



Does Leadership influence University Social Responsibility and Its' Image...?

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Abstract: *The role of universities has been manifested from excellent education to national economic growth and social contribution for community development. This study aims to focus on role of transformational leadership in enhancing university social responsibility (USR) and improve university reputation among stakeholders. This is a cross sectional quantitative study to measure the relationship among variables. Transformational leadership (TL), USR and university image significantly impact each other. Moreover, university image partially mediate the association between TL and USR. It has recommended that TL positively affects multiple dimensions of USR, including ethical governance, community engagement, sustainability initiatives and stakeholder accountability. Moreover, university social responsible practices contribute to enhance university image among internal and external stakeholders. This Paper will be a a great contribution in the existing literature on the subject.*

Keywords: *Transformational Leadership, University Social responsibility, Image, Students engagement.*

Introduction

Globalization and educational revolution have altered the landscape of university level education, asking universities to innovate and diversify educational disciplines to stay relevant in this evolving world (Alshuwaikhat & Abubakar, 2008; Butt & Rehman, 2010). Due to emergence of global economy, demand from higher education institutions (HEIs) have been manifested from excellent education to national economic growth through research, innovation and social responsibility projects (Gebreeyessus et al., 2019; Haden, Oyler, & Humphreys, 2009). These testaments have led universities to reconsider their roles in society and make a deliberate effort to create sustainable environment. In the current competitive educational environment, HEIs success depends upon student's engagement and institutional image (Rajput, 2022; Ali & Ahmed, 2021). Driving force of this transformation is transformational leadership, which lay emphasis on

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inspirational change, innovation and alignment of institutional goals with societal needs (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leader tie University Social Responsibility (USR) into the institutional fabric and work beyond academic excellence to resolve ethical, social and environmental issues of the community (Rajput, 2022; Barge, 2019). The leadership approach not only improves the reputation but also develop the culture of inclusive social responsibility in the university. It also encourages student's engagement for success of the university. Engaged students are more likely to perform better academically, participate in social activities and contribute to the community, thus certainly influencing the image (Ali & Ahmed, 2021; Huang & Lee, 2012).

Institutional image is referred to the general perception of a university, does have influence of leadership, educational quality, social responsibility and student's engagement (Osman & Saputra, 2019). It's an integral component of student's satisfaction, attract new comers, secure funds and ensure sustainability. Positive university image serves as a catalyst for competitive edge in educational paradigm (Marić et al., 2018). Transformational leadership ensures institutional image, student's satisfaction and engagement towards USR (Ball, 2003). Moreover, universities that vigorously integrate University Social Responsibility (USR) into their core values are more socially accountable and build positive image of the university (Barge, 2019). Rapid expansion has intensified importance of higher education and relationship mechanism of variables such as leadership, social responsibility and student's engagement becomes imperative for HEIs, especially in emerging economies like Pakistan (Haque, 2014; Osman & Saputra, 2019). Private universities have witnessed extensive growth in last decades, face immense pressure for quality education and their role in the society (Osman & Saputra, 2019). This study will explore student's satisfaction and commitment for institutional success and mediating role of university image among leadership and USR In the context of higher education sector of Pakistan (Ali & Ahmed, 2021; Skrbinek & Dermal, 2019).

The present study aims to fill this gap by investigating how transformational leadership influence University Social Responsibility (USR) and its image. This study will contribute in the domain of available literature about interplay of variables like institutional image, leadership and USR. (Alves & Raposo,

2010; Brown & Mazzarol, 2009). The research questions of this study are as under:-

RQ 1. How do the contextual factors of transformational leadership and University Social Responsibility (USR) enhance student's engagement in the society and build institutional image?

RQ 2. Does institutional image mediate relationship among transformational leadership and USR?

By answering these questions, the study proposes significant insights for higher education practitioners and policymakers, providing guidance on how to enhance student's engagement, improve institutional image and cultivate culture of social responsibility within HEIs. The findings of this study will provide practical framework to align leadership and USR practices to create long-term institutional success in an increasingly competitive world. This research holds particular relevance for Public and Private sector universities of Pakistan (Arambewela & Hall, 2009).

