

Corporate Social Responsibility and competitiveness of a Peruvian agro-exporting company in an emerging economy

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Abstract- *The general objective of the research was to establish the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the competitiveness of an agro-exporting company in Piura in the year 2024. A quantitative approach was used, applied type, correlational level, non-experimental and cross-sectional design; a survey was conducted using a questionnaire as an instrument to the final population of 52 workers of the company. The results indicated a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation between the CSR and competitiveness variables, with a Spearman's Rho coefficient of 0.640, with a bilateral significance of less than 0.001. Thus, it was concluded that, as CSR practices increased in the economic, social and environmental areas, the company's competitiveness also increased, although not proportionally.*

Keywords-- *Social responsibility, competitiveness, sustainable development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the current context, international markets are constantly evolving and there is increasing concern, both from governments and consumers, for environmental and social issues, forcing exporting companies to take responsible measures to manage in a sustainable manner and at the same time maintain their competitive position in the global market. For this reason, the incorporation of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) exercises is currently presented as an essential resource to demonstrate their commitment to the community where they carry out their activities, advocating respect and care for both the environment and society [1].

At the international level, it has been shown that the adoption of CSR strategies contributes to improving the competitive position of companies by being considered as a generator of opportunities, obtaining benefits such as the development of a positive image, a solid reputation, effectiveness in reducing operating costs and a tangible increase in labor efficiency. In addition, it was noted that the United States and Europe seek to do business with exporting companies capable of demonstrating that their products come from production programs aligned with CSR certifications, and that these consumers are also likely to pay a higher amount for products from companies that embrace social responsibility [2].

Although CSR has been gaining in recent times, as different companies have become aware of these principles, there is still a gap between the recognition of the importance of

CSR and the effective implementation of concrete strategies by Peruvian companies. This was evidenced in the study conducted by Global Research Marketing in 2016, that globally, 77% of executives consider the performance of CSR programs as excellent. However, in the case of Peru, the situation contrasts, where 62% of executives rate it as fair and 31% perceive it as good. Furthermore, despite the increase in executives' concern for CSR, 34% of companies allocate less than 1% of their budget to this initiative [3].

From a national perspective, agroexports in Peru emerge as a crucial pillar of the economy. In 2022, exports from this sector reached the significant figure of US \$9 807million, representing an increase of 12.3% over last year. In addition, more than 2,700 Peruvian agricultural export companies reported sales, so it is essential to highlight the business diversity present in this area, ranging from large multinationals to medium-sized and smaller ones [4].

Therefore, in view of the fundamental role played by these companies in the Peruvian industry, it is vital to explore how CSR is related to the competitiveness of agro-exporting companies in Peru. According to the above, the question arises to the general problem: What is the relationship between Corporate Social Responsibility and the competitiveness of a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024?

To help solve the problem, the general objective was established as: to establish the relationship between CSR and the competitiveness of a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024. And the following specific objectives were derived: 1) to analyze the relationship between the economic aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024; 2) to examine the relationship between the social aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024; and 3) to establish the relationship between the environmental aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024.

The research is justified on the grounds that, through a rigorous approach to data collection and analysis, the findings obtained will allow a better understanding of the relationship between CSR practices and competitiveness in the company

studied. In addition, it will contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence on this relationship in the specific context of agro-exporting companies. It is hoped that the results will serve as a basis for future studies in the area.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CSR is an important business strategy, capable of generating benefits for both organizations and the community. Companies that integrate CSR into their business model can expect improved long-term financial performance, enhanced reputation, increased ability to attract and retain talent, reduced operating costs, improved access to key resources and competitive advantages [5], [6], [7].

Similarly, those companies that adopt CSR strategies tend to improve their competitive performance, either through a better working environment, greater sustainability or better economic results, as well as opening up new business opportunities. Therefore, CSR acts as a driver of competitiveness by generating a positive impact on several strategic aspects of the organization [1], [8], [9].

Furthermore, CSR goes beyond being a voluntary choice, being motivated by consumer demand, the imperative need for sustainability and the pressure of international markets. Thus, the implementation of CSR in agribusiness is not a total solution to the challenges between companies and society, but needs to be addressed in a broad context that includes business strategies and organizational culture [10].

With regard to the theories underpinning this research, three main theories stand out in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

Elkington's triple bottom line theory [11], which states that economic, social and environmental aspects are interconnected, and companies seeking to be socially responsible must consider and balance these factors when implementing their business principles and strategies.

