

Social Responsibility and Institutional Image in a Public University in Peru

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in stakeholder and institutional theories, this study examines the relationship between university social responsibility (USR) and students' perceptions of institutional image at a public university in Peru. Using a quantitative, correlational design, data were collected from 134 undergraduate students in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities during the 2024–II academic cycle. A structured Likert-scale questionnaire measured perceived USR practices and institutional image, and data were analyzed using Spearman's correlation. The results revealed a strong and statistically significant positive association between USR and institutional image ($r_s = .762$, $p < .01$), indicating that socially responsible practices are closely linked to how students evaluate institutional reputation. These findings extend existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a resource-constrained public university setting in Latin America, where research remains limited. The study highlights the strategic role

of USR in strengthening institutional positioning and suggests that embedding socially responsive practices into core university functions can enhance both reputational capital and social impact.

Keywords: Image, public universities, social commitment, social responsibility, university management

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, university education centers have faced growing demands for transparency, educational quality, and commitment to their social environment, raising questions about how these institutions balance their academic mission with the need to project a strong, socially responsible image. Thus, university social responsibility (USR) has emerged as a perspective that synthesizes the ethical obligations universities seek to put into practice, extending these commitments across their academic and administrative practices and their institutional image (Andia Valencia et al., 2021).

USR is seen as universities' active commitment to strengthening the social, economic, and environmental fabric of the world around them, which inevitably affects how they are perceived. Even so, in the context of Latin American public universities, where resources are scarce and expectations are high, the challenge of achieving USR in relation to a positive institutional image is increasingly urgent (Ibarra Uribe et al., 2020).

Several studies have addressed the issue of USR and institutional image. Melo Rojas and Hernández Herrera (2024) highlighted how USR can significantly impact students' perceptions of it and reinforce external actors' confidence in the institutions that apply it. Olvera León et al. (2022) established that USR should be used in such a way as to seek alternatives in terms of the fundamental roles of universities; in this way, the social realities that the different current contexts bring with them demand that interventions based on USR be carried out, carrying out joint work between universities and other sectors for the construction of the institutional image and its recognition as a socially responsible university, which would imply a commitment to social welfare and responsibilities in the face of the problems faced by society. Studies have shown the transformative role of USR in the construction of a solid institutional identity, especially in sociocultural contexts

where the university is presented as an engine of social development. The results highlight the need to be able to go further from the moment that some USR initiatives are generated in public universities and observe how they are related, claiming the particularities and implications that their environment and their communities welcome, since in this way, they can generate forms together with their communities that are useful or even reinforce the social or institutional impact they have.

The present research was carried out at a Peruvian public university, specifically in the academic period 2024-II. The main objective of the research was limited to the degree of relationship that exists between university social responsibility and the institutional image of students, since the hypothesis that supports the research is as follows: A good management of MSW has a positive relationship with a good institutional image. The Peruvian context is relevant because the country's public universities work with scarce resources and high social demand, which is why understanding how USR can contribute to the country's institutional image and/or its role as an agent of social development is important. The relevance of this research lies in its contribution to explaining how public universities enhance their links with the community through comprehensive strategies that, in addition to fulfilling their educational function, increase their social relevance and image in the locality. In addition, this study, which addresses a little-researched topic in the Peruvian context, aims to fill a gap in the literature and provide practical tools for effective institutional management.

THEORETICAL REFERENCE

Theoretical basis

Over the past few decades, USR has evolved into a model that has changed the way universities are structured and how their contributions to today's society are determined. USR is based on the principles that govern corporate social responsibility, transferring the way in which USR is understood to the university sphere and articulating the educational function with the ethical modeling of the social, environmental, and cultural issues of its context (Rubio-Rodríguez and Blandón-López, 2021). According to Arevalo Alva et al. (2021), MSW should not be understood solely as a set of activities associated with university extension, but rather as a management model that spans or extends across each of the organizational spheres. Through this integral conception, universities assume a role that enables them to promote social welfare in response to the demands and interests of a constantly changing society.

