

# UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CORE COMPETITIVENESS: A NARRATIVE REVIEW IN THE CONTEXT OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN CHINA

Wang Fang<sup>1\*</sup>  
Abu Bakar Abdul Hamid<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology, 43000, Kajang, Selangor  
(E-mail: [694721077@qq.com](mailto:694721077@qq.com))

<sup>2</sup> Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology, 43000, Kajang, Selangor  
(E-mail: [abubakarhamid@klust.ed.my](mailto:abubakarhamid@klust.ed.my))

\*Corresponding author: [694721077@qq.com](mailto:694721077@qq.com)

## Article history

**Received date** : 19-6-2026  
**Revised date** : 20-6-2026  
**Accepted date** : 27-8-2026  
**Published date** : 28-8-2026

## To cite this document:

Wang, F., & Abdul Hamid, A. B. (2026). University social responsibility and core competitiveness: A narrative review in the context of private universities in China. *International Journal of Accounting, Finance and Business (IJAFB)*, 11 (67), 629 - 640.

**Abstract:** *University Social Responsibility (USR) is increasingly recognized as a strategic element in enhancing the competitiveness of higher education institutions, particularly in the context of private universities in China. This study aims to explore the relationship between the implementation of USR and the core competitiveness of universities through a narrative review approach. The main focus of this study is to identify the dimensions of USR, analyze the factors influencing core competitiveness, and examine the mechanisms of the relationship between these two constructs. This study adopts a qualitative approach in the form of a narrative review based on secondary literature analysis from indexed databases such as Scopus and Web of Science. The selected articles are within the period of 2020 to 2025 and are analyzed using thematic analysis methods to identify key patterns, themes, and relationships. The findings of the study show that USR has a significant influence on university core competitiveness through several main mechanisms, namely the enhancement of institutional reputation, improvement of stakeholder satisfaction, empowerment of innovation and collaboration, formation of a positive organizational culture, and strengthening of institutional adaptability. In addition, the findings also indicate that the dimensions of USR are interrelated and produce a synergistic effect on overall institutional development. In the context of private universities in China, USR is found to play an important role as a strategy in addressing challenges such as resource constraints, intense competition, and issues of public trust. This study also emphasizes that USR is not merely a social activity, but a strategic institutional development approach capable of enhancing sustainable competitive advantage. The implications of the study highlight the need to integrate USR into university strategic planning, strengthen collaboration with stakeholders, and ensure more comprehensive policy support from the government. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of USR as a driver of university core competitiveness, particularly in the rapidly developing context of private higher education in China.*

**Keywords:** *University Social Responsibility, core competitiveness, private universities, China, higher education, narrative review, stakeholders.*

## Introduction

In the era of globalization and knowledge-based economy, higher education institutions play an increasingly complex and strategic role in societal development. Universities not only function as centers of knowledge dissemination and human capital development, but also serve as agents of social change, innovation, and sustainable development. In line with these developments, the concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) has emerged as an important framework that emphasizes universities' commitment to societal well-being and global sustainability (Chen et al., 2023; Almawi, 2024).

Conceptually, USR is an extension of corporate social responsibility principles adapted to the higher education context. It encompasses various dimensions such as the integration of ethical values into curricula, community engagement, socially impactful research, and sustainable organizational management. In this regard, universities are viewed not only as academic entities but also as social organizations responsible to multiple stakeholders, including students, academic staff, industry, and society at large (Ebekozen et al., 2023).

At the global level, increasing awareness of sustainability issues, climate change, social inequality, and the need for inclusive development has driven universities to integrate USR principles into their development strategies. Higher education institutions are now increasingly evaluated not only based on academic performance but also on their contributions to society and the environment (Lee et al., 2023). This makes USR an essential element in determining a university's reputation and competitive positioning at the international level.

In the context of China, the higher education system has undergone rapid transformation over the past few decades. The country has implemented various reforms to enhance the quality and competitiveness of universities, including initiatives to build world-class universities and strengthen research and innovation (Huang, 2026). However, this rapid development also brings new challenges, particularly for private universities that must compete with more established public institutions in terms of resources and reputation.

Private universities in China play an important role in expanding access to higher education, yet they often face negative perceptions regarding educational quality, financial constraints, and lower levels of public trust compared to public universities. In this situation, the implementation of USR is seen as a potential strategy to enhance institutional image, build stakeholder trust, and strengthen universities' core competitiveness (Yu, 2025).

