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Corporate Social Responsibility and the Perception of Ethical Marketing among Students of Economics, Marketing, and Management

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Abstract

This study examines how university students understand and respond to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and ethical marketing. The research involved 110 undergraduate students from economics, marketing, and management programs at South Kazakhstan Research University named after M. Auezov and was conducted using a quantitative, cross-sectional design. Data were collected online through Google Forms and WhatsApp to ensure accessibility and participation. The study tested three hypotheses: that higher CSR awareness is associated with more favourable attitudes toward socially responsible companies; that positive attitudes foster greater trust and socially responsible consumer behaviour; and that students from different academic fields (Marketing, Management, and Economics) differ in their levels of CSR awareness and behavioural responses. The results show that students generally have a high level of CSR awareness ($M = 4.96$) and positive attitudes toward socially responsible companies ($M = 4.87$). Correlation analyses confirmed significant positive relationships between awareness, attitude, and behavioural impact, supporting the first two hypotheses. However, one-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences across fields of study, suggesting that CSR awareness and related behaviours are shared values among business students. Overall, the findings indicate that while CSR and ethical marketing are well-recognised concepts, practical understanding remains limited. The study recommends expanding CSR education through case-based and experiential learning and strengthening university–industry collaboration to cultivate ethical awareness and sustainable business values among future professionals.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethical marketing, student perception, consumer behaviour, business education, marketing.

Introduction

In the modern economy, corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethical marketing are indicators of a sustainable business strategy and the building of public trust (Nguyen and Rowley, 2015). Companies understand that a reputation built on transparency, fairness, and social responsibility is not only a matter of morality (ethical principles) but also a strategic advantage—an advantage that strengthens long-term competitiveness. CSR as a concept extends beyond voluntary assistance and includes organizational accountability, environmental protection, and stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, marketing ethics emphasizes fairness, honesty, and respect for consumers and society (Sarwari, Minar, and Alam, 2025).

As the importance of CSR grows, so does the perception of ethical marketing, reflecting the transformation of global consumer preferences. Younger generations of consumers expect corporations to demonstrate responsibility to people and the planet, not just profit. Recent research has shown that CSR initiatives positively impact educational, social, and environmental outcomes (Tuuli, Fusheini, & Salia, 2023). In Central Asia and Kazakhstan, the institutionalization of CSR and ethical marketing is still developing. Academic discourse in the region still lacks an empirical understanding of how future professionals, such as students of economics, management, and marketing, understand, evaluate, and internalize CSR-related values. This makes this topic particularly relevant for understanding how socially responsible attitudes are formed in future business leaders.

A growing number of international studies link corporate social responsibility (CSR) to companies' financial performance and reputation (Abdimomynova, Duzelbaeva, Berikbolova, Karbozova, & Mukhtarova, 2023). However, there is a gap in research on the perceptions of CSR and ethical marketing among young university students. Most scholarly studies have traditionally focused either on corporate strategies or on consumer reactions of the general population. However, the relationship between ethical marketing, cultural values, and sustainable development identified in Sarwari et al. (2025) study is not examined from the per-

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spective of student awareness. This empirical gap also includes trust development. There is a growing need to study students' understanding of CSR and its behavioral impact in Kazakhstan. This cohort is considered young and already on the threshold of professional activity. Developing a student understanding of CSR and ethical marketing is important for universities specializing in graduating economists, marketers, and management specialists. It is these representatives of the future generation who will shape the ethical foundations of business in the region. Adiva, Widvarti, and Ciptaningtias (2023) discussed the development of ethically conscious employees. Their work describes CSR programs based on corporate governance principles and the "triple bottom line" concept—a concept that connects people, the planet, and profit.

The study's findings can provide universities, policymakers, and corporations with evidence-based strategies for strengthening CSR education and integrating ethical principles into business curricula. This will ensure ethical responsibility is a central element of future management practice.

The study we present examines perceived aspects of CSR and trust building. The objective assessment of corporate practices and the students' limited professional experience represent analytical constraints rather than methodological limitations.

This study does not aim to replicate existing research on CSR and consumer preferences. It focuses on students majoring in business with a basic understanding of CSR and ethical marketing. Students' initial perceptions shape their trust and attitudes toward socially responsible companies before they assume positions in which they will be required to make professional and economic decisions (i.e., these perceptions are formed prior to hiring, not employee evaluations). The study also provides empirical data from Kazakhstan, where similar research is currently limited.

The study also examines perceptions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ethical marketing during the pre-employment phase. Students associate this phase with an important consumer segment and, simultaneously, with future professionals. Limited experience in the corporate environment does not pose a validity issue in this case, as the key constructs measured in the study (CSR awareness, attitudes, and trust-related behavioral intentions) do not require knowledge of the specifics of CSR implementation. A positive aspect is the lack of professional experience, which allows the analysis to focus on how education, personal values, and CSR communication shape early judgments about trust and ethical principles. Accordingly, the study results are intended to be generalizable to business students and young consumers in Kazakhstan. The results should not be interpreted as assessments made by corporate employees, managers, or CSR specialists.

