

## **Social responsibility of universities in the face of the Coronavirus crisis**

**Ali Jahangiri<sup>۱</sup>, Shahla Heydarbeygi<sup>۲</sup> and Sepideh Vafayi<sup>۳</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

The spread and continuation of the Corona virus has faced the people and the government with hard and terrible days. During this period, irreparable damages and losses were imposed on the country. In this regard, universities, as a scientific and popular institution, play a leading, guiding, informing and facilitating role in the occurrence of crises alongside governments, and they perform their duties in the form of social responsibility. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the social responsibility of universities in times of crisis, especially the Corona crisis in order to explain the dimensions of social responsibility, indicators and measures, and examine and analyze sample activities selected from Iranian universities. A qualitative method was chosen for the present exploratory research. The data collection tool in the present study was library studies, reviewing the websites of universities. In order to validate and reduce the data, two steps were used from the perspective of 15 faculty members and expert, and data on 15 universities. The findings showed that each of the universities had different functions in terms of the dimensions and elements of social responsibility, and knowing these dimensions and comparing the functions of each of them can open the way for the basic actions and orientations of the universities. The dimensions comprised: educational dimension (including student activities, communication activities and educational activities), cognitive dimension (including innovative plans in the production of products suitable for the Corona crisis, research activities and the production of science and knowledge enhancement) the legal dimension (including the establishment of laws appropriate to the conditions of the Covid-19 crisis), the humanitarian dimension (including the support of the affected groups and cooperation with other centers in the fight against Covid-19), the ethical dimension (including the provision of information and attention to the beneficiaries) and the informing dimension (including raising awareness and providing information in the field of prevention, control and management of the Corona virus.

**Keywords:** Corona virus and society, crisis, social responsibility, university social responsibility.



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1. Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Institute for Management and Planning Studies, Tehran, Iran. *Corresponding author:* ✉ [a.jahangiri@imps.ac.ir](mailto:a.jahangiri@imps.ac.ir)
  2. Ph.D. Candidate in Public Administration, Institute for Management and Planning Studies, Tehran, Iran.
  3. MSc. Student, Department of Management, Institute for Management and Planning Studies, Tehran, Iran.

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## **Introduction**

The social responsibility is an organizational social duty. By accepting that, while performing the prescribed duties, it respects the rights of individuals and facilitates public welfare (Zhu & Tan, 2008) and the organization; by accepting it, it acts beyond its economic responsibility to the stakeholders. (Gonzalez et al., 2020). On the other hand, the social responsibility is a tool to manage difficult situations and support society in overcoming the consequences of the crisis (Idowu et al 2017). Today, the global Corona crisis is, in a sense, the most global human challenge, affecting five continents (Chit Saz, 2020). These devastating conditions and uncertainties associated with the Coronavirus epidemic have created a new challenge for the proponents of corporate social responsibility (Ebrahim & Buheji., 2020). Today, among these, one of the most influential organizations that deals with the social responsibility and helps build a committed society are the universities and higher education centers (Habibi et al., 2016). The universities and educational institutions by creating academic programs, research centers and other initiatives have performed the duty of the social responsibility (Dagilienė & Mykolaitienė, 2015) and by doing so (doing social responsibility) they gain their legitimacy and university knowledge is expected to affect social welfare (Baradaran Haghir et al., 2019). Although Corona disease has many psychological, behavioral, clinical and interpersonal consequences (Farahati, 2020), it has also provided an opportunity for the scientific, research, academic and medical community to further explore their important and fundamental role. The key question in this study is: what is the social responsibility of universities in the face of the Covid 19 crisis to examine the performance of universities in time of Corona crisis with the following specific objectives:

1. Identifying the dimensions related to the social responsibility of universities in order to deal with the Corona virus crisis (Covid 19)
2. Identifying the indicators related to the social responsibility of universities in order to deal with the Corona virus crisis (Covid 19)
3. Identifying the activities taken in universities to deal with the Corona virus crisis (Covid 19)

## **Research Method**

The present exploratory research is in terms of developmental goal and in terms of experimental method and a qualitative research. The data collection tools in the present study were based on library studies, university site surveys and documentary studies. The research process has been such the basic dimensions of the social responsibility of universities during the Covid crisis were extracted from theoretical foundations. Then, after the validation process, the questionnaires were given to the participants (15 experts) for scoring in order to comment on the importance of each factor. After collecting

and analyzing the collected questionnaires, the questions which had a score below 3 were removed from the research process. Finally, after summarizing them, the main dimensions of social responsibility of universities were identified. The criterion for selecting universities for evaluation at this stage was the up-to-dateness and comprehensiveness of the university website information related to the Coronavirus crisis. But in order to choose the right community and bring it to the minimum acceptable (30 universities), it was decided to randomly select ten universities from each of the first, second and third ranked universities. However, a large number of selected universities lacked the least information in this regard, so they were excluded from the research and the study population was practically limited to the universities that had a site with information content. Eight universities were selected from among the first-ranked universities, five universities from the second-ranked universities, and two universities from the third-ranked universities.

