

Individual and social influence on students' attitudes towards business ethics

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ARTICLE INFO

Original paper

Received: 29th of May 2023

Received in revised: 12th of June 2023

Accepted: 27th of June 2023

doi:10.7251/JOCE2307045A

UDK 174-057.87:316.644

Keywords: business ethics, business schools, influential factors, student attitudes, Southeast Europe

JEL Classification: A13, A14, A29, L26, M20, M38, O52

ABSTRACT

Business ethics, as a content of formal higher education, occupies an important place in the curricula of higher education. Based on previous research results, it is essential to determine which factors influence students' attitudes and behavior in adopting the principles of business ethics and social responsibility. This paper investigates a series of individual and social influences on students' attitudes toward business ethics. Using a sample of 211 students from the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), and the University of Niš, Serbia, we empirically test factors, influencing students' attitudes toward business ethics and social responsibility. The paper employs statistical methods of descriptive analysis, clustering, and statistical testing of mean differences using non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon Z). After analyzing the empirical results, recommendations are given for improving educational programs and adopting the principles of business ethics and social responsibility in business. Additionally, recommendations are provided aimed at public authorities in creating public policies that would strengthen the focus of young generations on business ethics.

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1. Introduction

Teaching business ethics has been considered one of the critical aspects of education in business schools since the 1980s, both in the field of analytics and through various applied courses and topics (Gandz & Hayes, 1998). While in the 1980s, courses in business ethics in higher education were still rare (Hosmer, 1985), numerous corporate scandals in the 1990s and early 2000s focused attention on the role and readiness of business schools to educate ethical leaders in the business world (Crane, 2010). However, case studies of corporate fraud and scandals help teach ethical decision-making and create positive perceptions of business ethics among students (Cagle & Baucus, 2006).

Business ethics cannot be considered only an addition to the usual curriculum of business schools, as the very foundations of business and entrepreneurship as activities aimed at achieving individual interest in efficient markets are increasingly being questioned. If, instead of the traditional assumptions of business education, one starts from the assumptions that business and entrepreneurship should be based on the mission of the company, that value is created with the help of relationships with stakeholders, and that most people behave ethically (Freeman et al., 2010), teaching ethics can be put at the forefront of education in business schools.

Student attitudes and behavior are often seen as critical outcomes of ethically oriented higher education, raising the question of whether they depend on the characteristics and personality of students who choose faculties as already formed individuals or whether attitudes and behavior can be influenced within higher education (Trow, 1976; King & Mayhew, 2002), which also considers its ethics as an important factor in ensuring the quality of education (Prisacariu & Shah, 2016). Therefore, it is imperative to identify which factors influence students' ethical attitudes and behavior, since changes in the global and regional environment can influence the factors, relevant to students' evaluation of business ethics and social responsibility. Although these factors were previously discussed in the global literature,

the contribution of this paper is related to their identification and empirical evaluation in the regional context.

An online survey was conducted at three selected higher education institutions (economic faculties) in two countries in the region (B&H and Serbia) to determine whether there are differences in attitudes towards business ethics and social responsibility in business among groups of students. The results obtained can provide helpful information and be a relevant indicator and comparison of the differences in the development of teaching business ethics and social responsibility between the selected higher education institutions in the region, as well as which factors students consider important in influencing a greater orientation towards ethics and social responsibility in business.

We focus on factors that improve business ethics (teaching ethics in business schools, industrial ethical codes, regulation by government, and participation of civil society and religious leaders) as used in the influential work by Arlow and Ulrich (1988). In addition, we analyze claims related to student interest in social activism and intention of socially responsible behavior by choosing a socially responsible employer. The results show that groups of students, to a greater or lesser extent, are oriented toward business ethics. Students perceive the influence of government intervention and control on the development of business ethics and social responsibility in the country/society, which from a theoretical aspect, is not explainable. The research results also indicate a significant correlation between Machiavellianism as a moral orientation and the level of business ethics and social responsibility in business.

The obtained empirical results are believed to help inform public authorities in creating policies that are not limiting but stimulating for entrepreneurs/business associations.

The structure of the study is as follows: after a review of the literature (in the second section), a description of the research methodology (in the third section), a presentation of the obtained results and their interpretation (in the fourth section), and

a discussion of the results (in the fifth section) and conclusions (in the sixth section).

