

Students' Perceptions about Corporate Social Responsibility at the Academic Level

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Abstract: *During the last decades, the social responsibility of institutions, public as well as private, has been subject to intense debates, activities and academic research. The aims of the paper are to highlight in short the importance of the social responsibility of educational institutions, and to analyze the results of a research regarding students' perceptions on corporate social responsibility activities. By using primary data obtained from a survey based on a questionnaire a set of three hypotheses was tested during our research. The results of our research emphasize that students attach importance to the corporate social responsibility at academic level, a fact indicated through their involvement degree in the specific activities of this concept.*

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, students, colleges, academics

Introduction

The social responsibility concept has emerged because of engaging the civil society organizations, corporations and states all over the world in the community problems. During the last decades, the social responsibility of institutions, public as well as private, has been subject to intense debates, activities and academic research. There are numerous ways researchers and scholars conceptualize the corporate social responsibility (CSR). In principle, CSR refers to three main types of responsibilities that an organization has to fulfill i.e. economic, social and environmental (Elkington, 1997).

Higher education institutions in general and educational institutes in particular, have undergone in depth transformations in the last decades, affecting and being affected by socio-demographical, political and economic phenomena. As higher education has become a highly competitive diversified sector, it was necessary for educational institutes to reinvent themselves in response to new challenges and opportunities. Today's strong educational institutes stand out by their ability to follow their vision and to preserve their identity even amid significant shifts on the global higher education market by internationalization, the marketisation and deregulation of educational institutes. Moreover, the presence of many stakeholders and the application of theories and concepts that have been successful in the business world in an effort to gain a larger share of this market have clearly demonstrated that educational institutes behave more and more as entrepreneurial educational institutes in the current knowledge economy (Ramachandran, 2010; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2010; Petruzzellis and Romanazzi, 2010). The growing concern of nowadays educational institutes to satisfy the needs of different stakeholders i.e. students, parents, employees, public and private companies, society and to deal with a profound ecological and social disruption has imposed them a greater social responsibility (Kunstler, 2006).

Educational institutes are not only educational services providers, but also shapers of identity with major responsibilities to the nation and to the wider world (Sullivan, 2003). As educational institutes are facing some of the challenges corporations face, they both struggle for funds, good employees, reputation etc. In order to respond better to societal demands educational

institutes can learn from the corporate experience. This is why “corporate models and managerialism are a part of emerging definitions of academic work” (Hammond and Churchman, 2008, p. 237).

In essence, corporations are both economic organizations and social institutions (Drucker, 1972). Therefore, they have social responsibilities (SR) as educational institutes have. A corporate social orientation requires ethical and social commitments, connections with stakeholders and consistency of behaviour on a long term (Meehan, Meehan and Richards, 2006). For example, if a university decides to be more responsible and connected with the society, it must be prepared to create, develop and implement a successful social responsibility strategy. The third millennium university has to be “a place where people are taught to engage as critical and conscientious citizens” (Hinchcliff, 2006, p. 83). Arising from the above ideas two interrelated questions emerge for which we do not have adequate evidence yet in the Indian educational institutes. These are:

How are the SR activities of Indian educational institutes perceived by its students?

Which is the impact of the SR activities of Indian educational institutes among its students?

The aims of our paper are to highlight in short the importance of the social responsibility of institutions, and to analyze the results of a research regarding students’ perceptions on SR activities of Indian educational institutes. To such end, by using primary data obtained from a survey based on a questionnaire, a set of three hypotheses was tested during our research. The first part of the paper is dealing in details with the research methodology. The findings are analyzed and interpreted in the second part, which relate to the main questions that have driven our study.

Objectives of the Study

A. Identifying the degree of knowledge of the main components of the CSR concept among the under graduate students in and around Belgaum city.

