

EXPLORING THE DIMENSIONS OF UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON UNIVERSITY COMPETITIVENESS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract: *This study aims to explore the dimensions of University Social Responsibility (USR) and its influence on university competitiveness through a systematic literature review approach. Although USR has been widely discussed in higher education literature, existing studies remain fragmented because they often examine USR dimensions separately and provide limited explanation of how USR contributes to university competitiveness through internal stakeholder mechanisms. Therefore, a systematic review is necessary to consolidate existing evidence, identify conceptual gaps, and develop a more integrated understanding of the USR–competitiveness relationship. This study adopts the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method guided by the PRISMA framework by analysing articles from the Scopus and Web of Science databases published between 2015 and 2025. A total of 42 articles were selected after the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion processes. The findings identify seven main dimensions of USR, namely educational responsibility, research responsibility, social service responsibility, economic development responsibility, environmental responsibility, values and ethics responsibility, and globalization and sustainable development. The study also finds that USR contributes positively to university competitiveness through institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, and research innovation. In particular, lecturer satisfaction is identified as an important mediating mechanism because lecturers play a central role in teaching, research, innovation, and institutional performance. The findings suggest that strategic and integrated USR implementation can strengthen the sustainable competitive advantage of universities. This study contributes to the development of a multidimensional conceptual framework of USR and provides a foundation for future empirical research.*

Keywords: *University social responsibility, university competitiveness, lecturer satisfaction, stakeholders, systematic literature review*

Introduction

In the era of globalization and knowledge-based economy, higher education institutions play an increasingly complex role in social, economic development and global sustainability. Universities no longer function merely as centers for knowledge dissemination, but also serve as agents of social transformation that contribute to sustainable development and societal well-being. This shift in roles has led to the emergence of the concept of university social responsibility (University Social Responsibility, USR), which has evolved from the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Conceptually, USR refers to the commitment of universities to integrate social, ethical and sustainability values into their core functions such as teaching, research and community service (Vallaey, 2007; Meseguer-Sánchez et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2021).

The concept of social responsibility has long been discussed in the literature through the CSR pyramid model introduced by Carroll (1991), which classifies organizational responsibilities into four main dimensions, namely economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. In the context of higher education, this concept has been expanded by taking into account the multidimensional functions of universities involving teaching, research, administration and community engagement (Vallaey, 2014; Tauginienė & Pučėtė, 2021). This development shows that universities are not only responsible for academic achievement, but also for the social and environmental impacts generated through their activities.

In line with this development, stakeholder theory becomes an important foundation in understanding the implementation of university social responsibility. This theory emphasizes that organizations need to meet the needs of various stakeholders to ensure sustainability and long-term performance (Freeman, 1984; Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2022). In the context of universities, stakeholders include students, lecturers, staff, industry, government and the wider society. Recent studies show that active engagement of stakeholders in the implementation of USR can enhance institutional effectiveness and strengthen the relationship between universities and communities (Cavallone et al., 2020; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023).

At the same time, university competitiveness has become a major focus in the global higher education landscape. Universities now compete not only in terms of academic quality, but also in aspects of reputation, research innovation, graduate employability and international networks. The concept of core competitiveness introduced by Prahalad and Hamel (1990) emphasizes the unique capabilities of an organization that are difficult for competitors to imitate. In the context of universities, core competitiveness includes resource management capabilities, research innovation, teaching quality and institutional reputation (Foroudi et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022).

Previous studies show that the implementation of university social responsibility has a significant relationship with the enhancement of institutional competitiveness. Effective USR practices can improve university reputation, strengthen public trust and attract more students and industry partners (Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2020; Latif et al., 2024). In addition, social responsibility approaches are also seen as capable of increasing stakeholder satisfaction, particularly among lecturers and students, which in turn positively affects overall organizational performance (Booyesen & Baporikar, 2020; Phan et al., 2024). In this regard, the concept of shared value creation emphasizes that organizations can enhance competitiveness by simultaneously addressing social needs (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Problem Statement and Research Gap

Although university social responsibility (USR) has been widely discussed in higher education, the unresolved issue is that previous studies have not reached a clear and integrated explanation of how different USR dimensions contribute to university competitiveness. Existing knowledge remains fragmented because many studies examine USR as isolated activities, such as teaching, research, community service or sustainability programmes, rather than as a multidimensional institutional strategy that can strengthen reputation, innovation, stakeholder satisfaction and long-term competitive advantage (Ali et al., 2021; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023).