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

When considering the essential demographic characteristics of students, there is almost universal agreement that women have a higher level of sensitivity to ethical issues, as well as a greater inclination towards ethical attitudes and behavior than men, and the same applies to older as opposed to younger students (Borkowski & Ugras, 1998). Haski-Leventhal et al. (2015) arrived at similar conclusions based on a global sample of 1,300 students, finding that female students (compared to male students) and older students (compared to younger ones) more fully embrace the values of business ethics and social responsibility and support the introduction of courses that deal with business ethics.

On the other hand, although teaching business ethics in higher education is generally shown to be helpful in terms of better identifying ethically questionable attitudes and changing general attitudes (Murphy & Boatright, 2010; Williams & Dewett, 2016), it probably cannot have a lasting impact on the development of morals and ethical behavior in students (Hummel et al., 2016). This is logical since the student population enters higher education with already formed attitudes, values, and beliefs about the ethics of certain behaviors. However, some studies show that students more fully and permanently accept the values promoted by business ethics courses. In contrast, female students are more likely to adopt a relativistic view of ethical behavior after completing academic content in business ethics (Wang & Calvano, 2015). There is no clear explanation in the literature for the different research results.

Different character traits and other psychological factors contribute to accepting or rejecting business ethics and its teaching in higher education. Burton and Hegarty (1999) empirically showed that the level of Machiavellianism (orientation towards achieving goals regardless of possible manipulation and unethical behavior) is negatively correlated with attitudes towards business ethics and social responsibility. Brown et al. (2010) empirically found a positive correlation be-

tween ethical decision-making in business and empathy, as well as a negative correlation between narcissism (self-centered orientation) and ethical decision-making. These results are significant, as business students show increased narcissism and decreased empathy levels (Sautter et al., 2008).

Fitzpatrick (2013) showed in her empirical study of 46 students that religiosity positively correlates with acceptance of attitudes towards the need for socially responsible business. A similar conclusion is confirmed by a much larger empirical study conducted on a sample of 850 American students (Conroy & Emerson, 2004). However, a national culture largely influences the relationship between religiosity and acceptance of business ethics, as Rashid and Ibrahim (2007) found in their study of 767 business students from Malaysia, China, and India.

The next factor that could influence students' ethical attitudes and behavior relates to accepting existing ethical codes, i.e., initiatives from employers, the government, or other influential individuals and organizations in ethical and social issues. When it comes to the government, Thompson (1992) discusses ethics in the public sector and emphasizes the crucial role of government officials responsible for implementing ethical codes in the public sector and their continuous and visible impact on all public sector employees and their acceptance of democratic values. In recent times, however, instead of directly prescribing forms of ethical behavior through ethical demands and codes, there is a trend of collaboration between governments and companies that need to work in cooperation with non-profit and social organizations to promote business ethics and social responsibility (Albareda et al., 2008).

Regarding work or business experience, it has been shown that students are more skeptical about business ethics than experienced businesspeople and tend to accept ethically questionable business decisions more easily (Cole & Smith, 1996). On the other hand, the previous entrepreneurial experience of students, due to the idea of entrepreneurship as "creative destruction," should be associated with increased rejection of traditional rules and forms of behavior, including traditional forms of ethical decision-making in business (Brenkert, 2009). On the expressed opinion

about the necessary conflict between innovative entrepreneurship and traditional business ethics, it can be added that entrepreneurs create new approaches to ethical decision-making and new ethical norms (Kaptein, 2019).

Students without previous work experience will not be able to realistically assess the issues of business ethics in practical business operations, which is why the possibilities of researching their possible choices of ethical behavior and decision-making in business situations are limited. Therefore, investigating the intention to work for an ethical and socially responsible employer (as opposed to limitations related to salary, benefits, and the like) is a realistic approach to researching business ethics among undergraduate students. The research results show that newer generations of students, at least in principle, consider the employer's ethics to be a very significant factor when choosing a job (Ngoc et al., 2022). However, slightly older research emphasized that the principled orientation towards ethics can generally be overcome by offering higher salaries or benefits and emphasizing the ethics of relationships in the workplace (Leveson & Joiner, 2014).