Carroll's pyramid theory [12], which classifies the different responsibilities of companies in a hierarchical model, implying that a company should generate profits, adhere to laws, behave ethically and act as a responsible corporate citizen.

The theory of Corporate Social Responsibility guidelines of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) [13], to guide the practices and strategies of companies in their dedication to the community and the protection of the environment.

Due to the nature of this study, Elkington's triple bottom line theory has been chosen as the main frame of reference, as it encompasses the dimensions present in the other theories.

Subsequently, the different theories within the framework of competitiveness are presented.

Porter's theory of generic strategies [14], which are business tools help organizations to gain competitive advantages, stand out from their competitors and consolidate in their sector, which contributes to their extension of their life cycle in the industry.

The theory of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) business competitiveness map [15], in which all areas of the company are considered equally, which facilitates obtaining results that reflect the performance of each one and its contribution to the overall competitiveness of the organization.

Porter's diamond model theory [16], which evaluates the external competitive environment of a company, considering rivals, business partners and innovations.

Likewise, the research is based on the theory of generic strategies, since it provides a more strategic perspective on competitiveness.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Type and design of research

An applied type of research was carried out, using existing knowledge and methods to address the problem posed. A quantitative approach was adopted, using numerical data and statistical methods to measure the variables and analyze them statistically.

With a non-experimental design, the variables were observed without any alteration. The study was cross-sectional, since data collection and measurement was carried out at a single moment in time.

At the correlational level, the research focused on establishing the relationship between variables, analyzing how a change in one variable may be associated with variations in another related variable.

B. Variables and operationalization

The first variable was corporate social responsibility, understood as the balance between the economic objectives of the company and its responsibility to generate a favorable impact on society and the natural environment; through the commitment to operate in a sustainable manner interested [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22], [23].

The dimensions of CSR include: (1) economic, (2) social, (3) environmental.

The second variable was competitiveness, defined as the degree to which both products and services of a company stand out in comparison with those offered by its competitors, giving them an advantage that allows them to remain in the market consistently [24], [25], [26], [27], [28], [29].

Competitiveness is analyzed in three dimensions: (1) cost leadership, (2) product differentiation, (3) focus.

C. Population, sample and sampling

The population consisted of 52 workers from the Piura agroexport company. They were selected based on criteria such as being registered on the company's payroll, working at the Piura headquarters, having received CSR training or participated in sustainability projects, having more than three years of seniority in the company, occupying an administrative position with decision-making capacity, having higher academic training in areas such as administration, business

management and sustainability, and finally, being willing to participate.

Census sampling was chosen because the population is small and easily accessible, which made it possible to obtain accurate data from all members of the population.

D. Data collection techniques and instruments

The data collection technique was the survey with its characteristic instrument, the questionnaire, composed of 29 statements on a 5-point Likert scale.

For the reliability of the statements by means of a pilot test and Cronbach's Alpha, a reliability of 0.851 and 0.793 was obtained for the CSR and greenwashing variable, respectively. In addition, the questionnaire was validated by the judgment of 4 experts.

The technique used for data collection was the survey, using a questionnaire with 28 questions. The reliability of the statements was evaluated through a pilot test and Cronbach's Alpha, resulting in coefficients of 0.807 for the CSR variable and 0.823 for competitiveness. In addition, the questionnaire was validated with the judgment of three experts.

IV. RESULTS

The general objective of the research was to establish the relationship between CSR and the competitiveness of a Peruvian agroexport company, Piura - 2024. Two hypotheses were proposed:

H0: CSR is not significantly related to the competitiveness of a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024.

Ha: CSR is significantly related to the competitiveness of a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024.

The results, presented in Table 1, show a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation of 0.640, with a significance level of less than 0.001. This finding led to the acceptance of Ha and the rejection of H0. It was interpreted that as CSR practices in the economic, social and environmental spheres increase, so does the company's competitiveness, reflecting a direct, albeit moderate, relationship, meaning that the change in one variable does not occur in the same proportion as in the other.

TABLE 1
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

			Corporate Social Responsibility	Competitiveness
Spearman's Rho	Corporate Social Responsibility	Correlation coefficient	1.000	.640**
		Sig. (bilateral)	.	<.001
		N	52	52
	Competitiveness	Correlation coefficient	.640**	1.000
		Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	.
		N	52	52

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

If the company shows a moderate positive correlation between corporate social responsibility and competitiveness, this indicates that the company prioritizes aspects such as product excellence, labor welfare, environmental sustainability and regulatory compliance, achieving better results in terms of efficiency, innovation, differentiation and market positioning.