The existing literature is also insufficient because empirical findings on the link between USR and university performance are inconsistent across countries and institutional contexts. For example, some studies show that USR improves performance through reputation, service quality, student satisfaction and trust, while other evidence suggests that the direct effect may be weak or context-dependent (Latif et al., 2024; Suranta & Rahmawati, 2023). This inconsistency shows the need to synthesize previous findings systematically and to identify the mechanisms through which USR influences competitiveness.

Previous studies further show methodological and conceptual limitations. Methodologically, many studies use single-country survey designs, limited stakeholder groups or narrow institutional samples. Conceptually, several models still rely heavily on corporate social responsibility logic and do not fully reflect the distinctive mission of universities in teaching, research, governance, community engagement and sustainable development. Therefore, a systematic literature review is necessary because it allows the available evidence to be identified, screened, compared and synthesized transparently using PRISMA guidance (Page et al., 2021).

Lecturer satisfaction is important in this relationship because lecturers are internal stakeholders who directly implement the university mission through teaching, research, supervision, innovation and community engagement. When lecturers perceive their institution as socially responsible, this can strengthen institutional image, reputation and job satisfaction, which may in turn support academic productivity and university competitiveness (Phan et al., 2024).

Based on these research gaps, this article aims to systematically explore the dimensions of university social responsibility and its influence on university competitiveness. Specifically, this study focuses on three objectives: (i) to identify the main dimensions of USR based on recent literature, (ii) to analyse the relationship between USR and university competitiveness, and (iii) to examine lecturer satisfaction as a mediating variable in this relationship.

Literature Review

USR models in higher education can be grouped into four broad streams. First, the CSR-origin model, represented by Carroll's responsibility categories, provides a useful ethical foundation but is not fully sufficient for universities because it was originally designed for business organizations. Second, the university-specific model developed in USR literature places stronger emphasis on teaching, research, internal governance and community participation. Third, sustainability and SDG-based models frame USR through environmental stewardship, social inclusion, global citizenship and institutional contribution to sustainable development. Fourth, stakeholder-based models focus on how universities create value for students, lecturers, staff, government, industry and society (Carroll, 1991; Vallaeys, 2014; Ali et al., 2021; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023).

The empirical literature generally supports a positive relationship between USR and university competitiveness, but the strength of the relationship differs across contexts. USR is frequently linked to institutional reputation, service quality, trust, stakeholder satisfaction, innovation and student loyalty, which are important elements of competitiveness in higher education (Foroudi et al., 2021; Latif et al., 2024; Santos et al., 2020). However, findings are not fully consistent. Some studies indicate that USR has direct and indirect effects on performance, while others show that the effect becomes significant only through mediating variables such as service quality, university image, satisfaction or trust (Latif et al., 2024; Suranta & Rahmawati, 2023).

Therefore, this review organizes previous studies thematically rather than merely listing them chronologically. The thematic organization clarifies how USR models have developed, how empirical evidence connects USR with competitiveness, and where conceptual or methodological inconsistencies remain. Table 1 summarises key previous studies that informed the synthesis.

Table 1: Summary of Key Previous Studies on USR and University Competitiveness

Theme / model	Key studies	Main evidence	Gap / limitation identified
CSR-origin and USR models	Carroll (1991); Vallaeys (2014)	CSR provides ethical foundations, while USR adapts responsibility to university functions such as teaching, research, governance and social participation.	Corporate-based models alone do not fully capture the distinctive public and academic mission of universities.
Multidimensional USR	Ali et al. (2021); Godonoga & Sporn (2023)	USR is an umbrella and evolving concept involving academic, social, organizational and stakeholder-related responsibilities.	Previous studies often examine dimensions separately and lack an integrated competitiveness framework.
Sustainability and SDGs	Aleixo et al. (2018); Chaleta et al. (2021); Leal Filho et al. (2019)	Universities contribute to sustainability through curriculum, research, campus operations, outreach and global collaboration.	Sustainability integration differs by institutional resources, governance support and national context.
USR and performance / competitiveness	Gallardo-Vázquez et al. (2020); Foroudi et al. (2021); Latif et al. (2024)	USR may strengthen reputation, trust, service quality, student satisfaction, innovation and institutional performance.	Evidence is positive but not uniform; some effects depend on mediating variables and institutional context.
Stakeholder and lecturer satisfaction	Santos et al. (2020); Phan et al. (2024); Suranta & Rahmawati (2023)	USR can influence satisfaction through university image, reputation and service quality; lecturer satisfaction is linked to internal stakeholder well-being.	Student satisfaction is more frequently studied than lecturer satisfaction, leaving a gap in internal stakeholder mechanisms.