Consequently, USR occurs across four dimensions: organizational, educational, cognitive, and social. The organizational dimension corresponds to the university's ability to manage itself ethically and sustainably; the educational impact aims to train individuals to be reflective and engaged; the cognitive impact

refers to the development of useful and relevant knowledge; and the social impact is the form of interaction that the university establishes with the community. These dimensions are not independent but interdependent, as they not only strengthen the link between the university and society but also offer a strategic format for advancing toward the development of the proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Olaya Garcera et al., 2020). Among these, the most directly linked are quality education (SDG 4), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), which align with the organizational, educational, and social dimensions of USR, respectively.

On the other hand, institutional image, as reflected in how internal and external audiences perceive a given organization, plays a very important role in the reputation and recognition of public universities. According to Pereira Álvarez (2021), the perceptions that audiences have of their relationship with a university result from an interaction among a series of elements (quality of service, communicative coherence, and demonstrated social action). In the case of public universities, institutional image is often a strategic issue, as it depends on the trust and support of its various social actors: students, teachers, authorities, and the different local contexts of the community (La Cruz-Arango et al., 2022).

The association between USR and institutional image reflects a process of positive feedback, since well-managed USR can improve the public organization's image among citizens and be perceived as an involved actor. Moreover, a good institutional image promotes the implementation of USR, as it generates trust and legitimacy among stakeholders (Severino-González et al., 2023), which is highly valuable in resource-poor environments (such as those found in many public universities in Latin America) where the social impact of public universities in Peru, particularly in promoting social development, improving community well-being, and fostering inclusive education, is optimized as a strategy for success.

In this context, USR is not only an instrument for improving public perception; it is also understood as a means of reflecting on and promoting internal cohesion within universities. Good, ethical, and transparent management encourages identification among students, professors, and university administrative staff, creating an environment that ultimately promotes innovation and academic excellence (Revilla Neyra, 2022). Universities that implement CSR programs achieve not only high levels of external acceptance but also high levels of internal commitment, which, in turn, increases their capacity to respond to environmental challenges (Miranda Suárez et al., 2020).

Globally, USR has enabled universities to become agents of change. European universities have already adopted basic principles for integrating sustainability and ethics into their roles (today, European universities are the promoters of this practice) (Pernía et al., 2022). This model has been adapted in Latin America, and universities are currently developing proposals to resolve complex social situations, such as inequality, social exclusion, and climate change.

Public universities face additional difficulties, such as budget constraints and high social demand (Olvera León et al., 2022), which explains the focus of this study on public universities, as their principles, roles, available resources, and social responsibilities often differ significantly from those of private universities in Peru.

The influence of USR on institutional image has also been studied in the academic sphere. La Cruz-Arango et al. (2022) find that universities that establish USR as part of their management strategy achieve better positioning in their environment, a stronger reputation, and greater student loyalty. Gallardo-Vázquez et al. (2021) reported that consistent USR practices not only amplify public perception but also increase universities' capacity to form strategic alliances with key sectors, such as industry and certain nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

The inclusion of USR in university management raises the question of how these organizations can optimize their impact in a resource-constrained environment. The SDGs provide public universities with the opportunity to lead by example, making it clear that it is feasible to achieve an adequate balance between academic quality and social commitment. According to the Ministry of the Environment (2024), 69 public and private universities are implementing environmental standards in their institutions, thus contributing to sustainable development in the country. Among them, several public universities, such as the National University of Altiplano, the National University of San Agustín and the National Agrarian University La Molina, include water management policies, energy use, solid waste use, carbon footprint, and the promotion of green areas and environmentalization in the curricula.

These activities are a consequence of the application of the principles of USR and its affinity with the SDGs, especially with the SDGs for Quality Education (point 4), the SDGs for the Reduction of Inequalities (point 10) and the SDGs for Climate Action (point 13), for which strategic planning is indeed necessary that contemplates not only the needs of the community but also the plausibility of including the SDGs in university practice (López-Rodríguez et al., 2020).