Literature Review

The quality of higher education is a construct that leads to new university trends, technological disruptions and expectations of stakeholders (Abbas, 2020; Singh & Jasial, 2021). In this preview, passed out graduates are the outputs of higher education institutions (HEIs), acts as a benchmark for quality and a strategic tool of competitive positioning. Moreover, quality parameters including profile of teachers, qualification and pedagogical expertise play a distinct role in shaping students' academic excellence and perception of institutional prestige (Jansen in de Wal et al., 2014; Rajabalee & Santally, 2021). A well-structured curriculum serves as roadmap that aligns content with desired outcomes and industry relevance (Lagoe et al., 2023; Jeng et al., 2019). Research capacity, sustainable infrastructure, availability of funds and collaboration, is imperative for nurturing a culture of innovation (Asif et al., 2020). Economic value means affordability of education, access to scholarships and institutional budgeting for societal welfare (Sangiumvibool & Chonglertham, 2016; Ali & Ahmed, 2021). Institutional facilities starting from libraries and smart classrooms to recreational areas augment the overall learning environment (Mahmood et al., 2014; Enache et al., 2011). Finally, student centric policies and healthy management support streamline administrative processes and strengthen institutional trust (Seyfried & Ansmann, 2017; Raza et al., 2022).

This study is based on Equity Theory, conceptualized by John Stacey Adams (1963). The concept involves around fairness of individuals input-to-output ratio by comparing it with others, what they have received. It also proposes that when a mismatch is found between what individuals contribute and what they receive, they try to restore fairness through their attitudes and efforts. In the context of university education, students weigh whether the quality and value of services justify the time, energy and financial resources they utilize (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988; Grigoroudis & Siskos, 2010). When expectations meet perceived service quality, satisfaction then it enhances loyalty. On the other hand if discrepancies occur, dissatisfaction and image degradation leads to low trust (Yuan et al., 2010).

Research has shown that institutional image serve as a good mediator among service quality and satisfaction of students (Alves & Raposo, 2010; Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001). Institutional image contains both tangible and intangible factors. A positive image enhances student satisfaction and drives loyalty (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009). Moreover, many scholars agreed that a strong institutional image precedes satisfaction and act as a lens through which service quality is interpreted (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998; Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007).

In light of insights of above literature, the proposed research model postulates that Transformational leadership dimensions exert direct and indirect effects on USR via institutional image. Thus, this research contributes to both academic theory and practical strategy by highlighting how HEIs can leverage TL to cultivate a robust institutional image and ultimately enhance student satisfaction in a sustainable manner.

Transformational Leadership

In the landscape of higher education, transformational leadership (TL) has become need of the time to shape socially responsible universities. Transformational leaders, through their visionary approach empower academic community to embrace innovation, ethical culture and long term societal goals. They embed University Social Responsibility (USR) into institutional strategies by collaboration, inclusiveness and community engagement, unlike transactional leaders who focus on routine compliance only (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Eisenbeiss et al., 2008). Moreover, transformational leaders promote culture of purpose and strengthen institutional responsiveness towards society (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

University Social Responsibility means that ethical and proactive role of universities in contributing to the well being of internal and external

stakeholders; those are students, faculty, community and environment (Vallaes, 2014). It encompasses inclusive education, sustainability, access to resources, community service and socially applicable research (Lozano, 2006; Pérez-López et al., 2014). Transformational leadership provides the base for USR by cultivating shared values and collective sense of mission. Institutions driven by TL style are vibrant to institutionalize practices that reflect care, responsibility and accountability towards society.

Ethical leadership builds positive university image and implement socially responsible initiatives with transparency (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001; Arpan et al., 2003). Transformational leaders align vision with impactful actions and enhance institutional credibility and trust to improve internal and external perception of the university.

Relationship between Transformational Leadership and University Social Responsibility

In recent times, higher education institutions (HEIs) are facing massive pressure to exhibit not only academic excellence but also social impact and student's participation for the uplift of society. Therefore, Transformational Leadership (TL) has become a decisive element and influence universities to shape their identity and responsibility toward society. They inspire academic communities by articulating a convincing vision, signifying genuine concern for innovation and commitment towards a shared mission (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Gumus et al., 2018). This leadership style is very much effective in academic settings where creativity, autonomy and social awareness is the major concern of the leader (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

One of the main areas where transformational leadership demonstrates its influence is through the support of University Social Responsibility (USR). USR broaden traditional academic boundaries through ethical, social and environmental responsibilities of HEIs. Leader who gives value to USR embed equity, sustainability and civic engagement into the institutional culture (Vallaes, 2014; Sneddon et al., 2020). These leaders cultivate environments where students are encouraged to participate in addressing community challenges, thereby achieving sense of agency and engagement.

