perception of CSR has pointed toward the gradual development of a more positive perception of the subject in recent years (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2015). Some of this research observed and investigated the situation in a single country, while other research investigated the situation cross-country.

The majority of the previous research has studied the situation in a single country. Using students sampled from a Portuguese higher education institution, Teixeira et al. (2018) examined students' perception regarding CSR and whether sociodemographic variables (such as gender, age, professional experience and academic degree) influence their perception. The results suggest that the students' perceptions present different dimensions that can be grouped as i) pro CSR, ii) resistant to CSR and iii) secondary CSR, and sociodemographic variables do not present statistically significant differences in the perceptions of the different students studied.

Alonso-Admeida et al. (2015) examined Spanish undergraduate business students' perception of CSR in cases where they had not attended any specific course, either dealing with CSR or providing training in ethics. The results show that CSR deserves considerable attention. Female students were more concerned about CSR issues. The maximization of value for shareholders was less valued by second- and third-year students than by their first-year counterparts. Kaya et al. (2014) intended to discover Turkish students' awareness level on voluntarism and SR programs. Results showed that no significant difference was found between students who had taken a SR course and those students who had not, with regard to their attitudes towards voluntarism.

Conducting a survey among undergraduate and graduate students of all years in the Faculty of Economics in Osijek (Croatia), Ham et al. (2015) examined the attitudes of business students towards CSR, investigating the differences in those attitudes and how the education process can influence students' understanding of CSR. The results showed that students did perceive the importance of CSR, proven by the fact that 85% of students were willing to sacrifice some percentage of their salary to work in a socially responsible company. Elobeid et al. (2016) conducted a survey among university students and faculty members of a university in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the importance of teaching CSR in business schools, how it should be taught, and at what level of higher education. The results indicate that promoting awareness and dialogue about this important phenomenon can help increase accountability, transparency, and integrity.



Hilario (2014) observed the level of awareness of CSR among accounting and business administration students in the Philippines, at the Far Eastern University (FEU-Manila). The results showed a low level of awareness in both accounting and business administration students, although accounting students tended to exhibit a relatively higher level of awareness. However, no significant differences in CSR awareness were detected.

Ravi Kiran's (2011) study aimed to help understand how Indian students of management education perceived the introduction of CSR in their curricula. The results reveal that the i) linkage of CSR, ii) management education and business, iii) business responsibility, iv) philanthropy, and economic responsibility are the four important factors for describing the need for and importance of the introduction of CSR in management education.

Apart from profit-oriented business organizations, Burcea and Marinescu (2011) highlighted, in short, the importance of the SR of institutions, and analyzed the results of research regarding students' perceptions of the CSR activities of a Romanian university. The results emphasize that students attach importance to CSR at an academic level, a fact indicated through their degree of involvement in the specific activities of this concept.

Using a group of students of different nationalities, a group of researchers examined students' perception of CSR across countries to test for the influence of culture on students' perception of CSR. Among this type of research is that of Wong et al. (2010), González-Rodríguez et al. (2012) and Fitzpatrick and Cheng (2013). Wong et al. (2010) assessed perceptible differences in CSR among business students in the United States, China, and India. The study found that American and Indian respondents attached greater importance to the noneconomic aspects of SR than Chinese respondents did. Chinese students were more accepting of making facilitating payments to get things moving. Indian respondents placed more emphasis on philanthropy, while the US group emphasized legal obligations. In the choice of business goals, there was generally little difference between the three nationality groups. The two main goals selected were taking care of owners' interests and consumers' needs.

González-Rodríguez et al. (2012) observed students' perception of CSR, with the objective of contributing knowledge about the understanding of CSR among business students at universities in Spain, Poland and Bulgaria. The study's findings revealed different value profiles by gender, and diverse attitudes to CSR perception across these European countries. Fitzpatrick and Cheng (2013) examined the situation among a sample of United States and Hong Kong undergraduate business students, to investigate how CSR perceptions might be explained by culture, gender, and spirituality. The results suggest that Hong Kong students are less sensitive to issues of CSR, even though the percentage of Hong Kong students with ethics education was higher than that of their American counterparts. An important finding is that spirituality is related to CSR

perceptions and the intensity of views on ethics more strongly than to any other factors, including academic performance.

