

## **Consumers' Attitudes Towards the Social Performance of Saudi Business Firms: An Empirical Investigation**

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**Abstract.** Extensive literature review reveals that business ethics and social responsibility are both of great concern to people around the globe. This study investigates consumers' attitudes toward the social performance of Saudi businesses in the four areas of the marketing mix, among Saudis and non-Saudi Arabs in the three main regions of Saudi Arabia (i.e. Eastern, Central, and Western zones), and examines the relationship between eight demographic characteristics and consumers' attitudes. Detailed analysis is presented and implications for marketing strategy and suggestions for future research are discussed.

### **Introduction**

In today's highly competitive, global economy, escalating social and environmental problems are forcing corporations to focus on more than just their stockholders' interest in maximizing profits. A growing number of companies are recognizing the value of establishing strong relationships with all of the organization's stakeholders --employees, customers, suppliers, distributors, and communities. In fact, recent research shows that companies which implement employee programs, create jobs for the unemployed in the local community, develop innovative and safe products, carry out undecceptive advertising campaigns, do not pollute the environment, and contribute to the community's welfare are often more profitable [1]. Moreover, good corporate citizenship has shown a positive effect on brand loyalty, employee morale, and economic value [2].

Furthermore, some corporations adopt a proactive approach by forming citizen advisory panels that participate actively in setting the corporate environmental strategy. These corporations aim at building rapport with the public, gaining the society's long-term approval, and creating the image of good public citizens of high credibility and caliber [3, 4].

Globalization of business operations is another factor that complicates the situation. Business firms are now facing a global public that is increasingly aware of the social obligations of the business enterprise and expects a high level of accountability on its part. At the present time, being honest, upright, and ethical is not sufficient. In

response to business globalization, companies are asked to move beyond this definition and to integrate with society [5].

### **Importance of the Study**

The importance of this study stems from several factors. First, concern for protecting the environment is escalating worldwide and demands for cleaning it are unrelenting. Certainly, big corporations nowadays face continuing societal pressure to assume the major responsibility in this respect. Second, as the literature review below reveals, consumer protection against business malpractice and deception is lacking in the Arab world, and is desperately needed. Studies such as this highlight the areas of social and ethical performance that suffer from deficiencies in the business community. Third, as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is planning to join the World Trade Organization, Saudi business firms need to examine their social and ethical policies and practices thoroughly in order to strengthen their competitive position vis-à-vis foreign firms. Fourth, as mentioned above, good corporate citizenship has shown a positive effect on brand loyalty, employee morale, and economic value. Finally, to the author's knowledge, this is the first comprehensive study that measures consumers' attitudes towards the social performance of Saudi business firms in relation to all four marketing mix elements and in the three main regions of Saudi Arabia simultaneously.

### **Objectives of the Study**

While there is a large number of stakeholders facing a business firm, the focus of this study will be on a specific group -- consumers and the general public -- and their attitudes towards the social performance of Saudi businesses. Nowadays, this issue poses a major challenge for many corporations; a challenge that must be met effectively so that businesses can justify the new opportunities that deregulation, privatization and globalization have opened up for them. Unfortunately, compliance with this responsibility implies incurring higher costs (including human, monetary, and time costs), incorporating social responsibility into business strategy, and obligating organizational members to abide by strict ethical rules. Nevertheless, the gains both to the company and to the society in the long run outweigh the costs as the firm eventually enjoys stability and growth.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the attitudes of consumers in the Saudi market towards the social performance of business firms in general;
2. To compare the attitudes of consumers towards the social performance of business firms in the three main regions of the Kingdom (i.e., the eastern, central, and western regions);
3. To examine and compare the attitudes of Saudis and non-Saudi Arabs who live in the Kingdom towards the social performance of business firms; and
4. To test the relationship between consumers' attitudes towards the social

performance of business firms and their demographics.

### Literature Review

While there is no single, commonly accepted definition of the social responsibility of business, it can be defined as *the philosophy and actions of a business firm that are related to ethical values and behavior, compliance with legal requirements, and concern for customers, the environment, and the society at large*. Two outcomes flow from this definition. First, a company's social responsibility program should accommodate several stakeholders such as shareholders, customers, employees, suppliers, distributors, financiers, the local community, and the society at large. Second, this program should encompass four areas: a) prescribing --and abiding by-- moral and ethical standards, b) complying with existing laws and regulations, c) caring for the environment, and d) caring for the local community/society through philanthropic giving [6].

Economist Milton Friedman has a different viewpoint. He believes that the sole responsibility of a business is to act in the best interests of the company's shareholders, and this means that the company's executives should make as much profits as possible and maximize shareholders' wealth. However, the pressure is mounting on business firms worldwide to meet their social responsibility, reduce environmental pollution, and contribute to the community's welfare [7].

Historically, a growing number of researchers have given a great deal of attention to various aspects of business ethics and social responsibility since the late 1960s [8]. While there is no normative theory to guide research in this area, recent research [9] has highlighted *Integrative Social Contract Theory* (ISCT) as having a potential for providing normative guidance for addressing and resolving ethical problems in marketing. Not only does ISCT legitimize the relevance of community and professional ethics norms, but also its priority rules are particularly appropriate in the context of cultural diversity, which makes it more relevant both to domestic and to international marketing practices. However, there is evidence that important moderators; namely consumer trust in the marketing source and attributions of consumer responsibility, must be activated for pro-social positioning strategies to work. In addition, the levels of these moderating variables appear to be critical in determining whether a pro-social positioning strategy achieves the intended effect or backfires, thereby jeopardizing product quality and market share [10].

Another theory that represents an integrative element of the conceptual framework of social responsibility is *Sustainability Theory*. Environmental sustainability is defined as the satisfaction of present needs without compromising the needs of future generations. Attention to linking environmental sustainability to decision making has increased considerably since its first appearance in the 1987 Brundtland Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. Organizations are becoming more conscious not only about what is sustainable, but also about what will lead to

sustainability [11, 12].