Student engagement refers to the level of student's emotional, cognitive and behavioral involvement in academic and societal activities (Kahu, 2013). Engaged students are always motivated, perform better and contribute to their communities (Fredricks et al., 2004; Trowler, 2010). Transformational leadership ensures purpose driven institutional environment and enable students to connect with real world challenges. Hence, socially responsible

actions of universities are community outreach, environmental ownership and inclusive sustainable policies for deeper sense of belonging and commitment (Dahan & Senol, 2012).

Moreover, positive institutional image reinforced by responsible practices and ethical leadership always develop trust, loyalty and pride in their institution (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001). A progressive, inclusive and socially conscious university produces engaged learners (Arpan et al., 2003; Sultan & Wong, 2012). Based on the discussion, the hypotheses are as under:-

H1: TL is positively associated with USR and Student's engagement.

H2: TL is positively associated with University image.

Relationship between Institutional Image and University Social Responsibility

Institutional image plays a key role in shaping students' perceptions and overall satisfaction in the university settings. When students perceive image positively whether through its reputation, social efforts or leadership traits, they report higher level of satisfaction in the university (Douglas et al., 2006; Beerli Palacio et al., 2002). Universities with strong image provides quality education and inclusive innovative environment, both of them contribute to student's satisfaction (Liu et al., 2011).

Research in worldwide context has shown that institutional image is linked critically with student's satisfaction. Moreover, Brown and Mazzarol (2009) found that students of Australia and UK universities were more satisfied when they viewed reputation and public standing of their institution positively. Similarly, Ravindran and Kalpana (2012) also stated that student's satisfaction and happiness in India also depends upon the image of the institution. Their research has also explored that emotional and functional components of the university image, e.g academic prestige, ethical leadership and social initiatives play an important role in students' overall satisfaction.

The concept of university image is not restricted to a perception of the institution; rather, it embodies the trust in the institutional values, leadership and engagement in societal concerns. A positive university image, influenced by TL and a strong commitment to USR, leads to sense of pride and belonging among stakeholders. This also strengthens their affiliation with the institution and leads to greater satisfaction (Nguyen & LeBlanc, 2001). When students see their university socially well managed, they consider their educational

investment is aligned with true north. Following hypotheses has been developed:-

H3: A positive university image is significantly associated with USR and student's satisfaction.

University Image as a Mediator

University image has been often explored as a mediating variable in various fields of research, especially in the setting of higher education where its influence bridges gaps between the different variables. In education sector, the role of university image is crucial as it creates perception, impact and engagement. Moreover, Hung and Li (2009) has explored how these techniques could encourage parental involvement in children's education, with school image as a mediator between marketing and parent's loyalty. Similarly, the role of institutional image has been studied in various other walks of life, such as health care sector, where Faria and Mendes (2013) examined the mediating effect of organizational image on patient's satisfaction. These studies have revealed that institutional image serves as a key connection in enhancing overall customer's satisfaction and contentment.

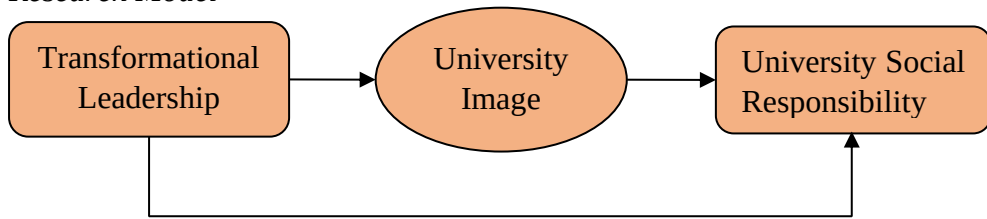
In the paradigm of higher education, Osman and Saputra (2019) described association among institutional image and satisfaction of students, highlighting the mediating role that image plays in shaping student's perceptions. This line of research has been extended in various educational settings, including Malaysian higher education, where Mohammed et al. (2024) utilized different models to explore the role of institutional image with service quality and student's loyalty. Hwang and Choi (2019) further investigated this concept in South Korea, finding that image mediates the relationship and influence behavioral intention and student's retention.

Additionally, studies in the realm of technical and vocational education have also supported the mediating role of corporate institutional image (Hassan et al, 2019; Daud et al, 2020).

In the case of Pakistan higher education (HEC), where there is a paucity of comprehensive empirical studies on TL and USR, this study aims to address gaps by investigating how various factors affect each other with the mediation of university image. Basing on the above literature, this study proposes the following hypotheses as mediating role of university image:-

H4: University image mediates the relationship between TL and USR.

