J Bus Ethics (2015) 131:137–150
DOI 10.1007/s10551-014-2253-1

Reconnecting Business and Society: Perceptions of Authenticity in Corporate Social Responsibility

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Received: 6 November 2013 / Accepted: 12 June 2014 / Published online: 10 July 2014

Abstract This article explores the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and authenticity by developing a framework that explains the characteristics of CSR activities that lead to a perception by stakeholders that a firm's CSR efforts are genuine. Drawing on the authenticity literature, we identify two core dimensions of authenticity that impact stakeholder perceptions of CSR: distinctiveness and social connectedness. Distinctiveness captures the extent to which a firm's CSR activities are aligned with their core mission, vision and values while social connectedness refers to the degree to which an organization's CSR efforts are embedded in a larger social context. We use this framework to explore the question 'when are a firm's CSR efforts most likely to be perceived as authentic by stakeholders?' and find that both of these dimensions are necessary; social connectedness or distinctiveness alone are necessary but insufficient conditions for perceptions of authenticity to occur. A detailed exploration of authenticity, therefore, advances research in the CSR domain that may help mend the growing divide between business and society.

Keywords Corporate social responsibility · Business and society · Authenticity

Both business and academic attention to corporate social responsibility (CSR) have grown significantly in the past several decades (Margolis and Walsh 2003; Orlitzky et al. 2003; Porter and Kramer 2006). Yet despite increased attention to CSR in general, mistrust and skepticism of companies appear to have also grown (Porter and Kramer 2011). For example, a recent Gallup poll found that only 21 % of respondents would rate the honesty and ethical standards of business executives as high or very high (Gallup Poll 2014). Indeed, accusations of greenwashing and revelations of other acts of duplicity continue to unfold in the popular press (Delmas and Cuerel Burbano 2011; Peattie and Crane 2005). Examples abound of companies that appeared to be good corporate citizens on paper, with strong CSR rankings, but whose subsequent actions resulted in significant harm to stakeholders. Basu and Palazzo (2008) point to the example of Enron, which on paper looked like a good corporate citizen right before it became embroiled in acts of corporate malfeasance. Such acts of corporate wrongdoing have led to widespread disenchantment with business, driving a wedge between companies and society (Goffee and Jones 2005; Mintzberg et al. 2002).

The irony, therefore, is that despite increased attention to CSR as the main vehicle by which companies address stakeholder concerns, CSR efforts have become the target of much skepticism. So although CSR efforts are supposed to benefit society, they are increasingly viewed as a tool for covering up firms' societal harms, or in other words greenwashing (Delmas and Cuerel Burbano 2011). Rather than quelling concerns, attempts at achieving a win–win for the firm and society through CSR efforts may indeed

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increase skepticism toward firms and may fuel concerns that firms are acting in their self-interest while trying to appear benevolent. In this way, CSR is perceived to benefit the firm primarily, or in the worst case, the firm at the expense of society.

The concept of authenticity may provide insights into this paradox. Authenticity is a construct that is prevalent in a variety of disciplines including philosophy and psychology. It has also recently gained some attention in the management literature, specifically in the fields of marketing and leadership (Avolio and Gardner 2005; Beverland and Farrelly 2010; Liedtka 2008). Authenticity refers broadly to "being true to oneself" such that one's actions and behaviors are aligned with one's core values and beliefs (Gardner et al. 2005; Harvey et al. 2006). However, one must be true to oneself within a social context in which others identify and accept these values and beliefs as appropriate (Eagly 2005). At the firm level, scholars have examined the tensions firms face when they strive to be distinct while also fitting into accepted social and cultural traditions (Maurer et al. 2011) and how both distinctiveness and being connected to one's social context are critical to authenticity in organizations (Liedtka 2008).

