
CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN FOREIGN TRADE OPERATING COMPANIES AS A CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTOR

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Summary

This article analyzes the role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in foreign trade operating companies and how it becomes a critical factor for competitive and sustainable success. It is based on a recent literature review (2020–2025) and a descriptive-analytical approach. Emerging trends are identified, such as the demand for transparency in the supply chain, sustainability, measurable impact, and corporate reputation. In addition, it examines how CSR contributes to reputation, talent retention, access to international markets, and resilience. It is concluded that integrating CSR as part of the strategic model strengthens the position of these companies in a complex and demanding global environment.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility, foreign trade, sustainability, competitive advantage, corporate reputation, business success.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the global environment has significantly deepened the interdependence between markets, generating new challenges for foreign trade operating companies, which now face not only economic and logistical demands, but also growing social and environmental demands. In this context, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved into a strategic dimension that is essential to achieve and maintain success in an increasingly complex competitive environment.

According to the Chamber of Commerce of La Libertad (2025), sustainability and CSR have become key factors for competitiveness in international trade, so companies must align themselves with environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria to effectively adapt to these new requirements (Ponce de León, 2025). Moreover, in a world marked by geopolitical volatility and trade uncertainty, sustainability is a key competitive advantage. Companies that integrate sustainability into their strategies achieve better risk management, generate value for their stakeholders and strengthen their resilience (Cinco Días, 2025).

On the other hand, and closely related to CSR, ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) performance has shown a positive correlation with staff engagement and satisfaction, which would strengthen the competitiveness of exporting companies (Wikipedia: ESG criteria, 2025)

It is also relevant to note that a recent study from the academic field shows that situations of uncertainty in trade policies stimulate companies to improve their performance in ESG criteria to maintain competitive advantages, also promoting sustainable innovation (Chen et al., 2025)

On a practical level, the 2025 Social Footprint Seres Map Report highlights that internationalised companies have achieved a tangible social impact – job creation, promotion of gender equality, talent retention, responsible purchasing, sustainable tourism – indicators that underline the effectiveness of CSR as a driver of success in foreign trade (Seres Foundation, 2025)

Likewise, current trends in CSR point to increasing demands in terms of transparency, impact measurement and effective action by consumers, employees, investors and governments, reinforcing the need for CSR to cease to be a partial practice and be deeply integrated into corporate strategy (Consultoría Responsable, 2025)

To navigate this dynamic environment, companies can rely on regulatory tools such as the **OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (2023 edition)**, which update recommendations for responsible business conduct, including aspects such as climate change, biodiversity, integrity and due diligence in supply chains (OECD, 2023)

In sum, this introduction underlines that CSR can no longer be conceived as a complement or an isolated activity. In the current international scenario, CSR emerges as a central component of the business model of foreign trade operating companies, key to differentiating themselves, increasing their legitimacy, promoting innovation and strengthening their position in the face of global risks and opportunities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section delves into the theoretical foundations of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) applied to foreign trade operating companies, addressing six key dimensions:

1. Strategic definition of CSR

CSR is conceived as a voluntary commitment that seeks to integrate economic, social and environmental objectives, generating value for all stakeholders and overcoming legal obligations (Corporate Social Responsibility - MARCO TEORIO, n.d.).

2. CSR, sustainability and international trade

In the current context of international trade, sustainability and CSR are necessary conditions to compete, access more demanding markets and project a responsible image at a global level (Chamber of Commerce of La Libertad, 2025).

3. Global CSR trends in 2025

Companies are forced to measure, audit, and communicate the impact of their responsible practices, especially in reducing emissions, social inclusion, and strengthening talent (Consultoría Responsable, 2025).

4. Trust, corporate reputation and legitimacy

Corporate reputation, based on trust and social commitment, has a direct impact on attracting talent, access to investment and consolidating relationships with stakeholders (Cinco Días, 2024).

5. Transparency and traceability in global chains

Traceability in supply chains has become a strategic priority, as a high percentage of the environmental and social impact comes from global suppliers (El País, 2025).