Methodology

This study used Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) as the main databases for article identification. These databases were selected because they provide broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals in higher education, management, sustainability and social responsibility. The search strategy combined terms related to USR and competitiveness, including “university social responsibility”, “corporate social responsibility in higher education”, “higher education social responsibility”, “university competitiveness”, “university performance”, “institutional reputation”, “stakeholder satisfaction” and “lecturer satisfaction”. The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2015 to 2025.

The inclusion criteria were: (i) articles published between 2015 and 2025, (ii) peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus or WoS, (iii) studies focusing on USR, social responsibility in higher education, university performance or university competitiveness, and (iv) studies that provided conceptual or empirical evidence relevant to the relationship between USR, stakeholder satisfaction and competitiveness. The exclusion criteria were: (i) studies focusing only on corporate CSR without a higher education context, (ii) conference papers, books, theses, reports and non-peer-reviewed documents, (iii) duplicate records, and (iv) articles without sufficient relevance to the research objectives.

The analysis process followed the PRISMA 2020 logic of identification, screening, eligibility assessment and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). To respond to the reviewer’s comment, the PRISMA flow is presented in Figure 1. The exact database-wise record counts and exclusion reasons should be verified against the authors’ original Scopus and WoS export files before final submission.

1. Stage 1: Identification

At the identification stage, records were retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science using the predefined keyword strings. The original manuscript reported 85 records in total. The revised PRISMA diagram separates this total into Scopus and WoS fields for author verification because the database-wise breakdown was not stated in the original draft.

2. Stage 2: Screening

At the screening stage, duplicate records were removed before titles and abstracts were reviewed. Articles were excluded when they were not related to higher education, focused only on corporate CSR, or did not address USR, competitiveness, university performance, stakeholder satisfaction or lecturer satisfaction.

3. Stage 3: Eligibility Assessment

At the eligibility stage, full-text articles were assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles were excluded if they lacked a clear USR focus, did not provide conceptual or empirical relevance to university competitiveness, were outside the publication period, or were not peer-reviewed journal articles.

4. Stage 4: Thematic Synthesis

The final articles were analysed using thematic synthesis. The coding process involved three steps. First, each article was read and coded using descriptive codes related to USR dimensions, competitiveness indicators, stakeholder groups, mediating mechanisms and methodological approach. Second, related codes were grouped into broader analytical

themes, including educational responsibility, research responsibility, social service, economic development, environmental responsibility, values and ethics, globalization and sustainable development, institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, lecturer satisfaction and innovation. Third, themes were compared across studies to identify patterns, contradictions and gaps. This process is consistent with thematic synthesis procedures that move from descriptive coding to analytical theme development (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

As a result of the selection process, 42 articles were retained for final analysis. These articles were used to develop the conceptual framework and to support the discussion of USR dimensions, lecturer satisfaction and university competitiveness. The use of PRISMA and thematic synthesis strengthens the transparency, replicability and analytical rigor of this review.

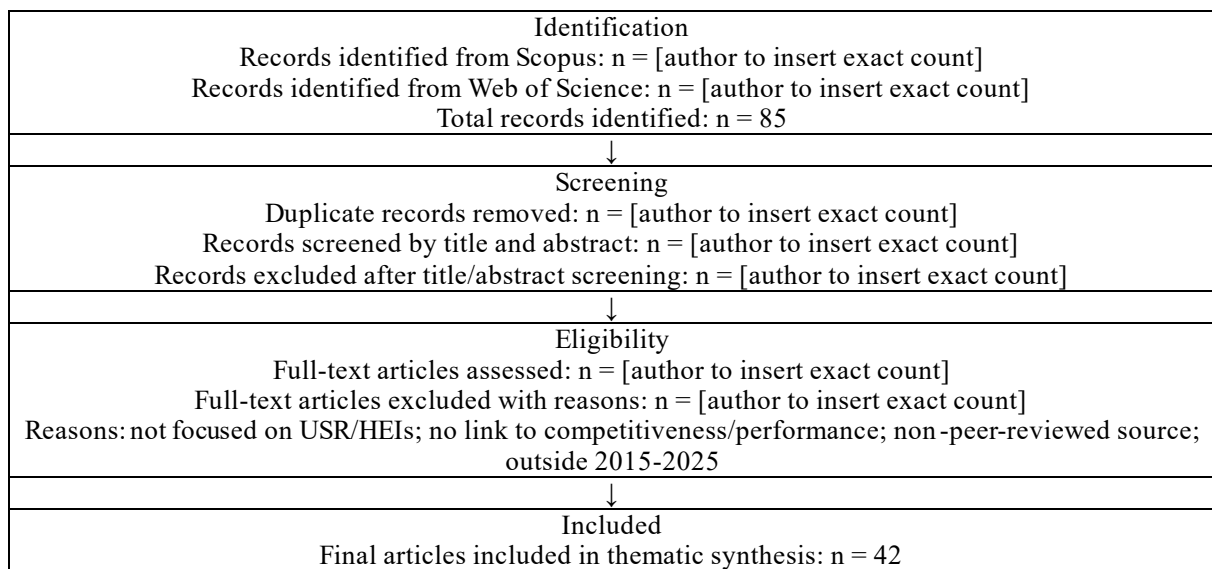


Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of Article Selection Process

Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the theoretical foundations supporting the relationship between university social responsibility and university competitiveness. Three main theories are used as the conceptual basis of this study, namely stakeholder theory, core competitiveness theory, and shared value creation theory. The use of these three theories is important to explain how the implementation of university social responsibility can influence institutional performance and competitiveness in a comprehensive manner.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory, founded by R. Edward Freeman, emphasizes that the success of an organization depends on its ability to meet the needs and expectations of various stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). In contrast to the traditional approach that focuses only on shareholders, this theory recognizes that organizations must consider the interests of all parties who are directly or indirectly involved in their operations. In the context of higher education, university stakeholders include students, lecturers, administrative staff, industry, government, and the wider society. Recent studies show that stakeholder relationship management plays an important role in enhancing institutional effectiveness and supporting the achievement of universities' strategic goals (Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2022; Cavallone et al., 2020). The implementation of university social responsibility is seen as a key mechanism in fulfilling the

needs of these diverse stakeholders through quality teaching activities, impactful research, and community engagement.

In addition, this theory also emphasizes that stakeholder satisfaction is a critical factor in determining organizational performance. In the context of this study, lecturer and student satisfaction are seen as important variables that can influence the effectiveness of USR implementation. Lecturers, as the main implementers of academic functions, play a crucial role in ensuring the success of university social responsibility initiatives. Therefore, their level of satisfaction with the working environment, institutional support, and professional recognition will directly affect university performance and competitiveness.

Core Competitiveness Theory

The concept of core competitiveness was introduced by C. K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel, who emphasized that organizations must develop unique capabilities that are difficult for competitors to imitate in order to achieve sustained competitive advantage (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). These capabilities are known as “core competencies” and form the foundation of superior organizational performance.

In the context of universities, core competitiveness includes several key components such as academic quality, research innovation, global reputation, and industry networking capabilities. Academic quality refers to the effectiveness of teaching and learning, while research innovation involves the production of new knowledge that impacts society and industry. Global reputation is closely linked to university rankings and international recognition, which are important factors in attracting high-quality students and academic staff (Foroudi et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). In relation to university social responsibility, the implementation of USR can be viewed as one source of competitive advantage. Universities that are actively involved in social activities, sustainability, and community development tend to have a better reputation and gain higher levels of trust from society. This in turn enhances university competitiveness in attracting resources such as students, research funding, and industry collaboration.

Furthermore, the implementation of USR can also stimulate innovation among university members, particularly in research and development. This is consistent with the view that competitive advantage does not only depend on physical resources, but also on the organization’s ability to manage knowledge and innovation effectively.

Shared Value Creation Theory

The shared value creation theory was introduced by Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer, who argued that organizations can achieve competitive advantage by simultaneously creating economic and social value (Porter & Kramer, 2011). Unlike the traditional CSR approach, which is often seen as an additional cost, the concept of shared value emphasizes that social activities can be a source of organizational profit and growth. In the context of universities, this approach suggests that the implementation of social responsibility not only benefits society but also enhances institutional performance. For example, community engagement programs, society-driven research, and sustainability initiatives can improve university reputation and strengthen relationships with stakeholders. This, in turn, contributes to the long-term improvement of university competitiveness.

Recent studies show that organizations that integrate social value into their strategies tend to achieve better performance compared to those that do not (Latif et al., 2024; Suranta &

Rahmawati, 2023). In the context of higher education, this approach supports the idea that universities need to integrate academic objectives with social responsibility in order to achieve sustainable success. In addition, this theory also supports the role of mediating variables such as stakeholder satisfaction in the relationship between USR and university competitiveness. When universities successfully create value for society and institutional members, satisfaction levels increase, which subsequently has a positive impact on organizational performance.

Findings

Dimensions of University Social Responsibility

Based on the literature synthesis conducted through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this study identified seven main dimensions of university social responsibility (University Social Responsibility, USR). These dimensions reflect the evolving role of universities from traditional functions to a more holistic role in societal development and global sustainability. This finding is consistent with previous studies that emphasize USR as a multidimensional construct encompassing academic, social, economic and environmental aspects (Vallaes, 2014; Meseguer-Sánchez et al., 2020; Tauginienė & Pučėtaitė, 2021).