Furthermore, while actors, including organizations, can strive for authenticity, such claims must be validated by others (Peterson 2005). Therefore, in this paper, we examine stakeholder perceptions of the authenticity of firms' CSR activities. We focus on the CSR activity as the unit of analysis and not the overall nature of a firm's CSR character (Basu and Palazzo 2008) as it is through these unique activities that stakeholders make attributions as to the genuineness of a firm's CSR efforts. Specifically, we ask 'when are a firm's CSR efforts most likely to be perceived as authentic by stakeholders?' We examine two aspects of authenticity that are at the core of the concept: distinctiveness and social connectedness. Distinctiveness captures the extent to which a firm's CSR activities are true to their core mission, vision and values while social connectedness refers to the degree to which an organization's CSR efforts is embedded in a larger social context. As such, we explore stakeholder perceptions of authenticity when a firm's CSR efforts are aligned with firm values and/or are embedded in the firm's social context. We suggest that both of these dimensions are necessary for attributions of authenticity to occur; distinctiveness and social connectedness alone are necessary but insufficient conditions. In so doing, we develop a framework that we believe helps explain the growing divide between business and society, yet also offers insights for reconciliation.

This paper stands to contribute to the CSR literature by highlighting the role played by authenticity in the growing gap between business and society. Our framework provides an explanation for why companies continue to elicit mistrust in society despite increased attention to CSR. A further contribution is to examine CSR efforts from the perspective of stakeholders. Recent CSR research has sought to understand what drives firms to engage in CSR (Basu and Palazzo 2008) and what the outcomes are for the firm (Margolis and Walsh 2003); however, to understand CSR's impact on society, an approach which evaluates how such efforts are received by stakeholders is needed. Current business and society discourse is focused on how firms relate to their stakeholders, primarily from the firm's perspective (Brickson 2007; Mitchell et al. 1997) but we also need insights into how stakeholders perceive firms' CSR efforts.

We begin by reviewing the CSR literature and how it has approached the gap between business and society. We focus on two streams of CSR research in particular. The dominant stream, which we call 'firm-centric', seeks to understand the instrumental benefits of CSR to the firm (e.g., McWilliams and Siegel 2001). The other 'society-centric' stream argues that CSR should benefit stakeholders, and more broadly society (Donaldson and Preston 1995; Margolis and Walsh 2003). We then examine the concept of authenticity, drawing on disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, leadership, marketing and strategy. Next, we develop a set of propositions to explain how firms' CSR activities are related to stakeholder perceptions of authenticity. Finally we discuss the implications of our framework for CSR research and practice.

The Growing Gap Between Business and Society

The CSR literature has long focused on the economic benefits of addressing societal needs (Margolis and Walsh 2003). Similarly, instrumental stakeholder theory has examined the benefit to firms of paying attention to stakeholder requirements (Donaldson and Preston 1995). This instrumental or firm-centric stream of CSR research has yielded a large number of empirical studies focused on the relationship between CSR and financial performance and on the need for firms to be strategic in their CSR efforts by choosing stakeholder issues that align best with the firms' needs (Orlitzky et al. 2003; Porter and Kramer 2006).

Meanwhile, a second stream of CSR research, which we label society-centric can be subdivided into a normative approach which argues that "each group of stakeholders merits consideration for its own sake and not merely because of its ability to further the interests of some other group, such as the shareowners" (Donaldson and Preston 1995, p. 67) and a critical approach, which views CSR discourse as an attempt to legitimize and consolidate the power of large corporations (Banerjee 2008). In other words, firms' CSR activities may in fact yield negative outcomes for society, given they are designed with corporate interests, rather than societal benefits, in mind.

Many of the reasons that have been put forth for the growing wedge between firms and society have centered on the dominance of the neo-classical view of the firm in the last several decades (Ferraro et al. 2005; Margolis and Walsh 2003). For example, Brickson (2007) argues that with the severe cost-cutting resulting from intense competition in the 1980s, followed by a period of prosperity for shareholders, profit-maximization became the focus of attention in firms and among business academics. Although academic interest in CSR also grew during this period, some scholars have argued that one reason for the divide is precisely the decades-long academic (i.e., the firm-centric stream of CSR research) and practitioner focus on the relationship between social responsibility and firm profits, which provides an economic rationale for firms to address societal problems (Margolis and Walsh 2003). Such an economic rationale is problematic because it propagates the neo-classical economic assumption of self-interest and promotes greed rather than focusing on the needs of society (Brickson 2007; Ferraro et al. 2005).

