

Demographic Effects on Attitudes Toward Business Ethics Among the Management and Commerce Students in India

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Abstract

Business is a human activity and so, it involves decisions that are based on certain moral foundations. Given the social and ecological problems at present time, these foundations and the role of business in society must be critically reviewed from an ethical point of view. Business and Commerce students are at the center of this scenario. They interact with businesses and society in multiple roles. They interact as citizens, customers, and employees with the businesses with which they work. They not only shape the development of the organization they work for- as employees members, and thus representatives, of his organization. This research aims to understand the effect of demographic characteristics on attitude towards business ethics of students pursuing post graduate studies in the area of Management and Commerce. This research concludes that there is a complex relationship between different demographic characteristics of commerce and management students on different moral dimensions studied. On some dimensions the variations are significant and on some it's not so significant. It is recommended to further explore this relationship for a better understanding of demographic effects on different moral dimensions.

Keywords: Business ethics, Student demographic effects on moral dimensions, Ethics attitude.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Business is a human activity. As such, it involves decisions that are based on certain moral foundations (DeGeorge 2005). Given the social and ecological problems at present time, these foundations and the role of business in society must be critically reviewed from an ethical point of view. Thus, it becomes important to reinforce the role of business ethics in this process of change (Ulrich 2008a).

Business and Commerce students are at the center of this scenario. In their role as stakeholders, they are first and foremost citizens that are affected by corporate decisions in the environment they live in. In many cases, they are also customers of a company. Graduating from university and entering into the job market, students take on the role of a third stakeholder group: the employee. Thus, they have certain attitudes and expectations regarding the ethical conduct of business in both of their roles as individual citizens and future employees of a company. Based on this moral mindset, they will not only shape the development of the organization they work for. As employees, they are in a sense the company as members, and thus representatives, of this organization. Thus, it is crucial to emphasize the understanding of their belief system.

The over-arching aim of this research is to understand the effect of demographic characteristics on attitude towards business ethics of students pursuing post graduate studies in the area of Management and Commerce. The decision to investigate post graduate management and commerce students was based on the fact that, there has been no recent study that investigates attitude towards business ethics among business and commerce students among Indian students. Thus, this research will achieve to close this research gap.

2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH/ LITERATURE REVIEW

Today, a sizeable academic literature has focused on the ethics of business students. The ethics literature has recognized the importance of including these prospective leaders and executives in ethics research. Many have called for sustained formal exposure of students to business ethics. In recent years, students majoring in business administration have been exposed to business ethics in a number of courses. Business programs teach business ethics in some form or the other. The goal is to develop the ability to integrate a concern for the welfare of others with an individual's managerial role. It is hoped that this will raise the students' awareness of the impact of ethics and social responsibility upon both business and society.

More than three decades ago, **Hawkins and Cocanougher (1972)** examined students' reactions to ethical matters in business. Their study revealed that those majoring in business were more tolerant of questionable business practices than were non-business students. More recent studies have confirmed these earlier findings. For example, **St. Pierre, Nelson, and Gabbin (1990)** found that accounting students scored lower on a test of moral reasoning than psychology students. In a survey of individual subscribers to *Business Ethics Quarterly*, **Hosmer (1999)** reported that accounting and finance students were more likely to view business ethics and social responsibility as generally unimportant. In their research, **Glenn and Van Loo (1993)** noted that there were indications that business students were making less ethical choices in the 1980s than in the 1960s. More recently, **Harmon and Webster (2002)** compared today's college students with college students of the 1960s and found "a continuing societal movement toward Machiavellian behaviour".

Some researchers have also examined business student's demographic characteristics from an ethics perspective. When gender was included as an independent variable, the results have been inconclusive. Some studies have reported no significant differences between female and male students. For example, no gender differences were found by **Davis and Welton (1991)** regarding ethical situations dealing with professional ethics. Similar results were obtained by **Tsalikis and Ortiz-Buonafina (1990)**; **Ford and Lowery (1986)**; **Friedman, Robinson, and Friedman (1987)**; and **McCuddy and Peery (1996)**. Other studies have focused on more homogenous subjects, based on their area of study. For example, **Stanga and Turpen's (1991)** survey of accounting students found no significant differences between females and males. Similarly, **Gilligan and Attanucci's (1988)** study of medical students revealed no relationship between gender and moral orientation.