1) Educational Responsibility

Educational responsibility is a core dimension of USR that emphasizes the delivery of quality education and the holistic development of students. Universities are responsible for providing curricula that are relevant to current needs, integrating ethical values and soft skills, and producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also socially responsible. Studies show that socially responsible education can raise students' awareness of global issues such as poverty, inequality and environmental sustainability (Chaleta et al., 2021; Aleixo et al., 2018). In addition, experiential learning and service-learning approaches are also seen as effective strategies for integrating social values into the learning process. In the context of university competitiveness, the provision of high-quality education that is relevant to industry needs is an important factor in enhancing graduate employability and institutional reputation (Foroudi et al., 2021). Therefore, the educational dimension not only fulfils the social responsibility of universities but also directly contributes to competitive advantage.

2) Research Responsibility

The research dimension in USR refers to the responsibility of universities to produce knowledge that benefits society and contributes to solving global problems. Research is no longer viewed merely as an academic activity but as a medium for creating social and economic impact. Previous studies show that society-oriented research can enhance the relevance of universities in the context of national and global development (Meseguer-Sánchez et al., 2020; Alshukri et al., 2024). In addition, the concept of responsible research emphasizes ethics, transparency and social impact in knowledge production. From a competitiveness perspective, universities that produce high-impact research tend to gain international recognition, attract research funding and improve their global rankings (Zhang et al., 2022). Therefore, the research dimension plays a crucial role in strengthening university core competitiveness.

3) Social Service Responsibility

Social service responsibility refers to the active involvement of universities in the community through various programs such as volunteering, knowledge transfer and community development projects. This dimension reflects the commitment of universities to contributing to social well-being and local community development. Studies show that university

involvement in community activities can improve relationships with society and strengthen institutional trust (Cavallone et al., 2020; Armijos et al., 2021). In addition, social service activities also provide opportunities for students and lecturers to apply knowledge in real-world contexts. In the context of competitiveness, active community engagement can enhance university image and reputation, thereby attracting more students and strategic partners. Therefore, this dimension plays an important role in building long-term relationships with stakeholders.

4) Economic Development Responsibility

The economic development dimension refers to the contribution of universities in driving economic growth through innovation, entrepreneurship and technology transfer. Universities act as catalysts for economic development through the production of quality graduates, impactful research and collaboration with industry. Studies show that universities actively involved in entrepreneurship and innovation activities can significantly contribute to local and national economic development (Ali et al., 2021; Guerrero et al., 2016). In addition, the concept of the entrepreneurial university has gained increasing attention as a new model in higher education. From a competitiveness perspective, the ability of universities to generate economic value through innovation and industry collaboration is a key factor in enhancing competitive advantage. Universities that successfully build strong innovation ecosystems tend to be more competitive in the global environment.

5) Environmental Responsibility

Environmental responsibility refers to the commitment of universities to implement sustainability practices such as efficient resource management, carbon footprint reduction and green campus development. This dimension is increasingly important in line with growing global awareness of climate change and sustainability issues. Studies show that the implementation of sustainability initiatives in universities can increase environmental awareness among campus members and contribute to sustainable development (Aleixo et al., 2018; Meseguer-Sánchez et al., 2020). In addition, universities also play a role in educating future generations about the importance of environmental protection. In the context of competitiveness, universities committed to sustainability tend to receive international recognition and enhance institutional reputation. Therefore, the environmental dimension not only fulfills social responsibility but also serves as a differentiating factor in global competition.

6) Values and Ethics Responsibility

The values and ethics dimension emphasizes the development of moral values, integrity and ethics among university members. Universities play a role in shaping individuals who are not only academically excellent but also possess strong moral values. Studies show that an organizational culture based on ethical values can enhance trust and commitment among institutional members (Tauginienė & Pučėtaitė, 2021; Phan et al., 2024). In addition, good governance practices are also seen as an important element in the implementation of USR. From a competitiveness perspective, universities that emphasize ethics and integrity tend to have better reputations and gain higher trust from stakeholders. Therefore, this dimension plays a crucial role in ensuring long-term institutional sustainability.

7) Globalization and Sustainable Development

The globalization and sustainable development dimension refers to the involvement of universities in global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Universities

play an important role in supporting global agendas through education, research and international collaboration. Studies show that the integration of SDGs into university strategies can enhance institutional relevance in the global context and contribute to sustainable development (Chaleta et al., 2021; Leal Filho et al., 2019). In addition, globalization also provides opportunities for universities to expand networks and improve international competitiveness. In the context of competitiveness, universities that are active in global networks and sustainability agendas tend to be more competitive due to greater access to resources, knowledge and collaboration opportunities.