In summary, this study aims to examine the level of awareness of students in three majors regarding the principles of CSR and ethical marketing. The analysis also reveals attitudes toward socially responsible companies and assesses the impact of CSR on trust and consumer behavior. The study determines how young professionals understand social and ethical standards in business and how trust in socially responsible brands is formed. The findings help develop educational and communication strategies that foster a culture of ethical and responsible management among future professionals. To achieve these goals, the study is based on the following objectives: (1) analyze students' understanding of CSR and ethical marketing concepts; (2) assess their awareness of companies implementing socially responsible initiatives; (3) study their attitudes toward socially responsible brands; (4) determine the impact of CSR on trust and consumer behavior; and (5) formulate recommendations for increasing students' awareness and involvement in ethical business practices.

The research logic is based on the concept that CSR awareness is a cognitive dimension, attitude reflects an affective evaluation, and trust and CSR-related behavior represent behavioral outcomes.

Based on these objectives and theoretical propositions, the following hypotheses are proposed for empirical testing. First, it is hypothesized that higher levels of awareness of CSR and ethical marketing will be positively associated with more favorable attitudes toward socially responsible companies (H1). Second, it is expected that more positive attitudes toward socially responsible companies will be positively correlated with trust and CSR-related consumer behavior (H2).

Although all respondents are enrolled in business-related undergraduate programs, marketing, management, and economics represent distinct specializations with different curricular emphases. Therefore, statistically significant differences between fields of study are expected in students' awareness and attitudes toward CSR, and their impact on their behavior (H3).

Literature review

Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

CSR is becoming increasingly important as a key element of corporate governance and the sustainable development of companies. CSR encompasses ethical, environmental, business, and social strategies, as well

as a decision-making process. According to Thakur and Devi (2025), CSR functions not only as a strategic tool but also as a primary mechanism for achieving social goals. These goals include corporate responsibility, stakeholder engagement (customers, employees), and ethical behavior.

The real attitude toward CSR and the contradictions between theory and practice are described by our Indian colleague Guha (2025). He notes that, despite legal obligations, companies view CSR as a formal compliance with rules.

There are also new aspects of CSR that are already emerging in the context of digital transformation. Vasin and Prokhorova (2025) introduce the concept of corporate digital social responsibility (the connection between CSR and digital ethics). Remote work for employees is already a well-established minimum. Here, the modern economy includes a technological boom and corporate responsibility, and companies are quickly catching up. Abdimomynova et al. (2023) studied CSR as a factor in correctness and legality, as well as competitiveness. In Kazakhstan, a link between investment and CSR is observed: the greater the investment, the more financially profitable and morally sustainable the outcome. Similarly, Nguyen and Rowley (2015) view CSR in Asia as a system of fairness management that promotes transparency and brand trust.

CSR, together with the corporate governance system and the “triple bottom line” concept, enshrines it at the level of laws, regulations, and organizations. Adiva, Widyarti, and Ciptaningtias (2023) note gaps in transparency and people-centered approaches, which limit overall effectiveness.

With modern trends, CSR has evolved into a comprehensive concept of corporate ethics and accountability. It is influenced by economic, legal, and digital innovations. The lack of empirical data on how CSR is perceived by younger generations and its actual social impact is precisely the problem addressed in this study.

Ethical Marketing and Its Relationship with CSR

Ethical marketing is a practical extension of CSR in the area of market communication. It embraces the principles of honesty, transparency, fairness, and respect for consumers and society. Sarwary, Minar, and Alam (2025) view ethical marketing as a mediating mechanism that transforms internal CSR commitments. When fully implemented, it transforms CSR from a proclaimed principle into a measurable business outcome.

Ethical marketing is fluid and adapts seamlessly to technological and societal changes. Dastane, Aw, Roig, and Sanchez-Garcia (2025) describe the transformation of this discipline due to automation, digitalization, globalization, and sustainability (the ADHOGS framework). Their extensive bibliometric review identified intelligent clusters within ethical marketing. The key cluster indicators were ESG indicators, digital transformation, AI-based personalization, and Islamic marketing. Their research highlights the future of ethical marketing through the ability to integrate data ethics and sustainability into digital ecosystems.

At the same time, Kaushal (2025) highlights existing ethical dilemmas in economic sectors such as pharmaceuticals. Here, aggressive marketing tactics can conflict with moral responsibility and patient welfare. The presented research demonstrates that ethical marketing determines public trust and brand authority, especially in industries with high social impact.

Similarly, Manoukas, Sgora, and Overkleeft (2025) propose the concept of an ethical economy. Here, marketing is not about persuasion but about the co-creation of value and shared responsibility. The authors' analysis of digital and cultural entrepreneurship demonstrates how authenticity, gratitude, and branding strengthen emotional bonds between companies and communities. This model aligns ethical marketing with the goal of CSR—sustainable stakeholder engagement and social benefit.