Core competitiveness of universities refers to an institution's ability to maintain strategic advantages in a competitive environment through resource management, innovation, teaching and research quality, and relationships with industry partners. In the context of modern higher education, competitiveness is no longer determined solely by academic achievements but is also influenced by reputation, graduate employability, and the institution's ability to generate significant social impact (Jiang & Xiao, 2024).

Previous studies indicate a significant relationship between the implementation of USR and the enhancement of university competitiveness. USR plays a role in improving student satisfaction, strengthening community relationships, and stimulating innovation through industry collaboration (Ebekozen et al., 2023). In addition, effective communication of social responsibility initiatives can also enhance positive perceptions of universities, thereby contributing to institutional reputation (Elareshi et al., 2024).

Although there is an increasing body of research on USR globally, most studies focus on public universities and developed country contexts. Research specifically focusing on private universities in China remains limited, particularly from the perspective of USR integration as a driver of core competitiveness. Furthermore, most studies adopt quantitative empirical approaches, while comprehensive narrative review-based analyses remain underexplored.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore and analyze in depth the relationship between University Social Responsibility (USR) and core competitiveness in the context of private universities in China through a narrative review approach. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of USR as an institutional development strategy and contribute to the enrichment of literature in higher education. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

- i. identify the main dimensions of USR in the context of higher education,
- ii. analyze the factors influencing universities' core competitiveness, and
- iii. examine the relationship between USR implementation and the enhancement of core competitiveness in private universities in China.

The findings of this study are expected to provide important implications for university management, policymakers, and researchers in formulating more sustainable and competitive institutional development strategies.

## Literature Review

### Concept and Evolution of University Social Responsibility (USR)

The concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) has developed significantly in recent decades in line with the changing role of higher education institutions in global society. In the early stage, universities were viewed as academic entities focusing on teaching and research. However, current developments indicate that universities also bear broader social responsibilities, including contributing to community development, environmental sustainability, and social well-being (Almawi, 2024).

USR is an adaptation of the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) applied within the context of higher education. However, USR has a broader scope because universities do not only operate as economic organizations but also as social institutions that shape societal values, ethics, and culture (Chen et al., 2023). In this regard, USR emphasizes the integration of social and ethical values across all core university functions, including teaching, research, and community service.

According to Lee et al. (2023), USR can be defined as a strategic commitment of universities to contribute to sustainable development through the implementation of academic and non-academic activities that generate positive societal impact. This definition highlights that USR is not merely an additional activity, but an integral part of institutional core strategy. Furthermore, Ebekozen et al. (2023) emphasize that USR also plays an important role in building social capital and strengthening relationships between universities and stakeholders.

At the global level, USR is increasingly associated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. Universities are seen as agents of change capable of contributing to global issue solutions through research, innovation, and education. Therefore, the integration of

sustainability principles into USR implementation has become a strategic necessity to ensure the relevance of universities in the modern era (Jiang & Xiao, 2024).

### **Dimensions of University Social Responsibility**

Current literature shows that USR is a multidimensional concept encompassing various aspects of university operations. Although classification varies, most studies agree that USR can be divided into several interrelated key dimensions. First, the academic dimension refers to the integration of social, ethical, and sustainability values into the curriculum and teaching and learning processes. Universities are responsible for producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also socially aware and responsible. In this regard, value-based pedagogy and experiential learning approaches play an important role (Chen et al., 2023).

Second, the research dimension involves knowledge production that has societal impact. Research oriented toward solving social problems such as climate change, poverty, and public health represents a significant form of USR implementation. Studies show that universities actively engaged in high-impact research tend to have better reputation and higher competitiveness (Ebekozien et al., 2023). Third, the operational and management dimension refers to ethical and sustainable organizational practices within universities. This includes efficient resource management, the use of renewable energy, and the implementation of policies that support staff and student well-being. In this context, universities serve as models of responsible and sustainable organizations (Lee et al., 2023).

Fourth, the community engagement dimension encompasses university interaction with society through community service programs, industry collaboration, and knowledge sharing. Such engagement not only benefits society but also enhances university relevance and strengthens relationships with stakeholders (Almawi, 2024). In addition, several studies also emphasize the importance of the communication dimension of social responsibility, referring to how universities communicate USR initiatives to stakeholders. Effective communication can improve positive perceptions of universities and subsequently contribute to institutional reputation (Elareshi et al., 2024).