Previous research has examined various dimensions of corporate social responsibility. It has not been limited to a single trade or industry; rather, it covered a wide variety of industries including transportation, food, computers, water and electricity utilities, e-commerce, long-distance telephone service, billboard advertising, accounting, consumer financial services including insurance and credit cards, publishing, time-sharing, hotels/motels, retailing, direct marketing, home building, customer information, and marketing research [13-18].

In addition, concern with business ethics/social responsibility has not been restricted to one country or a group of countries; instead, it is extended to include various societies around the globe, e.g.; the United States, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Sweden, Japan, Russia, China, Australia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Middle East [13, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26]. The topic of business social responsibility seems to be universal, and consumers around the world seem to have not-so-good attitudes towards the social performance of businesses in such a way that suggests a focal challenge facing business firms everywhere.

### **Business Ethics/Social Responsibility Research in the Middle East**

The Middle East represents an area whose peoples share numerous characteristics. In his major cross-cultural typology, Hofstede [27] grouped the Arab/Middle Eastern countries together based on empirical evidence. These countries speak the same language (Arabic), and the vast majority of their inhabitants embrace the same religion (Islam). According to recent statistics, Muslims in Algeria, Iran, and Yemen represent 99% of the population, in Morocco 98.7%, in Egypt 94%, in Iraq 97%, in Jordan 95%, in Lebanon 70%, in Bahrain, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia 100%, in Sudan 85%, in Syria 90%, in Tunisia 98%, in Turkey 99.8%, and in the United Arab Emirates 96% [28, 29].

Research interest in various aspects of business ethics/social responsibility in the Middle East is no less than that of other parts of the world. Moreover, Middle Eastern researchers believe there is an immense need for more government interference and regulation of business practices in order to provide better consumer protection against unethical and misleading marketing practices by business firms. Consumer protection agencies and measures that have been established in developed countries (such as the U.S. Federal Trade Commission) are absent from the Middle East.

Middle Eastern researchers contributed to many social responsibility issues since the late 1970s, especially consumer protection. For instance, Boeirah [30] from Libya reviewed consumer protection in developed countries, its purpose and efforts, and concluded that consumer protection is disparately needed in developing countries (including Arab countries). On the other hand, Mansour [31] discussed consumer

protection in developing countries, the social and economic structure of these countries, and problems of consumer protection in relation to various marketing practices, consumer information, and consumer representation and redress.

Other researchers wrote about consumer protection in Egypt [32, 33], Jordan and Tunisia [34], and Saudi Arabia [35]. Deceptive advertising received attention from Abu - Goma [36, 37] in Kuwait, while pricing practices were examined by Ismail [38] in Egypt.

Furthermore, attempts have been made to integrate past research efforts and establish a conceptual model for a social performance audit in the Middle East. For example, Allam [39] introduced a conceptual framework for reviewing the social performance of business enterprises, and proposed an accounting model for this purpose. However, efforts to measure the social performance of businesses were limited to certain areas and were mainly directed to industry executives. For example, in the Qureitem *et al.* [40] study, the researchers investigated the extent to which Saudi manufacturers dealt with production waste and polluters, whereas consumers' attitudes or perceptions were not measured.

In summary, Middle Eastern researchers have been deeply concerned with the social and ethical conduct of businesses and with the lack of consumer protection as evidenced by their recommendations.

### **Islamic Ethics and Business Practices**

Since Saudi Arabia is governed by the Islamic law (Shari'ah), it is appropriate to review Islamic business ethics as derived from this law. The moral teachings of Islam provide comprehensive ethical guidelines for the effective conduct and control of business practices. They forbid all business activities resulting in cheating, deception, harm, corruption, and exploitation of the weak [41]. According to Islamic teachings, Islamic business ethics are deeply rooted in the principles of equity and justice, and offer a framework that creates value and elevates the standards of living of all business parties while adhering to these principles [42]. This framework is not all hypothetical; it does have practical applications in such countries as Saudi Arabia where advertising and sales training guidelines are consistent with Islamic values. However, there is a degree of diversion between Islamic philosophy and practice in the economic life of some Islamic countries (e.g., see [43]). Table 1 summarizes Islamic business ethics in relation to the 5Ps (product, price, promotion, place, and people) as well as corporate social responsibility.

### **Hypotheses**

The writings of Abdul-Jalil [32], Al-Twaijri [35], and Qureitem *et al* [40] strongly point to the scanty role that Saudi businesses play in meeting their social responsibility and the need for consumer protection in the Saudi market. Accordingly, consumers' attitudes in this area should not be expected to be positive.