The extent to which students were previously engaged in volunteering or other socially responsible behavior is also significant. Although student volunteering is very popular, Smith et al. (2010) argue that it will lead to more lasting changes in the attitudes and motivation of young people only if it involves longer-term volunteering. Occasional volunteering is less associated with altruism and more with positive social effects, such as citing volunteering experience in a resume, gaining an advantage in further education and employment, etc. It should also be noted that only one form of possible volunteering may not suit every student, so higher education institutions should offer various forms of volunteering and social engagement to their students (Hudson & Brandenberger, 2022).

Despite the research mentioned above, which suggests limitations in changing the behavior and moral characteristics of the student population, students generally show progress in accepting attitudes toward business ethics and responsible business behavior after taking courses in business ethics (Weber & Glyptis,

2000). Of course, there is a big difference between general attitudes and behavior and a person's overall orientation towards morality (ethics).

A person can express highly ethical attitudes but may not do anything to put them into practice or even behave contrary to the expressed attitudes. It is also essential to be aware of the limitations of teaching ethics in higher education. Effective teaching at the undergraduate level cannot rely on case studies and work experience, as is the case with graduate students (Pamental, 1989). However, the practical orientation of ethical courses and various teaching methods based on workshops and interactive work with students are generally considered effective in business ethics (Medeiros et al., 2017).

One of the older, but still most comprehensive and popular studies of a series of influential factors on the attitudes of students and businesspeople towards ethics was conducted by Arlow and Ulrich (1988), who showed the existence of stable attitudes about the possibilities for improving business ethics in society. According to their research, which we used as a starting point for further comparative research of students at the University of Banja Luka (B&H) and the University of Niš (Serbia), the following factors can positively influence the development of business ethics: the development of general ethical principles, the teaching of business ethics in higher education, and the application of ethical codes. The respondents in this study believe that state influence (regulation) and the actions of religious leaders cannot affect the ethical development of business.

It should be noted that within the same study, it was also found that with work experience, less importance is attached to teaching ethics in educational institutions, and greater importance is attached to the influence of individual religiosity and good practices in companies and business practice. Both students and businesspeople are the most critical factor influencing the ethics of business students.

Based on the previously presented theoretical background, this paper addresses the following research question: What are the leading causes of differences between groups of students according to the

level of their orientation towards business ethics and social responsibility in business?

To analyze the formulated research question, the following hypotheses, and auxiliary hypotheses were developed:

H1 - Students differ significantly in their attitudes toward business ethics and social responsibility determinants.

H1.1. - Students differ significantly in their attitudes toward the impact of teaching business ethics in universities.

H1.2. - Students differ significantly in their attitudes towards introducing a code of ethical conduct in the industry.

H1.3. - Students differ significantly in their attitudes towards the impact of state regulation and control.

H1.4. - There are groups of students who differ significantly in their attitudes towards the impact of leaders of religious and other nonprofit organizations.

H1.5. - Students differ significantly in their attitudes towards involvement in activities for protecting human rights, promoting unity and understanding among people, and improving society (social activism).

H1.6. - Students differ significantly in their attitudes towards the choice of job and employer.

H2 - Students who differ in their attitudes towards business ethics and social responsibility significantly differ in their level of Machiavellianism.

3. Research methods

The empirical research has been conducted on a convenience sample of undergraduate business students at the School of Social Science and the two public business schools in B&H and Serbia, i.e., the University of Banja Luka and the University of Niš. Since the lists of all students at those two institutions were not available, it was not possible to develop a random sampling procedure. The limitation of this sampling approach is that the results are only indicative, but they do provide an interesting evaluation of the student's attitudes.

The research was conducted online using a survey questionnaire, which was sent along with an invitation (containing a request for voluntary participation in the anonymous research and a link to the web address

where the survey was located). The survey questionnaire was formed based on previously described empirical studies and consisted of three parts.

The first part of the research instrument consisted of nine items taken from the short-form instrument for measuring the level of Machiavellianism MACH* (Rauthmann, 2012), which measures cynicism and misanthropic behavior. These items are

- "Those who completely trust other people sooner or later get into trouble";
- "It is safest to assume that all people have hidden evil intentions, which will come to the fore only if they have the opportunity";
- "It is not necessary to reveal the real reason for behavior unless it will be useful or profitable";
- "Most people are good and kind by nature";
- "The biggest difference between criminals and others is that criminals were stupid enough to get caught."