### **Concept of University Core Competitiveness**

Core competitiveness refers to an organization's ability to maintain strategic advantages in a competitive environment. In the context of higher education, university core competitiveness involves a combination of resources, capabilities, and strategies that enable institutions to achieve academic excellence and strong reputation. According to Huang (2026), university competitiveness is measured through several key indicators such as teaching quality, research productivity, innovation, graduate employability, and global reputation. In the era of globalization, universities compete not only at the national level but also internationally, making competitiveness a critical factor for institutional sustainability. In the context of private universities, core competitiveness is even more crucial as these institutions often operate in a more challenging environment. Private universities must strive to build their identity and uniqueness to attract students, secure funding, and gain public trust. Strategies such as rebranding, improving teaching quality, and strengthening industry relations are commonly used to enhance competitiveness (Yu, 2025).

In addition, Jiang and Xiao (2024) emphasize that university competitiveness is also influenced by internal factors such as organizational culture, leadership, and academic staff commitment.

Universities with a positive organizational culture that supports innovation tend to achieve better performance outcomes.

### **Relationship between USR and University Core Competitiveness**

The relationship between USR and university core competitiveness has become a key focus in higher education literature. In general, studies show that the implementation of USR has a positive impact on institutional competitiveness through several mechanisms. First, USR contributes to the enhancement of institutional reputation. Universities actively engaged in social responsibility activities are often perceived as more ethical, responsible, and socially relevant. This perception is important in attracting students, high-quality academic staff, and industry partners (Lee et al., 2023). Second, USR improves stakeholder satisfaction, including students, academic staff, and society. This satisfaction subsequently contributes to better organizational performance and institutional loyalty (Elareshi et al., 2024).

Third, USR promotes innovation and collaboration. Through engagement with communities and industry, universities can access new resources, innovative ideas, and relevant research opportunities. This helps enhance their ability to produce high-impact research and solve real-world problems (Ebekozi et al., 2023). Fourth, USR strengthens organizational culture. Values such as ethics, integrity, and social responsibility embedded through USR contribute to a positive organizational culture that supports academic excellence (Chen et al., 2023).

### **Context of Private Universities in China**

In the context of China, private universities play an important role in the higher education system, particularly in expanding access to education. However, these institutions often face challenges such as resource constraints, intense competition, and negative public perceptions regarding educational quality (Yu, 2025). In this regard, the implementation of USR is seen as a potentially effective strategy to address these challenges. By implementing social responsibility initiatives, private universities can enhance their reputation, build public trust, and strengthen relationships with stakeholders. In addition, USR also helps private universities differentiate themselves from competitors and build a unique institutional identity (Huang, 2026).

However, the implementation of USR in Chinese private universities remains uneven. Some institutions have successfully integrated USR into their development strategies, while others are still at an early stage of implementation. Therefore, there is a need for more in-depth studies to understand the factors influencing the effectiveness of USR in this context.

### **Research Gap**

Although the literature on USR is growing, several research gaps remain. First, most studies focus on public universities and developed countries, while research on private universities in China remains limited. Second, most studies adopt quantitative approaches, resulting in limited in-depth understanding of the mechanisms linking USR and competitiveness. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies integrating multiple USR dimensions within a single comprehensive analytical framework. Most studies focus only on one or two dimensions, whereas USR is a complex and multidimensional concept. Therefore, the narrative review approach adopted in this study provides a more holistic and in-depth perspective.

## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach in the form of a narrative review to critically analyze the literature related to University Social Responsibility (USR) and university core competitiveness, particularly in the context of private universities in China. This approach is selected because it enables the researcher to synthesize various findings from previous studies in a flexible and interpretive manner, while also developing a deeper conceptual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. A narrative review is also suitable for studies involving multidimensional concepts such as USR, as it is not bound by overly rigid analytical procedures but instead allows for critical evaluation and comparison across different theoretical and empirical perspectives (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). The data sources for this study are derived from secondary literature consisting of high-impact academic articles. The main databases used include Scopus and Web of Science to ensure the validity and quality of the references. The literature search process was conducted systematically using key terms such as “university social responsibility”, “USR”, “higher education sustainability”, “university competitiveness”, “core competitiveness”, and “private universities in China”. Combinations of keywords were also used to broaden the scope of the search and ensure more comprehensive literature coverage. This process involved initial screening based on titles and abstracts, followed by full-text evaluation to ensure the relevance of the articles to the study focus.