**Table 1. Islamic business ethics**

Marketing mix element	Islamic directions
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Purity in matters pertaining to production and consumption.</li> <li>■ Marketed products and services must be safe, lawful, deliverable.</li> <li>■ Marketed products and services must be specified in terms of quality and quantity.</li> </ul>
Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Product warranties must be adhered to.</li> <li>■ Self-operating mechanism of price adjustments and healthy competition are encouraged.</li> </ul>
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ No corner market, black market, hoarding, or restrictions on trade are allowed.</li> <li>■ Forbidding the cheating of easy-going customers for illicit gain.</li> <li>■ Forbidding price discrimination among customers.</li> <li>■ Forbidding interest on loans and credit.</li> <li>■ Forbidding false propaganda regarding the position of supply and demand through the media.</li> <li>■ Condemning all forms of assertions, unfounded accusations, concoctions, and false testimonies.</li> <li>■ Forbidding fraudulent and false sales presentations.</li> <li>■ Revealing all available and known information of product defects to the buyer which cannot be found by cursory glance.</li> <li>■ Fear, sexual, and emotional appeals, false testimonies, subliminal advertising, and pseudo research appeals exploit the basic instinct of consumers; thus, they must not be used.</li> <li>■ Stereotyping of women in advertising, excessive use of fantasy, the use of suggestive language and behavior, and the use of women as objects to lure and attract consumers (with the objective of increasing profits) are all forbidden.</li> </ul>
Place (distribution)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Maintaining a balance between maximization of profits and safe transportation, which is costly.</li> <li>■ Avoiding unethical practices in distribution including uncesure packages, inadequate protection for the product, and transportation of toxic and dangerous products through public highways.</li> <li>■ Distribution channels should not create higher prices, delays, and inconveniences to the final consumer.</li> </ul>
People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Customers must have free and independent judgment when they make buying decision.</li> <li>■ Consumers have the right to honest, free from coercion marketing information.</li> <li>■ Orders should be processed speedily and without errors.</li> <li>■ Customers must not be discriminated against based on race, religion, or national origin.</li> <li>■ Cooperating with suppliers and distributors to maintain consistency in quality and service, and to ensure they make a fair profit.</li> <li>■ Supporting the community.</li> </ul>
Corporate social responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Contributing to the welfare of the needy and destitute.</li> <li>■ Protecting the environment and natural resources.</li> <li>■ Forbidding greed and excessive gains and acquisitiveness (through monopolizing distribution channels, deceptive advertising, and questionable pricing practices).</li> </ul>

***H<sub>1</sub>: The overall attitude of consumers towards the social performance of Saudi businesses is expected to be negative.***

Research (e.g., [44]) shows that residents of the western region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia tend to have more positive attitudes towards the marketing strategies of business firms than residents of both the eastern and central regions. Perhaps this is so because the western region is more open to the world via the Red Sea and the fact that a good number of its residents came from different parts of the world during pilgrimage seasons and settled there. It is expected, therefore, that a similar attitude pattern towards the social performance of businesses prevails. Consequently,

***H<sub>2a</sub>: There are significant differences in the attitudes of consumers residing in the three main regions of Saudi Arabia towards the social performance of businesses.***

***H<sub>2b</sub>: The attitudes of consumers of the western region are expected to be more positive towards the social performance of Saudi businesses than those of consumers of the central and eastern regions.***

There is evidence [44] that the attitudes of Saudis towards the marketing strategies of business firms are more negative than the attitudes of non-Saudi Arabs living in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and that the differences are significant. In addition, research (e.g., [47]) has shown that Saudis differ significantly from non-Saudi Arabs in terms of their perception of some hotel attributes and service quality. Thus, the third hypothesis postulates:

***H<sub>3</sub>: There are significant differences in the attitudes of Saudis and non-Saudi Arabs working in Saudi Arabia towards the social performance of business firms.***

In his study on "Consumers' Attitudes towards the Marketing Strategies of Business Firms in the Saudi Market," Soliman [44] found a negative relationship between respondent's age and wife's work, on one hand, and consumers' attitudes towards the marketing strategies of businesses in the Saudi market, on the other hand. Mixed results were obtained in relation to other demographics including gender, income, education, occupation, and family size. Thus, the fourth hypothesis suggests:

***H<sub>4</sub>: The relationships between the attitudes of consumers towards the social performance of Saudi businesses and consumers' demographics are expected to be mixed.***

## Methodology

### Sampling frame and sample selection

The sampling frame included all Saudi and non-Saudi residents of the three major regions of Saudi Arabia; i.e., the western, central, and eastern regions. A convenience sample of consumers was approached in each region at work (in private-sector companies, government agencies, and schools) and at home, using a snowball sampling approach. The sample covered a wide array of demographics (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the sample**

Demographics	N	%	Demographics	N	%
<b>Region</b>			<b>Monthly Income</b>		
Eastern	210	30.3	Less than SR 6000	362	54.4
Central	374	54.0	SR 6000-less than SR 12000	170	25.5
Western	109	15.7	SR 12000 and up	134	20.1
No answer	1	----	No answer	28	----
<b>Nationality</b>			<b>Occupation</b>		
Saudi	493	71.0	Government employees & armed forces	248	36.2
Arab Non-Saudi	201	29.0	Private sector employees and businessmen	297	43.4
No answer	0	----	Housewives, retired, students	140	20.4
			No answer	9	----
<b>Age (mean = 33.14, range = 18-67)</b>			<b>Marital Status</b>		
18-24	133	19.9	Single	226	32.6
25-34	264	39.5	Married	457	65.9
35-54	248	37.1	Widowed	3	0.4
55 and up	23	3.4	Divorced	7	1.0
No answer	26	----	No answer	1	----
<b>Education</b>			<b>Family Size (including respondent)</b>		
Less than high school diploma	102	14.7	1-4	311	47.9
High school diploma	180	26.0	5-8	250	38.5
2-year diploma after high school	68	9.8	9-12	64	9.9
College degree	283	40.9	13+	24	3.7
Master/Ph.D.	59	8.5	No answer	45	----
No answer	2	----			
<b>Sex</b>			<b>Wife Works</b>		
Male	526	75.9	Yes	128	28.3
Female	167	24.1	No	324	71.7
No answer	1	----	No answer	5	----

A total of 721 respondents agreed to participate in the study and, therefore, a similar number of questionnaires was distributed. The number of usable questionnaires was 694 as twenty-seven questionnaires were excluded for several reasons such as



incomplete answers, extremity of all answers, the respondent is under 18 years of age, and the like. Female respondents were approached both at home (for housewives and nonworking females) and at work (for working females) by female relatives of the assistants who helped in distributing and collecting the questionnaires.