- Evaluating the method in which the under graduate students are acquainted with the regulations regarding the environment policy in and around Belgaum city;
- Identifying the knowledge degree in respect with the procedures and regulations regarding the quality and honesty of the contracts between the Belgaum city and the undergraduate students;
- Measuring the undergraduate students’ perception related to the openness towards community which is promoted in and around Belgaum city;
- The students’ perception of the values promoted by the undergraduate colleges and Belgaum city;
- The students’ knowledge level of the strategy and periodical references on the activities specific to the CSR developed by the colleges in and around Belgaum city.

B. Impact on students’ social responsibility activities carried out in and around the Belgaum city

- The contribution of students in the CSR activities developed by the colleges in and around the Belgaum city;
- Quantifying the influence that the activities specific to the CSR and developed by the undergraduate colleges and students of Belgaum city;

Based on the above-mentioned objectives the authors formulated the following set of hypotheses:

- The higher the level of knowledge over the undergraduate courses CSR strategy among students, the higher their participation in the specific activities;

- The higher the level of knowledge over the CSR activities developed on an institutional level, the more numerous the students' improvement suggestions on the overall activity.

Research Process

We carried out a sociological survey based on a questionnaire. A survey was passed among the students of the undergraduate level in and around the Belgaum city. The sampling system consists of the undergraduate students in and around Belgaum city. The sample volume comprised 100 respondents, students of undergraduate, daily courses. (Table 1) The sample is representative on the level of the undergraduates of in and around Belgaum city. The established sample is probabilistic, in three stages and with stratification in the first stage in accordance to the section in which the student is registered. In the second stage, stratification was applied in relation to the year of study. In the last stage, we used a random selection in and around the Belgaum city that will be interviewed through the "statistical method".

Table 1: Distribution on sections and years of study of the surveys created during the field research

Class	BA	B.Com	B. Sc	Total No. of interviews
I	15	17	10	42
II	16	12	0	28
III	13	17	0	30
Total	44	46	10	100

Source: Field Survey

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The information gathered was analyzed and interpreted. Within each domain there was pursued to achieve students' knowledge over the specific CSR activities and their level of involvement, as follows:

1. Knowledge level of the supplementary measures and actions carried out with the purpose of reducing the impact of the undergraduates /in and around the Belgaum activities on the environment.

A significantly low level of knowledge over additional actions carried out by the Belgaum city for conserving the environment can be noticed. A higher visibility (52 %) has also had the measures and activities towards reducing and recycling waste products. (Figure 1)

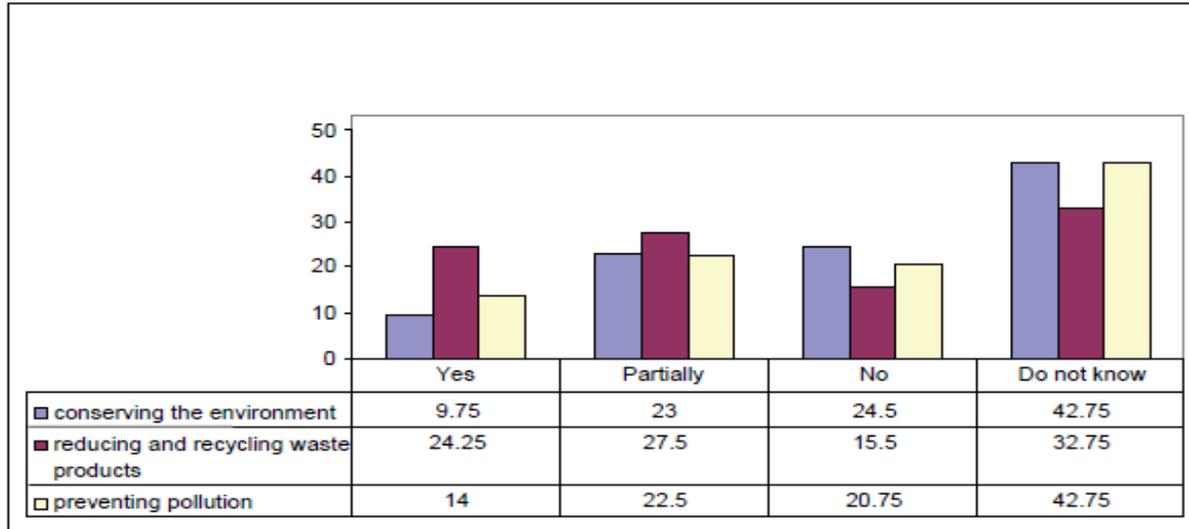


Figure 1: Level of knowledge of the additional measures that can lead to mitigating the impact of CSR activities over the environment (%)