To address the first specific objective: to analyze the relationship between the economic aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agroexporting company, Piura - 2024, the null hypothesis (H0) was formulated: There is no significant relationship between the economic aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agroexporting company, Piura - 2024. On the other hand, the alternative hypothesis (Ha): There is a significant relationship between the economic aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agroexport company, Piura - 2024.

The results obtained, presented in Table 2, revealed a moderate and statistically significant positive correlation, with a correlation coefficient of 0.604 and a significance level of less than 0.01. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis (Ha) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected.

TABLE 2
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ECONOMIC CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

			Economic CSR	Competitiveness
Spearman's Rho	Economic CSR	Correlation coefficient	1.000	.604**
		Sig. (bilateral)	.	<.001
		N	52	52
	Competitiveness	Correlation coefficient	.604**	1.000
		Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	.
		N	52	52

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

This means that as CSR economic practices increased, in terms of implementation of quality controls and investment in innovation, there was also an improvement in the company's competitiveness, and vice versa. Therefore, the fact that the company optimizes its production processes and works together with its suppliers in the value chain could be influencing cost reduction and improved efficiency, which has a direct impact on competitiveness.

For the second specific objective: to examine the relationship between the social aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024, two hypotheses were proposed: the null hypothesis (H0): there is no significant relationship between the social aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024, and the alternative hypothesis (Ha): there is a significant relationship between the social aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024. The results obtained, shown in Table 3, registered a moderate and significant positive correlation between social responsibility and competitiveness, with a correlation coefficient of 0.602 and

a significance level of less than 0.01. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis (Ha) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected, indicating that the relationship between these two variables is statistically significant and unlikely to be accidental.

TABLE 3
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

			Social CSR	Competitiveness
Spearman's Rho	Social CSR	Correlation coefficient	1.000	.602**
		Sig. (bilateral)	.	<.001
		N	52	52
	Competitiveness	Correlation coefficient	.602**	1.000
		Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	.
		N	52	52

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

An increase in their ability to compete in the marketplace was experienced as CSR practices increase, in other words, when the company has good treatment of shareholders, transparency of management, quick response to customer needs, selection of suppliers committed to sustainable practices and safe working conditions for its employees. Thus, increased investment in training and professional development programs for employees has not only improved internal motivation and efficiency, but has also translated into better practices that impact competitiveness.

For specific objective 3: to establish the relationship between the environmental aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024, the null hypothesis (H0): there is no significant relationship between the environmental aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024, while the alternate hypothesis (Ha): there is a significant relationship between the environmental aspect and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024.

The results, presented in Table 4, showed a moderate and significant positive correlation between the two variables, with a correlation coefficient of 0.588 and a significance level of less than 0.001.

With these results, the alternate hypothesis (Ha) was accepted and the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected, concluding that the observed relationship is statistically significant, suggesting that it is unlikely that this correlation occurred by chance.

TABLE 4
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ECONOMIC CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

			Environmental CSR	Competitiveness
Spearman's Rho	Environmental CSR	Correlation coefficient	1.000	.588**
		Sig. (bilateral)	.	<.001
		N	52	52
	Competitiveness	Correlation coefficient	.588**	1.000

	Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	.
	N	52	52

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (bilateral).

An increase in its competitive capacity was observed as environmental CSR practices increased through the monitoring of the impact of its operations, the implementation of energy saving actions, and the rapid response to environmental incidents. This is due to the company's rapid response to environmental incidents and support for conservation initiatives, which have not only strengthened the company's brand image, but also positioned it favorably with customers, who increasingly value sustainable practices.

IV. DISCUSSION

The study showed a moderate positive correlation (coefficient of 0.640) between Corporate Social Responsibility and the competitiveness of a Peruvian agroexporting company, which is statistically significant, indicating that a greater commitment to the economic, social and environmental dimensions of CSR contributes to improving business competitiveness, although not proportionally. The findings are consistent with previous research [8], where it was observed that companies that implement CSR practices tend to gain competitive advantages, especially in terms of brand perception and positioning. Through responsible initiatives, companies not only meet ethical and sustainable standards, but also achieve better market performance.