The selection of a convenience sample is justified by the absence of a documented frame that can be used for random sampling as well as the poor infrastructure of the marketing research function in Saudi Arabia [48]. Two restrictions were imposed on sample selection: a) setting a minimum age for respondents (18 years old and above) in order to ensure that the respondent has some shopping experience and is capable of judging the policies and actions of business firms, and b) limiting the non-Saudi respondents to Arab expatriates since the latter represent a majority among foreigners working in Saudi Arabia, and to control the cost of research as well. Respondents who stated their age as under 18 were excluded from the analysis. Some help was received from a number of assistants who were trained in delivering and collecting the completed questionnaires.

### **The Questionnaire**

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section covered social responsibility, and the second dealt with demographic questions. Because Klein [20] developed, tested, and used a scale in assessing the attitudes of both business executives and consumers towards consumerism issues with a comparison between Sweden and the United States and covered the four elements of the marketing mix, Klein's scale was deemed appropriate for this study.

The scale consists of 20 statements covering six factors as follows: (1) most businesses are concerned about and responsive to consumers; (2) consumers need protection and education to compete effectively with business; (3) generally, the quality of products has been decreasing; (4) our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries; (5) packaging today is essentially honest; and (6) business is primarily self-serving in nature.

This study used all the statements in Klein's scale except one (i.e.; "Companies try to influence the government to better their standing"), which was considered inapplicable to the Saudi business system. This statement was replaced with the statement, "Most firms attempt to increase their revenues in all ways." Additionally, while the original scale used a 6-point bipolar agreement-disagreement continuum, a pretest on 97 subjects indicated that they were confused about this scale. Accordingly, a 5-point Likert scale was utilized in the final administration of the survey (1=completely disagree, 5=completely agree). The original Klein's [20] scale was translated into Arabic, and five bilingual business professors checked the translation to ensure having the same meaning as in the original scale. A pretest proved that the subjects encountered no difficulty in understanding and responding to the statements. Because of these changes, a

series of reliability tests were performed on the modified scale whose results are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3. Reliability tests of the modified scale**

Tests	Results
Cronbach Alpha	Overall Alpha = .8264
Split-half	Correlation between forms = .7353
	Equal-length Spearman-Brown = .8475
	Guttman Split-half = .8475
	Alpha for part 1 = .6715
	Alpha for part 2 = .7217
Guttman	Lambda 1 = .7850, Lambda 2 = .8422, Lambda 3 = .8264
	Lambda 4 = .8475, Lambda 5 = .8273, Lambda 6 = .8819
Parallel model	Unbiased estimate of reliability = .8305
Strict parallel model	Unbiased estimate of reliability = .7179

As Table 3 demonstrates, Cronbach Alpha is .8264, and the values of various reliability coefficients range from .7179 to .8475 indicating a high level of reliability for the modified scale. On the other hand, to examine content and construct validity, two tests were conducted. First, the modified scale was assessed for face/content validity by five marketing professors who determined that the scale did have face validity. Then, a factor analysis was performed using the principal component extraction method and varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization in order to verify the construct validity of the six factors suggested by Klein [20]. Table 4 displays the resulting factor structure and factor loadings for all scale items (statements). As widely accepted in the literature, items with factor loadings of 0.4 and above were utilized to identify the new factor structure. Careful examination of the data revealed that some items loaded on factors that are different from the ones on which they loaded in the original study of Klein [20]. Consequently, factor labels were adjusted as stated in Table 4. Based on these results, the modified scale with its six dimensions (factors) was administered to the sample (see Table 5). This scale—with proven reliability and validity as shown above—better represents the Saudi environment, and accurately reflects the attitudes of consumers in this market.

### Findings and Discussion

The empirical findings of this study, in general, confirm the concern of Middle-Eastern researchers regarding the need for more government intervention and regulation of business practices in order to provide better consumer protection against unethical and misleading marketing practices. Consumers' attitudes, as revealed by the findings, indicate an overall negative view of the social policies of businesses in the Saudi market. Table 5 displays the means and standard deviations of the six major issues (dimensions) of concern and all twenty statements of the scale.

**Table 4. Factor structure of the pretest sample responses to the modified scale**

Statements	Factors and Factor Loadings*					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Factor (1): Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers:</b>						
• Most business firms make a sincere effort to help displeased customers	.700					
• Most manufacturers really want to fulfill warranty obligations	.739					
• In general, business firms usually accept responsibility for their products & guarantees	.745					
• When consumers have problems with products they have purchased, it is usually easy to get them corrected	.646					
• Most companies' complaints departments back up their products and effectively handle consumer problems	.546					
• Package sizes show in a correct way the amount of product contained inside	.427					
<b>Factor (2): Generally, the quality of products and repairs has been decreasing:</b>						
• Products that last a long time are a thing of the past		.654				
• What is seen on the outside of a package is often not what you get on the inside		.625				
• In general, the quality of repairs and maintenance service provided by manufacturers is getting worse		.612				
• The main reason a company is socially responsible is to make more sales		.462				
• In general, I am dissatisfied with the quality of most products today		.733				
<b>Factor (3): Our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries:</b>						
• Consumers in KSA are much more protected by government regulation than in most other countries			.583			
• Saudi-made products are less dangerous than those of most other countries			.474			
• The Saudi business system operates more efficiently than that of most other countries			.838			
<b>Factor (4): Consumers need protection:</b>						
• More frequent health and safety warnings on package are necessary to adequately inform the consumer of possible dangers				.679		
• Business should be legally liable for the pollution it or its products cause				.754		
<b>Factor (5): Business is primarily self-serving in nature:</b>						
• All Business really wants to do is make the most money it can					.818	
• Most firms attempt to increase their revenues in all ways					.499	
<b>Factor (6): Consumers need education:</b>						
• The government should set minimum standards of quality for all products sold to the consumer						.746
• Consumer education should be a required portion of a manufacturer's advertising budget						.532