Reflecting such an emphasis on win-wins in the CSR literature, a number of definitions of CSR have been put forth that support this instrumental view. For example, CSR is often conceptualized as firm activities that go beyond the narrow economic interests of the firm, but that benefit both the firm and society (Aguilera et al. 2007; Davis 1973; McWilliams and Siegel 2001). Thus, CSR often centers around doing well by doing good (Aguilera et al. 2007) but such an approach to CSR inadvertently places emphasis on the economic goals of the firm and may even contribute to the very problem many CSR scholars are trying to resolve: how firms can better meet the needs of society. If firms only engage in CSR when there is immediate pay off, then they may miss opportunities to make a positive difference in society. Furthermore, such an economic focus puts into question the genuineness of firms' CSR efforts (Beckman et al. 2009). A focus on win-wins assumes firms will not engage in CSR unless there is instrumental value for the firm.

Other definitions have placed greater emphasis on stakeholders but a firm-centric approach to CSR remains. For example, in their recent review of the CSR literature, Aguinis and colleagues use the following definition of CSR: "context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance" (2012, p. 933). This definition highlights the importance of balancing economic, social and environmental performance, again suggesting that firms should not engage in CSR unless there is some economic benefit. Yet with growing skepticism of CSR efforts, there is a need to focus on the societal benefits of CSR efforts. We therefore define CSR more broadly as organizational activities designed to make a positive impact on society.

Previous accounts of the wedge between business and society remain incomplete in two ways. First, they do not explain why, despite increased attention to CSR by firms and academics, there is increasing stakeholder skepticism regarding firms' CSR efforts. Second, they have not given adequate attention to the perceptions of stakeholders in evaluating and understanding firms' CSR efforts. In the next section, we examine how the authenticity literature can help us understand when CSR efforts are most likely to be perceived as authentic by stakeholders.

Perceptions of Authenticity

Scholars from many disciplines have pointed to an increasing quest by individuals for authenticity in the wake of the homogenizing forces of globalization. A growing consumer culture that emphasizes consumption over participation in society has resulted in a loss of meaning and a growing sense of alienation (Hardt 1993). In parallel, the growth of corporate malfeasance has increased skepticism of firms' ability to benefit society thereby also contributing to the call for more authentic corporate social and environmental efforts (Goffee and Jones 2005; Liedtka 2008). Despite the role of businesses in propelling this quest for authenticity, until recently surprisingly little attention has been paid to authenticity in the management literature. Table 1 presents a summary of this work including definitions and dimensions of authenticity as conceptualized in representative research emanating in the fields of philosophy, psychology, leadership, marketing, strategy/organizational theory and CSR/business and society. We review this literature broadly to induce the core dimensions required for perceptions of authenticity to be attributed to a firm's CSR activities.

In its most historical sense, authenticity as discussed by the ancient Greek philosophers referred to authenticity as a moral virtue and by later philosophers as a necessary moral capacity to make ethical choices involving conflicting individual and collective goals (Novicevic et al. 2006). In psychology, the term has been introduced to discuss the trait-like abilities of individuals to demonstrate self-awareness, self-regulation and self-determination regarding one's behaviors (Kernis 2003; Novicevic et al. 2006). However, in the management literature, most of the research focused on authenticity has stemmed from the leadership and marketing literatures where perceptions of authenticity are attributed either to organizational leaders or to products or brands. We review this literature here as