Other studies have reported very different results. Significant differences in ethical judgments of female and male business students have been found by a number of authors. For example, **Arlow's (1991)** study found that females place greater emphasis on ethical values and social responsibility than males. A study by **Church, Gaa, Nainar, and Shehata (2005)** revealed that gender does influence ethical decisions. **Ruegger and King (1992)** reported that female students rated behaviour as less ethically acceptable than males in 6 of 10 situations. Also, **Whipple and Wolf (1991)** and **Whipple and Swords (1992)** concluded that females are more ethical when different business scenarios were presented to them. **Galbraith and Stephenson (1993)** reported that, when dealing with issues of self-interest, males and females use different decision criteria.

Concerning the role of ethics in social and interpersonal relationships, **Smith and Oakley (1997)** found that females had higher expectations for ethical behaviours which reflect concern for social and interpersonal relationships. In a study among undergraduate business students, males and females offered different perceptions of a just society (**Prasad et al., 1998**). When **Lawson (2004)** examined classroom cheating, he concluded that, on average, women held more ethical beliefs than men. **Betz, O'Connell, and Shepard (1989)** observed that men were more than twice as likely than women to say they would engage in certain actions regarded as less ethical. **Khazanchi (1995)** concluded that women are better able to recognize unethical actions in information systems than men. **Landry, Moyes, and Cortes (2004)** found that female students, compared with the men, had a higher degree of ethical sophistication. The women demonstrated stronger responses with respect to situations involving unfairness, injustice, and moral wrongness. Also, **Loe and Weeks (2000)** found that women demonstrated higher levels of moral development than did the men. Finally, **Ameen, Guffey, and McMillan (1996)** reported that, among accounting students, females were less tolerant than males of unethical behavior.

3. RESEARCH APPROACH

For the purpose of this research, the researchers followed the research approach taken by **Albaum & Peterson (2006)**. This section covered statements regarding relational aspects of business and society. Few statements were extracted from previous studies- from **Albaum and Peterson (2006)**, from **Singhapakdi et al. (1996)**, from **Jaffe and Tsimmerman (2005)**, and from **Kolodisky et al. (2004)**. All other statements in this part were composed by the author. These statements were classified in nine dimensions representing the mesa, macro, and micro level of business and society relations. While section one asking students for the primary moral dimensions was

divided into three dimensions. Section two addressed the additional moral dimensions and was divided into six dimensions. While Albaum and Peterson (2006) used a six-point Likert scale, students in this study were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement for each presented statement on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 = completely agree to 1 = completely disagree. It was regarded as important to give students a possibility to choose neutral, in order not to push them for an answer they do not feel comfortable with. Also, a don't know answering option was provided additionally for every statement for the same reason.

Table 1: Primary Moral Dimensions

Dimension	Items
Dimension (1): Corporate Ethics	The growth of the large multinational corporation has led to a decline in ethical behaviour in business. I believe that corporations do not act according to their ethical principles. The ethical standards of large corporations are worse than the standards of small business. I believe that the corporate goal of generating high profits hinders a positive sustainable development.
Dimension (2): Ethical Mutuality	In order to solve the social problems, businesses, governments, NGOs and the individual must cooperate We feel we must redefine the relationship between economic and social values toward a more human face. I believe that all business students should take a formal course in business ethics.
Dimension (3): Ethical Dilemma	I fear that in my future job life, my personal values will conflict with the values of the business world. The current system of a free market economy makes ethical behaviour difficult to realize. I realize that I would have to change my behavioural patterns, but often find myself in a dilemma In order to succeed in business, it is often necessary to compromise one's ethics. I experience value conflict situations as stressful.

Table 2: Additional Moral Dimensions

Dimension (4): CSR and Profitability	Social responsibility and profitability can be compatible. Responsible corporate social behaviour is essential for the long-term profitability of a company.
Dimension (5): Expectation and Conduct	Current ethical standards in business meet the need of society. The expectations of society regarding the social responsibilities of business are often too unrealistic.
Dimension (6): Government	Governments should take more control over corporate actions. Governments are more trustworthy than multinational

<p>Dimension (7): Ethicality</p> <p>Dimension (8): Role and Influence</p> <p>Dimension (9): Ethical Behaviour of Others</p>	<p>corporations. Business that is legal is ethical. Within a business firm, the ends justify the means. I feel that as a future employee of a company, I can have a positive impact on the development of society. I feel that as an individual citizen, I can have a positive impact on the development of society. Business managers often engage in behaviours that I consider being unethical. I feel that my fellow students are less aware of social and environmental problems than I am.</p>
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Examining Differences in Means for Moral Dimensions for Demographic Variables

The section below provides descriptive statistics for the factors under the Corporate Ethics, Ethical Mutuality, Ethical Dilemma, CSR and Profitability, Expectation and Conduct, Government, Ethicality, Role and Influence and Ethical Behaviour of others dimension against all the demographic variables. All results are presented in Tables and Figures below.