\* Only factor loadings above .4 are considered

**Table 5. Means and standard deviations of social responsibility dimensions and statements**

Dimension	N	Mean <sup>1</sup>	S. D.
<b>(1) Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers:</b>	<b>665</b>	<b>3.03</b>	<b>.71</b>
• Most business firms make a sincere effort to help displeased customers	690	3.03	1.17
• Most manufacturers really want to fulfill warranty obligations	685	3.21	1.11
• In general, business firms usually accept responsibility for their products & guarantees	687	3.22	1.17
• When consumers have problems with products they have purchased, it is usually easy to get them corrected	692	2.79	1.17
• Most companies' complaints departments back up their products and effectively handle consumer problems	691	2.75	1.08
• Package sizes show in a correct way the amount of product contained inside	684	3.19	1.09
<b>(2) Generally, the quality of products and repairs has been decreasing:</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>2.72</b>	<b>.56</b>
• Products that last a long time are a thing of the past	687	2.49	1.18
• What is seen on the outside of a package is often not what you get on the inside	692	2.31	1.05
• In general, the quality of repairs and maintenance service provided by manufacturers is getting worse	691	2.48	1.12
• The main reason a company is socially responsible is to make more sales	691	3.78	1.02
• In general, I am dissatisfied with the quality of most products today	691	2.56	1.13
<b>(3) Our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries:</b>	<b>669</b>	<b>3.17</b>	<b>.93</b>
• Consumers in KSA are much more protected by government regulation than in most other countries	682	2.98	1.36
• Saudi-made products are less dangerous than those of most other countries	692	3.49	1.09
• The Saudi business system operates more efficiently than that of most other Countries	683	3.04	1.15
<b>(4) Consumers need protection:</b>	<b>690</b>	<b>4.62</b>	<b>.62</b>
• More frequent health and safety warnings on package are necessary to adequately inform the consumer of possible dangers	692	4.60	.78
• Business should be legally liable for the pollution it or its products cause	692	4.64	.73
<b>(5) Business is primarily self-serving in nature:</b>	<b>673</b>	<b>4.36</b>	<b>.73</b>
• All Business really wants to do is make the most money it can	686	4.46	.88
• Most firms attempt to increase their revenues in all ways	679	4.26	.89
<b>(6) Consumers need education:</b>	<b>689</b>	<b>4.45</b>	<b>.61</b>
• The government should set minimum standards of quality for all products sold to the consumer	690	4.63	.74
• Consumer education should be a required portion of a manufacturer's advertising budget	693	4.26	.84

<sup>1</sup> The scale used is: 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= not sure, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree.

The table indicates that respondents' attitudes towards the six issues as well as individual statements reflect a high level of dissatisfaction with the social performance of businesses. The attitude means for the six dimensions range from "unsure" to "agree" or "strongly agree" with negative dimensions, and "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with positive dimensions. Therefore,  $H_1$  is upheld.

A series of one-way ANOVA was performed on the six dimensions to assess the differences in respondents' attitudes in the three major regions of the Kingdom. Table (6) displays the results of these analyses, which show that attitudes differ significantly regarding all but the second issue (the quality of products and product repair and service). The statistical differences are highly significant whereas statistical significance ( $\alpha$ ) ranges from .004 to .000. So,  $H_{2a}$  is also supported.

The attitude means of the three regions with regard to the second issue (2.72, 2.71, and 2.77) are all low and not significantly different from each other. This finding implies that consumers in the three regions tend to equally disagree (but more likely to be unsure) that the quality of products and repairs has been decreasing over time. While this dimension reflects a moderate attitude by the three regions, all regions carry adverse attitudes towards other dimensions and the central region has more negative attitudes than the two other regions in almost all issues.

In order to assess the exact differences among the three regions, post-hoc Least Square Difference (LSD) tests were conducted. The results appear in Table (7) and indicate that the western region differs significantly from the two other regions in all issues, and seems to be more tolerant with businesses as apparent from mean comparisons. These findings prove to be consistent with those of Soliman [44]. Therefore,  $H_{2b}$  is supported.

A series of t-tests were conducted between Saudis and non-Saudi Arabs for the six social responsibility dimensions. Significant differences were found between the two groups regarding the first three issues (see Table 8).

In two of these issues (issue #1 in Table 8: "Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers," and issue #3 in Table 8: "Our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries,") Saudis rate businesses more negatively than non-Saudi Arabs do. Conceivably, there are several reasons for this result. First, Saudis—especially the educated ones—travel abroad more frequently than non-Saudi Arabs do. Consequently, Saudis are exposed to, and deal more with, Western business systems than non-Saudi Arabs. Alternatively, non-Saudi Arabs might consider the Saudi business system as more efficient than its counterpart in their countries.

**Table 6. ANOVA results for the three main regions of the Kingdom**

Dimension/Issue		Source of variation	Sum of squares	d.f.	Mean square	F	Sig.
(1)	Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers	Between Groups	8.002	2	4.001	8.074	.000
		Within Groups	327.542	661	.496		
		Total	335.543	663			
(2)	Generally, the quality of products and repairs has been decreasing	Between Groups	.322	2	.161	.514	.598
		Within Groups	210.516	673	.313		
		Total	210.838	675			
(3)	Our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries	Between Groups	10.653	2	5.326	6.223	.002
		Within Groups	569.232	665	.856		
		Total	579.885	667			
(4)	Consumers need protection	Between Groups	20.807	2	10.404	29.334	.000
		Within Groups	243.302	686	.355		
		Total	264.110	688			
(5)	Business is primarily self-serving in nature	Between Groups	9.423	2	4.712	9.166	.000
		Within Groups	343.868	669	.514		
		Total	353.291	671			
(6)	Consumers need education	Between Groups	4.196	2	2.098	5.666	.004
		Within Groups	253.618	685	.370		
		Total	257.814	687			

**Table 7. Individual significant differences among regions**

Dimension/Issue	Region	Mean <sup>1</sup>	Region		
			Eastern	Central	Western
(1) Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers	Eastern	3.08		*2	*
	Central	2.95			*
	Western	3.26			
(2) Generally, the quality of products and repairs has been decreasing	Eastern	2.72			
	Central	2.71			
	Western	2.77			
(3) Our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries	Eastern	3.15			*
	Central	3.09			*
	Western	3.46			
(4) Consumers need protection	Eastern	4.65			*
	Central	4.72			*
	Western	4.22			
(5) Business is primarily self-serving in nature	Eastern	4.45			*
	Central	4.39			*
	Western	4.09			
(6) Consumers need education	Eastern	4.41		*	
	Central	4.51			*
	Western	4.30			

<sup>1</sup> The scale used is: 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= not sure, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree.