The analyzed studies demonstrate that ethical marketing and CSR represent an integration of responsible business behavior. Ethical marketing implements CSR by integrating its principles into everyday interactions with the brand, thereby establishing communication strategies (communication plans and methods). Therefore, transparency, authenticity, and cultural sensitivity become essential for maintaining consumer trust and loyalty. With the consistent application of ethical values, marketing becomes a strategic tool for sustainable and socially responsible growth.

Good Corporate Governance and the Triple Bottom Line

The effectiveness of CSR depends not only on the strength of corporate governance mechanisms (transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making), but also, as Adiva, Vidyarthi, and Ciptanithias (2023) note, adherence to NGO principles allows CSR programs to become a structured process rather than a collection of isolated volunteer activities. The authors also point to shortcomings in the implementation of human-centered corporate governance principles. Many companies still view CSR as a non-core function or

management task. However, the true impact of CSR depends on how deeply ethical values are embedded in management and day-to-day decisions.

The risks of “green washing” in sustainability management are identified by Pratama, Yusoff, Yadiati, and Jaenudin (2025). The key finding of these researchers is that internal development departments prioritize image over results. Consumers lose trust in such companies and their reports. This is evident in the studied countries, such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia.

Our analysis highlights unified and mandatory governance mechanisms that link CSR policies to real accountability. Without oversight, social responsibility can be lost, so integrating corporate governance is only effective if rules are followed.

Involving young people in CSR research is based on their values and awareness in this area. Tuuli, Fusheni, and Salia (2023) found that CSR improves educational infrastructure, including teaching quality and institutional trust. Here, CSR is not about profit but about motivation, social awareness, and equality.

A study by Che et al. (2025) examined CSR in Chinese universities, focusing on faculty well-being and organizational climate. It was shown that CSR aligned with faculty values increases satisfaction, respect, and loyalty. Therefore, socially responsible engagement contributes to both individual well-being and institutional success.

From a student perspective, Saxena and Mishra (2017) found that students in India and Mauritius associate CSR with long-term success and ethical reputation. Rather than focusing on profit, their study focuses on the role of management education in shaping ethical business values and the role of the university in transmitting these values to future leaders.

Sarmah, Khatun, and Singh (2023) also report that 64 % of young respondents believe that social advertising (PSA) genuinely promotes social initiatives. These initiatives are implemented through the use of stories, music, and famous celebrities. This suggests that young audiences value authenticity and emotional connection in CSR communications. Navi (2014) also found that students consider participation in CSR an important part of their academic and professional development.

In an international study, Licandro et al. (2024) compared management students in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, showing that national and institutional contexts shape CSR perceptions.

Overall, all the studies analyzed above highlight students’ awareness and interpretation of CSR. University students, particularly those studying economics, marketing, and management, constitute a key group whose values and ethics shape the future behavior of corporations. Empirical data is sometimes insufficient to fill all the gaps in the Asian region. Our study examined Kazakhstani students living in the southern region. We examined CSR principles, respondents’ understanding of social responsibility, ethical marketing, and how these factors might influence future decision-making.

Marketing Students

The integration of CSR with marketing, theoretical perspectives, and ethical responsibility between consumers and companies was studied by Sanclemente-Télez (2017). The study emphasizes that marketers can apply CSR principles to build trust in brands by emphasizing the marketing ethos itself rather than profit.

Carvalho, Nogueira, and Martins (2023) observed in their study that marketing students do not treat different groups equally in their business projects, thereby demonstrating social and environmental responsibility. However, the application of this concept begins after a targeted educational intervention. After CSR-focused training, students demonstrated significantly higher awareness. Students’ preferences for choosing socially responsible companies were observed specifically after formal education in CSR and ethical perspectives on marketing.

Economics Students

An earlier study by Ham, Pap Vorkapić, and Pezić (2015) examined the attitudes of business students toward CSR in Eastern Croatia. The study found generally positive attitudes toward CSR, but also noted differences in understanding between undergraduate and graduate students. The authors emphasized that education plays a key role in fostering awareness and readiness for socially responsible business practices. Students represent future decision-makers who will influence corporate ethics and sustainable development.

This idea is also supported by Zientara, Adamska, and Bak (2025). Economics students generally hold a positive theoretical attitude toward CSR, but may shift toward a profit-oriented mindset. This is due to real-world management contexts (theory differs from practice). This theory addresses the influence of neoliberal economic education on the need to integrate ethical and social aspects into economics curricula to balance financial priorities and social responsibility.

Business and Management Students

Frizon, Eugenio, and Morais (2024) examined business students' CSR orientation and found that their expectations regarding corporate environmental and social initiatives had a strong influence on their CSR values. Students from Portugal and Brazil favored non-profit motives and a commitment to sustainable development. Rather than focusing on profit, students espoused CSR as a strong predictor of future professional ethics among management students.