To ensure data quality and relevance, several selection criteria were established. Selected articles must be published between 2020 and 2025, be directly related to the concepts of USR and university competitiveness, and have undergone a peer-review process. Both empirical and conceptual studies were included to provide a balanced perspective in the analysis. Articles that were not directly related to the research topic, did not meet academic standards, or were not peer-reviewed were excluded from the analysis. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, concepts, and key relationships within the reviewed literature. The analysis process began with an in-depth reading of the selected articles to understand their context and findings. Subsequently, initial coding was conducted to identify key ideas and concepts related to USR dimensions and factors influencing university competitiveness. These concepts were then categorized into broader themes based on identified similarities and relationships. The synthesis process was conducted to integrate findings from multiple studies into a coherent and systematic narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

To ensure validity and reliability, this study utilized high-quality literature sources and applied triangulation through the comparison of findings across multiple studies. This step is essential to reduce bias and enhance the credibility of the analysis. In addition, the use of clearly defined selection criteria also helps ensure consistency and accuracy in the research findings (Creswell, 2014). However, this study is not without limitations. The use of a narrative review relies heavily on the researcher’s interpretation, which may introduce subjective bias. In addition, the study focuses only on articles published between 2020 and 2025, which may limit the broader scope of literature coverage. Furthermore, the absence of primary data means that the findings rely entirely on previous studies. Nevertheless, these limitations are minimized through the selection of credible sources and a careful and systematic analytical process. Overall, the methodology employed in this study is appropriate for achieving the research objectives, namely to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between University Social Responsibility and core competitiveness in the context of private universities in China.

## Finding

The findings of the narrative review of recent literature indicate that University Social Responsibility (USR) plays a significant role in shaping and strengthening university core competitiveness, particularly in the context of private universities in China. The thematic analysis conducted identified several key themes that describe the mechanisms linking USR and institutional competitiveness, namely the enhancement of university reputation, strengthening of stakeholder satisfaction, empowerment of innovation and collaboration, formation of a positive organizational culture, and the university's ability to respond to environmental challenges.

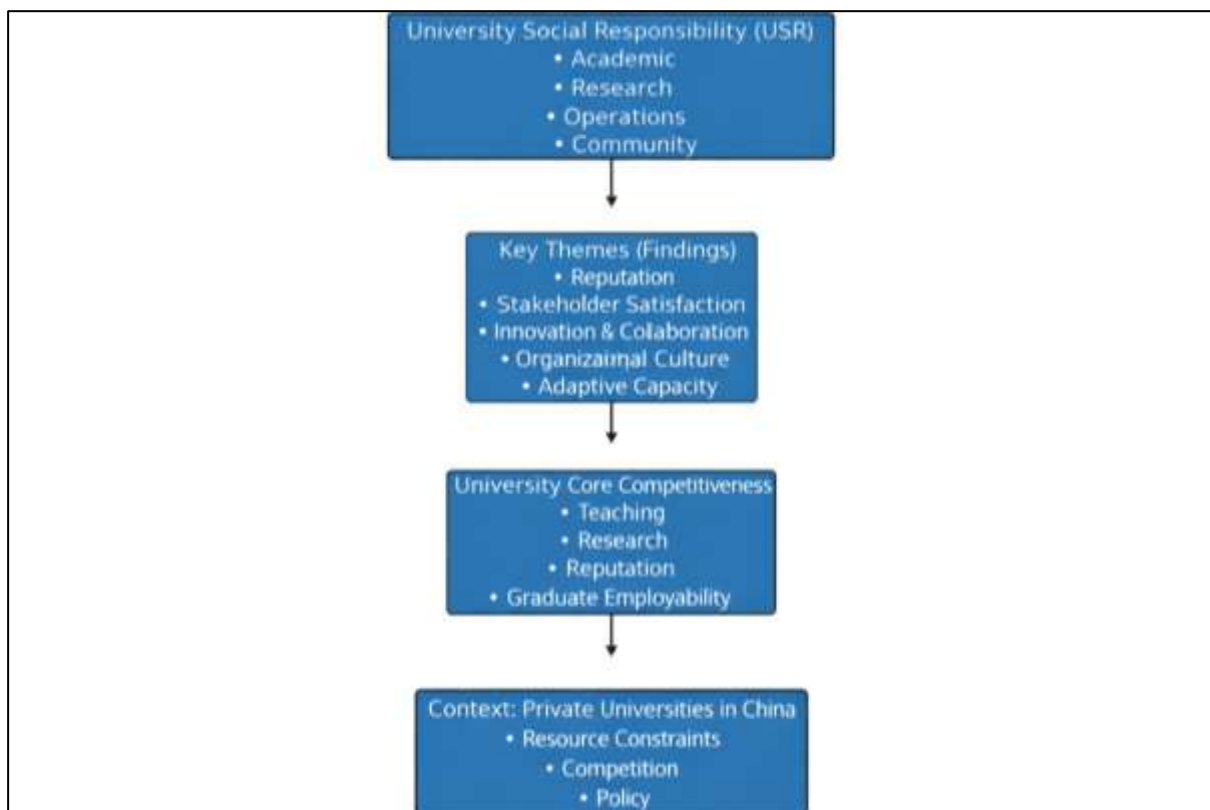
The first identified theme is the role of USR in enhancing institutional reputation. The findings show that universities that actively implement social responsibility initiatives tend to receive positive perceptions from society and stakeholders. This reputation is built through university involvement in community activities, socially impactful research, and commitment to sustainability. A strong reputation not only increases the attractiveness of universities to students and high-quality academic staff but also contributes to the institution's competitive positioning at both national and global levels (Lee et al., 2023). In the context of private universities in China, reputation is a critical factor as these institutions often face negative perceptions regarding educational quality; therefore, the implementation of USR serves as an important mechanism to enhance public trust (Yu, 2025). The second theme relates to stakeholder satisfaction. The literature shows that the implementation of USR has a positive effect on the satisfaction levels of students, academic staff, and the community. Initiatives such as community service programs, the provision of an inclusive learning environment, and emphasis on ethical values in education have improved the overall student experience. This satisfaction subsequently leads to increased commitment, loyalty, and performance, which ultimately enhances organizational effectiveness (Elareshi et al., 2024). In this regard, universities that successfully meet stakeholder expectations through USR implementation tend to achieve more sustainable competitive advantages.