Table 1 A review of authenticity across disciplines

Discipline	Level of theory	Representative definition of authenticity	Dimensions of authenticity
Philosophy	Individual	Authenticity is a moral virtue; required of someone with moral character	Differentiation (Anton 2001) Openness, tolerance of uncertainty (Jackson 2005)
Psychology	Individual	"owning one's personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to 'know oneself'"; "acting in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings" (Harter 2002, p. 383)	Consistency of thoughts/feelings/actions (Harter 2002) Uncalculated honesty; distinctive closeness to other (Yagil and Medler-Liraz 2013) Self-awareness, balanced processing (Kernis 2003)
Leadership	Individual/dyad	"authenticity is a developmental process that promotes self-awareness and accurate perceptions, and enables self-regulation that aligns behaviors with one's internal values, beliefs, emotions, and thoughts" (Harvey et al. 2006, p. 2)	Self-awareness, balanced processing, self-regulation, relational transparency (Luthans and Avolio 2003; Harvey et al. 2006; Ilies, et al. 2005; Walumbwa et al. 2008) Value congruence (Eagly 2005; Ilies et al. 2005) Retain distinctiveness within strong cultures (Goffee and Jones 2005)
Marketing	Individual/firm	"authenticity is an evaluation, judgment, or assessment of how real or genuine something is" (Beckman et al. 2009, p. 199) "authenticity can be defined as a 'story that balances industrial (production, distribution and marketing) and rhetorical attributes to project sincerity through the avowal of commitments to traditions (including production methods, product styling, firm values, and/or location), passion for craft and production excellence, and the public disavowal of the role of modern industrial attributes and commercial motivations.'" (Beverland 2005, p. 1008)	Uniqueness; relationship to place; commitment to traditions; communication of core values (Beverland 2005; Beverland and Farrelly 2010) Rooted in a passion for the cause and ethical values; taking a holistic view on impacts; tailored to social needs of community; transparency and consistency; visibly enacted in the community; deeply embedded in the fabric of the firm (Beckman et al. 2009)
Strategy/OT	Firm	"Authenticity involves developing a differentiated sense of self within a larger social context; of each individual's ''once occurredness;'' on the primacy of voice and participation and recognition of the powerful role of emotions; and, finally, recognition of the comfort of the familiar against the lure of the novel" (Liedtka 2008, p. 239); "consistency between a firm's espoused values and realized practices" (Cording et al. 2014);"authenticity is a claim that is made by or for someone, thing, or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others." (Peterson 2005, p. 1086)	Novel versus familiar; distinctiveness; once-occurredness; connectedness (Liedtka 2008) Individualistic versus collectivistic (Brickson 2007) Distinctive versus fitting in (Maurer et al. 2011) Distinctive versus traditional (Hsu and Hannan 2005) Differentiated yet connected to traditions (Liedtka 2008) Consistent (Cording et al. 2014; Godfrey 2005)
CSR/B&S	Firm/society	"Actions driven by core, enduring, and central organizational values will be genuine and likely to be perceived as such" (Godfrey 2005, p. 795)	Normative commitment (Basu and Palazzo 2008) Part of core purpose (Lyon and Maxwell 2011; Waddock 2008b) Stability; transparency, responsiveness (Godfrey 2005) Aligned with organization's true identity; organization takes a leadership role with regards to its CSR initiatives (McShane and Cunningham 2012) Embedded versus Peripheral (Weaver et al. 1999)

well as discuss how authenticity as a concept has been used in the broader strategy and CSR fields as well, drawing out two core dimensions of authenticity that we believe capture the most salient characteristics of CSR activities required for attributions of authenticity to occur: distinctiveness and social connectedness.

Authenticity as explored in philosophy and psychology lends itself primarily to a social constructionist perspective given the focus on experience, meaning and existence instead of on knowledge, truth and reality (Anton 2001; Liedtka 2008). Authenticity refers to an interpretation of what is observed rather than to properties inherent in an object (Beverland 2005). In addition, authenticity is about action more than reflection. It is determined by our actions, of which motives and reasons are integral parts (Jackson 2005).