Mallik, Brijlal, and Sahu (2022) conducted a study among MBA students in Bhubaneswar, India. After collecting 294 respondents, the researchers identified eight factors shaping CSR perceptions. The key factors include: responsibility to companies and consumers, responsible management, ethical commitments, and humanitarian responsibilities (protecting human rights, helping those in need, etc.). The study's results indicate that management students expect companies to operate responsibly and with a CSR focus. This helps shape corporate strategy and generate useful insights, even at the regional level.

Summary of the Literature Gap

The literature review shows that business ethics and corporate transparency are measured by CSR and ethical marketing.

Research confirms that CSR initiatives, guided by corporate governance principles and the "triple bottom line" model, enhance both corporate reputation and social well-being (Adiva et al., 2023; Pratama et al., 2025).

Research in the field of ethical marketing emphasizes its role in translating CSR principles into consumer trust and loyalty through fairness and authenticity in communication (Sarwari et al., 2025; Dastane et al., 2025). At the same time, recent works highlight the growing importance of youth education and perceptions in shaping future business ethics (Che et al., 2025; Saxena & Mishra, 2017; Singh et al., 2023; Licandro et al., 2024).

However, empirical research on how students in transition countries like Kazakhstan perceive CSR and ethical marketing remains limited. Our study closes this gap by analyzing the awareness, attitudes, and behavior of students studying economics, marketing, and management.

Methods

Participants

A total of 110 students participated in the survey (South Kazakhstan Research University named after M. Auezov, Shymkent). The majority were female (84.5 %), while male respondents accounted for 15.5 %. Most participants were aged 18–20 years (58.2 %), followed by 21–23 years (23.6 %), with a small number of respondents under 18 (7.3 %) or over 23 (10.9 %) (Table 1).

In terms of academic background, the largest group consisted of second-year students (44.5 %), with smaller proportions from third-year (17.3 %), fourth-year (16.4 %), first-year (8.2 %), and Master's programs (13.6 %).

Demographic data (age, gender, and year of study) were used to describe the sample and account for potential differences among respondents across fields of study: marketing (46.4 %), management (31.8 %), and economics (21.8 %). This distribution provided a balanced representation of students from key business-oriented disciplines for the study of awareness and perceptions of CSR and ethical marketing in future professional groups.

Table 1. Respondents' profile (n=110)

Parameters	Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	93	84.5
	Male	17	15.5
Age	Under 18	8	7.3
	18–20 years	64	58.2
	21–23 years	26	23.6
	Over 23 years	12	10.9
Year of Study	1st year	9	8.2
	2nd year	49	44.5
	3rd year	19	17.3
	4th year	18	16.4
	Master's	15	13.6
Field of Study	Marketing	51	46.4
	Management	35	31.8
	Economics	24	21.8

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. Students in the selected major were considered either as a separate group or as a whole, depending on the type of study.

Research Methodology

The quantitative, cross-sectional approach used in the study examined students’ awareness, attitudes, and behavioral responses to corporate social responsibility.

The study utilized a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 6 (Strongly Agree).

Regardless of the number of companies mentioned by respondents, statistical analysis methods were used.

Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of four thematic sections, addressing the research objectives:

Section 2 — Awareness of CSR and Ethical Marketing;

Section 3 — Attitudes Toward Socially Responsible Companies;

Section 4 — The Impact of CSR on Trust and Consumer Behavior.

Open-ended questions in which students named socially responsible companies were not used to test hypotheses or construct a scale.

Procedure

Data collection for analysis took place in the fall of 2025, using Google Forms. Before the survey began in the first block, students were familiarized with the study objectives and consented to data processing. The average response time was 10–12 minutes.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using SPSS Statistics (version 28). In the first stage, descriptive statistics (percentages, frequency distributions, and mean scores) were calculated. Thematic content analysis (qualitative) helped identify recurring themes and patterns in students’ perceptions of CSR and their expectations of companies.

In the second stage, the following hypotheses were tested: Pearson correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between CSR awareness and attitude (Hypothesis 1), as well as between attitude and influence (Hypothesis 2). Normality tests (Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk) were used to check the distribution of data across academic fields. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) followed by a Tukey test was used to determine differences in CSR awareness among marketing, management, and economics students (Hypothesis 3). All analyses were conducted at a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the academic policy of South Kazakhstan Research University named after M. Auezov. Participants’ anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, and no personal data was collected. The study was conducted exclusively for academic purposes, without any financial or institutional conflicts of interest.

Results

The internal consistency of the scales presented in Table 2 meets or exceeds the acceptable threshold ($\alpha \geq 0.70$), indicating the reliability of the questionnaire items in each block.

The “Attitude” block ($\alpha = 0.822$) has strong internal consistency. The “Awareness” block ($\alpha = 0.804$) also demonstrates high reliability. The “Influence” block ($\alpha = 0.773$) meets the acceptable reliability standard, given the diversity of responses.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics by Scale

Scale (Block)	Cronbach’s Alpha (α)	N of Items	Reliability Level
Awareness of CSR and Ethical Marketing	0.804	5	High
Attitude Toward Socially Responsible Companies	0.822	5	High
Impact of CSR on Trust and Behaviour of Consumers	0.773	5	Acceptable

The results demonstrate a generally high level of student awareness and engagement with the concept of CSR (Table 3). The mean score of 4.96 out of 6 indicates a deep understanding of CSR principles, and the low variance (0.25) confirms the relative homogeneity of the responses.