6. Regulatory framework and responsible leadership

Legislative and regulatory initiatives in various countries seek to align CSR with international guidelines, promoting corporate responsibility and sustainable leadership (El País, 2025).

Table 1. Key theoretical dimensions of CSR in foreign trade

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Key Description</i>	<i>Source (APA, recent)</i>
<i>Strategic definition</i>	CSR as a voluntary strategy that generates social and environmental value beyond legal compliance	Corporate Social Responsibility - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

<i>Sustainable international trade</i>	ESG integration strengthens market access, image and sustained development	La Libertad Chamber of Commerce (2025)
<i>Measurable and strategic CSR</i>	By 2025, it is required to measure social and environmental impact with clear indicators	Responsible Consulting (2025)
<i>Reputation and trust</i>	Social commitment and trust are key to attracting talent, investment and legitimacy	Cinco Días (2024)
<i>ESG Chain</i>	ESG traceability improves profitability, reputation and global competitiveness	El País (2025)
<i>Transparency</i>	Legal impulse and responsible leadership as the axis of corporate transformation	El País (2025)
<i>Regulatory reform and leadership</i>		

Source: Own elaboration based on Corporate Social Responsibility - Chamber of Commerce of La Libertad (2025); Responsible Consulting (2025); Cinco Días (2024); El País (2025).

Comparison table with theoretical CSR models (Carroll, Triple Bottom Line, Stakeholder Theory) adapted to foreign trade:

Table 2. Theoretical models of CSR applied to foreign trade

<i>Theoretical model</i>	<i>Core focus</i>	<i>Adaptation to foreign trade</i>	<i>Source (APA, recent)</i>
<i>Carroll's Pyramid (1991, adapted)</i>	CSR as a hierarchy of responsibilities: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic	In foreign trade, it emphasizes international regulatory compliance, sustainability, and ethical relationships with global partners	Carroll & Brown (2023)
<i>Triple Bottom Line (TBL)</i>	Business success measured in three dimensions: people, planet, profits	Integrate social, environmental, and economic impact into international operations and supply chains	Elkington (2020, reed.)
<i>Stakeholder Theory</i>	Value created for all stakeholders	Include suppliers, governments, NGOs and international customers as key actors in the CSR strategy	Freeman et al. (2021)
<i>ISO 26000</i>	International Guidelines for Social Responsibility	Framework for implementing responsible practices, assessed by global standards, applicable to logistics and cross-border trade	ISO (2024)
<i>ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance)</i>	Environmental, social and governance criteria as key indicators	Evaluate and report corporate performance in global markets, aligned with investor and regulatory expectations	CFA Institute (2022)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Carroll & Brown (2023), Elkington (2020), Freeman et al. (2021), ISO (2024) and CFA Institute (2022).

METHODOLOGY

The present study adopted a **qualitative-descriptive approach with the support of a systematic documentary review**, with the aim of identifying and analyzing the role of **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** as a critical success factor in foreign trade operating companies. The research was developed in three phases: information collection, categorical analysis and interpretative synthesis.

1. Research Approach

The qualitative methodology allows us to delve into meanings, trends, and contexts, being especially useful for exploring complex phenomena such as CSR in international trade (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). It was complemented with a documentary review to obtain updated evidence from academic, regulatory, and sectoral sources (Snyder, 2019; Booth et al., 2021).

2. Scope and design

A descriptive-analytical design **was chosen** to expose characteristics of CSR and evaluate its link with business competitiveness (Martínez et al., 2022). This was supported by the content **analysis technique**, which facilitates the categorization of concepts and the identification of common patterns (Neuendorf, 2022).

Table 3. Methodological design of the study

<i>Element</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Source (APA)</i>
<i>Type of study</i>	Qualitative-descriptive, with systematic documentary review	Creswell & Creswell (2021)
<i>Approach</i>	Exploratory and analytical, to understand the strategic role of CSR	Snyder (2019)
<i>Object of analysis</i>	CSR in foreign trade operating companies	Martínez et al. (2022)
<i>Main technique</i>	Thematic and categorical content analysis	Neuendorf (2022)
<i>Time horizon</i>	2020–2025 (last five years)	Own elaboration

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Creswell & Creswell (2021); Snyder (2019); Martínez et al. (2022); Neuendorf (2022).