In the leadership literature, the concept of authentic leadership has gained significant research attention in the last decade (Mazutis and Slawinski 2008). Authentic leadership has been described as a process "which results in both greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development" (Luthans and Avolio 2003, p. 243). Despite such attention, authentic leadership research has remained narrowly focused on certain aspects of authenticity without invoking its full richness. For example, researchers have given considerable attention to describing authentic leader values/attributes (e.g., hope, optimism, resilience, trustworthiness, integrity, accountability, credibility, respect and fairness), and authentic leadership capabilities, which include self-awareness, balanced processing, self-regulation and relational transparency (Gardner et al. 2005; Ilies et al. 2005; Kernis 2003). However, as Liedtka (2008, p. 240) notes, "Most of the leadership works … invoke the term ''authenticity'' only in its common usage… As a result, much of the potential power of the concept has not yet been tapped." Thus, an opportunity exists to examine how richer conceptualizations of authenticity are related to CSR research.

In marketing, the focus has been on the quest for authenticity as a result of standardization and homogenization in the marketplace. In addition, green marketing has not delivered for consumers, leaving them disillusioned and skeptical (Peattie and Crane 2005). Consumers therefore seek authenticity to find meaning in their lives and to strengthen their self-identity (Beverland and Farrelly 2010). Much of this literature has focused on branding, and authenticity is usually portrayed as a component of brand. However, according to this literature, it is not sufficient for firms to attempt to develop authentic products and brands; the authenticity of the object must also be taken to be real by the group targeted (Castaldo et al. 2009; Peterson 2005). In his study of luxury wines, Beverland (2005) found that authenticity tended to be co-created between the firm, competitors, consumers and other stakeholders. In addition, creating the perception of brand authenticity required wine makers to demonstrate uniqueness and a relationship to place and tradition while simultaneously disavowing commercial motives. A similar argument has been made for the U.S. micro-brew industry in that their commitment to traditional craft methods distances these organizations from mass produced and marketed beers by invoking distinctiveness and tradition (Hsu and Hannan 2005). Thus, brand authenticity requires both distinctiveness and a connection to the social context, which includes an understanding of norms and traditions.

In the broader strategy and organizational theory fields, the concept of authenticity has been defined as consistency between espoused values and realized practices (Cording et al. 2014) but has rarely been directly invoked as either an explanatory or outcome variable. Rather, like in other fields, the term authenticity has been used primarily in its more common form (Liedtka 2008). Similarly, in the CSR domain, and specifically within the more society-centric CSR streams, authenticity or genuineness has been discussed mostly peripherally. However, at the root of many of these definitions and dimensions of authenticity explored across these different domains, two core themes in particular surface: distinctiveness and social connectedness. We explore these two themes and their relationship to stakeholder engagement below.

Two Core Dimensions of Authenticity: Distinctiveness and Social Connectedness

Distinctiveness is expressed in a variety of ways including being 'true to oneself' and developing a differentiated sense of self. In philosophy, a particular emphasis has been put on the discovery of self through a process of continually becoming (Jackson 2005). Individuals achieve differentiation through the discovery of their unique identity, and the concept of "once occurredness" is key, meaning individuals are unique and exist at one point in time only (Anton 2001). In developmental psychology, finding one's authentic self is linked to psychological health (Harter 2002).

At the same time, this distinctiveness exists within a social context that is rooted in familiar traditions, thus representing a tension between the novel and the familiar (Liedtka 2008). Examples of this tension come to light in the performing arts where authenticity requires a balance between being original and grounded in a social context that includes familiar traditions. Peterson (2005) gives the example of country music performers whose music and performance style must not only be distinct but must also be deemed authentic by producers, fans and others who form part of the social context. Similarly, in philosophy, defining the self occurs within a social context. Each one of us is what we pursue and care for and this occurs within a certain context that is familiar (Liedtka 2008).