Overall, the seven identified dimensions indicate that university social responsibility is multidimensional and interrelated. The educational and research dimensions form the academic foundation, while the social, economic and environmental dimensions expand the role of universities in society. The values and ethics, as well as globalization dimensions further strengthen the position of universities in the context of sustainability and global competition. Therefore, an integrated approach that combines all these dimensions is essential to ensure effective implementation of USR and to enhance university competitiveness in a sustainable manner.

Relationship between University Social Responsibility and University Competitiveness

Based on the literature synthesis, university social responsibility (University Social Responsibility, USR) is found to have a significant and positive relationship with university competitiveness. This relationship does not occur in a direct manner alone, but through several important mechanisms that act as drivers for institutional performance improvement. This finding is consistent with the view that organizations that integrate social responsibility into their strategies tend to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2011; Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2020).

In the context of higher education, the implementation of USR not only enhances the social value of institutions but also contributes to the formation of reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, and organizational innovation. These three mechanisms play an important role in strengthening university competitiveness in an increasingly competitive global environment.

1) Institutional Reputation

Institutional reputation is one of the main mechanisms linking USR with university competitiveness. Reputation refers to the overall perception of stakeholders regarding the quality, credibility, and integrity of a university. In the era of globalization, reputation becomes a strategic asset that influences a university's ability to attract students, high-quality academic staff, and industry partners. Effective implementation of USR can enhance institutional image through active involvement in social activities, environmental sustainability, and community development. Studies show that universities that consistently practice social responsibility tend to gain higher levels of trust from society and improve their reputation at both national and international levels (Latif et al., 2024; Foroudi et al., 2021). In addition, a strong reputation also has a direct impact on university competitiveness, particularly in global rankings and graduate employability. Universities with high reputation are more likely to attract international students and secure strategic collaboration opportunities with other institutions. Therefore, USR can be viewed as an important strategy in building and maintaining institutional reputation as a sustained competitive advantage.

2) Stakeholder Satisfaction

Stakeholder satisfaction is the second mechanism linking USR with university competitiveness. Based on stakeholder theory, the success of an organization depends on its ability to meet the needs and expectations of various involved parties (Freeman, 1984; Freeman & Dmytriiev, 2022). In the context of universities, key stakeholders include students, lecturers, staff, and society. Effective implementation of USR can enhance stakeholder satisfaction through the provision of a conducive learning environment, professional development opportunities, and involvement in social activities. Studies show that lecturer and student satisfaction have a positive relationship with organizational performance, including improvements in productivity, commitment, and teaching quality (Booyesen & Baporikar, 2020; Phan et al., 2024). In the context of this study, lecturer satisfaction is seen as a critical factor because lecturers are the primary implementers of university academic functions. Lecturers who are satisfied with their working environment and institutional support tend to be more committed to teaching and research, which in turn contributes to improved university performance. Therefore, stakeholder satisfaction acts as an important mediating variable in the relationship between USR and university competitiveness.

3) Innovation and Research

Innovation and research represent the third mechanism linking USR with university competitiveness. In a knowledge-based economy, the ability to produce high-impact innovation and research is a key factor determining the competitiveness of higher education institutions. The implementation of USR can stimulate innovation through university involvement in addressing social issues and sustainable development challenges. Studies show that organizations integrating social responsibility into their strategies tend to be more innovative because they are driven to develop new solutions to societal challenges (Latif et al., 2024; Suranta & Rahmawati, 2023). In the context of universities, society-oriented research not only enhances institutional relevance but also opens opportunities for collaboration with industry and communities. This in turn contributes to improved university competitiveness through innovation output, increased research funding, and international recognition (Zhang et al., 2022). In addition, innovation also plays an important role in enhancing teaching and learning quality, particularly through the use of technology and new pedagogical approaches. Therefore, the relationship between USR and innovation demonstrates that social responsibility not only benefits society but also acts as a driver for the development of university competitive capabilities.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the relationship between university social responsibility and university competitiveness is complex and multidimensional. USR influences competitiveness not only directly but also through mediating mechanisms such as institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, and innovation and research. These three mechanisms are interrelated and mutually reinforcing in enhancing university performance. This finding supports the theoretical framework adopted in this study, namely stakeholder theory, core competitiveness theory, and shared value creation theory. Therefore, the strategic and integrated implementation of USR is essential to ensure that universities are able to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in an increasingly challenging global environment.