Gender

It can be observed from Table and Figure below that females have higher mean values as compared to males for all primary moral dimensions. It was highest for corporate ethics dimensions followed by ethical mutuality and ethical dilemma. The perceptual gap between females and males for corporate ethics was also highest. For the same mean value reported for females was 5.295 as compared to 4.728 reported for males. This indicates that female perception that the large corporations are more unethical as compared to small businesses is higher as compared to males. The perceptual gap between female and males was lowest for ethical dilemma and was reported as .069.

Table 3: Mean Values of Primary Moral Dimensions According to Gender

Gender	Corporate Ethics	Ethical Mutuality	Ethical Dilemma
Male	4.728	4.904	4.811
Female	5.295	5.034	4.880
Total	4.925	4.949	4.835

The mean values for additional moral dimensions for males and females are provided in Table and Figure. Except for Government for all other dimensions like CSR and Profitability, Expectation and Conduct, Government, Ethicality, Role and Influence, and Ethical Behaviour of others- females reported a higher value as compared to males. The perceptual gap between females and males was highest for CSR and Profitability and lowest Ethical Behaviour of Others dimension.

Figure 1: Mean Values of Primary Moral Dimensions According to Gender

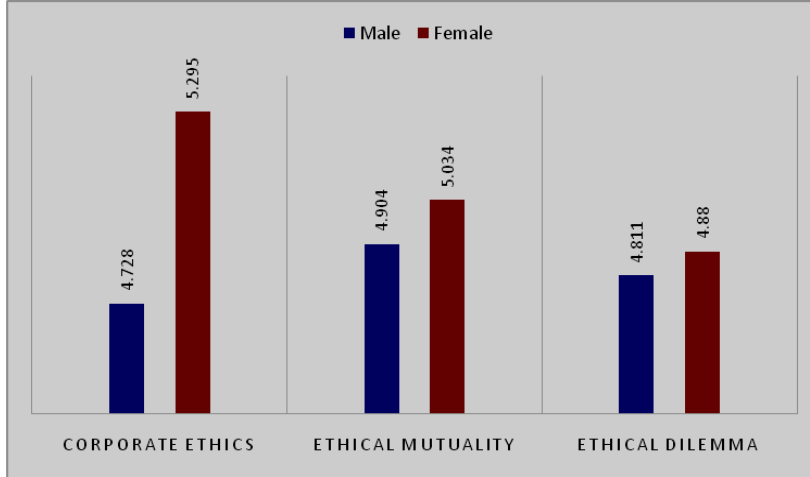
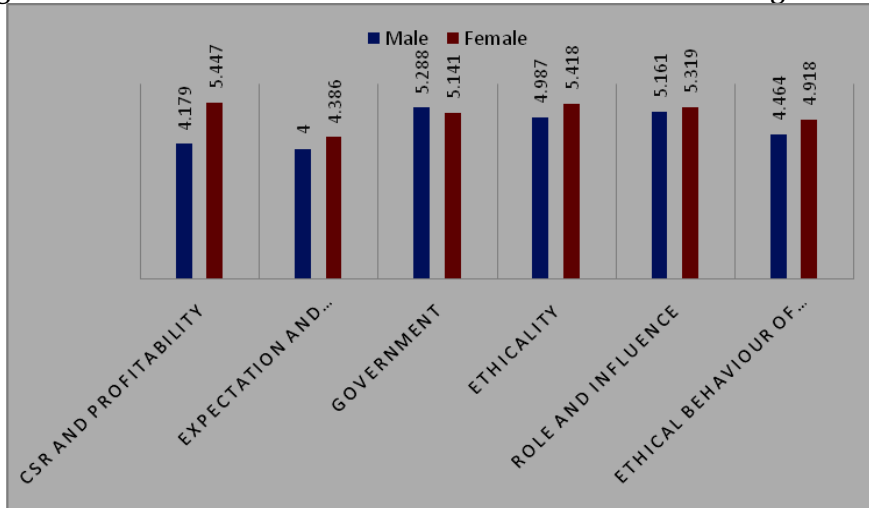


Table 4: Mean Values of Additional Moral Dimensions According to Gender

Gender	CSR and Profitability	Expectation and Conduct	Government	Ethicality	Role and Influence	Ethical Behaviour of Others
Male	4.179	4.000	5.288	4.987	5.161	4.464
Female	5.447	4.386	5.141	5.418	5.319	4.918
Total	4.620	4.134	5.237	5.137	5.216	4.622

Figure 2: Mean Values of Additional Moral Dimensions According to Gender



Age

In terms of age student respondents of above 30 years group have highest mean score for Corporate Ethics dimensions. It simply is showing an increasing trend with increasing age. This

means that with increasing age student's perception that large businesses are more unethical as compared to smaller businesses increases. For mutual ethicality dimensions also, this group indicated highest mean value. This means that respondents from this group feels that all stakeholder should work together for a better society and more responsible business. For ethical dilemma dimension a continuously decreasing trend was indicated with increasing age of respondents. This indicates that respondents from younger group perceive greater situations of ethical dilemma as compared to older age group.