Figure 1
Research Model



Source(s): Developed by the Researcher

Research Methodology

This is a cross sectional quantitative study utilizing survey questionnaire. The survey was carried out physically and online using Google forms. The primary data for this study was collected from university administration, teachers and students in Pakistan, targeting a diverse range of respondents from public and private sector universities. To reach the targeted respondents online, the survey link was also sent using a convenience sampling technique. This sampling method was applied because the study aimed to get empirical analysis of universities about interplay of transformational leadership, university social responsibility (USR), student's engagement and the mediating role of university image. Convenience sampling is considered appropriate in such type of studies where access to specific respondents is feasible with time constraints (Speak et al., 2018). While distributing the questionnaire link online and physically, the objectives of the study were explained to the potential respondents. It was ensured to respondents that transparency, confidentiality and anonymity of their responses will be kept at all cost. Before proceeding with the full survey distribution, the researcher consulted two professional researchers regarding the objectives and questionnaire design. Hence, necessary adjustments based on their feedback were made for accuracy.

A pilot survey was conducted with 30 respondents to judge the reliability of the variables. The value of Cronbach alpha was calculated to check the reliability of the items, with a threshold value of 0.70 or more (Cronbach, 1951; Sekaran and Bougie, 2016; Hair et al., 1998). Items with low reliability were revised. The then, full survey was administered after deliberate screening. Incomplete and conflicting responses were discarded to ensure reliability.

Basing on the conclusions of pilot study, the minimum sample size was determined on the recommendations of Bentler and Chou (1987) and Wolf et al. (2013), who has suggested a minimum of five respondents per item. Given the number of items in the constructs, the minimum sample size was calculated to be 165. Moreover, following Nunnally's (1967) rule of thumb of ten cases per indicator, the expected sample size was set at 325. Ultimately, the survey collected 350 responses. After cleaning of data and outlier detection using Mahalanobis distance (d^2) and Chi-square statistics (Tabachnick et al., 2007), 307 valid responses were kept for further analysis.

The demography of respondents is appended below in statistical Table 1. The majority of the participants were male (73%), and the largest age group range was between 20 and 24 years (57%). The respondents were fairly selected across educational levels from universities situated in Sind province of Pakistan, with 44% from undergraduate programs and 43% from graduate programs. Regarding institutional affiliation, 68% of respondents were from public universities, 32% from private universities.

Table 1:

Demographic Details (n = 307)

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	226	73.62%
	Female	81	26.38%
Age group	20–24 Years	178	57.98%
	25–29 Years	85	27.68%
	30–34 Years	27	8.79%
	35–39 Years	11	3.58%
	Above 40 Years	6	1.95%
Respondents Educational Level	Undergraduate	137	44.63%
	Postgraduate	134	43.65%
	Higher degrees of research	36	11.73%
Nature of Institutions	Public	209	68.08%
	Private	98	31.92%

Measurement and Questionnaire

All construct measurements of this study were taken from existing literature after necessary modifications to meet the present research needs. The survey questions were framed on the basis of five point Likert scale and relevancy of

questions were ensured with research objectives of the study. The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

Number I: This section includes five questions related to the demographic data of the respondents.

Number II: This section contains main variables of the study, where the appropriate constructs were discussed. For each construct, the measurement items were adapted after modification for this study from available research as follows:-

Table 2:

Measure the Relevant Constructs

Domain	Adopted From
Transformational Leadership	Burns (1978), Bass & Avolio (1994), Avolio & Bass (2004), Leithwood & Jantzi (2000) and Riggio (2012)
USR	Vallaey's (2014), Larrán Jorge et al. (2016), Dima. (2013), Ramos-Monge (2017) and Osman and Saputra (2019)
University Image	Alessandri et al (2006), Arpan et al (2003), Nguyen & LeBlanc (2001), Palacio (2002) and Helgesen & Nasset (2007)

The researcher modified multiple items from existing literature in order to measure the relevant constructs of this study, relatively less number of items but most authenticated were considered.

This study initially included 41 items from various sources, a total of 34 items were kept after calculating their factor loading values. Seven items were dropped due to lower factor loading values.

Statistical Analysis

On completion of data collection, the data was diagnosed and cleaned to eliminate irregularities. Additionally, demographic characteristics of the respondents were analyzed using SPSS 24 and AMOS 22 software. These tools were used to examine the measurement model, structural model, and mediation model as per guidelines provided by Hair et al, (2017).