The third emerging theme is the role of USR in stimulating innovation and collaboration. University engagement in social responsibility activities creates opportunities for collaboration with various stakeholders such as industry, non-governmental organizations, and local communities. Such collaboration not only enhances research and development opportunities but also strengthens the university's capacity to produce innovations that are relevant to societal needs (Ebekozi et al., 2023). In this context, USR functions as a catalyst for the development of an innovation ecosystem that supports knowledge and technological advancement. For private universities in China, these strategic collaborations are particularly important in overcoming resource constraints and enhancing institutional competitiveness. The fourth theme refers to the formation of a positive organizational culture. The findings indicate that the implementation of USR contributes to the development of organizational values such as integrity, responsibility, and commitment to excellence. These values shape a conducive working culture that supports organizational performance. Universities that adopt a socially responsible value-based culture tend to have more motivated and innovative staff, thereby improving institutional efficiency and effectiveness (Chen et al., 2023). In the long term, this positive organizational culture serves as a foundation for sustainable core competitiveness.

The fifth theme is the university's capacity to respond to environmental challenges. In the era of globalization and rapid technological change, universities must possess high adaptive capacity to ensure institutional sustainability. The findings show that USR helps universities

develop this capability through strengthened stakeholder relationships, improved organizational flexibility, and engagement with global issues such as sustainability and social responsibility (Huang, 2026). Universities that are proactive in implementing USR are better prepared to face challenges such as global competition, changes in education policy, and labor market demands. In addition, the findings also indicate that the dimensions of USR are interrelated and cannot be viewed in isolation. For example, community engagement not only enhances university reputation but also contributes to innovation through collaboration with external parties. Similarly, socially impactful research not only strengthens academic reputation but also provides direct benefits to society. This synergistic relationship among dimensions suggests that a holistic implementation of USR is essential to achieve maximum impact on university competitiveness.