Table 5: Mean Values of Primary Moral Dimensions According to Age Groups

Age	Corporate Ethics	Ethical Mutuality	Ethical Dilemma
Less than 25	4.811	4.923	4.949
25-30 Years	4.917	4.919	4.852
Over 30 Years	5.267	5.183	4.447
Total	4.925	4.949	4.835

Figure 3: Mean Values of Primary Moral Dimensions According to Age Groups

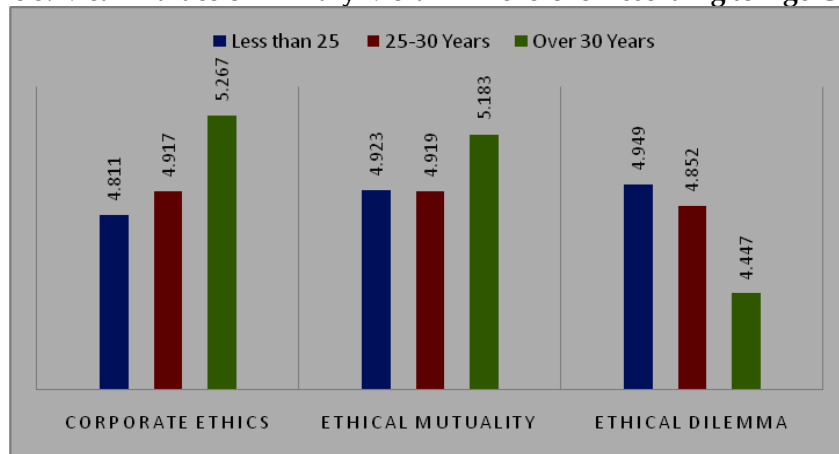
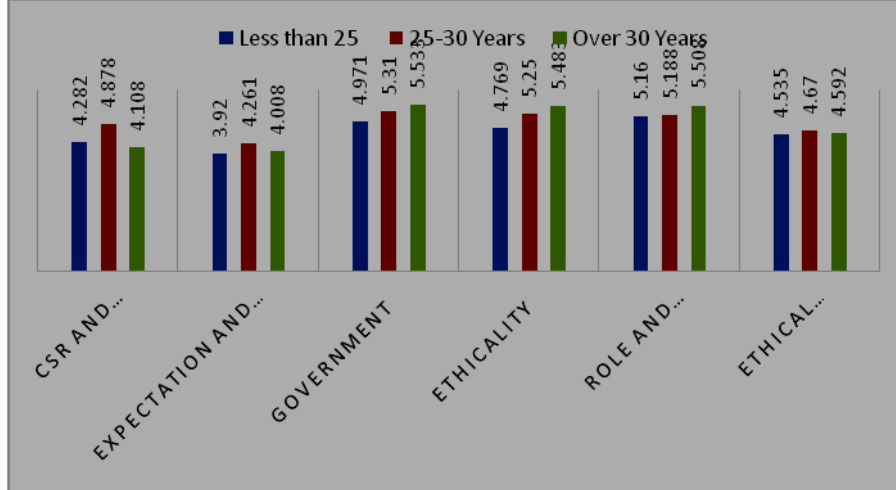


Table 6: Mean Values of Additional Moral Dimensions According to Age Groups

Age	CSR and Profitability	Expectation and Conduct	Government	Ethicality	Role and Influence	Ethical Behaviour of Others
Less than 25	4.282	3.920	4.971	4.769	5.160	4.535
25-30 Years	4.878	4.261	5.310	5.250	5.188	4.670
Over 30 Years	4.108	4.008	5.533	5.483	5.508	4.592
Total	4.620	4.134	5.237	5.137	5.216	4.622

Figure 4: Mean Values of Additional Moral Dimensions According to Age Groups



The mean values for additional moral dimensions for respondents from different age groups are provided in Table and Figure. For CSR and Profitability dimension students from 25-30 groups indicated highest mean value as compared to other age groups. This indicated that students from this group perceive positively towards CSR and profitability. For Expectation and Conduct and Ethical Behaviour of others dimension also students from 25-30 groups indicated highest mean value as compared to other age groups. For Government, Ethicality, and Role and Influence an increasing trend was observed with increasing age of respondents.