It is important to note that authenticity in organizations is also related to how the firm is perceived and this involves stakeholders in two ways. First, stakeholders are often involved in the process of authenticity making. For example, as Beverland (2005) argued in his research on luxury wines, authenticity making can require a number of actors including producers, consumers, critics, competitors, and regulators. Second, authenticity is not inherent in an object, person or performance but, as Peterson explains, "authenticity is a claim that is made by or for someone, thing, or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others" (2005, p. 1086). Similarly, in the context of leadership, Goffee and Jones (2005, p. 86) argue that "authenticity is a quality that others must attribute to you." Thus, stakeholders not only help the firm discover its authentic self, but they also validate claims made by the organization about its authenticity.

In summary, authenticity is fundamentally about being unique and original, by developing a differentiated self. Yet this occurs within a larger social context, which connects the actor to traditions, norms and other people. Thus, based on this previous literature, we define authenticity in organizations as a state of simultaneous distinctiveness and connectedness to the organization's social context. In the next section, we develop propositions that link stakeholder perceptions of authenticity with firms' CSR efforts.

Authenticity and CSR

Organizations often interface with society through their CSR efforts. As such, firms tend to be evaluated by stakeholders based on these activities and stakeholders, such as NGOs, often denounce firms that misrepresent their CSR efforts, accusing firms of greenwashing (Jahdi and Acikdilli 2009; Lyon and Maxwell 2011). Conversely, when firms genuinely pursue CSR activities, stakeholders are more likely to trust the organization (Beckman et al. 2009; Bhattacharya et al. 2009).

Researchers have examined multiple antecedents of stakeholder trust in organizations (Fulmer and Gelfand 2012) including firm benevolence, integrity and communication. It is important to note, however, that trust and authenticity are related but distinct constructs. For example, in the context of stakeholder perceptions of CSR, trust refers to stakeholders' willingness to be vulnerable due to positive expectations of an organization's CSR efforts (Davis et al. 1997; Fulmer and Gelfand 2012). In contrast, authenticity refers to whether a firm's CSR efforts are genuine, meaning whether they are tied to the organization's values and whether they are connected to societal norms and expectations. In other words, stakeholders are more likely to trust an organization's CSR efforts if they perceive them to be authentic (Wicki and van der Kaaij 2007). However, trust refers to stakeholders' expectations of the firm whereas authenticity links internal aspects of the firm (distinctiveness) with external expectations (social connectedness). We begin with a discussion of these two dimensions of authenticity, linking these concepts to existing literature in CSR. We then examine how each is related to stakeholder perceptions of a firm's CSR efforts.

Distinctiveness and CSR

Distinctiveness permeates the strategy literature, but its meaning is quite different than in the authenticity literature. In strategy, the concept of distinctiveness is tied to competitive advantage rather than to gaining self-awareness. Indeed, the concept of competitive advantage rests on the premise that firms must differentiate themselves from others, and draw on their unique resources and capabilities, to achieve superior economic performance (Barney 1991; Wernerfelt 1984).

In the CSR literature, distinctiveness of CSR efforts has been tied to competitive advantage. In particular, Porter and Kramer (2006, 2011) have argued that firms should engage in strategic CSR by tying their CSR initiatives to their company's strategy. In addition, they should tackle only those social or environmental issues that contribute meaningfully to society while also adding to a company's bottom line. In contrast, firms that do not engage in strategic CSR select CSR initiatives on an ad hoc basis and are more likely to react to stakeholder demands, rather than carefully planning their initiatives and capitalizing on their distinct resources and capabilities (Basu and Palazzo 2008). Dowling and Moran (2012) call this type of CSR bolted on rather than built in. As a result, these types of CSR initiatives will be less likely to bring benefits to the firm or to society.