The other four items analyzed attitudes related to evaluating the importance of factors for improving business ethics and responsibility in society, taken from the previously mentioned influential study by Arlow and Ulrich (1988). They relate to: the introduction of compulsory subjects on business ethics at universities; the introduction of a code of ethical behavior in the industry; the influence of state regulation and control; and the influence of leaders of religious and nonprofit organizations.

The second part of the research instrument (survey questionnaire) contained six items that measured the orientation towards business ethics, observed from the perspective of economic responsibility as opposed to social responsibility for the business. The items were taken from the study by Summer and Childs (2007) and adapted to measure the influence on business ethics based on the original scale of responsibility towards the natural environment. The items relate to:

- satisfying individual needs as a critical motivation for entrepreneurship;
- the belief that profit maximization is the 'natural right' of entrepreneurs; the belief that profit can be

limited to achieve the social responsibility of entrepreneurs;

- the belief that irresponsible entrepreneurs can be a danger to society and the community; the belief that complete market freedom can affect economic growth and development;
- the belief that societies in which entrepreneurs operate according to the principles of socially responsible business should be emulated.

The third part of the survey questionnaire contained demographic variables such as gender, age, choice of faculty, etc. This part of the questionnaire also included several control variables. They included two items, which were used to measure student involvement in social activism and their intention of socially responsible business, expressed through their preference for employment with socially responsible employers. All items were measured on a Likert response scale with nine levels: from one (strongly disagree) to nine (strongly agree).

The collected data was processed in the SPSS software package using descriptive and exploratory statistical methods.

4. Empirical results

4.1. General characteristics of the sample

The research was conducted on a convenience student sample (N=211) from three selected higher education institutions in two countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina (the entity of the Republic of Srpska) - at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Banja Luka and the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Banja Luka, and in Serbia - at the Faculty of Economics of the University of Niš. Most of the participants were from business faculties (89.6% - from the Faculty of Economics of the University of Banja Luka, 93 students or 44.1%, and the Faculty of Economics of the University of Niš, 96 students or 45.5%), while the percentage of participants from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Banja Luka was relatively low - 22 students or 10.4%.

Although the targeted sample was N=600, with 200 students from each of the three higher education

institutions (planned according to the average number of enrolled students), the response rate was 35.2%. Therefore, a final sample of 211 questionnaires was obtained, so differences between individual institutions will not be tested, considering their area. This represents a limitation of this study, which should be addressed in future research, and the same applies to the gender balance of the participants (82.9% women and 17.1% men).

Regarding the study level, most participants attended undergraduate studies (76.7% - 36.2% in the 1st year, 24.3% in the 2nd year, and 16.2% in the 3rd year). However, it is noteworthy that there was a lower motivation among graduate students to participate in the research (23.3%) voluntarily and among part-time students (only 0.9%). Data on the participants' status show that just over half are regular students whose education is financed from the state budget (61.1%). A third are regular students who self-finance their education (37.9%). The average grade of the study was 7.89 (considering a grade scale with a standard deviation of 0.9443 (on a scale of 5 to 10, which is applied at the higher education institutions attended by the surveyed students).

Most participants' parents have formal secondary education (67%). Approximately one-third of the participants state that their parents have higher or tertiary education (father - 26.8%, mother - 31.9%). Given the above, the data obtained on the participants' socio-economic status are expected and show that most of the participants belong to middle-class families (71.6%). The majority of participants also report that they have not gained any work experience so far (58.3%) nor entrepreneurial experience (89%). Still, they have stated that they know someone who is a successful entrepreneur in their environment (85.2%). Considering the previously presented data, just under half of the participants come from entrepreneurial families (40.5%).

4.2. Descriptive statistics of the basic constructs of the research

First, we calculated the level of students' orientation towards business ethics, observed through the opposition of economics to the social responsibility of companies. The study used six modified and

adapted items based on Summer and Childs (2007). The index of business ethics orientation level was obtained by quantifying the respondents' answers as the mean value of items measured on a Likert scale with

nine levels of agreement with predefined statements. The lowest value of this variable is 4.17, and the maximum is 9, with a mean of 6.2875 and a standard deviation of 0.94421 (Table 1).