The students who notice additional measures in reducing and recycling waste are mainly those that appreciate the voluntarism participation of the undergraduates under different aspects in projects for the environment’s protection and that it offers clear information about the products and services provided. (Table 2)

Table 2: Knowledge level of the undergraduates in and around Belgaum city voluntary participation in actions for environment protection

Variants	Relative Frequency %
Yes	22.3
No	6.5
Do not know	71.2
Total	100

Source: Created by researcher on the basis of field work

It can be observed that 22.3% of the undergraduate students know that undergraduates voluntarily participate in actions for the protection of the environment. The very high percentage of those who cannot answer this question reveals a reduced level of information among students about this sort of approach. It results that there are communication deficiencies in both ways. On one hand, the institution does not always provide complete information regarding the projects for environment protection (even when plans exist). On the other hand, in some situations the groups of students present indolence towards their implication in this sort of activities. It can be observed that 54 students have indicated concrete actions towards environment protection. (Figure 2) Planting trees, followed by cleaning and developing parks represented most of the actions carried out.

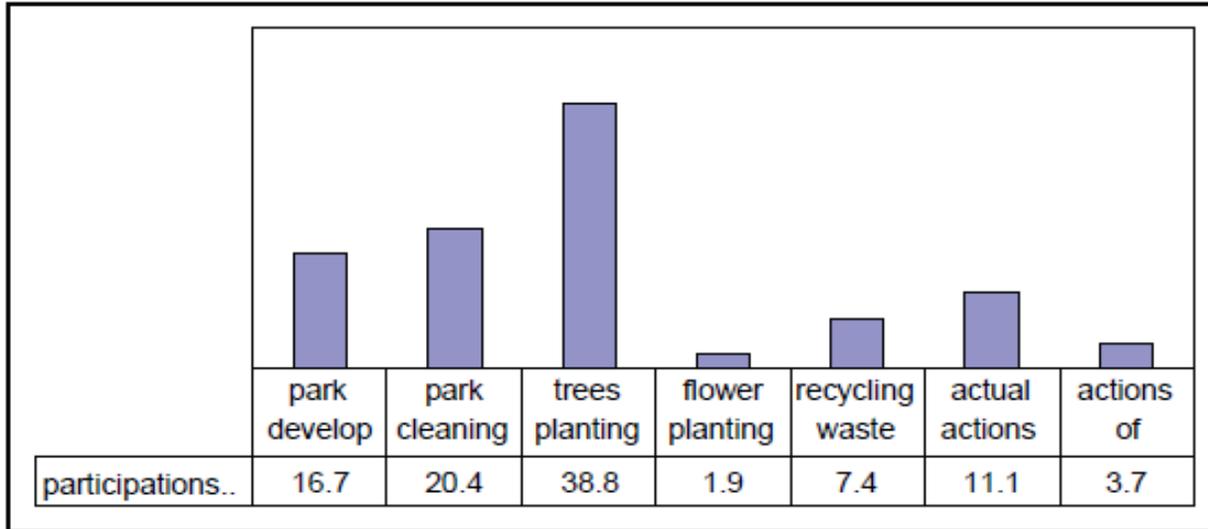


Figure 2: Share of types of environmental protection actions carried out by undergraduates, according to the opinion of the questioned students (%)

In conclusion, the actions and measures fulfilled towards protecting the environment captured the attention of a well-structured group with clear preoccupations in this domain, stakeholders in the activities that undergraduates completes in relation to the employees, the students and the business environment.