Thus, the theoretical foundation of USR and institutional image evidence the need to adopt an integrated approach that allows public universities to enhance their social relevance and public image. Although this binomial is complex, it becomes a strategic tool for facing the challenges posed by society and ensuring long-term viability among public universities. In addition, the challenge lies in overcoming both cultural and structural barriers and applying USR practices from public universities that are coherent, effective, and not confined to the academic, thus achieving an impact on society.

Conceptual framework and definitions

University Social Responsibility

USR is understood as a systemic approach that helps universities manage their relationships with society, inextricably linked to the idea that, as organizations that generate knowledge and train professionals, they have the capacity and duty to contribute to sustainable development at the global and local levels. USR, beyond specific actions such as community engagement, works to integrate ethical principles into all areas of educational management (Barreto Cruz et al., 2021).

According to Salcedo-Muñoz et al. (2023), USR involves a set of policies, strategies and practices to respond to the ethical, social and environmental repercussions that are generated from university activity. This definition implies the need for conscious and responsible management, far from being restricted in the educational dimension but also with the direct relationship with the university community, environmental sustainability and the promotion of ethics in all organizational processes.

USR can be broken down into four fundamental dimensions that allow us to analyze its implementation and operating method: educational impact, organizational impact, social impact and ethical management (Olaya Garcera et al., 2020). The first focuses on the adoption of principles of clarity, integrity and the obligation to explain. This includes financial management and the selection of strategic alternatives that affect both the internal members of the university community and the external actors that interact with it (Condori Apaza et al., 2022).

Organizational impact is linked to the way in which the resources of universities are managed and how they carry out internal management in a way that can avoid or cope with negative effects on the environment and maximize utility for society. Some sustainability practices, care in waste management, the responsible use of energy, health promotion and healthy work environments are examples of this type of organizational utility (Condori Apaza et al., 2022).

In terms of educational impact, this refers to one of the most relevant aspects of MSWs, as it is aimed at training students as socially critical citizens and incorporating ethical values, leadership skills and a commitment to sustainable development into the training curricula. Education for sustainability also becomes a transition axis, which flows not only through the classroom but also through cocurricular and extension activities (Garbizo Flores et al., 2021).

Finally, social impact expresses the vocation of universities to respond to the reality of the community in which they are embedded; this impact can be seen in the implementation of outreach projects, applied research, and development programs that attempt to address local and global demands, among others. This

interaction, through community services, disciplinary projects, cultural projects, etc., demonstrates that universities are capable of making changes in the world beyond their campuses (Ibarra Uribe et al., 2020).

The establishment of USR implies not only a change in perspective in institutional management but also the conception of strategies aimed at addressing the ethical, educational, and social problems that exist within the specific context of each university. Therefore, the four dimensions mentioned above allow for the development of an operational framework from which to select alternatives and evaluate results, establishing a pattern of good practices in higher education. For example, in Peruvian public universities, the organizational dimension is applied through transparent governance and sustainable resource management; the educational dimension, through programs that foster critical thinking and social engagement among students; the cognitive dimension, through research projects addressing local community challenges; and the social dimension, through community outreach and inclusion initiatives (Paucar-Curasma et al., 2025; Peña et al., 2024).

Institutional Image

The term institutional image refers to the way in which the public perceives organizations, which is manifested through association or direct contact with them and the information generated in their environment (Pereira Álvarez, 2021). According to Bravo Herrera and Núñez (2021), the image in question is not a static construct but rather a completely dynamic one that is generated from the strategic actions, communication processes, and experiences of the organizations' audiences. In particular, for universities, institutional image reflects not only the capacity or quality of the education they offer but also their ability to respond to social action and meet the needs of the community.

The elements of institutional image allow us to understand how this perception is constructed from different perspectives. First, public perception is the set of opinions and assessments held by various actors outside the university, such as the local population, prospective students, graduates, and various collaborating entities. This appearance is particularly significant, given that internal perception generates a working atmosphere and justifies the way in which the members of the group project their identity to the outside world. A good internal image contributes to the commitment and sense of belonging of the institution's members, which together constitute the most characteristic elements of institutional cohesion (Sarmiento Orna and Vinueza Martínez, 2020).