Following awareness, the analysis shifted to perception ($M=4.87$). Students expressed a positive attitude toward companies implementing CSR practices. The proportion of students who were critical of companies’ motives did not outweigh the overall score.

An analysis of behavioral results ($M = 4.84$) indicates a significant impact of CSR on students’ trust and purchase intentions. However, the observed range of responses ($SD = 0.53$, $min = 2.4$) suggests that not all

students respond to corporate social responsibility in the same way. This difference may be due to individual experience, familiarity with corporate practices, and varying levels of trust in specific brands.

Table 3. Overall perception of CSR and ethical marketing

Indicator	Awareness	Attitude	Impact
Mean	4.96	4.87	4.84
Median	5.0	4.8	4.8
Standard Deviation	0.49	0.53	0.53
Range	2.8–6	3–6	2.4–6

To assess students' understanding and awareness of CSR and ethical marketing, five indicators were analyzed: knowledge of the concept of CSR, familiarity with socially responsible companies, understanding of ethical marketing, and discussion of CSR topics at university. The results were grouped by field of study—marketing, management, and economics—and average scores were calculated for each group, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Awareness of CSR and Ethical Marketing by Field of Study (Block 2)

Indicator	Marketing (n = 51)	Management (n = 35)	Economics (n = 24)
Knowledge of the term CSR	5.02	5.00	4.96
Knowledge of company examples	5.02	4.97	4.92
Understanding of ethical marketing	4.82	4.94	4.96
Discussion of CSR topics at university	4.78	5.09	5.04
Desire to learn more about CSR	4.80	5.20	5.04
Overall mean	4.89	5.04	4.99

Management students (n = 35) demonstrated the highest overall awareness of CSR and ethical marketing principles (M = 5.04), particularly in terms of motivation for further study (M = 5.20).

Marketing students (n = 51) showed consistent but slightly lower mean scores (M = 4.89), while economics students (n = 24) maintained stable scores across all items (M = 4.99).

These results suggest that CSR and ethics topics are discussed and integrated into management education more actively than in other fields.

To assess which companies students considered socially responsible, participants were asked the open-ended question: "Which company do you consider socially responsible?"

Of the 110 students surveyed, 100 provided valid responses, which were grouped and analyzed to identify the most frequently mentioned brands (Fig. 1).

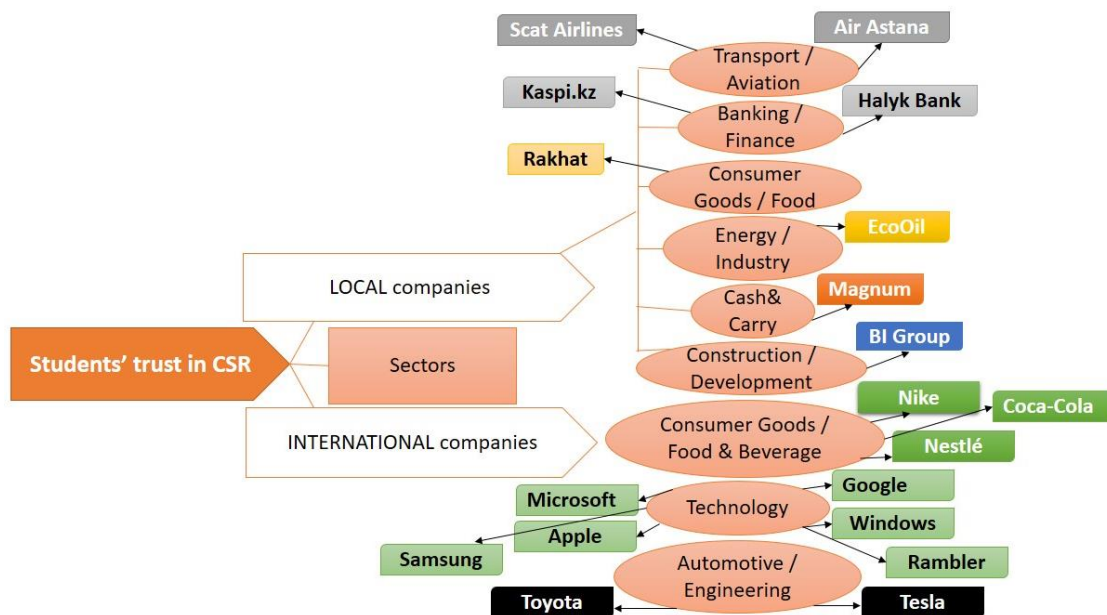


Figure 1. Distribution of Students' Trust in Socially Responsible Companies by Origin and Sector

The concept map presented the distribution of responses by company origin: local (Kaspi.kz (12 mentions) and Scat Airlines (8), followed by Air Astana (2), Halyk Bank (2), Magnum (3), Rakhat (3), EcoOil (1), and BI Group (4). Local brands were mainly associated with transparency, support for education, and initiatives in the field of environmental protection or public interest; international (Tesla (12 respondents), symbolizing innovation, sustainability, and ethical business practices. The following numbers of international brands were also mentioned: Nestlé (3), Coca-Cola (2), Microsoft (2), Google (3), Apple (2), Toyota (2), Nike (2), and Samsung (1).