The Role of Lecturer Satisfaction as a Mediator

Based on the literature, lecturer satisfaction is found to play an important role as a mediating variable in the relationship between organizational factors and institutional performance outcomes. Lecturer job satisfaction not only reflects the level of psychological and emotional

well-being in the work environment but also serves as a catalyst for the enhancement of positive work behaviors.

Firstly, lecturer satisfaction is able to increase organizational commitment. Lecturers who are satisfied with aspects such as workload, administrative support, rewards, and the academic environment tend to demonstrate higher levels of loyalty and attachment to the institution. This indirectly reduces turnover intention and enhances the long-term stability of academic staff. Secondly, lecturer satisfaction also has a significant impact on research productivity. Lecturers with high levels of job satisfaction are generally more motivated to engage in research activities, publication of scholarly articles, and academic innovation. A supportive and satisfying work environment can foster a more active and competitive scholarly culture, thereby increasing institutional research output. Thirdly, lecturer satisfaction also contributes to strengthening university reputation. When lecturers are satisfied and demonstrate high performance, the quality of teaching, research, and community service also improves. This has a positive effect on the perception of external stakeholders such as students, parents, industry, and accreditation bodies regarding the credibility and prestige of the university.

Overall, lecturer satisfaction functions as a critical linking mechanism in explaining how organizational factors are translated into broader institutional outcomes, particularly in terms of commitment, productivity, and university reputation.

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings of this study confirm that university social responsibility (University Social Responsibility, USR) is a multidimensional construct that is significant in enhancing university competitiveness. In contrast to the traditional approach that views universities merely as academic entities, this study demonstrates that the integration of social, economic, and sustainability elements into institutional strategies serves as a key driver of sustainable competitive advantage. These findings support the theoretical frameworks employed, particularly stakeholder theory and shared value creation theory, which emphasize that organizations are able to enhance performance by simultaneously addressing social needs (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

In greater depth, the findings indicate that the seven identified dimensions of USR do not operate in isolation; rather, they complement one another in forming a competitive university ecosystem. The education and research dimensions serve as the foundation for academic excellence, while the economic development, social services, and environmental dimensions expand the university's role in contributing to society. Meanwhile, the values and ethics dimension, as well as globalization, strengthen the institution's position in the context of sustainability and global competition. These findings extend existing literature, which has largely examined USR dimensions separately, thereby contributing to the development of a more holistic conceptual framework.

However, the findings also indicate that the relationship between USR and university competitiveness is complex and non-linear. In this context, mediating mechanisms such as institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, and innovation play an important role in translating USR practices into tangible performance outcomes. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that organizational competitive advantage depends not only on internal resources but also on stakeholder perceptions and relationships (Foroudi et al., 2021; Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2020).

In addition, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting the role of lecturer satisfaction as a critical mediating variable. While most previous studies have focused on student satisfaction, these findings demonstrate that lecturer satisfaction has a more direct influence on academic performance and institutional innovation. Lecturers who are satisfied with their work environment, organizational support, and professional recognition tend to demonstrate higher levels of commitment and productivity, thereby contributing to enhanced university competitiveness. This finding strengthens the argument within stakeholder theory that the well-being of internal stakeholders is a determining factor for long-term organizational success.

Nevertheless, the literature analysis also reveals several inconsistencies in previous findings. For example, the effect of USR on competitiveness is found to be more pronounced in universities in developed countries compared to developing countries. This difference may be due to variations in resource availability, policy support, and awareness of sustainability. In addition, some studies indicate that symbolic or non-strategic implementation of USR does not significantly affect institutional performance. This suggests that the effectiveness of USR depends on the level of integration and alignment with the core strategy of the university.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the development of literature by integrating three main theories, namely stakeholder theory, core competitiveness theory, and shared value creation theory into a comprehensive analytical framework. This integration enables a deeper understanding of how USR functions as a strategic driver in enhancing university competitiveness through mediating mechanisms. Furthermore, the identification of seven USR dimensions strengthens the concept of USR as a multidimensional, dynamic, and contextual construct.

From a practical perspective, the findings of this study provide important implications for university management. First, universities should integrate USR practices strategically into institutional planning rather than treating them as peripheral activities. Second, emphasis should be placed on human capital development, particularly in enhancing lecturer satisfaction through a conducive work environment, organizational support, and professional recognition. Third, universities should strengthen relationships with stakeholders through active community engagement and industry collaboration. This approach not only enhances the social impact of universities but also strengthens long-term competitive positioning.