In the context of private universities in China, the findings reveal that the level of USR implementation varies across institutions. Some universities have successfully integrated USR into their development strategies, while others are still at an early stage of implementation. Factors such as leadership, financial resources, and policy support play important roles in determining the effectiveness of USR implementation (Yu, 2025). Nevertheless, there is a general consensus in the literature that USR is a key factor contributing to the enhancement of university core competitiveness. Figure 1 illustrates that USR dimensions act as the main drivers influencing university core competitiveness through several mediating mechanisms, namely institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, innovation and collaboration, organizational culture, and adaptive capacity. In the context of private universities in China, environmental factors such as resource constraints and competition also influence the strength of these relationships.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Relationship between University Social Responsibility (USR) and Core University Competitiveness in the Context of Private Universities in China**

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that University Social Responsibility (USR) not only functions as a social obligation but also as an institutional development strategy capable of enhancing overall university competitiveness. The relationship between USR and core competitiveness is complex and multidimensional, involving interactions between internal and external organizational factors. Therefore, the strategic and integrated implementation of USR is essential to ensure that universities, particularly private universities in China, remain relevant and competitive in a dynamic global environment.

### Discussion and Implication

The findings of this study indicate that University Social Responsibility (USR) plays a significant role in strengthening university core competitiveness through several key mechanisms, namely institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, innovation and collaboration, organizational culture, and adaptive capacity. Overall, these findings reinforce the view that USR is not merely a supplementary or symbolic activity, but a strategic component that directly contributes to the competitive advantage of higher education institutions. From a theoretical perspective, this study supports the argument that universities should be viewed as complex stakeholder-based organizations, where institutional success depends not only on academic achievement but also on the extent to which universities are able to meet the social, economic, and ethical expectations of stakeholders. In this context, USR acts as an integrative mechanism that links the core functions of universities with broader societal needs. This finding is consistent with Chen et al. (2023), who emphasize that USR strengthens organizational value through the integration of social elements into universities' academic and administrative functions. In addition, this study further reinforces the theory that institutional reputation is a critical strategic asset in determining university competitiveness. Consistent implementation of USR has been found to enhance positive public perceptions of universities, thereby influencing the decisions of students, parents, and industry stakeholders in selecting institutions. This demonstrates that reputation is shaped not only by academic performance but also by a university's social commitment to society. In the context of private universities in China, this aspect is particularly important, as these institutions often face greater challenges related to public trust (Yu, 2025).

From the perspective of stakeholder satisfaction, the findings show that USR has a direct impact on the experiences and perceptions of students and academic staff. Universities that actively engage in community and social responsibility activities tend to create a more inclusive, meaningful, and value-oriented learning environment. This, in turn, enhances the commitment and loyalty of university members toward the institution. These findings support Elareshi et al. (2024), who emphasize that effective communication and implementation of social responsibility can improve stakeholder satisfaction and positive attitudes. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that USR serves as a catalyst for innovation and strategic collaboration. Universities' involvement in social activities creates broader opportunities for interaction with industry, communities, and external organizations, which in turn generates new research opportunities and high-impact innovation. In this regard, USR not only provides social benefits but also contributes to strengthening the university's innovation ecosystem. This finding aligns with Ebekozien et al. (2023), who highlight that university–external stakeholder engagement through social responsibility initiatives enhances knowledge sharing and value co-creation. In addition, organizational culture has been identified as another important impact of USR on university competitiveness. Values such as integrity, responsibility, and commitment to sustainability embedded through USR contribute to a more positive and productive organizational culture. This strong culture then becomes the foundation for more sustainable

and competitive institutional performance. This indicates that USR not only affects external reputation but also internal organizational values and behaviors (Chen et al., 2023). In terms of adaptive capacity, the study found that USR helps universities enhance organizational flexibility in responding to dynamic environmental changes. Universities that integrate USR into their strategies are better prepared to adapt to changes in educational policy, industry demands, and global challenges such as digitalization and sustainability. This suggests that USR functions as a mechanism for strengthening institutional resilience in the long term (Huang, 2026).

From a practical perspective, this study offers several important recommendations for university management, particularly in private universities in China. First, USR should be comprehensively integrated into institutional development strategies rather than being implemented as an additional activity. This includes integration into curriculum, research, organizational management, and community engagement. Second, universities need to strengthen strategic communication regarding USR initiatives to enhance stakeholder awareness and positive perception. Third, universities should develop strategic collaboration networks with industry and communities to maximize social impact and innovation. From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that policymakers should provide more systematic support for the implementation of USR in higher education institutions. This can be achieved through incentives, guidelines, and university performance evaluations that incorporate social responsibility components. Such an approach would not only improve the quality of higher education but also ensure that universities play a more active role in national social and economic development.