It's worth noting that students trust both local and international companies equally. Kaspi.kz and Air Astana emerged as Kazakhstan's leaders in CSR in our study.

Ten respondents refrained from listing the companies they trusted.

Analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions, presented in Figure 1, suggests that students, primarily, effective CSR implementation is associated with several specific areas: (1) transparency and honesty in corporate communications; (2) environmental responsibility and green practices; (3) socially oriented initiatives (education and community support); (4) ethical marketing—without manipulation and aggressive promotion; and (5) perceived authenticity of CSR actions—without image-building activities. These aspects represent CSR practices that are most likely to contribute to building trust and forming positive behavioral intentions among young audiences.

Thirty-six respondents identified environmental responsibility in open-ended questions as a link between CSR and environmental friendliness: “All environmentally friendly companies”.

An analysis of the mean scores for students' attitudes toward socially responsible brands in Table 5 shows that students in all three test groups consistently demonstrate positive emotional and value-based attitudes toward socially responsible brands. Mean scores range from 4.6 to 5.3 on a six-point scale.

Managers have a positive attitude toward CSR, with mean scores exceeding 5.0. This category of students is aware of the strategies and benefits of the subject they are studying. Economists also highly support CSR initiatives. They value recognizing the impact on brand reputation and trust in the organization. Marketers show slightly lower but consistent mean scores. They are more pragmatic and balance CSR with market and promotion strategies.

Table 5. Mean scores of students' attitudes (Block 3)

Indicators	Marketing (n = 51)	Management (n = 35)	Economics (n = 24)
Sympathy toward socially responsible brands	4.92	5.26	5.08
Preference for CSR companies' products	4.71	5.00	5.04
Impact of CSR on brand reputation	4.63	4.83	4.96
Trust in transparent CSR brands	4.67	5.00	4.92
CSR is more important than aggressive marketing	4.69	5.00	4.88

The survey results show that students positively evaluate companies and brands that behave socially responsibly. Companies that openly demonstrate their CSR activities inspire trust in our respondents. Students also believe that aggressive advertising has less of an impact on them than the social responsibility demonstrated by companies.

Block 4 included four behavioral indicators measuring the impact of CSR on student trust and consumer behavior. Respondents' willingness to pay more for socially responsible products and their perception of the lack of impact of CSR on brand trust and purchase decisions were assessed. Additionally, one statement was reverse-answered to assess perceptions of CSR authenticity.

Table 6. Mean scores of the influence of CSR on students' trust and consumer behaviour (Block 4)

Indicators	Marketing (n = 51)	Management (n = 35)	Economics (n = 24)
CSR increases my trust in a company.	5.16	5.11	5.08
I am willing to pay more for CSR companies' products.	4.98	4.71	4.79
The absence of CSR reduces my trust in a brand.	4.78	4.74	4.83
CSR influences my purchasing decision.	4.65	4.69	4.79
CSR is more of a PR move than real action. (reverse item)	4.73	4.71	4.79

Average scores (ranging from 4.6 to 5.2) demonstrate consistently positive attitudes toward CSR across all respondent groups. The highest scores were obtained for the statement “CSR increases my trust in the company” ($M \approx 5.1$). This indicates that CSR is viewed as a key factor determining brand trust. Similarly, the statements “The absence of CSR reduces my trust in the brand” and “CSR influences my purchase decision” ($M \approx 4.7$ – 4.8) indicate that students perceive CSR as a critical factor influencing both emotional trust and behavioral decisions.

Respondents' responses to the statement “I am willing to pay more for products from companies that engage in CSR” ($M \approx 4.8$ – 5.0) demonstrate a willingness to support socially responsible brands, even if their products are more expensive. The reverse-worded statement, “CSR is more about PR than actual action”, received moderate mean values approximately 4.7–4.8). This indicates that most respondents do not view CSR merely as advertising and recognize its true social impact.

This demonstrates that CSR is an important factor influencing students' trust, perceptions of companies, and consumer behavior. Higher levels of CSR awareness are associated with more positive and engaged attitudes toward socially responsible companies.

Management students demonstrate the highest level of CSR awareness ($M = 5.04$) and the greatest desire to learn more about it ($M = 5.20$), positive behavioral responses, including a high level of trust in companies engaged in CSR ($M = 5.11$) and agreement that CSR influences their purchasing decisions ($M = 4.69$).

Economics students also had a high level of awareness ($M = 4.99$), as did their assessment of the impact of CSR on brand reputation ($M = 4.83$) and willingness to pay more for responsible companies ($M = 4.79$).