On the other hand, perceived quality refers to the subjective opinion that various audiences have about the services and products that the university offers them, such as academic training, infrastructure, or development opportunities. This aspect refers to the need for universities to be perceived as leading universities and

for their quality standards to be perceived as such both locally and internationally (Alvarez Alvarez, 2022).

Finally, institutional communication is oriented toward the way in which the university addresses its external audience and uses different spaces to do so, such as digital media and events. It is an essential component in building and maintaining an image that is consistent with the criteria and purposes that govern the institution. Universities, as organizations that are highly dependent on social support, use these strategies to help them express their identity and enhance their position as agents of change, innovation, and development in society (García González and Pacheco Proaño, 2022).

Legal bases, plans and programs

In Peru, University Law No. 30220 constitutes the fundamental regulatory framework governing compliance with obligations arising from the social responsibility and institutional transparency of universities. This law emphasizes that higher education institutions must be committed to promoting social welfare, with educational, research, and social outreach strategies that incorporate the principles of environmental sustainability and community cohesion. In this sense, the regulatory framework in question also demonstrates that public universities are the engines of social development and should prioritize actions that generate positive changes both on and off campus (Ministry of Education, 2014).

On another note, the National Education Plan 2036 serves as a strategic roadmap that complements the provisions of this University Law. Among its objectives, the plan aims to strengthen universities as drivers of social change, providing quality education while promoting the effective participation of universities in solving problems that arise at different levels. In this regard, the importance of USR as a cross-cutting axis in institutional planning is highlighted, which aims to ensure that higher education institutions properly comply with human development and sustainable development (Ministry of Education, 2020).

In terms of institutional image, Peruvian regulations attach great importance to clarity and accountability as fundamental principles to ensure public trust. University law requires universities to periodically publish their financial statements, the results of research and the progress of social projects so that the education sector and citizens can evaluate their performance and thus establish a relationship of trust. Such transparency enhances not only credibility but also openness to a governing style that favors the exercise of ethics and responsibility by universities so that the university is considered a responsible institution.

Antecedents

Various studies have examined the issues of social and environmental responsibility and institutional image in public universities in different regions. In this context, Melo Rojas and Hernández (2024) conducted research at a public university in Mexico and reported high acceptance and a favorable assessment of social and environmental responsibility in the area of organizational management (52.4%). The conclusions highlight the relevance of this dimension in relation to CSR, emphasizing its direct impact on student assessment. With a special focus on the subdimensions of the work environment, equity, clarity, integrity, and inclusion, these dimensions were rated positively, suggesting that students perceive an environment of fairness, collaboration, and consideration. With respect to the dimension of sustainable practices on campuses, although the results showed an average score by students, it is worth highlighting their willingness to participate in environmental conservation projects promoted by the university. In public universities in Peru, these dynamics are reflected in initiatives such as inclusive student councils, mentorship programs promoting equity, environmental awareness campaigns, and partnerships with local NGOs, which help translate the principles of USR into observable outcomes in the university context (Dirección Académica de Responsabilidad Social, 2022; Universidad Católica de Santa María, 2025; Universidad César Vallejo, 2024).

In Ecuador, Barreto Cruz et al. (2021) reported that the university plays an important role in the advancement of humanity as a trainer of professionals in different areas, contributing to the dissemination of USR in a globalized context. In the research carried out, whose objective was to understand the visions and actions of the main protagonists in the academic space, it was revealed that such visions and visibility of USR are directly related to obtaining a solid mission identity. They also reported that the perception of the university community and the representative image of the university are fundamental factors that favor institutional commitment to USR, criticism, and social equity.