2. Knowledge degree of the additional measures and actions fulfilled by the undergraduates in order to assure honesty and quality of procedures towards stakeholders.

Regarding contracts with students and stakeholders, half of the respondents said that before signing those the respondents were clearly informed in detail about all rights and obligations. (Figure 3) They have remarked that the quality of the studies is largely guaranteed through the faculty teachers (competent, connected to the labor market realities), the contracts are detailed and most of the requests have been solved on time. Thirty two percent of the students believe that in and around Belgaum, procedures that guarantee the honesty and quality of advertisement for products and services. The said underlined the transparency of the selection processes regarding abroad educational programs, as well as for professional training workshops, labor mediation services, the correct appreciation of the students’ activity, the diversity of social services, of professional groups and university fairs.

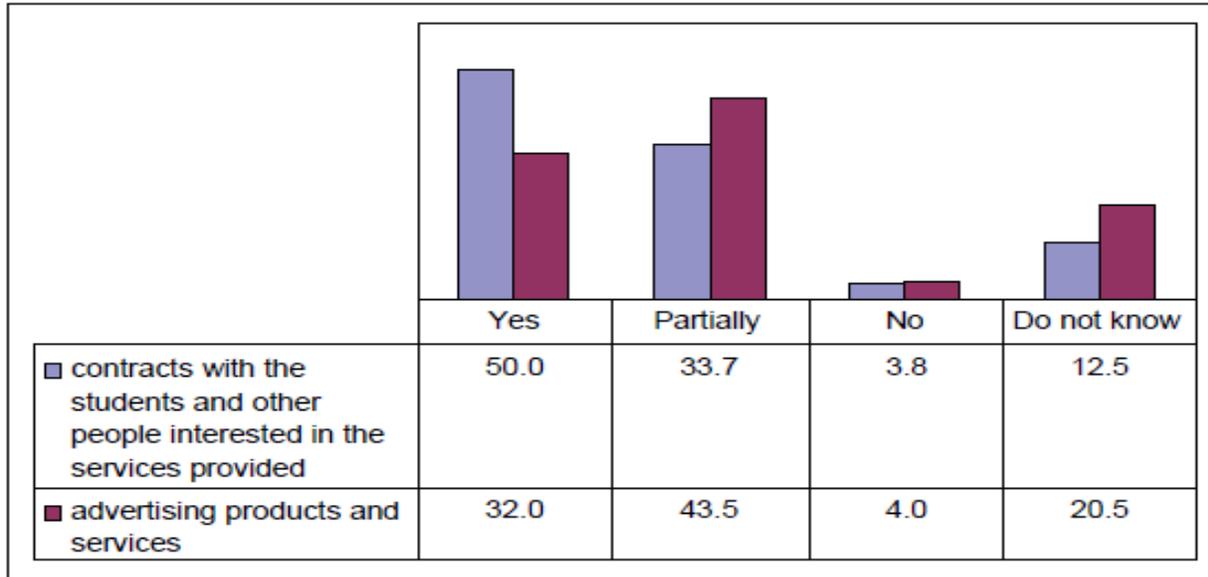


Figure 3: Students’ perceptions related to the honesty and quality of procedures of undergraduate colleges in and around Belgaum city.

Therefore, an optimum rapport has to be between the image of undergraduate products and services, and their content whereas there are situations in which the content of some programs is substantial but the presentation requires improvements. An important chapter of CSR activity is represented by undergraduates concern for fulfilling and improving the services provided. A measurement was made about the students’ perception of fulfilling the discounts calendar regarding the amounts paid by the students registered on the public scholarships allocated under the budget of the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports, over the procedures through which a consultation or a dialogue is assured for the students regarding the quality of their courses and seminars and registering and solving filed complaints. Regarding the compliance of discounts regarding the passes for the students registered on the public scholarships allocated under the budget of the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and sports, 63% of the students affirmed they were always fulfilled, while 32% noticed that there were situations when the deadline was exceeded. Only 0.5% of the interviewed students considered that deadlines for discounts were never fulfilled. (Table 3)