Results

Measurement Model

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 22 to judge the psychometric properties of items. The modification indices were used. The modifications made in this study were consistent as recommended by Wang et al. (2014) and Hair et al. (2017). Moreover, it was suggested that covariance should be included between errors of items measuring the same construct. It is evident that all fit indices fall within their recommended thresholds, as outlined by Hair et al. (2017). The value chi-square (CMIN/df - 1.78) which is below the critical value of 3. The Goodness of Fit Index (GFI - 0.895), Normalized Fit Index (NFI - 0.991), Incremental Fit Index (IFI - 0.929), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI - 0.976) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI - 0.941) are all above the recommended threshold of 0.90, confirming a good model fit (Bentler & Bonett, 1980; McDonald & Marsh, 1990; Byrne et al., 1989). Additionally, the adjusted goodness of fit index, (AGFI - 0.85) is very close to the 0.90 cut-off value and “the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA - 0.051)”, which is also below the recommended threshold of 0.08. Apropos, the goodness of fit results depicts satisfactory fit and support the construct measures validity (Hair Jr et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2017; Browne & Cudeck, 1992).

The Analysis of Reliability and Validity

The validity and reliability, of the measurement model were calculated using different statistical techniques. Average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), inter-item correlations, square root of AVE, Tolerance values and variance inflation factor (VIF) are calculated in statistical table II.

The values of Cronbach alpha ranged from 0.90 to 0.93, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.70 suggested by Hair Jr et al. (2014). The CR values are between 0.90 to 0.94, which also surpass the greater than the threshold of 0.70. The results of this study meet the criteria for convergent validity, the model proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Hair et al. (2017). Therefore, convergent validity of exogenous and endogenous variable was also assessed and found factor loading greater than 0.50 as recommended Hair Jr et al. (2014) and Hair et al. (2017). The results of Cronbach's alpha and CR indicate that the constructs exhibit good reliability. Discriminant validity was also examined by comparing the square root of the AVE values with the inter construct correlations and results meet the criteria of discriminant validity.

Table 3:*Stats of Reliability and validity*

	Alpha	CR	AVE	TL	UI	USR	Tolerance	VIF
TL	0.93	0.94	0.78	0.88			0.39	2.52
UI	0.92	0.92	0.76	0.68	0.87		0.44	2.23
USR	0.90	0.90	0.70	0.67	0.70	0.84	0.42	2.32

Note: Model fit indices: CMIN/df = 1.78, GFI = 0.895, AGFI = 0.85, NFI = 0.991, IFI = 0.929, TLI = 0.976, CFI = 0.941, RMSEA = 0.051.

Furthermore, multi-collinearity was assessed by examining the VIF values. The results show that the VIF values are below the critical cut-off of 3, indicating that there are no multi-collinearity issues in the model (Happell & Gaskin, 2013; O'Brien, 2007; Marcoulides & Raykov, 2019). The Tolerance values further confirm the suitability of the model.

Hypothesis Testing

After assessing psychometric criteria for measurement model; then the researcher investigated relationships among inter constructs and hypothesized relationships. To assess the relationships, standardized estimates (β values), t value and p value were calculated (Byrne, 2001). The structural model explained 47% of the variance in TL and 56% of the variance in USR, which indicates that the model has reasonable predictive power.

Statistical summary of hypothesis results is shown in Table III. From the analysis, it was found that all hypotheses of this study were supported. The statistical findings are as follows:

- TL significantly enhance University image ($\beta = 0.34$, $t = 6.04$, $p < 0.001$).
- University image had a significant impact on USR ($\beta = 0.16$, $t = 2.79$, $p < 0.05$).
- TL had a positive and significant influence on USR ($\beta = 0.33$, $t = 5.77$, $p < 0.001$).

Mediation Analysis

Following the principles of Hayes (2009), mediating effect was investigated within the structural model. 5000 repetitions of boot strapping analysis were performed, with 307 sample size. Results of mediation are shown in table IV, which exhibit significant indirect effect of TL on USR via university image. It revealed percentile model with 95% confidence interval (CI) associated with the indirect effect and suggests the presence of partial mediation.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that TL has a direct impact on both the university image and USR. This aligns with the notion that the transformational leadership qualities of management team, teachers and students can significantly influence the reputation of higher education institutions (HEIs) and contribute to society for sustainable development. Therefore, teacher's training of ethical leadership, institutional image, USR and student satisfaction are highly interconnected. This result is almost consistent with a study conducted in Malaysia, which depicted that qualified faculty can enhance student's satisfaction and the overall image of the university (Ali et al., 2016).