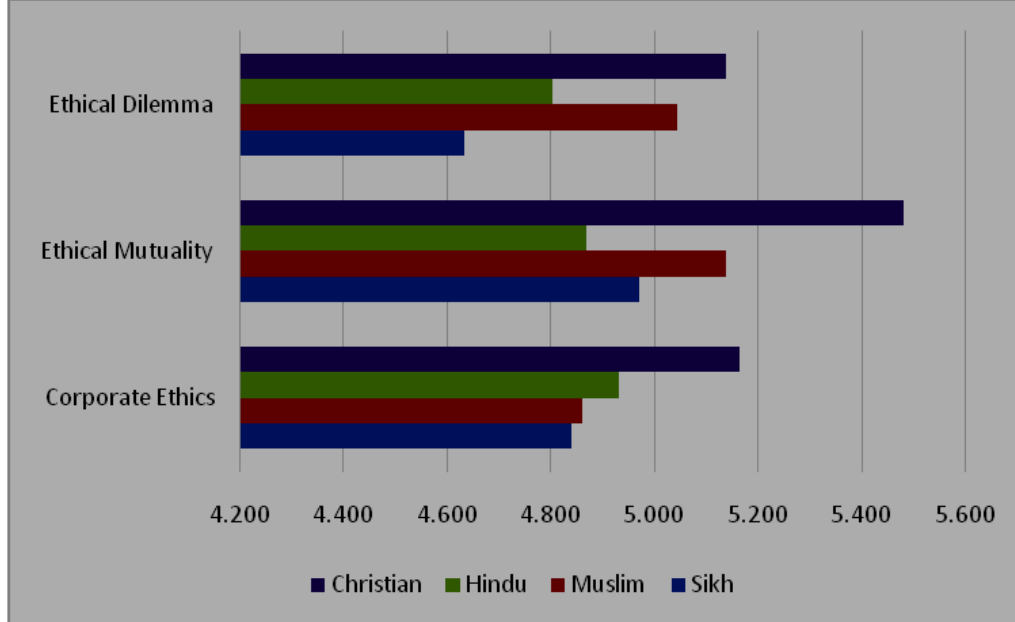
Religion

This paper also made an attempt to study student’s religion on their perception towards business ethics. For corporate ethics dimension it was found that Christians indicated a highest mean value of 5.1 followed by Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. This indicates that Sikh perception that large businesses are more unethical as compared to smaller businesses is lowest and it is highest for Christians. As far as ethical mutuality is concerned all students from all religions indicated a positive perception towards the same. However, it was highest for the Christians. Christians also indicated highest mean value for Ethical Dilemma dimension and it was lowest for Sikh. This indicates that Christians feel to come across a situation of moral dilemma more often as compared to respondents from other religious groups.

Table 7: Mean Values of Primary Moral Dimensions According to Religious Groups

Religion	Corporate Ethics	Ethical Mutuality	Ethical Dilemma
Sikh	4.839	4.970	4.632
Muslim	4.861	5.138	5.043
Hindu	4.930	4.867	4.802
Christian	5.164	5.479	5.138
Total	4.925	4.949	4.835