In the case of Peru, La Cruz-Arango et al. (2022) reported that the integration of MSW into the strategic plans of universities not only strengthens their organizational structure by incorporating principles of sustainability and social responsibility but also significantly contributes to student loyalty. Universities that combine their educational activities, scientific research projects, university management and community insertion projects on the basis of these principles have the function of being considered innovative and socially committed while strengthening their status as educational institutions. An example of this can be community service programs, environmental sustainability projects led by students, inclusive education workshops or the creation of practical alliances with different local organizations, since they show in a practical way how to implement the principles of social responsibility, which translates into noticeable results

(greater implications of students, praising comments from the community, better institutional image, among others) (General Directorate of Social Responsibility UNMSM, 2023). This comprehensive approach allows the consolidation of a solid identity, effective communication and a positive perception among its target audiences, which reinforces its positioning in the educational environment.

In the same way, a study carried out in Colombia by Espitia Cubillos et al. (2020) analyzed the expectations that graduates have regarding a UAR model, where the authors wanted to highlight that the categories of ethics and sustainability are key elements that affect the implementation of UAR and that, on the other hand, contribute to the creation of a greater perception of the institutional image among universities. On the one hand, incorporating ethical principles into academic and administrative activities leads to the creation of an environment of trust and credibility, and on the other hand, sustainability means a long-term commitment to society and the natural environment. Additionally, the study emphasizes that a good institutional image, built on these pillars, represents a reinforcement to the university–graduate–community relationship, which allows the formation of a virtuous circle of social commitment and sustainable development.

Finally, Venero Vásquez and Puente de la Vega Aparicio (2022) explored perceptions of MSW among a set of stakeholders and reported that a large number of respondents held a moderately positive view of MSW at the National University of San Antonio Abad of Cusco across its four axes. However, a large number of the respondents regarding MSWs stated that the university does not have the capacity to have a connection abroad, with the organizations with which it interacts for its local and regional environment, especially in terms of the management and innovation axis, although it is admitted that the university can be considered an institution with sufficient attributes to become an interested party, that is, a strategic ally for the institutional activities of the aforementioned organizations. These findings highlight the importance of social responsibility as a strategic pillar for strengthening institutional perception and consolidating public universities' position as key players in social and educational development.

RESEARCH METHOD

Context of the University

The research was conducted at only one Peruvian public university with a strong tradition of social engagement and community participation. This institution has an institutional culture that emphasizes ethical and responsible management, transparency and a commitment to social responsibility. It promotes initiatives aimed at generating a greater bond with the community around it, inclusive education, and support for sustainable development projects. All this offers an

interesting context for analyzing how students put into practice and understand MSW practices, and how these practices influence the institutional image. Academic programs, research activities, and administrative processes are aligned with principles of social commitment, ensuring that students are exposed to both educational and practical experiences that reflect the university's values.

Research approach

The present research developed a quantitative approach focused on collecting and analyzing numerical data, seeking to establish patterns and correlations among the variables under study (Muijs, 2020). The choice of the design was non-experimental and transversal, since no variable was manipulated and the data were collected in a single temporal instant (Espinoza Casco et al., 2023). The scope of the study was also defined as correlational to the extent that it aims to establish relationships between two variables (Arias González and Covinos Gallardo, 2021).

Units of analysis

The population consisted of students from the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at a single public university in Peru, corresponding to the 2024-II academic cycle. To select participants, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was used, considering the following inclusion criteria:

- Students should be actively enrolled in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities during the 2024-II academic year.
- Agree to participate voluntarily in the study by signing an informed consent form.

The exclusion criteria included students who did not complete the questionnaire in its entirety, students on academic leave, and those who did not provide consent. The sample consisted of 134 students, both male and female, aged 18 to 25 years, all enrolled in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities and representing different fields of study. Data were collected during the months of January and March 2024. To minimize the potential limitations of studying a single university, the questionnaire was carefully designed and piloted with a small group of students of both sexes prior to full application, ensuring the clarity, relevance, and reliability of the instrument.