<sup>2</sup> \* designates a statistically significant difference at alpha <.05.

**Table 8. Individual significant differences based on nationality**

	Dimension/Issue	Nationality	Mean <sup>1</sup>	T	Sig.
(1)	Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers	Saudis	2.98	-2.962	.003
		Non-Saudis	3.16		
(2)	Generally, the quality of products and repairs has been decreasing	Saudis	2.67	-3.313	.001
		Non-Saudis	2.83		
(3)	Our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries	Saudis	3.12	-2.193	.029
		Non-Saudis	3.29		
(4)	Consumers need protection	Saudis	4.60	-1.542	.124
		Non-Saudis	4.67		
(5)	Business is primarily self-serving in nature	Saudis	4.37	.133	.895
		Non-Saudis	4.36		
(6)	Consumers need education	Saudis	4.42	-1.523	.128
		Non-Saudis	4.50		

<sup>1</sup> The scale used is: 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= not sure, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree.

However, while both groups tend to disagree with issue #2 in Table 8, "Generally, the quality of products and repairs has been decreasing," both mean ratings are less than 3.0 and the non-Saudi Arabs rate this issue slightly more negatively than the Saudis, perhaps because the latter take pride in their own products as opposed to expatriates. As to the last three issues, both Saudis and non-Saudis almost strongly and equally agree that consumers need both protection and education, and that business is primarily self-serving in nature. So, H<sub>3</sub> is partially supported.

Eight demographic characteristics were examined in relation to consumers' attitudes towards the social performance of Saudi businesses. T-tests were conducted with gender, marital status, and wife's work status, whereas one-way ANOVA tests were performed with age, education, occupation, income, and family size. The results are displayed in Tables 9 and 10.

The means of both male and female respondents reflect dissatisfaction with all issues and the mean differences are insignificant across all six dimensions except the first one (Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers), whereas females have more negative attitudes (mean = 2.94) than males (mean = 3.06) and the difference is significant at the .06 alpha level. This finding has a crucial implication to marketers given the increasing role of female members of both Saudis and non-Saudi Arab households in buying decisions.

As to marital status, significant differences were found between married and single respondents regarding issue nos. 1, 5, and 6. In general, these results point to more negative attitudes among married consumers than among single consumers, perhaps because married consumers have more family responsibilities than single consumers who either live with their families or live separately and don't have to worry about anybody else.

**Table 9. t-Tests of demographics' mean differences**

	<b>Dimension/Issue</b>	<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Mean<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
(1)	Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers	<b>Gender</b>			
		Male	3.06	1.885	.060
		Female	2.94		
		<b>Marital status</b>			
		Single	3.11	2.229	.026
		Married	2.99		
(2)	Generally, the quality of products and repairs has been Decreasing	<b>Gender</b>			
		Male	2.73	.556	.578
		Female	2.70		
		<b>Marital status</b>			
		Single	2.75	.881	.378
		Married	2.70		
(3)	Our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries	<b>Gender</b>			
		Male	3.15	-.527	.598
		Female	3.20		
		<b>Marital status</b>			
		Single	3.19	.498	.619
		Married	3.15		
(4)	Consumers need protection	<b>Gender</b>			
		Male	4.62	-.161	.872
		Female	4.63		
		<b>Marital status</b>			
		Single	4.61	-.273	.785
		Married	4.62		
(5)	Business is primarily self-serving in nature	<b>Gender</b>			
		Male	4.35	-.800	.424
		Female	4.40		
		<b>Marital status</b>			
		Single	4.44	1.934	.054
		Married	4.33		
(6)	Consumers need education	<b>Gender</b>			
		Male	4.45	.473	.636
		Female	4.43		
		<b>Marital status</b>			
		Single	4.36	-2.533	.012
		Married	4.49		
		<b>Wife's work status</b>			
		Wife works	4.48	-.003	.998
		Wife doesn't	4.48		

<sup>1</sup> The scale used is: 1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3= not sure, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree.



**Table 10. ANOVA and LSD tests for demographics**

	Dimension/Issue	Demographics	F	Sig.	Groups with significant Differences
(1)	Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers	Age	4.544	.004	1&2
		Education	6.086	.000	1&4, 1&5, 2&4, 2&5, 3&5, 4&5
		Occupation	5.693	.004	1&2
		Income	13.360	.000	1&2, 1&3, 2&3
		Family size	.836	.474	
(2)	Generally, the quality of products and repairs has been decreasing	Age	1.494	.215	
		Education	2.481	.043	1&2, 1&4
		Occupation	2.262	.105	
		Income	3.247	.040	1&3
		Family size	1.445	.228	
(3)	Our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries	Age	3.245	.022	1&3
		Education	12.146	.000	1&2, 1&3, 1&4, 1&5, 2&4, 2&5, 3&5
		Occupation	7.189	.001	1&2, 1&3
		Income	21.047	.000	1&2, 1&3, 2&3
		Family size	3.849	.010	1&3, 2&3, 3&4
(4)	Consumers need protection	Age	1.432	.232	
		Education	.387	.818	
		Occupation	.078	.925	
		Income	1.103	.332	
		Family size	2.298	.076	1&3
(5)	Business is primarily self-serving in nature	Age	.664	.574	
		Education	.489	.744	
		Occupation	1.243	.289	
		Income	2.198	.112	
		Family size	1.038	.375	
(6)	Consumers need education	Age	2.738	.043	1&3
		Education	.664	.617	
		Occupation	1.786	.168	
		Income	2.840	.059	1&3
		Family size	4.206	.006	1&3, 2&3