Table 3: The distribution of answers regarding the way how undergraduate colleges ensures on time reimbursement of passes towards the students

Answers	Relative frequency (%)
Yes, always	63.2
Sometimes, it exceeds the deadline	32.0
They never pay on time	0.5
Do not know	4.3
Total	100.0

Source: Created by researcher on the basis of field work

Concerning the procedures that assure consultation/dialogue regarding the quality of courses and seminars, 74% of the students affirm the existence of such procedures. (Table no. 4) It is interesting to notice the lack of a significant statistical association between affirming the existence of consultation procedures regarding the quality of courses and seminars and the section, year of study, gender and the residential area from which the students originate. These procedures indicate, in the students' opinion, the interest shown for their training, for a dialogue and creating a climate of trust between the two parts involved in the educational process.

Table 4: The distribution of the answers regarding the way how undergraduate colleges makes use of procedures, rules through it ensures a consultation/dialogue regarding the quality of courses and seminars with the students

Answers	Relative frequency (%)
Yes	74.0
No	22.5
Do not know	3.5
Total	100.0

Source: Created by researcher on the basis of field work

On the topic of registering and solving complaints made by students, about 29% of them did not experience any problems. (Table 5) Only 11% of the students are, in a certain degree, not satisfied with this component of the faculty-students relationship.

Table 5: Distribution of the answers regarding the perception over the way how undergraduate colleges registers and solves students' complaints

Answers	Relative frequency (%)
Yes, always	13.0
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	46.7
Rarely or very rare	8.3
Not at all	2.8
Do not know	29.2
Total	100.0

Source: Created by researcher on the basis of field work

In this analyzed aspect, no significant statistical association (adjusted residual value under 2 on a 95% trust level) can be noticed of the variables specialization, year of study, gender and residential environment of the student. In the students' opinion solving the complaints that the institution receives leads to improving confidence in the educational process, assures transparency and creates a proper climate for the activities to be properly carried out. We must also mention that solving the students' complaints indicates the importance awarded to them by the institution's leaders.

In the case of undergraduate colleges, cooperation with other companies or organizations in solving aspects related to responsible educational activity, it can be observed that 3% of the respondents affirm that the institution does not look for external support. (Table 6) The answers to this question are not influenced by variables such as specialization, year of study, gender and residential environment, however such are directly proportional with the degree in which clear

and exact information on its products, services and activities are provided to students, suppliers and the local community.

Table 6: The distribution of answers regarding the perception over the cooperation of undergraduate colleges with other companies or organizations in solving the issues related to the responsible educational activity

Answers	Relative frequency (%)
Yes	61.1
Partially	35.9
No	3.0
Total options	100.0

Source: Created by researcher on the basis of field work

The answers to said question are not influenced by variables such as specialization, year of study, gender and residential environment, but are directly proportional with the level of delivery to students, suppliers, and local communities of clear and exact information over its products, services and activities.

3. Degree of knowledge of the additional measures and actions carried out by undergraduate colleges in and around Belgaum city with the aim of opening towards the community.