Harvesting techniques

The information was collected using a structured questionnaire (Feria Ávila et al., 2020) designed to measure CSR and institutional image. The instrument included closed questions with a five-point Likert scale (1: never, 2:

almost never, 3: sometimes, 4: almost always, and 5: always). With regard to the USR variable, the questionnaire included questions on the following dimensions: a) social awareness and commitment, b) sustainability and the environment, and c) inclusion and equity. In contrast, the dimensions of the questionnaire for the institutional image variable considered the following: a) public perception, b) perceived quality, and c) institutional communication. Notably, to facilitate the interpretation of the information, a scale was created to classify the responses and define the levels of each variable such that responses 1 and 2 corresponded to a low level, response 3 to a medium level, and responses 4 and 5 to a high level.

Before the questionnaire was applied, the instrument was subjected to a validation procedure by experts in didactics and social responsibility, who examined the relevance and understanding of the items. A pilot test was also carried out with the students as a test to ensure the understanding and adequacy of the instrument. With respect to internal reliability, the analysis of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire yielded an index of 0.92, which indicates the high reliability of the instrument for the measurement of the contemplated variables.

Analysis processing

To analyze the data, SPSS version 27 was used, enabling descriptive and correlational analyses. First, measures of central tendency and dispersion were calculated to characterize the variables' general characteristics (Espinosa Casco et al., 2023). Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient was subsequently used to analyze the relationships between the variables under study. The level of statistical significance was set at 0.05, ensuring that the presented analysis adheres to the perceptual rigor in interpreting the results.

It is important to note that the methodological design also has several limitations. First, the study was restricted to a single public university, limiting the generalizability of the results to other institutional contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design did not allow monitoring of changes over time in the relationship between USR and institutional image. Finally, although efforts were made to ensure the instrument's clarity and reliability, respondents' perceptions may be subject to biases inherent in self-reported data.

RESULTS

The following is a summary of the findings resulting from the statistical analysis carried out to explore the relationships between the variables. In this analysis, Spearman's rho was used, a technique that measures the strength and direction of the relationship between variables.

Table 1: University Social Responsibility Variable Levels

Dimensions	Low		Medium		High	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Social awareness and commitment	15	11.19	75	55.97	44	32.84
Sustainability and the environment	15	11.19	58	43.28	61	45.52
Inclusion and equity	16	11.94	64	47.76	54	40.30

Note. Own elaboration.

In terms of the levels of the UAR variable, as detailed in Table 1 at the end of the document, 55.97% of the respondents reported a medium level of awareness and commitment, which shows that, although there is a certain acceptable level of awareness and commitment in the university community, a high overall impact has not yet been achieved. Thirty-two points out that eighty-four percent of the participants rated it as high, reflecting a good assessment and high commitment on the part of a large portion of the sample, whereas 11.19% considered it low, suggesting that there may still be groups that do not have a sufficient level of commitment in this dimension.

The results obtained in the sustainability and environment dimension paint a slightly more positive picture. In this case, 45.52% of the sample considers the level of sustainability and the environment to be high, with an interest in promoting sustainable practices within the institution. Despite this, the average 43.28% rate suggests that although initiatives related to this dimension are seen as positive, there are still opportunities to increase actions related to environmental sustainability. Finally, 11.19% of the participants perceived this dimension as low, indicating that certain strategies or activities may not be sufficiently visible or effective for part of the group.

Table 2: Levels of Institutional Image

Dimensions	Low		Medium		High	
	F	%	f	%	f	%
Public perception	17	12.69	68	50.75	49	36.57
Perceived quality	12	8.96	70	52.24	52	38.81
Institutional communication	9	6.72	68	50.75	57	42.54

Note. Own elaboration.

Finally, the dimension of Inclusion and Equity received a high rating from 40.30% of the respondents, reflecting significant recognition of inclusive actions within the university. However, 47.76% rated this dimension as average, suggesting that although there are clear efforts, there are still areas for

improvement to ensure full equitable inclusion. Similarly, 11.94% of participants rated this dimension as low, suggesting potential gaps that need to be addressed to achieve greater impact.

Continuing with the analysis, in relation to the levels of the institutional image variable, in Table 2 at the end of the document, the data show that 50.75% of respondents rated it at a medium level, indicating a moderate perception that, although not negative, leaves room for improvement. Approximately 36.57% rated this dimension as high, reflecting that a significant proportion have a positive assessment. However, 12.69% perceive this dimension as low, indicating that challenges remain in relation to the institution's external image and how it is valued by external audiences.