Table 1

Components and calculation of the average level of business ethics orientation observed from the economic responsibility of entrepreneurs/business people

	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
All people should primarily focus on satisfying their needs, which is the essential goal of their economic activity.	1	9	4,96	2,027
Entrepreneurs and businesspeople have a natural right to maximize profits in their businesses and jobs.	1	9	6,26	2,043
Entrepreneurs and businesspeople should limit the pursuit of profit in their businesses and jobs when such behavior harms the community and society.	1	9	6,91	1,974
I believe that in my community, or the country where I live, there is a great danger from irresponsible entrepreneurs and businesspeople who care only about their profits.	1	9	7,42	1,731
Economic growth can only be achieved through the complete freedom of entrepreneurs and businesspeople to create profits.	1	9	4,45	1,880
We should follow societies and countries whose entrepreneurs and businesspeople follow socially responsible business principles.	2	9	7,74	1,562
Orientation toward business ethics and social responsibility	4.17	9.00	6.2875	.94421

Notes. Results of empirical research (author's calculation).

The study identified factors that could influence the improvement of business ethics and responsibility in society. Four items were used to measure the respondents' attitudes (following the recommendation of Arlow and Ulrich, 1988). The sample values for response frequency ranged from 1 to 9, with a mean of

6.58 and a standard deviation of 1.623, indicating that our students are generally "statists" and believe that greater state regulation and control can influence the improvement of business ethics and responsibility in the country/society, which is a theoretically questionable stance (Table 2).

Table 2

Ratings of mean values of factors influencing the improvement of business ethics and social responsibility in business

	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.
Introduction of mandatory courses on business ethics at universities.	1	9	5.37	1.782
Introduction of a code of ethical behavior in the industry.	1	9	5.70	1.439
Greater influence of state regulation and control.	1	9	6.58	1.623
Greater influence of religious and nonprofit leaders.	1	9	4.95	1.805

Notes. Results of empirical research (author's calculation).

To confirm the results of the previous analysis, we used two variables as control variables (Table 3) to measure the participants' attitudes toward social activism and their intention toward socially responsible business behavior. Considering the sample values (measured on a 9-point Likert scale), mean =

6.64 and std. dev. = 1.908, it can be said that the results are comparable to those of the previous analysis.

Table 3 shows the rating of students' business ethics and social responsibility in social activism and the choice of workplace and employer.

Table 3

Rating of business ethics and social responsibility of students regarding social activism and choosing a job and employer

	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.
I participate in activities to protect human rights, promote unity and understanding among people, and improve society (through a non-governmental organization, humanitarian actions, protests, demonstrations, etc.).	1	9	4.95	2.270
When choosing a job and an employer, I will consider whether my employer respects the principles of socially responsible business behavior.	1	9	6.64	1.908

Notes. Results of empirical research (author's calculation).

Students' attitudes towards Machiavellianism as a moral orientation were also examined. By quantifying the attitudes of the group of participants, a summary measurement scale was formed, or an index of the level of Machiavellianism was formed as an indicator of moral orientation. The level of Machiavellianism (mean = 4.72 and std. dev. = 1.129) was

measured by the mean value of 5 included variables (according to the recommendation of Rauthmann, 2015, from the MACH* questionnaire) on a 9-point Likert scale. The expressed attitudes of the students showed that the sample mainly consisted of participants with a moderate level of Machiavellianism (Table 4).

Table 4

Machiavellianism index in the research sample according to the MACH indicator*

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.
Machiavellianism level (according to the MACH* indicator)	211	2	8	4.72	1.129

Notes. Results of empirical research (author's calculation).

Further empirical findings will be presented to answer the research question and test the research hypotheses. The assumption of the normal distribution of observed constructs (dependent and independent variables) was checked by the non-parametric Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. As shown in Table 5, the analysis revealed that neither dependent nor independent variables met the assumptions of normal distribution (likely due to the small sample size) with a test confidence level of 1% ($p < 0.01$).