In spite of the previous research on this topic, there is no empirical evidence on the perception of business students regarding CSR in the context of Kuwait; this is why the present study intends to investigate the subject in Kuwait. This investigation contributes the CSR body of knowledge. It is also important to gauge CSR and ethics perceptions among tomorrow's business leaders/future accountants – today's accounting students.

## **5. Research objectives and hypotheses development**

The present research aims to observe and investigate perceptions of accounting students in Kuwait regarding CSR activities. The research also aims to determine whether sociodemographic factors, such as gender, academic phase, and working during study, influence the students' perceptions of CSR. A hypothesis is tested for each of the three sociodemographic factors: gender, academic phase, and working during study.

### **5.1 Gender and primary corporate responsibilities**

Gender has been considered by most previous research as one of the sociodemographic factors that explain differences in students' perception of CSR. Among those researchers are Fitzpatrick and Cheng (2013), González-Rodríguez et al. (2012) and Wong et al. (2010). According to these studies, females have greater sensitivity to CSR issues, since they better understand the benefits that socially responsible actions can bring to the marketing of an organization, whereas males are more reluctant to accept this idea and believe that organizations often take advantage of consumers by requesting their support for certain causes (Teixeira et al., 2018). So, the present study tends to test the following hypothesis:

**H1: Female accounting students appear to pay more attention to the six primary corporate responsibilities than male students do.**

### **5.2 Academic phase and primary corporate responsibilities**

In addition to gender, academic phase has been used as a variable to explain difference in CSR perception. Some of the literature points out that the academic phase is an influential factor and considers that those in a higher academic phase respond more favorably to the question of CSR, because they believe that organizations aim at higher levels of fairness (Gavin and Maynard, 1975). As such, the present study tests the following hypothesis:

**H2: Higher-academic phase accounting students pay more attention to the six primary corporate responsibilities than lower-academic phase students do.**

### **5.3 Working during study and primary corporate responsibilities**

Finally, work experience is another factor frequently used for shaping and analyzing CSR perceptions. It has been found that those who acquire greater experience have a more favorable idea of the relevance of the theme, since social policies with positive effects affect the willingness and satisfaction of employees within the organization and contribute to initiatives that call for social change (Aguilera et al., 2007). Accordingly, the third hypothesis to be tested is:

**H3: Accounting students who work during study are more concerned with the six primary corporate responsibilities than those who do not work during study.**

## **6. Methodology**

In this study, the population used is comprised of accounting students at the College of Business Administration, GUST. To accomplish the study objectives, a questionnaire was adopted from previous studies conducted by Tan and Komaran (2006) and Alonso-Almeida et al. (2015). The questionnaire was piloted to some faculty members of GUST, in order to review and validate, as well as to assess its appropriateness to achieve its objectives.

The questionnaire was administered to the students during accounting classes. Two hundred and fifteen questionnaires were distributed in various accounting classes offered to students. Of the 215 questionnaires administered, 203 responses were considered suitable for statistical analysis. Data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using quantitative methods. Descriptive statistics and level of agreement were measured on a five-point Likert scale, with 5= strongly agree, while 1= strongly disagree. This was to help to assess the differences existing among accounting students in respect of the major corporate responsibilities explored. Non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney (M-W) and Kruskal Wallis (KW) tests) were employed to test the research hypotheses.

## **7. Data analysis and research results**

This section provides descriptive statistics of the demographic characteristics of respondents, the level of agreement among participants about the major responsibilities of corporates, their opinion about the most important motivations for a company to be involved in social activities, and, finally, the results of testing the research hypotheses.

## 7.1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

The participants in the questionnaire survey were asked to provide their demographic information. As shown in Table 1, 63.55% of the participants were female, while the remainder (36.45%) were male, with most respondents (97%) being aged 20 years or above. The distribution of respondents according to their marital status implied that 84.20% were single. The overwhelming majority of accounting students surveyed in this study (91.60% and 98%, respectively) had college GPA 2.00 or above and were in their second or higher academic year. The results further indicate that only 12.80% of the participants were employed during their studies. This result was expected, since the Kuwaiti government provides financial support to Kuwaiti university students.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents**