Figure 5: Mean Values of Primary Moral Dimensions According to Religious Groups

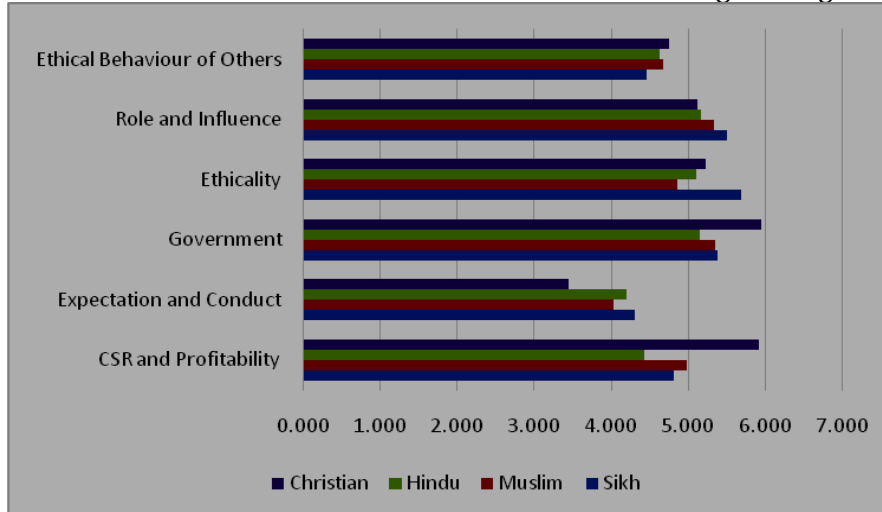


The mean values for additional moral dimensions for respondents from different religious groups are provided in Table and Figure. For CSR and Profitability dimension students from Christian religious group indicated highest mean value as compared to other groups. This indicated that students from this group perceive positively towards CSR and profitability. For Expectation and Conduct students from Christian religious group indicated the lowest mean value.

Table 8: Mean Values of Additional Moral Dimensions According to Religious Groups

Religion	CSR and Profitability	Expectation and Conduct	Government	Ethicality	Role and Influence	Ethical Behaviour of Others
Sikh	4.813	4.295	5.366	5.688	5.491	4.455
Muslim	4.971	4.029	5.343	4.857	5.329	4.671
Hindu	4.420	4.188	5.140	5.101	5.164	4.627
Christian	5.906	3.438	5.938	5.219	5.109	4.750
Total	4.620	4.134	5.237	5.137	5.216	4.622

Figure 6: Mean Values of Additional Moral Dimensions According to Religious Groups



This indicates that they feel that current ethical standards of business do not meet the needs of society. For Government dimension highest mean value was indicated by students from Christian religion and lowest by students from Hindu religious group. This means Christian perception towards Government is more positive as compared to that of Hindu. As far as Ethical Behaviour of Others dimension is concerned students from all the religious groups indicated a positive perception but variation among them was only marginal.

Family Income

This research paper also made an attempt to study student’s family income on their perception towards business ethics. For corporate ethics dimension a continuously decreasing trend with increasing family income. Thus, with increasing family income of students their perception that large businesses are more unethical as compared to small businesses decreases. For ethical mutuality dimension a continuously decreasing trend is being indicated with increase in family income. This indicates that respondents from lower income groups feel that all stakeholders should mutually cooperate for a better world and business. For ethical dilemma no fixed trend was indicated. Respondents from 5-8 Lacs family income group indicated highest mean value for ethical dilemma. Thus, respondents from lower and higher income groups both indicated to face lower ethical dilemma as compared to respondents from the middle, income group.

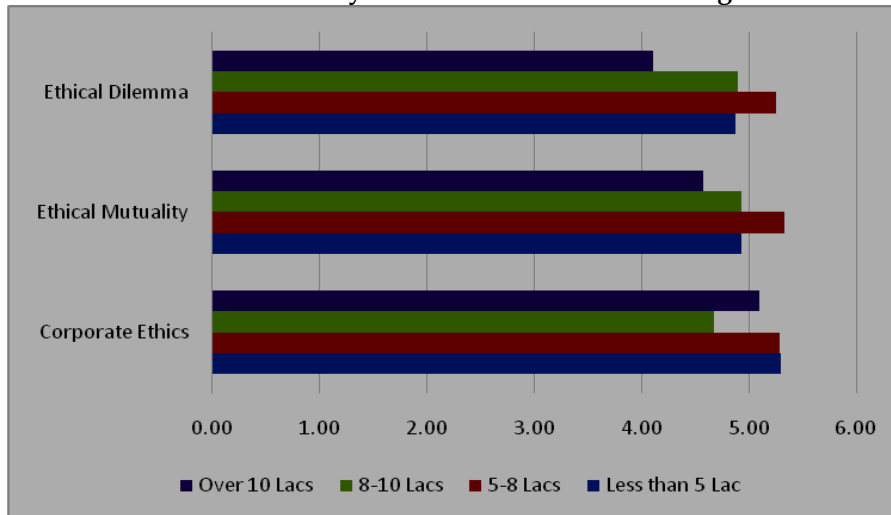
Table 9: Mean Values of Primary Moral Dimensions According to Income Groups

Family Income	Corporate Ethics	Ethical Mutuality	Ethical Dilemma
Less than 5 Lac	5.30	5.33	4.87
5-8 Lacs	5.29	4.94	5.26
8-10 Lacs	5.10	4.93	4.89
Over 10 Lacs	4.68	4.58	4.11
Total	4.93	4.95	4.84