Marketing students' average scores were distributed as follows: awareness ($M = 4.89$), behavioral assessments (trust $M = 5.16$; willingness to pay more $M = 4.98$). This suggests that even modest knowledge of CSR positively influences consumers.

Overall, the observed pattern suggests a moderate positive correlation between CSR awareness and socially responsible consumer behavior: students who are more familiar with CSR concepts and examples are also more likely to trust, support, and purchase products from socially responsible companies. These results highlight the educational importance of integrating CSR and ethical marketing topics into university curricula to strengthen students' socially responsible decision-making.

Hypothesis Testing

Using the Pearson correlation coefficient, we assessed the strength and direction of the relationship between two continuous variables. This is consistent with the study's objective—to determine whether knowledge of CSR is associated with a more positive attitude toward socially responsible business practices. The analysis revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between students' awareness of CSR and their attitudes toward socially responsible companies, $r(108) = 0.64$, $p < .001$. This result supports Hypothesis 1 and suggests that students with greater knowledge and understanding of CSR principles tend to evaluate companies that implement socially responsible and ethical marketing practices more favorably.

Positive attitudes toward socially responsible companies with greater trust and consumer behavior are revealed through a Pearson analysis between the Attitude and Influence scales. A moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship is found, $r(108) = 0.44$, $p < .001$.

This finding supports Hypothesis 2, suggesting that students who have more favorable attitudes toward socially responsible companies tend to report greater trust and behavioral intentions driven by CSR initiatives.

Before conducting a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), the assumption of normal distribution was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for each group (Table 7). The results showed that the data for all three groups—marketing ($p = 0.401$), management ($p = 0.537$), and economics ($p = 0.096$)—did not deviate significantly from a normal distribution ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the assumption of normal distribution for the ANOVA was met.

Table 7. Tests of normality for the Awareness variable by field of study

Speciality	n	Shapiro–Wilk Statistic	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Marketing	51	.976	.401	$p > .05 \rightarrow$ Normal distribution
Management	24	.965	.537	$p > .05 \rightarrow$ Normal distribution
Economics	35	.948	.096	$p > .05 \rightarrow$ Normal distribution

Hypothesis 3 (Field Differences) predicted that there would be statistically significant differences among students from Marketing, Management, and Economics programs in their levels of CSR awareness, attitudes toward socially responsible companies, and the perceived impact of CSR on trust and behaviour.

However, the one-way ANOVA results revealed no statistically significant differences across academic fields for CSR Awareness (Table 8), $F(2,107) = 0.98, p = .38$.

Table 8. One-Way ANOVA Results for Awareness across Fields of Study

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Significance (p)
Between Groups	0.485	2	0.243	0.977	0.380
Within Groups	26.562	107	0.248		
Total	27.048	109			

Post-hoc Tukey comparisons further confirmed that the mean scores for Marketing ($M = 4.89$), Management ($M = 4.98$), and Economics ($M = 5.04$) students did not differ significantly ($p > .05$) (Fig. 2).

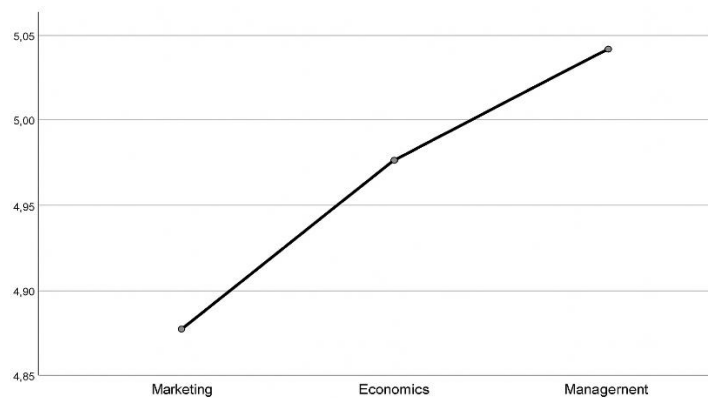


Figure 2. Mean awareness scores across Marketing, Management, and Economics students.

Thus, **Hypothesis 3 was not supported**, indicating that students from different academic disciplines demonstrate **comparable levels of CSR awareness, attitudes, and perceived behavioral impact**. This suggests that the understanding and appreciation of corporate social responsibility principles are relatively consistent across business-related fields of study.

Discussion

The study results confirm that the development and formation of CSR, discussed by Thakur and Devi (2025) and Adiva et al. (2023), is reflected not only at the corporate level but also in the perceptions and values of young people. Students at a research university in southern Kazakhstan demonstrated a relatively high level of awareness of CSR and ethical marketing, indicating that they were already familiar with these concepts at their educational level.

A statistically significant correlation between students’ awareness of CSR and their attitudes toward socially responsible companies ($r = .64, p < .001$) supports Hypothesis 1: the higher the level of understanding of CSR principles, the better their attitudes toward responsible companies.

This finding is consistent with the work of Sarwary, Minar, and Alam (2025), who argue that ethical marketing transforms CSR from rhetoric into practice, building consumer trust.