On the other hand, additional research has also confirmed that CSR has a positive influence on aspects such as market and environmental orientation, generating greater business competitiveness and sustainability [6]. In these cases, the adoption of ethical policies, the development of personnel skills and the promotion of safe working conditions strengthen both competitiveness and the perception of corporate commitment.

In contrast, other studies have identified an inverse relationship between CSR evaluation and competitiveness. For example, a negative correlation was observed, suggesting that higher CSR scores are associated with lower financial performance or market positioning [7]. This research highlights that cultural and economic factors can have a greater impact on competitiveness, depending on the context and region of study.

In relation to the first specific objective, a moderate positive correlation was identified between the economic aspect of CSR and competitiveness, highlighting that economic responsibility not only seeks to optimize costs and generate good financial results, but also to strengthen the value chain through responsible practices. This approach includes actions such as the implementation of quality controls and collaboration with suppliers to improve efficiency, which has a favorable impact on the company's competitiveness.

Companies in more developed environments tend to benefit significantly due to factors such as greater financial capacity and a more favorable business context [9], thus finding a stronger relationship between the economic aspect of CSR

and competitiveness. This picture highlights that economically responsible activities not only have a positive impact on financial performance, but also improve the perception of transparency and corporate reputation, key elements for long-term success.

In reference to the second specific objective, a moderate positive correlation was identified between the social aspect of CSR and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, indicating that an increase in the company's social initiatives is linked to an improvement in its competitiveness, although not in equivalent proportions. This suggests that actions such as strengthening the welfare of employees, promoting transparency at management levels and commitment to suppliers and clients can contribute to a better competitive position, although the impact generated is not completely uniform.

Studies based on stakeholder theory underline the importance of considering employees, customers and other stakeholders as key factors in achieving business competitiveness. Among the factors identified as determinants for successful strategic planning are the constant training of human talent, the quality of the products and services offered, and effective personnel management [5].

With regard to the third specific objective, aimed at analyzing the relationship between the environmental aspect of CSR and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, a positive correlation was identified between the two variables, indicating that a greater commitment to environmental practices is associated with an increase in competitiveness, although not proportionally.

International exporting companies integrate environmental sustainability strategies as part of their CSR to improve their competitive position. These strategies, driven by increasing pressure from governments and markets in response to global environmental crises, have become a priority for organizations seeking to remain relevant in demanding markets [1]. While Europe and Asia prioritize the environmental dimension, in Latin America more attention is given to the social aspects of CSR.

On the other hand, responsible environmental practices not only mitigate risks and reduce operating costs, but also strengthen market confidence in the brand, generating a positive impact on long-term competitiveness [10]. This trend is particularly visible in markets where consumers value sustainable products, which adds distinctive value to companies and allows them to consolidate their competitive position. And it is noted that consumer preference for products produced under responsible practices drives companies to align their environmental strategies with market demands.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The general objective was achieved by identifying a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship between the variables of corporate social responsibility and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura -

2024, with a correlation coefficient of 0.640. These results show that as the company intensifies its CSR practices in the economic, social and environmental areas, so does its competitiveness, although this increase does not occur proportionally.

Specific objective 1 was met by determining that there is a moderate and statistically significant positive relationship between economic responsibility and competitiveness in a Peruvian agroexport company, Piura - 2024, with a correlation coefficient of 0.604.

Specific objective 2 was also achieved, as a moderate and significant positive relationship was found between social responsibility and competitiveness in a Peruvian agro-exporting company, Piura - 2024, with a correlation coefficient of 0.602.

Finally, specific objective 3 allowed us to determine a significant moderate positive relationship between environmental responsibility and competitiveness in a Peruvian agroexport company, Piura - 2024, with a correlation coefficient of 0.588.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the agro-exporting company implement a long-term Corporate Social Responsibility strategic plan, with a fixed allocation of profits for social and environmental initiatives, which will strengthen its competitiveness and reputation [8].

To improve its image and competitiveness, the company should focus on transparency and communication of its CSR practices, as this generates trust and reinforces external perception [30].

In future research, it is recommended that a longitudinal approach be adopted to assess the evolution of CSR and competitiveness over time, complemented by qualitative methods to obtain a more detailed view [31].

It is valuable to conduct comparative studies across sectors to understand how CSR strategies affect competitiveness in different industries, identifying best practices and challenges [32].

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