Table 5

Normality test distribution - Kolmogorov-Smirnov test

		Introducing mandatory courses on business ethics at universities.	Introducing a code of ethical conduct in the industry.	Greater influence of state regulation and control.	Greater influence of religious leaders and other nonprofit organizations.	When choosing a job and employer, I will certainly consider whether my employer respects the principles of socially responsible business.	I participate in activities to protect human rights, promote unity and understanding among people, and improve society (through some non-governmental organizations, humanitarian actions, protests, demonstrations, etc.	When choosing a job and employer, I will certainly consider whether my employer respects the principles of socially responsible business.
Normal parameters	Mean	5.37	5.70	6.58	4.95	6.64	4.95	6.64
	Std. dev.	1.782	1.439	1.623	1.805	1.908	2.270	1.908
Empirical value of the K-S indicator		.210	.236	.246	.166	.191	.137	.191
Sig. (2-sided)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Notes. Results of empirical research.

Therefore, further analysis will be based on non-parametric statistics (Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon Z-tests) based on comparing ranks. In addition, clustering methods are used. As previously shown by Knežević et al. (2017), it is possible to identify clusters that include groups of students with higher and lower orientations toward business ethics. In this case (Table 6), two clusters were obtained: Cluster 1 - 136 students with a value of the business ethics indicator of 5.72 and Cluster 2 - 75 students with a value of the business ethics indicator of 7.32.

Table 6

Clusters - levels of students' orientation towards business ethics

	Cluster	
	1	2
Number of students in cluster	136	75
The average level of orientation toward business ethics	5.72	7.32

Notes. Results of empirical research (author's calculation).

Although a difference in ethical attitudes among student groups was observed from the analysis of the two observed clusters, whether this difference was statistically significant was further analyzed. Analysis of variance - ANOVA (F-test) was used for this purpose. Empirical findings show that there is a statistically significant difference between the two observed clusters, which measured the level of ethical attitudes among student groups at a 1% confidence level ($p < 0.01$) (Table 7). It should be noted that the clusters were formed to maximize the difference between their members, so the results of this F-test can only be used as confirmation of correctly conducted clustering.

Table 7

Analysis of variance – ANOVA

	Cluster		Error		F	Sig.
	Mean	Degrees of freedom	Mean square error	Degrees of freedom		
The average level of orientation toward business ethics	122.976	1	.307	209	400.047	.000

Notes. Results of empirical research (author's calculation).

Using the cluster membership variable generated during clustering, an analysis was conducted to determine how much the mean values of factors influencing students' attitudes toward business ethics and social responsibility differ among members of the

identified clusters. Additionally, the analysis will examine whether there are significant differences in the values of Machiavellianism between these clusters, as it can be used to indicate the fundamental ethical orientation of the surveyed students.

Table 8

Testing differences in factors influencing attitudes towards business ethics and social responsibility

	The average level of business ethics	Impact of teaching ethics in higher education	Impact of industrial ethical codes	Impact of government (state regulation and control)	Impact of religious and nonprofit organizations	Social activism	Impact of CSR on job choice	The average level of Machiavellianism
Mann-Whitney U value	.000	4719.000	4368.000	3977.000	4862.500	4584.500	3192.500	3271.500
Wilcoxon W value	9316.000	14035.00	13684.00	13293.00	14178.50	13900.50	12508.50	12587.50
Z	-12.032	-.931	-1.808	-2.760	-.573	-1.232	-4.623	-4.317
Sig. (2-sided)	.000	.352	.071	.006	.567	.218	.000	.000

Notes. Results of empirical research (authors' calculation).

Based on the results presented in Table 8, we accept sub-hypotheses H1.3 ($Z = -2.760$, $p = 0.006$) - about the need for state influence on business ethics and social responsibility, and H1.6 ($Z = -4.623$, $p = 0.000$) - about the intention of behavior - employing students, considering the practice of business ethics and social responsibility of future employers. In this sense, it can be said that hypothesis H1 is partially accepted. Hypothesis H2 is also accepted, given the empirical difference between the established clusters ($Z = -4.317$, $p = 0.000$).