With regard to the second dimension, the results show that 52.24% attribute an average rating to this dimension, from which it can be deduced that although users consider that there are positive characteristics, they have not reached a consolidated perception of high quality in the services or benefits offered. On the other hand, 38.81% rate this dimension as high, which suggests that a proportion of individuals recognize high-quality standards. In contrast, 8.96% of the participants reported a low percentage, which is relevant when determining the areas that need to be addressed to improve the perception of quality.

Finally, in the third dimension, 50.75% of the participants rated it as average, indicating that communication is functional but could be optimized to achieve greater effectiveness. A total of 42.54% consider communication to be high, which shows that the efforts made in this area have been accepted by a certain number of users; 6.72% rate it as low, indicating that there are aspects of communication that should be addressed to ensure good, clear, effective, and accessible interaction with key audiences.

Next, as shown in Table 3 at the end of the document, the results of Spearman's correlation between the variables analyzed are presented. The statistical analysis performed using Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient revealed a strong positive correlation ($r_s = 0.762$) that was statistically significant ($p = 0.000$) between University Social Responsibility (USR) and Institutional Image.

Table 3: Spearman correlation between USR and institutional image

		University social responsibility	Institutional image
Spearman's Rho.	University social responsibility	Correlation coefficient	,762**
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.000
		N	134
	Institutional image	Correlation coefficient	,762**
		Sig. (bilateral)	0.000
		N	134

** . The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

DISCUSSION

The conclusions obtained through this study support the hypothesis that a significant positive relationship exists between USR and institutional image. As the results confirm, the strong positive correlation between USR and institutional image ($r_s = 0.762$) clearly supports the idea that USR affects students' perceptions of the educational institution itself. This aspect also refers to one of the study's objectives, which was to verify the relationship between USR and institutional image. In this sense, the results offer possibilities for improvement and strengths for universities and, in turn, give rise to a process of reflection and interpretation of the results obtained.

These results are consistent with previous research highlighting the great importance of USR in the construction and strengthening of universities, for example, in the work of Melo Rojas and Hernández Herrera in Mexico (2024). In this work, strong support for USR was also found, particularly regarding its organizational management dimension, as it directly affects students' perceptions. As the results of this study confirm, there is a good assessment of the social awareness and commitment dimension, with 55.97% of the respondents rating this category as average. In other words, some consideration has been detected in this regard, but at the same time, areas for improvement are necessary so that USR efforts generate widespread consideration and a general impact on the university community.

On the other hand, sustainability and the environment, which were also well regarded in the Mexican study, received high scores in the results of this survey, with 45.52% of the respondents rating them at a high level. However, as in the case of the Mexican study, a smaller percentage (43.28%) consider this dimension to be at a medium level; i.e., although there is awareness of sustainability, there are still doubts about which more visible and effective practices to implement. This finding coincides with what Barreto Cruz et al. (2021) reported, who reaffirmed that the internal perception and institutional image of the university are key to strengthening a consolidated mission identity, particularly with regard to identify in the context of sustainability and social responsibility.

With respect to inclusion and equity, the results of this survey reveal that 47.76% of the respondents perceive it to be at a medium level. This finding is emphasized in the work of La Cruz-Arango et al. (2022), who stressed that the implementation of USR in the strategic plans of universities not only allows them to strengthen their organizational structure but also helps them achieve student loyalty. The focus on equity and inclusion within the plans of the USR can have an important function to strengthen the institutional image, generating a good perception among students and in the community. In this sense, USR is recognized as a fundamental element for the construction of an inclusive university identity that is committed to social development.