Based on the findings of this study, Figure 2 proposes a conceptual model that links USR as the independent variable, lecturer satisfaction as the mediating variable, and university competitiveness as the dependent variable. This model suggests that the implementation of USR, which encompasses seven key dimensions, is capable of enhancing lecturer satisfaction, which in turn contributes to improved university competitiveness. This model provides a strong foundation for future empirical studies, particularly in testing relationships among variables using quantitative approaches such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).

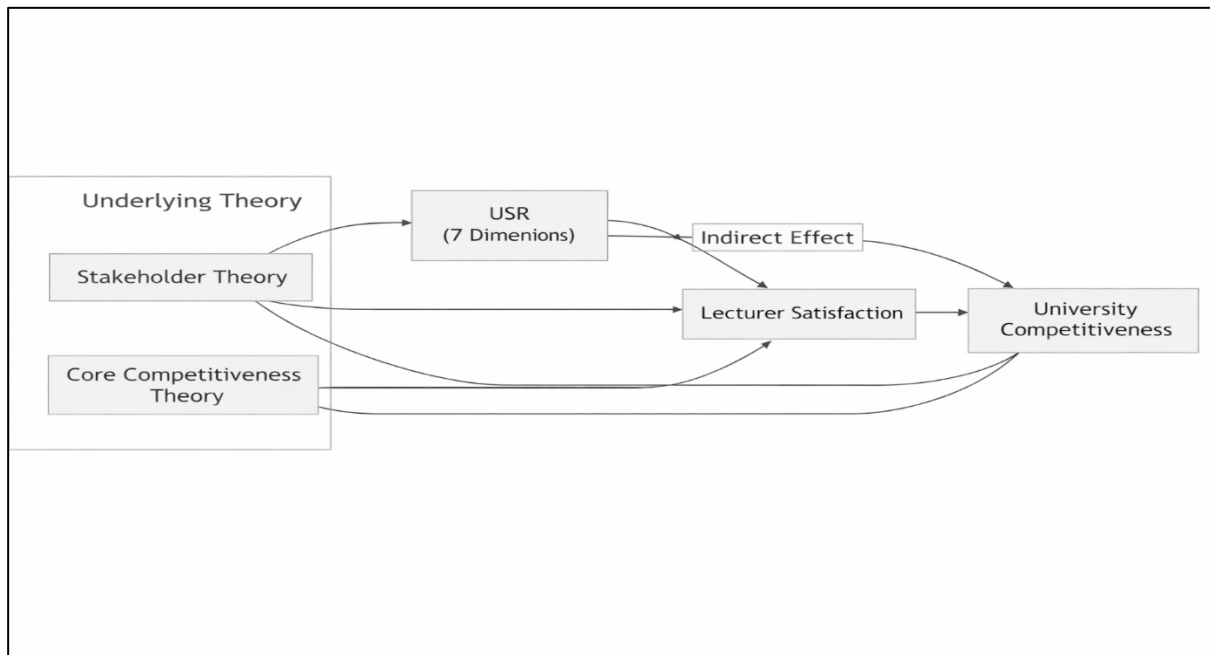


Figure 2: Proposed Conceptual Framework of USR, Lecturer Satisfaction and University Competitiveness

Conclusion

This study aims to explore the dimensions of University Social Responsibility (USR) and its influence on university competitiveness through a systematic literature review approach. Based on the analysis of 42 selected articles, the study successfully identified seven main dimensions of USR, namely educational responsibility, research responsibility, social service, economic development, environmental responsibility, values and ethics, as well as globalization and sustainable development. These findings confirm that USR is a multidimensional construct that plays an important role in expanding the function of universities from academic entities to comprehensive agents of social development. In addition, the study found that the relationship between USR and university competitiveness is complex and operates through several mediating mechanisms, particularly institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, and research innovation. Specifically, lecturer satisfaction was identified as a significant mediating variable in explaining how the implementation of USR can be translated into improved performance and competitive advantage of universities. These findings emphasize that the well-being of internal stakeholders is a critical factor in ensuring the effectiveness of social responsibility strategies. From a theoretical perspective, this study strengthens the existing literature by integrating stakeholder theory, core competitiveness theory, and shared value creation theory into a comprehensive conceptual framework. The identification of the seven USR dimensions also contributes to the development of USR as a more holistic and contextually relevant multidimensional construct. From a practical perspective, this study provides guidance for university management in designing more systematic and integrated USR implementation strategies, particularly in enhancing lecturer satisfaction and strengthening relationships with stakeholders. Overall, this study highlights that University Social Responsibility is no longer merely a moral obligation or supplementary activity, but a strategic necessity in enhancing the competitiveness of higher education institutions in an increasingly challenging global environment. Therefore, universities should fully integrate USR practices into their institutional planning and strategic implementation to ensure long-term sustainability and competitive advantage.

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