Finally, consumers, whose wives work, have more negative attitudes than consumers whose wives do not work with regard to dimension (1): "Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers," and dimension (3): "Our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries," and the mean differences are highly significant. There are three possible reasons for this finding: (a) a working wife is more likely to have an educated husband, and as the analysis reveals below, highly educated consumers have more negative attitudes than less educated ones, (b) families with working wives have more income than families with non-working wives and as the analysis reveals below, consumers with higher household income have more negative attitudes than those with lower income, and (c) the family of a working wife is more likely to travel abroad more frequently and

interact with other business systems than a family with a non-working wife.

With regard to other demographics, Table 9 points to many significant differences among the group means for all the dimensions except the fifth one. With respect to age, respondents were classified into four age categories: (1) 18-24, (2) 25-34, (3) 35-54, and (4) 55 and over. The F and LSD tests show significant differences between age groups (1) & (2) and (1) & (3). In all cases, the third group has more negative attitudes than the younger groups concerning the issues at hand. It is expected that older consumers are more mature and have more shopping and life experiences than younger consumers and, accordingly, the third group was more dissatisfied.

With regard to education, all five educational groups differ significantly in their attitudes towards the first three issues. The F and LSD test results clearly demonstrate that highly educated groups have more negative attitudes than other groups with lower education, and that the differences are significant. With respect to occupation, respondents were classified into three groups as follows: Group (1) included government employees, armed forces (all types), and police; Group (2) included private sector employees, businessmen, and craftsmen; and Group (3) included housewives, full-time students, and the retired.

As Table 10 shows, the ANOVA results reveal significant differences among the three occupational groups only with regard to the first and third dimensions. LSD test results indicate the presence of significant differences between the first group (government employees) and the second group (private sector employees) on both issues, and between the first group and the third group on the second issue. The first group carries more negative attitudes than other groups on both issues, probably because of the low wages and salaries of government employees as compared to those of their private-sector counterparts, as well as the lack of work incentives in the government.

As to income, respondents were classified into three groups based on their monthly income as follows: Group (1): less than SR 6000; Group (2): SR 6,000 to less than SR 12,000; and Group (3): SR 12,000 and above. The ANOVA results show significant differences among the groups concerning dimensions 1, 2, 3, and 6. Significant differences exist between the third group (with the highest monthly income) and the two other groups (with lower incomes). The highest-income group carries more negative attitudes than other groups with respect to all four issues.

Finally, family size was analyzed using a classification of four groups as follows: Group (1): 1-4 people; Group (2): 5-8 people; Group (3): 9-12 people; and Group (4): 13 people and more. Significant differences were found among the different groups with regard to dimensions 3, 4, and 6. Group (3) with a size of 9-12 people was found significantly different in its attitudes from other groups particularly the smaller-size groups (1) and (2). In general, the larger size group (3) has more positive attitudes towards the issues at hand than the smaller size groups (1) and (2). This finding may

well be interpreted in light of the tendency of the younger generation --who is more educated and occupies better positions in the private sector-- to have smaller families. On the other hand, families with a size of 13+ seem to be extended families with a large number of young educated members whose influence on the attitudes of their heads of households appears to be relatively strong. Based on the above findings, the study hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> was, therefore, supported.

An important question that remains to be addressed is related to the demographic variables strongly associated with consumers' attitudes towards the social performance of businesses. To answer this question, stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted with each of the six dimensions of business social performance as the dependent variable, and the eight demographic characteristics in addition to geographic region and nationality as the independent variables. Table 11 displays and shows that:

- a) Income is a major factor associating with attitudes towards the issues 1, 3, and 5.
- b) Education is a major factor associating with attitudes towards the issues 1, 3, and 4.
- c) Nationality is a major factor associating with attitudes towards the second issue only.
- d) Occupation is a major factor associating with attitudes towards the third issue only.
- e) Region is a major factor associating with attitudes towards the issues 3, 4, 5, and 6.
- f) Marital status is a major factor associating with attitudes towards the sixth issue only.

**Table 11. Stepwise regression analysis for the demographic variables associated with consumers' attitudes**

Dimension	Influential demographic variables	Standardized coefficient beta	F	Sig.
(1) Businesses accept responsibility for their products and warranties and respond to consumers	Monthly income	-.250	18.196	.000
	education	-.113		
(2) Generally, the quality of products and repairs has been decreasing	Nationality	.242	24.861	.000
(3) Our business system is more efficient than that of most other countries	Monthly income	-.303	21.957	.000
	Education	-.178		
	Occupation	.151		
	Region	.108		
(4) Consumers need protection	Region	-.249	15.961	.000
	Education	-.128		
(5) Business is primarily self-serving in nature	Region	-.198	9.877	.000
	Monthly income	.098		
(6) Consumers need education	Region	-.119	5.115	.006
	Marital Status	.111		

Marketers in Saudi Arabia must consider each of the above factors when planning their marketing strategies and address the social issue(s) pertaining to each factor more effectively in order to attain a higher level of customer satisfaction.