Demographic information		N	Percent
<b>Gender</b>	Male	74	36.45
	Female	129	63.55
	Total	203	100.00
<b>Age</b>	18-19 years	6	3.00
	20-21 years	76	37.40
	22-23 years	67	33.00
	24 and over	54	26.60
	Total	203	100.00
<b>Marital status</b>	Single	171	84.20
	Married	30	14.80
	Other	2	1.00
	Total	203	100.00
<b>High school GPA</b>	Below 60%	3	1.50
	61%-70%	26	12.80
	71%-80%	73	36.00
	81%-90%	82	40.40
	Above 90%	19	9.40
	Total	203	100.00
<b>College GPA</b>	Less than 2	17	8.40
	2.00-2.49	63	31.00
	2.50-2.99	49	24.10
	3.00-3.49	45	22.20
	3.50-above	29	14.30
	Total	203	100.00
<b>Academic phase</b>	1st Year	4	2.00
	2nd Year	25	12.30

	3rd Year	67	33.00
	4th Year	107	52.70
	Total	203	100.00
<b>Working during study</b>	Yes	26	12.80
	No	177	87.20
	Total	203	100.00

## 7.2 Major responsibilities of the corporate

This section provides the results from analyzing data related to the level of agreement among accounting students about the six major corporate responsibilities categories, as well as exploring students' awareness of CSR philosophy and activities. Table 2 shows these results for each of the six corporate responsibilities categories. Generally, all statements in each of the six categories (with few exceptions) are perceived as important aspects of a well-run company in the view of respondents (see Table 2).

Among the six key corporate responsibility categories, based on the whole sample's mean scores, environmental responsibility (with a mean of 4.29, it is clearly in the first place) is rated the most important corporate responsibility in the view of survey participants as a stakeholder group. This suggests that Kuwaiti corporates should take greater action and play a significant role in conserving the natural environment, instead of working only to maximize their investments and the wealth of their shareholders. The reported result is consistent with Alonso-Almeida et al.'s (2015) statement that the company is a multi-objective organization a notation more attuned to stakeholder theory rather than an entity serving one single objective.

The results also indicate that accounting students in Kuwait show strong concern regarding environmental issues, and this can be interpreted using the perspective of stakeholder theory. Environmental responsibility is followed by the stewardship principle (mean = 3.81, in second place), which is just ahead of company–employee relationship (mean = 3.80, in third place) ethical responsibility (mean = 3.78, in fourth position), economic responsibility (mean = 3.75, in fifth position) and legal responsibility (mean = 3.72, in last position), in that order. It can be stated that the accounting students as a part of society and as stakeholders pay great attention to social activities and corporate social performance, and their views are related to stakeholder theory. Therefore, corporates should concentrate more on these activities in the society in which they run their operations. Also, this may be an indication of the high level of public interest and awareness among accounting students regarding a corporate's role in social activities and the concept of CSR. On a different point, the response to economic corporate responsibility shows

that the interests of the shareholders'/owners' vision did not receive a high degree of attention from accounting students.

**Table 2: Students' perceptions regarding the six major corporate responsibilities categories**

A	Economic responsibility	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Whole sample mean	Rank
1	The primary goal of companies is to make as much profit as possible.	0.00	4.43	16.26	43.35	35.96	4.11	1
2	Companies strive to lower their operational costs.	0.49	2.96	28.08	48.77	19.70	3.84	2
3	Companies should strive to maximize the wealth of their shareholders.	0.00	3.45	29.56	48.28	18.72	3.82	3
4	Companies should not be distracted from their economic functions by solving social problems.	3.45	23.65	30.05	31.03	11.82	3.24	4
<b>B</b>	<b>Legal responsibility</b>							
1	Companies strive to comply with all laws and regulations.	0.00	3.94	26.60	36.45	33.00	3.99	2
2	Companies must operate strictly within the legal framework of the society.	0.49	2.96	19.21	47.29	30.05	4.03	1
3	It is sometimes convenient for companies to violate some laws and regulations.	8.40	25.10	33.50	23.60	9.40	3.00	4
4	Companies have to adhere to all rules and regulations even though it may be costly for them.	0.49	5.42	28.57	38.42	27.09	3.86	3
<b>C</b>	<b>Ethical responsibility</b>							
1	Companies should not compromise ethical norms and social values to achieve their goals.	6.40	16.75	20.69	25.12	31.03	3.58	3
2	Socially responsible companies always do what is right, fair and just.	1.48	7.39	24.14	37.93	29.06	3.86	2
3	Companies should avoid doing harm at all cost.	0.00	2.46	17.73	32.51	47.29	4.25	1
4	It is sometimes convenient for companies to engage in questionable practices for economic gains.	6.40	10.84	30.05	36.45	16.26	3.45	4
<b>D</b>	<b>Stewardship principle</b>							
1	Companies have an obligation to see that everyone in the society benefits from their actions.	1.48	7.39	27.09	41.87	22.17	3.76	3
2	Companies should consider the interests of all who are affected by their decisions and actions.	0.99	3.45	18.72	48.77	28.08	4.00	1
3	Successful companies should balance the interests and needs of different groups in the society in which they operate.	0.49	2.96	21.67	46.31	28.57	4.00	1
4	Companies and society are interrelated.	5.91	7.39	35.47	34.98	16.26	3.48	4
<b>E</b>	<b>Company-employee relationship</b>							
1	Companies are stable employers.	3.45	8.37	36.45	33.99	17.73	3.54	4
2	Companies invest in employee training and development programs.	0.00	3.45	27.09	38.42	31.03	3.97	2