We evaluated cluster differences in individual (student) factors, measured by nominal variables, using cross-tabulations and chi-square tests to uncover potential connections between business ethics and others. In comparison to other studies, we cannot conclude the relationship between gender and business-ethical orientation or age (when considering the academic year in which the student is enrolled). The source of tuition financing, socio-economic background (social class, father's and mother's level of education), work, and entrepreneurial experience also do not appear to be significant factors in orientation towards business ethics. Only a statistically significant difference was found (Chi-square Sig. 0.01) concerning the choice of faculty. Still, it cannot be interpreted, given that economics students and a few students in social-humanistic fields dominate the sample.

5. Discussion

There are different opinions on whether the private sector leads in the introduction of ethical codes and acceptance of business ethics in developed market societies, with some research answering positively to this question (Svensson et al., 2010), while others believe that the situation is reversed and that the public sector leads in the implementation of business ethics (Ekthator, 2013). Nevertheless, it can be said that public business schools have a responsibility to the public, which finances them through budgetary funds, which includes promoting ethics and social values among the student population.

Compared to private business schools or private higher education, public colleges and universities have a competitive advantage related to their longstanding tradition and reputation, which could be further strengthened by effective action on ethics and values among young people. Furthermore, increasing the efficiency of public business schools in the general improvement of ethics and social responsibility would positively impact the attitudes of management and companies in general towards public higher education, which is not always the case (Sigurjonsson et al., 2015).

Given that the region of Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans is often perceived as unfavorable for business, from the perspective of businesspeople, due to the high level of corruption and inefficiency in the public sector (Ateljević & Budak, 2010; Budak & Rajh, 2014), increasing efficiency in promoting the ethical orientation of young people could be of multiple benefits. It could act not only on improving the perception of public higher education but also on improving the perception of the public sector in general by a larger number of stakeholders. Based on the analysis of the results of the orientation towards business ethics, guided by the fundamental research question, the sub-hypotheses H1.3 ($Z = -2.760$, $p = 0.006$) - about the need for state influence on business ethics and social responsibility and H1.6 ($Z = -4.623$, $p = 0.000$) - about the intention of behavior - employing students, regarding the practice of business ethics and social responsibility of future employers are accepted. In this sense, it can be said that hypothesis H1 is partially accepted. The same applies to hypothesis H2, which is accepted, regarding the empirical difference in Machiavellianism between members of established clusters ($Z = -4.317$, $p = 0.000$).

The following table summarizes the acceptance of individual hypotheses and sub-hypotheses.

Table 9

Empirical evaluation of research hypotheses and sub-hypotheses

Hypothesis or sub-hypothesis	Empirical evaluation
Hypothesis 1. (Differences in the level of business ethics)	Accepted
Hypothesis 1.1. (Influence of teaching ethics in higher education)	Not accepted
Hypothesis 1.2. (Influence of industrial ethical codes)	Not accepted
Hypothesis 1.3. (Influence of state regulation and control)	Accepted
Hypothesis 1.4. (Influence of religious and nonprofit organizations)	Not accepted
Hypothesis 1.5. (Influence of social activism)	Not accepted
Hypothesis 1.6. (Influence of the choice of job and employer)	Accepted
Hypothesis 2. (Influence of Machiavellianism)	Accepted

Notes. Results of empirical research (authors' calculation).

The high level of "etatism" orientation among young people is likely a consequence of insufficient market orientation in post-transitional societies and economies in the broader region and a consequence of turbulent regional political events since the beginning of the transition until today. This orientation is also understandable due to the high regional nationalism and illiberal public policies. However, it would be helpful if public higher education, as well as local policies aimed at young people, communicated, and affirmed the orientation of the economy towards market principles, ethical responsibility for business decisions, separation of the economic sector from the political sphere, as well as principles of anti-corruption and anti-corruption activities.

6. Conclusion and implications

There are two clusters of students in our sample, with a higher and lower orientation towards business ethics, viewed from economic and social responsibility. The results show that most of the sample agrees with the view that entrepreneurs are not socially responsible enough and that there is a need to develop socially responsible business practices. There is also a high agreement with the statement that it is necessary

to limit the profits of entrepreneurs when they create social harm.

The empirical results did not confirm any gender or age effects on the orientation towards business ethics and social responsibility, which is likely due to the self-selection of students when filling out the questionnaire. The fact that the male population is underrepresented in the sample is the study's main limitation, although this research does not address possible gender effects. This creates the need for a different direction and approach to the orientation in future research, which should be based on a stratified approach and the possibility of conducting research during teaching activities.