The moderate but statistically significant correlation between attitude and behavioral impact ($r = .44, p < .001$) further supports Hypothesis 2, suggesting that favorable attitudes toward socially responsible companies foster consumer trust and ethical choices. Sometimes, emotional approval alone is insufficient to drive consistent behavioral engagement; strengthening experiential learning components in CSR education is necessary.

As research on corporate governance and the triple bottom line concept (Adiva et al., 2023; Pratama et al., 2025) demonstrates, ethical values must be embedded within clear frameworks and mechanisms. In an educational context, this can be achieved by integrating CSR principles into various academic disciplines in majors such as management, marketing, and economics. This will help foster the understanding of social responsibility as a structural, rather than secondary, element of business in the selected student population during their studies. Incorporating case-based and project-based learning methods, such as CSR audits, sustain-

ability reports, or collaboration with socially responsible companies, will bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. This applies to the ethical entrepreneurship models proposed by Manoukas, Sgora, and Overkleeft (2025), where shared responsibility and co-creation enhance the moral dimension of business behavior.

Students' ethical competencies are emphasized through education. According to Che et al. (2025) and Saxena and Mishra (2017), who noted that CSR initiatives in educational institutions foster trust, engagement, and motivation, the study demonstrates that collaboration between universities and companies can significantly enhance students' responsibility now and in their future careers.

Young people remain wary of CSR when faced with aggressive advertising. Therefore, companies should enhance trust and social responsibility through their image. As Vasin and Prokhorova (2025) argue, this is especially relevant in the digital age, where social media and interactive formats are key to building trust among young audiences. Also engaging students as active participants in internships and social projects can strengthen their perception of CSR as a genuine activity. As Sarmah, Khatun, and Singh (2023) note, authenticity and emotional resonance play a central role in how young people evaluate social messages.

A one-way analysis of variance revealed no statistically significant differences between students studying marketing, management, and economics in their levels of CSR awareness, attitudes, or influence on behavior ($p > 0.05$). This finding does not weaken the study, but rather supports the interpretation that CSR awareness has become a common normative value across all business-related disciplines. It also confirms that the principles of sustainable development and ethical responsibility have permeated all curricula, consistent with Hypothesis 3. The fundamentals of responsible business education are learned consistently, regardless of academic specialization.

From a practical perspective, the lack of statistically significant differences between students studying marketing, management, and economics points to an important implication: CSR awareness and related beliefs are formed at a general educational level. This could include CSR curricula for different business majors, as well as business programs.

For companies, this result suggests that CSR communication strategies targeting students and young graduates do not require segmentation by academic specialization. Differences between specializations are minimal. Companies can view business students holistically.

Students' knowledge of CSR shapes their ethical judgment and responsible actions. For education, this means developing ethical competence, critical thinking, and engagement (attitudes) through both curricular and extracurricular initiatives. Companies should communicate transparently, integrating social impact and partnerships with educational institutions. Together, these efforts can create a system where young people not only understand CSR but also internalize it as a professional and ethical principle. This integrative approach is consistent with the broader paradigm of sustainable development and ethical economics described by Manoukas et al. (2025). The model posits that education serves as a bridge between the concept of CSR and its actual social transformation. The main limitation of this study is that it captures CSR perceptions before participants have gained significant experience with the company. Therefore, the results are not generalizable to company employees or managers. Their attitudes toward CSR are already shaped by internal policies, compliance procedures, and constraints. Future studies could replicate this model using new employees already employed by the company. This would directly determine whether professional experience moderates or modifies the relationship between awareness, attitudes, and trust.

Conclusion

This study shows that students majoring in economics, marketing, and management demonstrate relatively high levels of awareness of corporate social responsibility and ethical marketing. It is clear that their understanding of social responsibility, which is ingrained in their university education, influences the development of young people's professional thinking.

The study's results support two hypotheses: greater awareness of CSR leads to more favorable attitudes toward responsible companies and promotes ethical consumer behavior. However, students often perceive CSR in a vague manner, as they are unsure of their nascent experience. This suggests the need for a practical component.

The lack of differences among students majoring in marketing, management, and economics reflects the growing integration of ethics and sustainable development into higher education. CSR is closely linked to positive behavioral intentions, so universities should expand applied training in CSR and ethical marketing. This can be achieved through in-depth research, projects, and partnerships with responsible companies. This

collaboration between academia and business can prepare professionals who combine competence with ethical awareness.

Practical Recommendations

The practical significance of the study lies in the fact that both companies and universities, through CSR initiatives (transparency, ethical marketing, and genuine social engagement), can build trust among future professionals who will form the foundation of management businesses.

For universities, the results highlight the importance of integrating CSR content and ethical marketing into business-related programs. Familiarity with CSR alone does not lead to behavioral engagement—it requires a transition from theory to practice. From an employer perspective, the results demonstrate that CSR is becoming an important factor in shaping employer attractiveness and trust in organizations among young professionals. Only joint programs help reinforce CSR values as a common norm in business education.

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