### **Summary, Implications, and Directions for Future Research**

The findings of this study indicate that:

1. Consumers are either unsure or dissatisfied with the overall social performance of Saudi businesses.
2. Their attitudes differ significantly according to their geographic region. The Western region seems to have more positive attitudes than the two other regions.
3. Saudis have more negative attitudes than non-Saudi Arabs working in Saudi Arabia towards the first three issues under study, and the difference is significant.
4. Older respondents (especially 35-54 years old) have more negative attitudes than younger ones in term of issues # 1, 3, and 6, and the differences are significant.
5. The gender of respondents is not a major factor associated with their attitudes towards the social performance of Saudi businesses.
6. Government employees have more negative attitudes towards the first three issues than people with other occupations, and the differences are significant.
7. Married respondents have more negative attitudes than single respondents in terms of issues # 1, 5, and 6, and the differences are significant.
8. Higher-income respondents carry more negative attitudes than lower-income respondents in terms of issues # 1, 2, 3, and 6, and the differences are significant.
9. Respondents with smaller families have more negative attitudes than respondents with larger families in terms of issues # 3, 4, and 6, and the differences are significant.
10. Consumers whose wives are employed have more negative attitudes than consumers whose wives are unemployed in terms of issues # 1 and 3, and the differences are significant.
11. When all demographic characteristics were analyzed altogether, it was found that:
  - a) Geographic region is strongly associated with attitudes towards issues 3, 4, 5, and 6.
  - b) Income is strongly associated with attitudes of consumers towards issues 1, 3, and 5.
  - c) Education is strongly associated with attitudes towards issues 1, 3, and 4.
  - d) Nationality is strongly associated with attitudes towards the second issue only.
  - e) Occupation is strongly associated with attitudes towards the third issue only.
  - f) Marital status strongly is associated with attitudes towards the sixth issue only.

These findings, in general, point to an obvious deficiency in the social

performance of businesses in the Saudi market as expressed by negative consumer attitudes in numerous areas. Thus, appropriate steps must be taken by several parties to rectify this situation including decision makers both in business and in government. In the following sections, policy implications of the findings for business leaders, government officials, and marketing researchers will be addressed briefly.

### **Policy implications for business leaders**

The findings of previous research (e.g., [50]) indicate that companies may use corporate philanthropy as a strategic tool to remedy negative portrayals of their social responsibility in the media. Thus, Saudi businesses can remedy the deficiency in their social performance and enhance their image among the public in general, and their customers in particular, through philanthropy especially that the Islamic culture in which they operate encourages philanthropic acts. Furthermore, top management should keep in mind that business ethics and social responsibility are important components of organizational effectiveness and a vital contributor to profitability and growth [1, 2]. Increasing corporate credibility with consumers is of great importance since recent research indicates that corporate credibility seems to have great influence on attitude-toward-the-brand and on purchase intentions [51].

What does the future hold for corporate social responsibility? Observers maintain that the future will be no better than the present or the past. On the contrary, the new millennium is expected to carry more challenges to business corporations as consumerism escalates and environmental problems get worse. Therefore, Saudi business firms must set out a strategy for corporate responses to the challenges they will face. Awareness of this fact is increasing throughout the world, and it is about time for Saudi businesses to be a part of this movement.

### **Policy implications for government decision makers**

Despite the sweeping trend towards deregulation of business activities across the globe, many governments issue the appropriate regulations and establish the necessary governmental bodies, agencies, and councils to protect both final consumers and businesses from the exploitation, deception, and other unethical practices of businesses. For instance, the Health and Consumer Protection Directorate-General has been established by the European Union, the Federal Trade Commission and the Consumer Product Safety Commission by the United States government, and the Fair Trade Commission by the Japanese government. These agencies are active in protecting consumers from the harmful effects of unfair and deceptive trade practices and monopolies at all fronts and in all business forms including manufacturing, wholesaling, retailing, direct marketing, e-commerce, and other business fields. They disseminate relevant information to consumers and businesses through their publications, telephone lines, fax machines, and the Internet. A similar government agency is needed in Saudi Arabia to assume the described tasks actively.

### Implications for researchers and directions for future research

Future research in this field might shed more light on consumers' attitudes in other parts of the country that have not been covered in this study; namely, the northern and southern regions of Saudi Arabia and compare them to those of other regions. Also, the attitudes of non-Arab expatriates might be assessed and compared to those of the Saudis and of non-Saudi Arabs for policy directions and change. In addition, periodical measurement of the social performance of businesses is needed in order to assess progress in this area over time and to enable businesses to implement the necessary strategic and tactical plans accommodating changes in consumers' attitudes. Last but not least, researchers should help Saudi business firms in developing valid measures and mechanisms by which consumers' attitudes towards the social performance of businesses can be monitored on a regular and continuing basis.

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## اتجاهات المستهلكين نحو الأداء الاجتماعي لمنشآت الأعمال السعودية: دراسة ميدانية

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أستاذ مشارك ، قسم إدارة الأعمال ، كلية العلوم الإدارية ، جامعة الملك سعود

(قدم للنشر في ١٤٢٣/٨/٣ هـ ؛ وقبل للنشر في ١٤٢٤/٣/٢١ هـ)

ملخص البحث تكشف المراجعة المكثفة لأدبيات أخلاقيات منشآت الأعمال ومسئوليتها تجاه المجتمع عن اهتمام الأفراد الشديد بهذه الموضوعات حول العالم. لذلك تقيس هذه الدراسة اتجاهات المستهلكين السعوديين والعرب المقيمين بالمملكة من غير السعوديين نحو الأداء الاجتماعي لمنشآت الأعمال السعودية في المجالات الأربعة للمزيج التسويقي مع مقارنة المناطق الثلاثة الرئيسية للمملكة (الشرقية والوسطى والغربية) ببعضها ، كما تفحص الدراسة العلاقة بين ثمانية خصائص ديموجرافية وتلك الاتجاهات ، وينتهي تقرير البحث بعرض نتائج التحليل الإحصائي ومناقشة الدروس المستفادة منها في تصميم استراتيجيات التسويق واقتراح بعض موضوعات البحث في المستقبل.