Distinctiveness, in the context of authenticity, does not refer to achieving competitive advantage. Rather, it refers to being true to self. That is, organizational members must have a clear and shared sense of their firm's values and purpose. In this manner, a firm's CSR activities might become a part of its organizational identity and reflect the central, distinctive and enduring features of the organization in response to self-reflective questions such as: "Who are we?" or "What kind of business are we in?" (Albert and Whetten 1985). However, a firm's identity is accorded to the organization not only by its internal constituents, but also by a variety of external stakeholders as well (Hsu and Hannan 2005). When there is no discrepancy between the way the organization views its central, distinctive and enduring features and how important stakeholders see the organization, the firm's identity can be said to have been affirmed by that community (Gioia et al. 2000) or have reached a form of institutional consolidation around the distinctive purpose of that organization (Hsu and Hannan 2005). As such, when CSR activities are part of the answer to these 'distinctiveness' questions, affirmation and consolidation around the firm's purpose will allow these CSR activities to be seen as more authentic by key stakeholders (Dowling and Moran 2012; Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Scott and Lane 2000).

In the marketing literature, brands that communicate core values are seen as more authentic (Beverland 2005) while in the leadership literature leaders who are transparent with regards to their values are also seen as more authentic (Ilies et al. 2005). Some companies have explicitly made CSR or sustainability issues a core part of their mission, vision or values—seamlessly forging social or environmental considerations with what makes them distinctive (Austin and Leonard 2008; Waddock 2008b).

In the CSR literature, the concept of commitment helps to capture what is meant by distinctiveness as it relates to authenticity. Basu and Palazzo (2008) describe two types of commitment to CSR: instrumental and normative. Instrumental commitment means that it is driven by external incentives, such as the desire to improve profits or reputation. Normative commitment is derived instead from internal and moral considerations, including company values, and as such, is more likely to yield integration of CSR into everyday activities (Weaver et al. 1999). In addition, the consistency by firms of such a commitment to a particular set of CSR activities is one of the indicators of the genuineness of CSR proposed by Godfrey (2005). We therefore define CSR distinctiveness as the degree to which CSR efforts reflect the firm's values. As such firms are more likely to commit to their CSR initiatives over the long term. In contrast, generic CSR refers to CSR efforts that do not reflect the firm's values, but instead are adopted in an ad hoc manner, often in reaction to external pressures.

Social Connectedness and CSR

The second dimension that is critical to perceptions of authenticity is social connectedness. In the authenticity literature, individuals aim to be distinctive within a social context. In other words, they must remain socially connected while being true to self.

Social connectedness has also been discussed in the organizations literature. A number of researchers have explored how firms differ based on their connectedness to others, including society. For example, Driver (2006) argues that organizations exist on a continuum. At one end, organizations view themselves as embedded in a larger social context. Such embeddedness in social relations leads to trust and connectivity with the wider community (Granovetter 1985). It also leads organizations to incorporate a corporate narrative that is more complex, multidimensional, and dynamic which allows organizations to better relate to their stakeholders (Beckman et al. 2009). At the other end of the spectrum, organizations view themselves as disconnected from society. These organizations possess a simplified, stable and uni-dimensional self-concept which is focused on economic goals. This disconnected, isolated self-concept lessens these firms' awareness of their social context and leads to a we/them attitude vis-a-vis their stakeholders given that a simplified self-concept pits one's goals against those of others (Driver 2006).

Similarly, Brickson (2007) describes different levels of social connectedness based on organizational identity orientation. Individualistic firms view themselves as distinct from others and interact with stakeholders only when these latter stand to directly benefit the firm. These firms may deny their connection to others, especially when such others are distant or not directly affected by the firm. For example, in the case of the use of child labor by suppliers in developing countries, managers may argue that the firm is not responsible for the practices of its suppliers (Young 2004). In contrast, collectivistic firms view themselves as connected to society, including to stakeholders. As such, they are more likely to engage with a wide variety of stakeholders and would be more likely to view themselves as connected to their suppliers.