Overall, this discussion confirms that USR is a strategic factor that comprehensively influences university core competitiveness. The relationship between the two is dynamic and interdependent, involving interactions between internal organizational factors and the external environment. Therefore, the integrated and strategic implementation of USR is essential to ensure that universities remain relevant and competitive in an increasingly competitive global higher education landscape.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, several strategic recommendations can be proposed to strengthen the implementation of University Social Responsibility (USR) in the context of private universities in China.

1. Universities should institutionalize USR as part of their long-term strategic institutional plans. This approach is important to ensure that USR is not implemented in an ad hoc manner or as short-term project-based initiatives, but instead becomes an integral part of the university's culture and management system. Such institutionalization also enables the effectiveness of USR to be evaluated in a more systematic and continuous manner.
2. Universities are encouraged to strengthen the integration of USR across all core institutional functions, namely teaching, research, and community service. This integration can be implemented through the development of value-based curricula, student involvement in community projects, and research that has a direct impact on society. Such an approach not only enhances academic quality but also strengthens the relationship between universities and external stakeholders.
3. University management should emphasize the development of academic staff capacity in implementing USR. Professional training, exposure to international best practices,

and continuous institutional support are essential to ensure that academic staff are able to integrate elements of social responsibility into their teaching and research activities. In this context, human capacity development is a critical factor in ensuring the sustainable success of the USR agenda.

4. Private universities in China should expand strategic collaboration networks with industry, government, and local communities. Such collaboration can enhance the impact of USR through the sharing of resources, expertise, and knowledge. In addition, cross-sector collaboration can also improve innovation and graduate employability, thereby contributing to enhanced university competitiveness at both national and international levels.
5. From a policy perspective, governments and policymakers are encouraged to develop a more comprehensive USR evaluation framework for higher education institutions. These evaluation indicators should include social, economic, and sustainability dimensions in addition to traditional academic performance. With a clear assessment mechanism in place, universities will be more motivated to implement USR in a more structured and committed manner.

Therefore, this study concludes that University Social Responsibility (USR) is a key strategic driver in strengthening university core competitiveness, particularly in the context of private universities in China. USR not only impacts institutional reputation and stakeholder satisfaction but also influences innovation, organizational culture, and university adaptive capacity. This relationship demonstrates that USR should be viewed as a comprehensive strategic element rather than merely a social initiative.

## Reference

- Almawi, J. (2024). The relationship between university social responsibility and corporate social responsibility concepts: The comparison of Saudi Arabian and Turkish cases. *Dalam ... IntechOpen*. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1005290>
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1997). Writing narrative literature reviews. *Review of General Psychology*, 1(3), 311–320. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.1.3.311>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chen, Y.-S., Yan, X., & Liew, C.-B. A. (2023). University social responsibility in China: The mediating role of green psychological capital. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(4), 3634. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20043634>.
- Chen, C., & Vanclay, F. (2023). Universities need a social license to operate and grow: Reflecting on the university-community engagement of two transnational universities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 27(5), 798–816. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10283153221121394>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ebekozien, A., Abdul-Aziz, A. R., & Jaafar, M. (2023). Stakeholder engagement and innovation performance in higher education institutions. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 98, 102745.
- Elareshi, M., Habes, M., & Salloum, S. (2024). Communication strategies and stakeholder satisfaction in universities: Evidence from higher education sector. *Sustainability*, 16(2), 1120.
- Li, J., & Wang, X. (2022). Social responsibility practices and competitive advantage in Chinese private universities. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 23(4), 567–582.
- Liu, Y., & Chen, Z. (2021). University social responsibility and institutional reputation in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(10), 2105–2119.
- Sun, H., & Zhou, L. (2023). Higher education competitiveness and stakeholder theory application in private universities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 42(5), 1180–1194.
- Wang, M., & Zhang, Q. (2024). Innovation ecosystems in universities: The role of social responsibility initiatives. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 198, 122982.
- Xu, F., & Li, Y. (2020). University governance and stakeholder satisfaction in Chinese higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 74(4), 512–528.
- Yang, D., & Liu, S. (2025). Strategic integration of university social responsibility in higher education management. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 389, 136045.
- Yu, K. (2025). Reputation building and competitiveness in Chinese private universities. *Education and Urban Society*, 57(1), 88–105.
- Zhang, T., & Wang, H. (2022). Corporate social responsibility and its extension into higher education institutions. *Social Responsibility Journal*, 18(6), 1234–1248.
- Zhou, Y., & Chen, L. (2023). Sustainable development and university social responsibility practices in China. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 401, 136754.