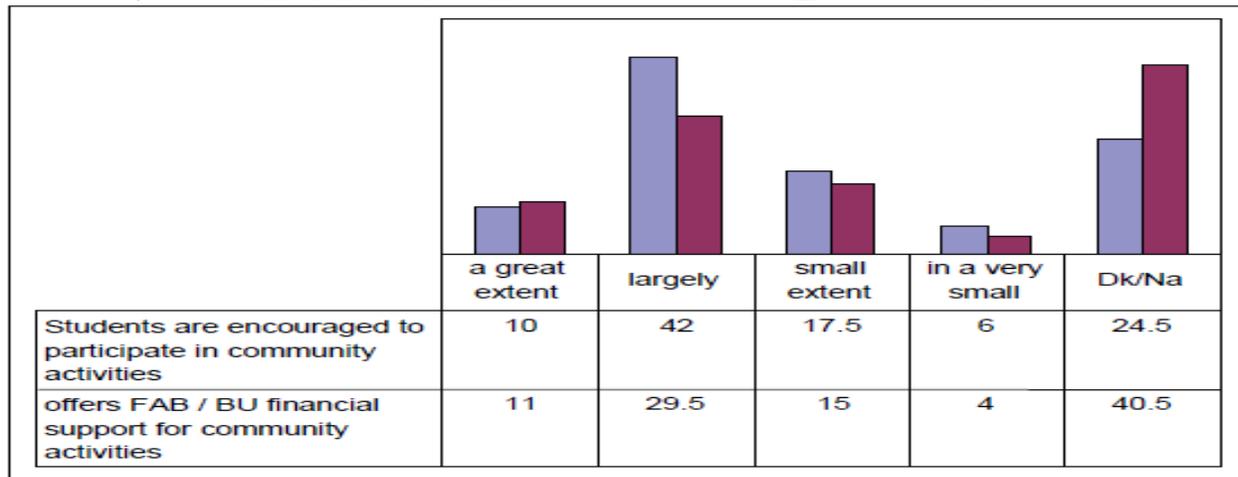


Figure 4: The degree of involvement from undergraduate colleges and its students in the life of community (%)

The interviewed students know the dimension of the communitarian activity developed by undergraduate colleges in a high degree. (Figure 4) From those that answered about the community implication aspects, 80% affirm that the faculty offers opportunities to community members. Sixty-eight percent sustain that the institution supports in a high and very high measure different activities (such as donations, acts of charity or sponsorship) and encourages students' participation in activities.

4. Degree of knowledge of the additional measures and actions carried out by undergraduate colleges and aiming knowledge of the values that define its internal and external relationships.

In the widest area the concept of value expresses a set of general and abstract principles about what is important and cherished in life, about how people should behave and appreciate situations, events, people, as well as social and natural objects. Those who believe that the values are clearly defined within the institution in relation with the stakeholders represent approximately 89-94% of the interviewed subjects. The students consider that the best-regulated situation is the one in accordance to its employees and then with them and the business environment. (Figure 5) In view of the correlation between the main considered demographical and social features (gender, year of study, specialization, and residential environment) and the three addressability segments (university staff, students and the business environment), it can be noticed that only the gender feature influences the answers to the questions in the questionnaire. Thus, the students of masculine gender tend more to consider that the values are not clearly defined regarding the university staff while they cannot make any statements in respect with said aspects in the case of students and the business environment.