3	Companies offer competitive compensation and benefit packages.	0.49	1.97	19.21	52.22	26.11	4.01	1
4	Companies offer equal-opportunity employment.	1.97	14.78	24.63	33.00	25.62	3.66	3
<b>F</b>	<b>Environmental responsibility</b>							
1	Companies should take care of the environment (e.g. participate in the rationalization of energy consumption and in environmentally friendly activities).	0.00	0.99	9.85	30.54	58.62	4.47	1
2	Companies should avoid damaging the environment as a part of their strategies.	0.00	2.96	10.34	28.08	58.62	4.42	2
3	Companies should contribute to the upkeep of the environment.	0.00	1.97	18.23	35.47	44.33	4.22	4
4	Companies should have waste minimization and recycling programs.	0.49	3.94	22.66	29.56	43.35	4.11	5
5	Companies should encourage their staff to conserve natural resources and energy in the society in which they operate.	0.49	2.96	19.70	26.11	50.74	4.24	3

### 7.3 Perceived benefits of corporate social responsibility

The results in Table 3 suggest that all proposed statements related to the motivations behind corporates' participation in social events and activities with the exception of the final statement, which falls in the neutral rating (mean = 2.58) received a high level of agreement from the majority of respondents, as is clear from the overall sample mean values of 3.23 or above. The following statements are considered the most important motivations and are rated the top three perceived benefits by respondents:

1. Improve public image/reputation (mean = 4.44)
2. Increase customer loyalty and satisfaction (mean = 4.29)
3. Increase support from the community (mean = 4.27).

These results could be explained on the grounds that, in the view of participants, the motivations and benefits behind corporates' CSR practices are to strengthen their competitive position among others in the market, increase the number of deals and their share prices, and foster political and community support. Overall, these findings lend support to the predictions suggested by stakeholder theory. Based on the above findings, it is noteworthy that corporates practice social activities in different mechanisms, in order to achieve their goals. In this sense, corporates employ different strategies to disclose information about their social and environmental performance, and this may help to influence public opinion (Haider and Nishitani, 2020). The study results are in line with those of Tan and Komaran (2006), who observe that social and environmental friendliness are highly rated. Moreover, participants' responses clearly indicate that they did not give a high ranking to the last item, "no benefit", and therefore it is found in the

last position. It could be argued that this result takes into account the fact that participants believe that a number of motivations encourage companies to participate in social activities and national campaigns, and this is consistent with the propositions of stakeholder theory.

**Table 3: Perceived benefits of CSR practices**

Statement	Whole sample mean	Rank
Improve public image/reputation	4.44	1
Increase brand image	4.19	5
Increase support from the community	4.27	3
Improve employee morale	4.26	4
Increase customer loyalty and satisfaction	4.29	2
Reduce criticism from the public	3.75	13
Enhance investors' confidence	3.96	10
Attract quality employees	4.19	5
Enhance employee loyalty	4.13	7
Increase sales	4.00	8
Minimize regulatory problems	3.98	9
Minimize restrictive regulations	3.79	12
Improve market price of shares	3.96	10
Others	3.23	14
No benefit	2.58	15

## 7.4 Testing the research hypotheses

This section presents and analyzes the results of testing the three research hypotheses related to the issue of whether sociodemographic factors, including gender, academic phase, and working during study, influence the students' perceptions of CSR.