Table 10: Mean Values of Additional Moral Dimensions According to Income Groups

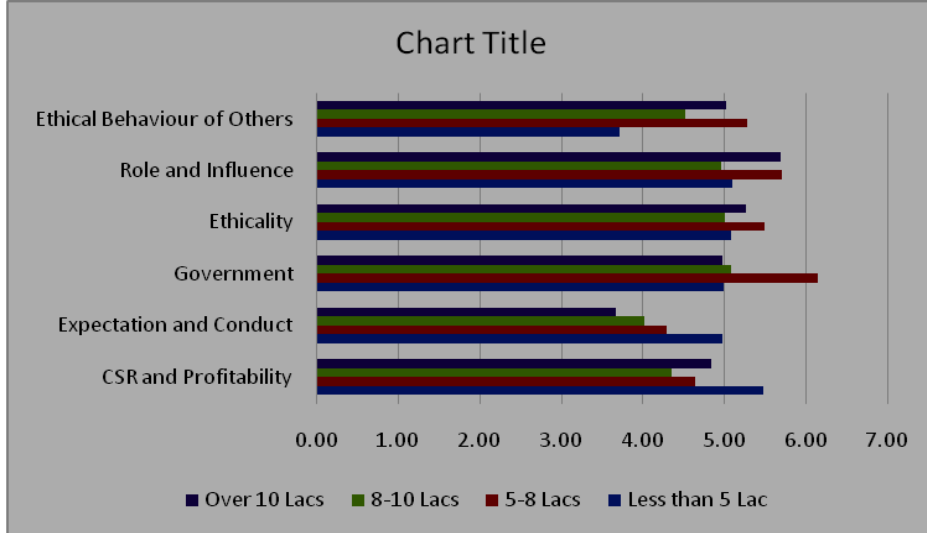
Family Income	CSR and Profitability	Expectation and Conduct	Government	Ethicality	Role and Influence	Ethical Behaviour of Others
Less than 5 Lac	5.48	4.97	4.99	5.08	5.10	3.72
5-8 Lacs	4.64	4.30	6.15	5.49	5.71	5.28
8-10 Lacs	4.36	4.02	5.08	5.01	4.96	4.51
Over 10 Lacs	4.84	3.66	4.98	5.26	5.69	5.02
Total	4.62	4.13	5.24	5.14	5.22	4.62

Figure 7: Mean Values of Primary Moral Dimensions According to Income Groups



The mean values for additional moral dimensions for respondents from different family income groups are provided in Table and Figure. For CSR and Profitability dimension students from less than 5 Lac family income group indicated highest mean value as compared to other groups. This indicated that students from this group perceive positively towards CSR and profitability. For Expectation and Conduct students from less than 5 Lac family income group again indicated the highest mean value. This indicates that they feel that current ethical standards of business meet the needs of society. For Government dimension highest mean value was indicated by students from 5-8 Lac family income group. This means that students from this group perceive that the Government is more ethical as compared to Businesses and so play an active role in making businesses ethical and socially responsible. As far as Ethical Behaviour of Others dimension is concerned students from 5-8 Lac family income group indicated highest mean value, indicating that the ethical behaviour demonstrated by other stakeholders affect their attitude towards business ethics.

Figure 8: Mean Values of Additional Moral Dimensions According to Income Groups



Education

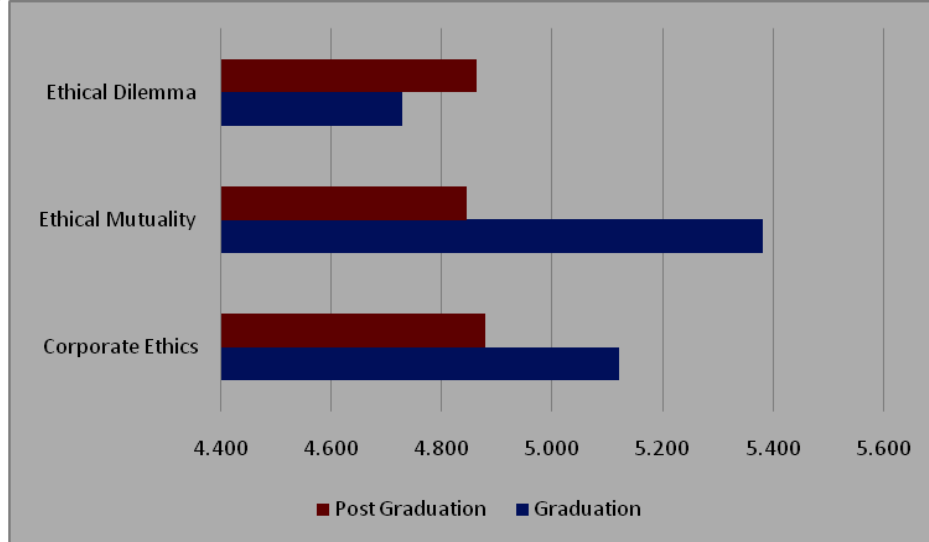
The research made an attempt to understand the difference in attitude between Post-graduate and Graduate students. The data for the same is presented in Table below. It is indicated that students in their Graduation perceive Large Businesses to be more ethical as compared to small businesses. However, the same is not true for Post-graduate students. Graduate students also indicated a higher mean value for Ethical Mutuality dimension as compared to Post-graduate students. This indicates that the graduate student strongly feel that involvement and cooperation of all stakeholders is required for a better world and more responsible business.