On the basis of the research of Espitia Cubillos et al. (2020) in the Colombian sector, which also stated that ethical and sustainable principles are important in terms of institutional image, the research data indicate that the U.S.R. has direct implications for trust and credibility around the university. In fact, although the study subjects expressed a positive assessment of the specific USR programs, it is necessary to ensure that particular forms of inclusion of ethical and sustainable principles that affect external perception are visible. These principles have their relevance throughout the realization of the UAR, but they are also important in the process of implementing an institutional image consolidated over time, which in turn strengthens the link of the university with its graduates and with the community.

Finally, the findings of Venero Vásquez and Puente de la Vega Aparicio (2022) in their research on the perception of USR at the National University of San Antonio Abad in Cusco revealed a moderate appreciation of USR, especially in the areas of management and innovation. These results are consistent with the findings of this study, which also identified areas for improvement in the university's connection with local and regional organizations. Although the university is recognized as a potential ally for these organizations, there is still work to be done in terms of strengthening collaboration and innovation in institutional management. This aspect should be prioritized to improve both the implementation of USR and the perception of the institutional image.

CONCLUSIONS

The research carried out clearly highlights the relationship between USR and institutional image at a public university. The research confirmed that USR actions are directly related to the image that the community outside the university has of it. This finding is highly relevant, as it indicates that USR not only impacts social welfare but is also important in building a positive reputation for the institution, which can be reflected in its positioning and recognition in the educational and social fields.

Among the dimensions studied, social awareness and commitment were considered the most influential on institutional image, confirming that actions aimed at improving the quality of life of communities and promoting social participation are highly valued. On the other hand, sustainability and the environment, although also highly valued, showed some areas where the university could improve to make its efforts in this dimension even more visible. Similarly, the dimension of inclusion and equity was clearly seen as a central and characteristic element of the university and its facilities, but the need to promote and strengthen inclusive policies to achieve greater impact was also evident.

On the basis of these results, a series of recommendations can be made that could contribute to both the implementation and perception of USR actions. First, we suggest that the university strengthen its communication strategies around USR practices, as they should be more easily understood by all members of the university community and the external community. Similarly, strengthening the dimension of inclusion and equity with programs that promote a richer and more effective integration of students from different backgrounds, such as mentorship programs for underrepresented students, workshops on intercultural understanding, and initiatives that promote gender equity in student leadership roles, exemplify how inclusion and equity are applied in practice in Peruvian public universities, would be beneficial.

Similarly, the university could consider implementing more effective communication strategies to make its USR achievements more visible; improving communication channels is important for enabling students and the rest of the external community to have a better understanding and appreciation of the results obtained by the university in this area.

In addition, these results can be framed within global agendas such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 4 (quality education), Goal 10 (reduced inequalities), and Goal 17 (partnerships for goals). Similarly, they align with UNESCO's recommendations, which emphasize the responsibility of higher education institutions to foster ethical governance, sustainability, and inclusive development. Positioning USR within these frameworks not only strengthens its national relevance but also highlights its contribution to addressing global educational and social challenges.

With respect to future research, it is pertinent to raise some questions that may continue to guide the study of the possible relationship between USR and institutional image. In this regard, it could be interesting to delve into how the image of USR has an impact on the satisfaction and sense of belonging of the student body or even how USR strategies can influence the relationships that may exist between the university, graduates, and companies or to conduct studies that explore how USR actions can impact the university's international positioning.

While the value of the results of this research is recognized, limitations imposed by the research itself were also considered. First, the scope of the sample was limited to a single public university; therefore, the generalizability of its results to other higher education institutions is also limited. Studies should be conducted in different contexts and at different types of universities (public or private) located in different areas. Furthermore, the study was cross-sectional in nature; thus, it was not possible to track the evolution of the relationship between USR and institutional image. Longitudinal follow-up would provide a more in-depth understanding of the impact of USR actions.

Finally, although an attempt was made to develop a representative sample, respondents' perceptions may have been affected by subjective biases. For future research, we believe that mixed methods combining surveys with qualitative interview methods could be incorporated to provide a richer, more complete, or more nuanced perspective on the perceptions of students or other key stakeholders in relation to USR.

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Manuscript submitted: July 23, 2025

Manuscript revised: August 20, 2025

Accepted for publication: October 6, 2025