Moreover, the study demonstrates that the university image of the university positively influence USR and enhance student's satisfaction. It brings innovative culture in the university. This finding is consistent with prior studies by Seyfried and Ansmann (2017) and Pratolo et al. (2020), which showed a positive relationship between university policies, student's satisfaction and institutional image. This outcome provides valuable insights for university administrators, suggesting that positive image can bring USR practices and recover stakeholder's satisfaction.

In addition to exploring the direct effects of these factors on USR, this study also examined the mediating effects of university image. The mediation model showed that university image mediates the relationship between TL and USR. Results depicted that university image partially mediates the relationship between TL and USR. This finding aligns with previous research by Osman et al. (2022), who found that corporate image mediates the relationship between corporate social responsibility and customer loyalty. Similarly, Chien and Chi (2019) demonstrated that corporate image mediates the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. In the context of education, Hassan et al. (2019) showed that institutional image partially mediates the relationship between service quality and student loyalty in Malaysian technical and vocational education institutions.

Table 4:

Hypothesis Analysis

Hypotheses Paths	Std. Estimate	Unstd. Estimate	t-Value	p-Value	Final Decision
TL → University image	0.34	0.26	6.04	0.000	Supported
University image → USR	0.16	0.12	2.79	0.005	Supported
TL → USR	0.33	0.21	5.77	0.000	Supported
Square of multiple correlations : R^2 TL ~ 0.47 USR ~ 0.56					

Table 5:*Bootstrapping analysis*

Variables	Estimate	SE	Z	Bootstrapping		Decision
TL Indirect effect on USR via UI				Percentile Model (95% CI)		
				Lower	Upper	
Mediating Effect	0.079	0.046	1.72	0.013	0.184	Partially Mediated

Conclusion

This study adopts a three-dimensional contextual framework to explore the influence of transformational leadership on university social responsibility (USR) and university image. The findings suggest that transformational leadership positively affects multiple dimensions of USR, including ethical governance, community engagement, sustainability initiatives and stakeholder accountability. These socially responsible practices contribute significantly to strengthen the university image among internal and external stakeholders. Moreover, the results indicate that transformational leadership also has a direct and substantial impact on institutional image, independent of USR. However, university image emerges as a mediating variable in the relationship between transformational leadership and USR, especially in areas related to stakeholder trust, institutional transparency and long term reputation. More importantly, while transformational leadership encourages USR initiatives and promote image, the effect of university image as a mediating variable also mediates partially. It indicates that an exogenous and endogenous variable has direct and indirect effects.

Theoretical Contributions

Leadership plays a key role in institutional values and public perception. This study contributes in the domain of literature while probing the effect of transformational leadership on university social responsibility (USR) and institutional image. This study places ethical leadership at the center of the institutional ecosystem and statistic results indicates that it significantly enhance both socially responsible practices and the reputation.

The study highlights positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and key components of USR, such as community engagement, social ethics, environmental initiatives and stakeholder's engagement. Furthermore, it demonstrates that transformational leadership directly influences the institutional image, reinforcing the notion that values-

driven leadership contributes not only to internal culture but also to external perceptions.

Importantly, the findings also reveal that university image serves bridges the relationship between transformational leadership and effectiveness of USR practices. This supports an integrated theoretical model, which suggests that a university's image is both a product of internal leadership and a mechanism through which social responsibility impacts stakeholder's trust. This research extends transformational leadership theory within the higher education framework and provides insight of USR and leadership behavior that aligns institutional goals with societal expectations.

Limitations and future research direction

The model of this study focused on examining the influence of transformational leadership on university social responsibility and institutional image, without including other potentially relevant variables such as employment support, internationalization, alumni engagement and academic environment. Moreover, it was a cross sectional study of Pakistan HEIs and hence it is suggested that longitudinal study in other countries be conducted to confirm the empirical results. Additionally, the study considered institutional image as a mediating variable, future research may explore other mediators such as service quality and sustainability.

Declarations

Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

The Study was presented in front of departmental ethical committee. It was agreed upon that ethical approval and consent to participate is not required for this study. It does not involve human or animals in such a way that necessitates ethical review.

Consent for Publication

The study does not contain any personal information and data of individuals which requires consent for publication. However, all authors have given their consent for publication of this manuscript.

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