## Findings

### A: Identifying the Dimensions of the Research:

First, the initial dimensions and then the final dimensions of the social responsibility of universities in the face of Coronavirus were extracted through the research methodological process, the final dimensions of which are as follows:

Educational arrangements, Cognitive arrangements (production of science and knowledge enhancement), Legal arrangements, Humanitarian arrangements, Ethical arrangements, Information arrangements

### B: The Extraction of the Indicators for the Social Responsibility

After determining the final dimensions of the social responsibility, the initial and then the final indicators for the approved dimensions were extracted through the research methodological process. The final indicators are as follows (Table 1):

**Table 1: The Extraction of Indicators for Social Responsibility**

Final indicators	Dimensions
Provide information Attention to stakeholders	Ethical dimension
Supporting the people affected by Covid 19 Collaborating with other centers in the fight against Covid 19	Humanitarian dimension
The establishment of laws appropriate to the circumstances of the Covid Crisis 19	Legal dimension
Students' activities performed during the time of Coronavirus Communication activities performed during the time of Coronavirus Educational activities in the time of Corona	Educational dimension

Innovative designs in the production in line with the Coronavirus Research activities performed during the time of Corona	Cognitive dimension
Raising awareness and information appropriate to the prevention, control and management of coronavirus	information dimension

### **C: Extracting activities for indicators of the social responsibility**

After determining the final dimensions and indicators of the social responsibility, the initial and final activities for those indicators were extracted through a methodological process, the final activities of which are as follows in Table (2):

**Table 2: The Activities for Indicators of Social Responsibility**

<b>Final activities</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
Holding a competition; preparing educational instructions (related to Corona control and prevention); creating online and telephone counseling systems (mental, physical, etc.); launching an online Corona test; launching an intelligent monitoring system and monitoring the health of Covid patients. Garuda online home health platform design, preparation and distribution of health items, e-wallet design; calming application design)	Students' activities performed during the Coronavirus (in the educational dimension)
Creating easy access to university units (telephone, etc.); providing the necessary infrastructure for holding virtual university activities; integrating sites related to education, prevention and Corona control, announcements about the process of educational activities	Communication activities performed during the Corona (educational dimension)
Holding (meetings, conferences, congresses, workshops, brochures, posters focusing on Coronavirus); holding educational webinars	Educational activities during the Coronavirus (in the educational dimension)
Launching a national remote radiology system for patients with Coronavirus; construction of artificial respiration system, voice screening system, kit production, design and construction of active oxygen detection system in pulmonary inflammation, intelligent device for disinfection, production of spray tunnel; production of disinfectants (alcohol, etc.); production of drugs and production of plant compounds; access to raw material production technology for the production of alcohol; production of Nano filter and anti-virus masks	Innovative designs in the production in line with the Corona crisis (in the cognitive dimension)
Compilation (article, research project, scientific report) in relation to Coronavirus; holding a heccon (convergent technology) in the field of Covid; webinar on building an intelligent robot to disinfect the environment, books, free access to databases.	Research activities performed during the Corona (in the cognitive dimension)

Final activities	Indicators
Teleworking, health monitoring and medical testing of clients in the university; preparation and distribution of health items; disinfection and sterilization of university facilities; creating the necessary regulations in educational activities; providing the necessary infrastructure for holding virtual activities of the university	Establishing laws appropriate to the circumstances of the Corona crisis (in the legal dimension)
Supporting vulnerable students from Corona (financial, etc.); preparing and distributing livelihood packages	Supporting Corona-affected people (in humanitarian terms)
Mass production of masks, cooperation with various organizations (health, mobilization, grassroots organizations, etc.) to combat Covid 19	Cooperation with other centers in the fight against Corona (in the humanitarian dimension)
Provide up-to-date information, transparent information	Providing information (in the field of ethics)
Increasing the service hours of the university; honoring the active staff in the field of combating Covid; paying attention to the criticisms and suggestions	Attention to stakeholders (in terms of ethics)
Preparing reports, holding meetings, conferences; preparing and distributing posters and brochures	Raising awareness and information in the field of prevention, control and management of Corona (information dimension)

## Discussion and Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate the performance of universities in terms of the social responsibility and related dimensions towards Covid 19 and what activities they took in this regard and what reactions they showed and to what extent these reactions were in line with their social responsibility. The result of the research after summarizing the dimensions, indicators and activities is as follows:

1. Research findings in the educational dimension show that the universities have not performed well in student affairs and extracurricular activities and communication and educational activities related to Corona, although among universities, Shahid Beheshti University is the most frequently ranked first and Tehran and Tarbiat Modares universities were the second rank and the universities of Tabriz and Golestan were ranked last among the universities in terms of the set of arrangements.
2. In terms of cognitive arrangements (production of science and knowledge enhancement), among the universities, according to the mission and facilities of the relevant university, the University of Tehran was ranked first and Shahid Beheshti and Razi universities were ranked second among the universities in terms of actions. However, the innovative designs presented did not have a wide range. Also, in terms of facilitating and carrying out research activities such as free access to databases and compiling articles, research projects, scientific reports are below average and have not carried out significant activities in the direction of the Corona crisis.

3. Regarding legal arrangements, all universities have tried to adjust the space inside the university in accordance with the Corona conditions by preparing educational and non-educational instructions so that the staff and students may be safe from the relevant injuries.
4. Regarding humanitarian activities, support for vulnerable students, preparation and distribution of health packages and cooperation with organizations and institutions of society have been done in almost all universities (desirable) so that universities and university families are less affected by the crisis.
5. The universities have tried to fulfill their mission by providing appropriate, up-to-date and transparent information and to pay sufficient attention to the university stakeholders within the university borders.
6. In information dimension, although many activities such as preparing reports, conferences, brainstorming sessions, brochures and posters have been done by all universities, the relevant activities are considered weak in a brief comparison with the site of foreign universities.

Therefore, it is suggested that the universities as well as university stakeholders and target groups in the time of crisis define an approved program in the field of the social responsibility before carrying out the social responsibility actions and activities are fully defined and even possible for out-of-university stakeholders. In order to fulfill their duty towards the society, they should have a popular social base and play an effective role in the policies of the society in the governing body, not in times of crisis, but in all conditions.

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