### 7.4.1 Testing H1: Gender and CSR

The Mann-Whitney (M-W) tests were used to examine the differences between genders in the level of awareness of and importance allocated to each of the six primary corporate responsibilities. Table 4 shows that economic responsibility was the only primary corporate responsibility that showed a significant difference between the genders ( $p < 0.10$ ). Unexpectedly, males placed more emphasis on economic responsibility than females, with mean ranks of 112.38 and 96.05, respectively. However, the remaining five primary corporate responsibilities did not show any significant difference, when the gender dimension was considered. This result may be interpreted on the grounds that, as future accountants/businessmen in Kuwait, male

accounting students believe that profit is an important measure for successful corporates and enhances their competitive position in the market, more than their female counterparts do. Thus, these findings do not support the research’s hypothesis. This finding is consistent with that of Tan and Komaran (2006), who observed a significant difference in CSR rating due to gender.

**Table 4: Results of testing hypothesis 1**

Primary corporate responsibilities	Gender	Mean rank	Z	p-value
Economic res.	Male	112.38	1.927	.054*
	Female	96.05		
Legal res.	Male	102.02	.004	.997
	Female	101.99		
Ethical res.	Male	99.89	.392	.695
	Female	103.21		
Stewardship Principle	Male	102.24	.044	.965
	Female	101.86		
Company–employee relationship	Male	101.75	.046	.963
	Female	102.14		
Environmental res.	Male	100.90	.204	.838
	Female	102.63		

\*  $p < .10$ .

#### 7.4.2 Testing H2: Academic phase and CSR

The Kruskal Wallis (KW) tests were employed to assess the second assumption, “higher-academic phase accounting students pay more attention to the six primary corporate responsibilities than lower-academic phase students”. As depicted in Table 5, it can be concluded that there are only statistically significant differences in the views of participants regarding ethical responsibility ( $p < 0.05$ ). Senior accounting students (4<sup>th</sup> academic phase) pay greater attention to ethical responsibility than other students from different academic phases, with mean rankings of 83.25, 89.12, 89.09, and 113.79, respectively. On the other hand, the remaining five main corporate responsibilities did not display any significant differences, when the academic phase perspective was taken into account.

It could be argued that this result indicates that senior accounting students believe this type of corporate responsibility has a positive impact on enhancing the corporate’s reputation globally and locally, as well as its competitive position, compared to the other main responsibilities. Also,

the results indicate that life experience and academic background and knowledge play a key role in improving accounting students' attitudes and views toward primary corporate responsibilities.

Hanifa and Kahar (2015) claim that education institutions which provide their accounting students, as future accountants, with a good academic background in environmental topics will have a positive impact on creating accountants who are interested in and aware of environmental affairs. In line with this, Matten and Moon (2004) and Alonso-Almeida et al. (2015) state that universities should adopt CSR-related issues in their curricula, to build students' awareness and help them to make sound decisions when they join the work environment.

Consequently, it can be stated that these results lend support to the study's proposition regarding the academic phase of students, in the case of ethical responsibility but not in respect of the other five primary corporate responsibilities. These findings are similar to those of Alonso-Almeida et al. (2015), who found significant differences in CSR perception between entry-level and upper-level students. Their results reveal that upper-level students have a more positive perception of CSR than entry-level students.

**Table 5: Results of testing hypothesis 2**

Primary corporate responsibilities	Academic phase	Mean rank	$\chi^2$	Df	<i>p-value</i>
Economic res.	1st Year	77.63	1.758	3	0.624
	2nd Year	106.60			
	3rd Year	96.63			
	4th Year	105.20			
Legal res.	1st Year	124.63	1.495	3	0.683
	2nd Year	92.16			
	3rd Year	100.94			
	4th Year	104.12			
Ethical res.	1st Year	83.25	9.337	3	0.025*
	2nd Year	89.12			
	3rd Year	89.09			
	4th Year	113.79			
Stewardship principle	1st Year	91.63	.886	3	0.829
	2nd Year	103.52			
	3rd Year	97.22			
	4th Year	105.02			

Company– employee relationship	1st Year	84.13	2.518	3	0.472
	2nd Year	117.00			
	3rd Year	97.00			
	4th Year	102.29			
Environmental res.	1st Year	117.00	1.013	3	0.798
	2nd Year	94.52			
	3rd Year	99.65			
	4th Year	104.66			

\*  $p < .05$ .