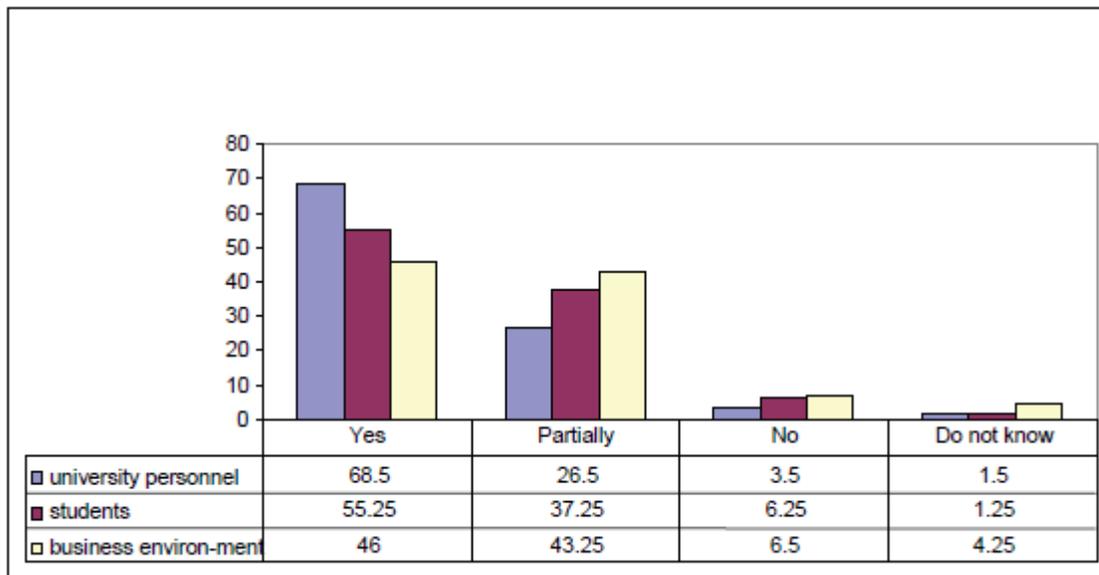


Figure 5: The degree in which undergraduate college has clearly defined values in relation with the stakeholders (%)

5. The benefits provided by the additional actions carried out by the undergraduate college in order to increase the confidence and communication with stakeholders.

In the opinion of the undergraduate students, the benefits of the information/communication activity are the improvement of the institution’s reputation/prestige, an increased satisfaction level among the employees and students, better relationships with the local community and public authority.

The level of satisfaction of the students is also significantly influenced by the CSR strategy of the undergraduate college. The level of the students’ expectancy regarding the activities fulfilled by the undergraduate college in the CSR is high: 49% of the subjects

appreciate these performances as being good and very good. Approximately 41% of the students await a better-sustained activity by the institution related to CSR. (Table 7)

Table 7: Degree of appreciation of the undergraduate college's achievements in the CSR domain

Level of appreciation	Relative frequency (%)
Very good	8.1
good	41.0
So so	41.4
bad	4.1
Very bad	0.3
Do not know	5.1
Total	100.0

Source: Created by researcher on the basis of field work

Findings and Conclusion

Social responsibility in the higher education sector is not so different from the corporate social responsibility. Both educational institutes and corporations have to provide sound responses to new realities of environment and society. The primary role of educational institutes is to serve the society within its functions. The results of our research emphasize that students attach importance to the CSR at academic level, a fact indicated through their involvement degree in the specific activities of this concept.

It can be differentiated within the sample a group that is interested in the CSR activity carried out by undergraduate college. It is a group with a variable dimension, according to the CSR domain. Themes about environment and community involvement capture the attention of 35-55 % of the students. A higher impact over the students is given by the concern for the values of undergraduate college in and around Belgaum city, which raise the interest of 55-60 % of the questioned students. The best-appreciated values of Belgaum city by the students are the development of the team spirit, concern for the quality of the activity carried out and the encouragement of personal initiatives. The concern for continuous improvement of the products/services provided by the undergraduate college is known by 75-85 % of the students. Marketing activity is coherent as a message and actions; thus, it is more probable that those who are interested in regulations that guarantee honesty to be more interested in the quality of the contracts with students and third parties, in the quality of the supplied information and the feedback of educational activities and measures for improving such. The research has validated initial hypotheses. It has been noticed that the wider was spread the informing on the programs and actions of undergraduate college, the higher their involvement.

Students have involved in all specific SR areas: environment, honesty and quality assurance in relation with the beneficiaries of provided services, the relation with the community. Thus, as regards the environmental protection actions, students took part to actions for trees planting, parks fitting and cleaning, or waste recycling. Actions have also mentioned aimed at helping those in need: disabled children, needy people. In the area of procedures honesty and quality assurance, there has been noticed the students' involvement in professional training workshops, labour mediation services, professional groups and university fairs.

As regards the relationship between undergraduate college and the community it is most likely that those who are informed of the provided opportunities to take part in community activities., The hypothesis analysing the relationship between the knowledge over the carried out SR activities and the improvement suggestions from students is also validated by the data provided by the questionnaire-based research.

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