Table 11: Mean Values of Primary Moral Dimensions According to Education Level

Education	Corporate Ethics	Ethical Mutuality	Ethical Dilemma
Graduation	5.120	5.381	4.728
Post-Graduation	4.878	4.844	4.861
Total	4.925	4.949	4.835

However, it was the post-graduate students who indicated a higher mean value for Ethical Dilemma dimension as compared to Graduate students. This may be because generally with increasing awareness and exposure one may face more situations with ethical dilemma.

Figure 9: Mean Values of Primary Moral Dimensions According to Education Level

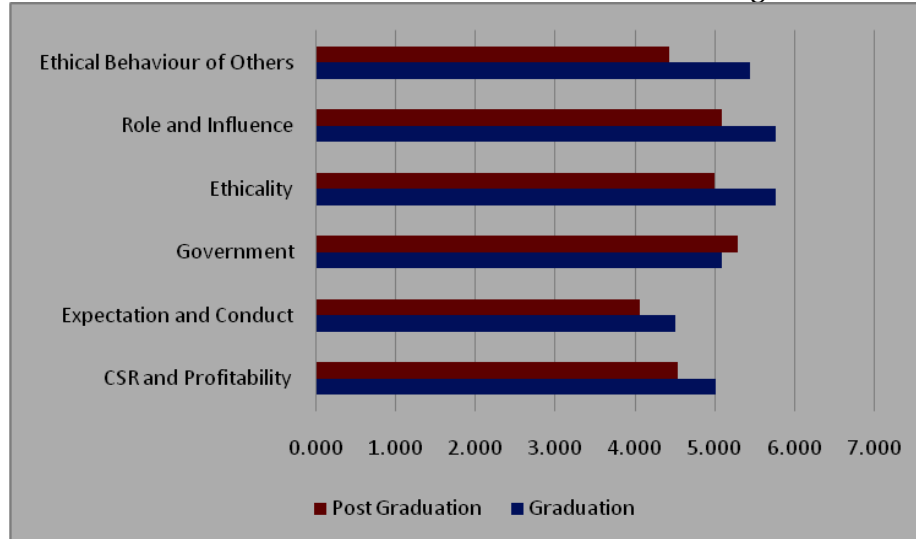


The mean values for additional moral dimensions for respondents from different education levels are provided in Table and Figure. For CSR and Profitability dimension students from Graduation group indicated higher mean value as compared to Post-graduate groups. This indicated that students from this group perceive positively towards CSR and profitability. For Expectation and Conduct again students from Graduation indicated a higher mean value. This indicates that they feel that current ethical standards of business meet the needs of society. For Government dimension higher mean value was indicated by students from Post-graduation group. This means that students from this group perceive that the Government is more ethical as compared to Businesses and so play an active role in making businesses ethical and socially responsible.

Table 12: Mean Values of Additional Moral Dimensions According to Education Level

Education	CSR and Profitability	Expectation and Conduct	Government	Ethicality	Role and Influence	Ethical Behaviour of Others
Graduation	5.000	4.495	5.075	5.750	5.755	5.434
Post-Graduation	4.528	4.046	5.276	4.987	5.084	4.424
Total	4.620	4.134	5.237	5.137	5.216	4.622

Figure 10: Mean Values of Additional Moral Dimensions According to Education Level



As far as Ethicality and Role and Behaviour dimension is concerned again students from Graduation Group indicated a higher mean value. This means that students from Graduation group connect ethics with law more as compared to post-graduate students. Same was the case for Behaviour of Others dimension for which graduate students indicated a higher mean value, indicating that the ethical behaviour demonstrated by other stakeholders affect their attitude towards business ethics.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, it can be concluded that student's ethics perception for different dimensions of business ethics does not a uniform pattern. On some dimensions it differs significantly on the basis of different demographic parameters. However, for some, it does not differ significantly on the basis of different demographic variables. Hence this relationship is complex one and need further exploration.

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