### 7.4.3 Testing H3: Working during study and CSR

The Mann-Whitney (M-W) tests were conducted to assess the differences in the level of awareness of and importance placed on each of the six primary corporate responsibilities by accounting students with work experience and those with no work experience. Ethical responsibility and stewardship responsibility were the primary corporate responsibilities that showed a significant difference between students with work experience and those without work experience ( $p < 0.10$ ) (see Table 6). Unexpectedly, accounting students without work experience give greater importance to ethical responsibility than other colleagues with work experience, with mean ranks of 81.31 and 105.04, respectively. This finding is consistent with that of Alonso-Almeida et al. (2015), who failed to find significant differences in CSR perception among business students, with respect to work experience.

Another result is that, as expected, accounting students with work experience give greater importance to stewardship responsibility than their non-working counterparts, with mean ranks of 121.27 and 99.17, respectively. This finding was expected and consistent with Alonso-Almeida et al.'s (2015) argument that a company is a multi-objective organization rather than an entity serving one single objective. On the other hand, no statistical differences were found in the other four primary corporate responsibilities, when the work experience attribute was taken into consideration.

**Table 6: Results of testing hypothesis 3**

Primary corporate responsibilities	Working during study	Mean rank	Z	p-value
Economic res.	Yes	109.35	.690	0.490
	No	100.92		
Legal res.	Yes	95.27	.634	0.526
	No	102.99		
Ethical res.	Yes	81.31	1.942	0.052*
	No	105.04		
Stewardship principle	Yes	121.27	1.810	0.070*
	No	99.17		
Company–employee relationship	Yes	94.75	.678	0.498
	No	103.06		
Environmental res.	Yes	107.06	.475	0.635
	No	101.26		

\*  $p < .10$ .

## 8. Conclusion, Limitations and Future Studies

This paper explores the perceptions and knowledge of the GUST accounting students in respect of CSR. Further, the paper tests whether sociodemographic factors, such as gender, academic phase, and working during study, influence the students' perceptions of CSR. To achieve these objectives, the differences in the level of awareness of and interest accounting students showed in CSR philosophy and activities was examined. A questionnaire was developed from previous studies. Data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, level of agreement and non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney and Kruskal Wallis tests).

The results imply that the accounting students in Kuwait have a reasonable knowledge about key components of corporate responsibility. The results also revealed that students show a strong concern about environmental issues. The analysis further indicated that improved public image, increased customer loyalty and satisfaction, and increased support from the community are considered the most important motivations for a company to be involved in social activities. With the exception of economic responsibility, there is no significant difference between males and females as to the other five components of CSR. Moreover, based on their academic phase aspect, there is significant difference between students' perceptions regarding ethical responsibilities alone. The result of the third factor tested, working during study, revealed that there is a significant difference between those who are employed in work during their studies and those who are not, as regards ethical responsibility and the stewardship principle.



Young people such as accounting students are members of the community and play a crucial role in it. Overall, they are eager to obtain a better life and progress in the accounting profession and business environment. Moreover, the results of the study imply that accounting students have a reasonable knowledge about key components of corporate responsibilities; thus, it is worthwhile for academic institutions in Kuwait to widen education issues related to social activities, and this may improve the students' knowledge and awareness about these topics before starting their professional life. As an example, in the context of CSR education, Kaya et al. (2014) proposed that, when corporates are aware of their stakeholder groups' expectations, they tend to recruit people who are influenced by social effects such as SR education. Hence, it is crucial to provide degree programs with awareness about SR for the future work force.

The current study has some limitations, and this provides a good opportunity to recommend future research streams. Future research may utilize another data-gathering method such as the interview technique, a qualitative approach, to support the outcomes of this study. Further research could be conducted by including business students from other majors, as future managers, in order to gain a deeper understanding of their views and attitudes regarding the concept of CSR and its policies and practices. Other promising research issues derive from undertaking a comparative study between business students in private universities and those in public universities, regarding their perceptions of corporate social activities' engagement, since a difference is expected in the levels of importance and value that students place on these topics. Further insight could also be gained by comparing the views of graduate/MBA students from private and public universities on corporate social performance. On a different point, the education on CSR matters has a vital role to play in building and developing the skills and abilities of business students, as young people who will become future accountants and managers, in terms of education and ethics, and this may have a positive impact on them, by enhancing their sense of caring SR and its importance. Consequently, it is important to explore the instructors' perceptions and views regarding the role of the education system in teaching CSR issues as a part of the curriculum.



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