3. Procedure

The methodological work was developed in **four stages**:

1. **Search and selection of sources:** Academic databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Scielo) and specialized repositories were consulted, as well as institutional reports and publications of recognized economic press (Snyder, 2019).

Inclusion criteria: Publications between 2020 and 2025, direct relationship with CSR and foreign trade, and academic or institutional rigour.

Exclusion criteria: Articles without reference to foreign trade operators, without empirical evidence or with a focus prior to 2020.

2. **Classification of information:** The sources were organized into categories:

- CSR conceptual framework
- Theoretical models
- Critical success factors
- Empirical evidence from companies
- Global Regulations and Trends

3. **Content analysis:** An open coding process was applied to identify key concepts, followed by axial coding to relate categories (Neuendorf, 2022).

4. **Synthesis and interpretation:** The findings were integrated with the theoretical framework to build solid and sustained conclusions (Booth et al., 2021).

Table 4. Methodological phases and expected results

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Main activities</i>	<i>Expected results</i>
<i>1. Collection</i>	Search in academic bases and institutional sources	Relevant set of articles, reports and regulations (2020–2025)
<i>2. Classification</i>	Thematic organization of information	Categorical CSR Matrix by Dimensions
<i>3. Analysis</i>	Open and axial coding of information	Identification of patterns and relationships between CSR and success in foreign trade
<i>4. Synthesis</i>	Integration of findings with theoretical framework	Interpretative conclusions and strategic proposals

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Snyder (2019); Neuendorf (2022); Booth et al. (2021).

4. Validation tools

To ensure the **validity and reliability** of the analysis:

- Source triangulation **was applied**: contrasting academic literature, regulations, and business cases (Flick, 2018).
- The timeliness **of the information was verified**, prioritizing publications from the last five years.
- Academic peer review was used to validate coherence and consistency.

Results

The documentary and categorical analysis carried out on **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** in foreign trade operating companies allowed the identification of **five key findings**, supported by data and trends from 2020 to 2025.

1. CSR as a driver of global competitiveness

78 % of exporting companies in Latin America that implement CSR practices report improvements in their positioning in international markets, mainly in sectors with high environmental and social regulation

(La Libertad Chamber of Commerce, 2025). These companies achieve preferential access to contracts, reduced reputational risks, and greater customer loyalty (Santos et al., 2023).

2. Measurable impact on internationalized companies

The Social Footprint Beings Map (2025) revealed that companies with international operations:

- They generated a growth of **5.8% in direct employment**.
- They maintained a **labor turnover of 8%**, below the national average (17%).
- They allocated **68.8% of their purchases** to local suppliers.
- They implemented **sustainable projects** with an impact on reducing their carbon footprint by an **average of 12% per year**.

This confirms that CSR is not only a social investment, but also a driver of operational efficiency (Fundación Seres, 2025).

3. Corporate reputation and investment attraction

The Global Business Reputation Index 2024 shows that companies with solid CSR strategies achieve a **22% increase in brand value** and an **18% increase in the probability of attracting foreign capital** (Cinco Días, 2024). Reputation based on social commitment translates into better relations with investors and communities (Martínez & Ríos, 2023).

4. Alignment with international standards

70% of exporting companies that apply the **ISO 26000** standard and report under **GRI** standards obtain greater acceptance in European and North American markets (ISO, 2024). This reinforces the importance of standardization as a guarantee of transparency and credibility (Responsible Consulting, 2025).

5. Critical success factors identified

From the comparison of cases and documentary evidence, five key factors emerge:

1. Integration of CSR into corporate strategy.
2. Compliance with international regulatory frameworks.
3. Transparency and traceability in the supply chain.
4. Impact measurement and communication.
5. Relationship management with global stakeholders.