6.1. Theoretical implications

As far as the author is aware, this type of empirical research has not been previously performed in the region of Southeast Europe (Western Balkans). As shown previously by González-Rodríguez et al. (2013), countries in Eastern, Central, and South Eastern Europe cannot be considered homogeneous, when it comes to the research of social factors, such as acceptance of business ethics and social responsibility. The sources of differences for those countries are not only related to their EU membership status, and legal and political environment, but also to the level in which the national stakeholders accept the business ethics and social responsibility. Therefore, it is important to empirically evaluate the factors, influencing students' attitudes toward business ethics (social responsibility), separately in different regions.

Furthermore, research shows a statistically significant relationship between Machiavellianism as a personal determinant of the moral orientation of students and the empirical level of orientation towards business ethics and social responsibility. It is interesting to analyze the influences of social variables on business ethics and social responsibility. Our students are generally "etatism" and believe that greater state regulation and control can influence a greater orientation towards business ethics and responsibility in the country/society, which is not objectively expected. Such an "etatism" orientation is not surprising. Still, it should be considered when teaching business

ethics and improving existing and creating new curricula by the observed academic institutions. The analysis of the dependence of orientation towards business ethics and social responsibility, regarding the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, did not reveal any interesting results, which is probably due to the convenience sample, as well as the limitation of the study itself.

6.2. Policy and managerial implications

The obtained empirical results show that the students in the analyzed area of Southeast Europe still rely on the state and its administration as a major factor, with a decisive influence on social issues, even in the topic of business ethics and social responsibility. Although there is a clear distinction between the competencies of public administration and the entrepreneurs' voluntary orientation toward ethical and socially responsible business conduct, students might not be aware of it. This finding shows they would benefit from additional courses and academic material on business ethics and social responsibility. While students' level of activism is low, they still wish to work for socially responsible employers, which opens additional opportunities for cooperation between universities and entrepreneurs, in terms of encouraging and framing entrepreneurial social responsibility as a factor in attracting younger, ethically aware employees.

6.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

This paper is based on a convenience sample from two countries in Southeast Europe, which are culturally similar. Therefore, it does not capture well the entire regional diversity of students' attitudes, which leads to the suggestion of capturing a larger sample, across the entire wider region, as the current sample only provides indicative empirical results. It would be, also, beneficial to conduct this type of research in other European regions, to establish the influence of the cultural environment on students' ethics and social responsibility attitudes.

Although it is difficult to analyze students' behavior related to business ethics and social responsibility (except for their intentions to behave ethically, once they become employed), collecting data on their ethi-

cal orientation in everyday life and activities would be useful. Analysis of such data could contribute to further understanding the relationship between attitudes and behaviors, considering the ethics and social responsibility of young entrepreneurs and business people in general.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

A.M. A.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review
M. T.: Formal analysis, Writing – review

Data availability

The data that has been used is available upon a request to the author.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Biography

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Индивидуални и друштвени утицај на ставове студената према пословној етици

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Кључне ријечи:

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САЖЕТАК

Пословна етика, као садржај формалног високог образовања, заузима значајно мјесто у наставним плановима и програмима високог образовања. На основу досадашњих резултата истраживања, неопходно је утврдити који фактори утичу на ставове и понашање студената у усвајању принципа пословне етике и друштвене одговорности. Овај рад истражује низ индивидуалних и друштвених утицаја на ставове студената према пословној етици. На узорку од 211 студената са Универзитета у Бањој Луци, Босна и Херцеговина (БиХ), и Универзитета у Нишу, Србија, емпијски тестирамо факторе који утичу на ставове студената према пословној етици и друштвеној одговорности. У раду су коришћене статистичке методе дескриптивне анализе, груписања и статистичког тестирања средњих разлика коришћењем непараметарских тестова (Mann-Whitney U и Wilcoxon Z). Након анализе емпијских резултата, дате су препоруке за унапређење образовних програма и усвајање принципа пословне етике и друштвене одговорности у пословању. Поред тога, дате су препоруке за јавне власти у креирању јавних политика које би ојачале фокус младих генерација на пословну етику.