Table 5. CSR impact indicators on foreign trade operating companies (2020–2025)

Indicator	Average companies with CSR	Average companies without CSR	Source (APA)
Annual export growth (%)	6,5	3,2	La Libertad Chamber of Commerce (2025)
Reduced carbon footprint (%)	12,0	3,5	Seres Foundation (2025)
Labor turnover (%)	8,0	17,0	Seres Foundation (2025)
Brand Value Increase (%)	22,0	7,0	Cinco Días (2024)
Access to new markets (%)	68,0	39,0	ISO (2024)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the Chamber of Commerce of La Libertad (2025); Fundación Seres (2025); Cinco Días (2024); ISO (2024).

6. Comparison by region

The comparative analysis of CSR implementation shows regional differences:

Table 6. Level of CSR implementation in foreign trade by region (2025)

Region	Implementation Level (%)	Main areas of focus	Source (APA)
Latin America	54	Environmental sustainability and local employment	Santos et al. (2023)
Europe	78	Energy efficiency and supply chain	ISO (2024)
North America	72	Social innovation and emission reduction	Responsible Consulting (2025)
Pacific	61	Process digitalisation and green trade	Martínez & Ríos (2023)

Source: Authors' elaboration based on Santos et al. (2023); ISO (2024); Responsible Consulting (2025); Martínez & Ríos (2023).

Interpretative synthesis of results

The data support that **CSR is well implemented** in foreign trade operating companies:

- Improves economic, social and environmental indicators.
- It strengthens reputation and facilitates access to capital.
- Reduces regulatory and reputational risks.
- Increases international competitiveness.

Consequently, it is confirmed that CSR acts as a **critical success factor** and not as an isolated philanthropic action.

Conclusions

The findings of this study confirm that **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** has ceased to be a voluntary action of a philanthropic nature and has become a **strategic and transversal element** in foreign trade operating companies. Its correct implementation translates into sustainable competitive advantages, improved positioning in international markets, and a tangible contribution to economic and social development (La Libertad Chamber of Commerce, 2025).

First, the data show that CSR positively influences **key business performance indicators**, such as export growth, reduced labor turnover, and increased brand value (Seres Foundation, 2025). This is consistent with recent literature linking responsible practices to improvements in customer loyalty, talent retention, and supply chain efficiency (Santos et al., 2023).

Secondly, it is confirmed that **corporate reputation** is significantly strengthened when companies align their strategies with principles of sustainability and social commitment. This reputation not only improves public perception, but also increases the **attraction of foreign investment** and facilitates access to new markets, especially those with strict environmental and social regulations (Cinco Días, 2024; Martínez & Ríos, 2023).

Third, standardization through **international frameworks such as ISO 26000 and GRI** proves to be a determining factor for the acceptance of products and services in markets with high regulatory requirements (ISO, 2024). Transparency in the measurement and communication of social and environmental impacts is key to building trust among stakeholders (Consultoría Responsable, 2025).

Likewise, the analysis shows that the **integration of CSR into corporate strategy** is more effective when it is articulated with business objectives, rather than treated as isolated initiatives. Companies that incorporate CSR as part of their management model show greater resilience to economic, regulatory, or geopolitical crises (Chen et al., 2025).

Finally, five **critical success factors** for CSR in foreign trade companies are identified:

1. **Strategic integration** of CSR into the corporate plan.
2. **International regulatory compliance** as a competitive requirement.
3. **Traceability and transparency** in the supply chain.
4. **Impact measurement and reporting** with verifiable indicators.
5. **Proactive management of stakeholders** at a global level.

In summary, the results reinforce the hypothesis that CSR is an **indispensable pillar for sustainable success** in foreign trade. Companies that adopt a comprehensive and measurable approach to their CSR not only obtain economic benefits, but also consolidate their social legitimacy and international reputation, positioning themselves favorably in an increasingly competitive and regulated global market (Fundación Seres, 2025; ISO, 2024; Chamber of Commerce of La Libertad, 2025).

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