Godfrey (2005) has suggested that three indicators of the genuineness of CSR include: stability, transparency and responsiveness. Attention to these indicators will affect the extent to which the CSR activity is viewed by the community as a "genuine manifestation of the firm's intentions, motivations, and character" (Godfrey 2005, p. 784) which in turn will lead to a positive evaluation of the firm's activities by that community. Two of these indicators, transparency and responsiveness, are related to a firm's social connectedness. Transparency refers to the access of stakeholders to information about the firm's past, current and planned CSR activities, and whether or not the information presented is balanced, rather than biased (Basu and Palazzo 2008). Responsiveness refers to the willingness of firms to adapt their CSR practices to the changing social and economic requirements of their environment. In contrast to defensive firms, responsive firms are willing to listen to and learn from stakeholders, including critics, who bring a different perspective to the issues (Carroll 1979). In this way, responsive firms are connected to their social context and remain aware of the needs and expectations of a variety of stakeholders.

In this paper, we examine the social connectedness of CSR efforts, which refers to the degree to which a firm's CSR activities are tied to the social context in which the firm operates. Social connectedness requires deep engagement with stakeholders and responsiveness to their needs. It also requires firms to understand the effect they have on society.

As illustrated in Fig. 1, the two dimensions of distinctiveness and social connectedness combine to form four frames through which multiple stakeholders can perceive a firm's CSR efforts: authentic, inauthentic, disingenuous and misguided. We now explore each of these frames in detail, providing illustrative examples and developing propositions that examine how the two dimensions of distinctiveness and social connectedness interact to impact stakeholder perceptions of authenticity of CSR efforts.

Authentic CSR

In order for stakeholders to perceive a firm's CSR efforts as authentic, these must be seen to be both distinctive and socially connected. Organizations that are connected to their social context engage with their stakeholders. As

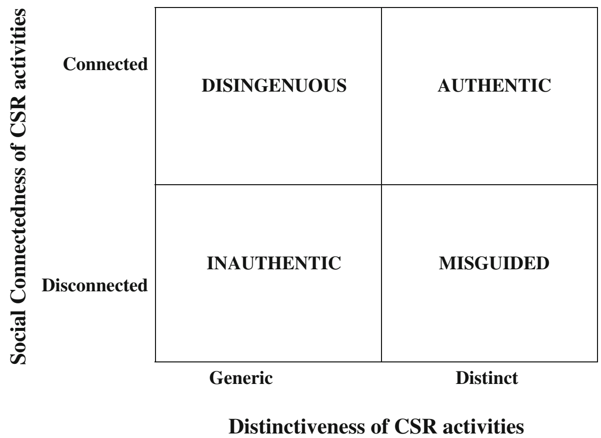

Fig. 1 Stakeholder perceptions of authenticity of CSR efforts

such, they remain open to feedback and to incorporating it into their CSR practices (Basu and Palazzo 2008). Not only are their CSR practices more likely to be complex as a result, but they are more likely to incorporate a broader range of issues, including global issues such as social justice and climate change, into their decision making. They also take into account the impacts of their business decisions on society given that dialogue with multiple stakeholders leads to an evaluation of organizational boundaries and can widen the company's sphere of responsibility to society at large (Driver 2006). In some cases, these organizations may even advance causes and social change (Brickson 2007).

When firms make decisions on which CSR activities to pursue based on their social connectedness and stakeholder engagement, these activities are more likely to address a number of stakeholder concerns (Rowley 1997). As such, they will be viewed by stakeholders as concerned about society, rather than only concerned with their own interests. However, stakeholders must also believe that firms are committed and capable of executing on their CSR activities. In other words, firms must demonstrate that their CSR activities are linked to their values and core purpose.

When firms link their CSR efforts to their values to develop a distinctive rather than generic approach to CSR, they demonstrate to their stakeholders their commitment to such efforts. As mentioned above, CSR distinctiveness is not about competitive advantage but about connecting with the core purpose and values of the company (Dowling and Moran 2012). To achieve CSR distinctiveness requires much reflection as managers deliberate on which CSR initiatives are most consistent with their values. Such reflection often requires the engagement of a variety of organizational actors who help articulate the firm's values and link them to the firm's CSR. In turn, such commitment demonstrates to stakeholders that that the firm's CSR is not conducted as an after-thought or on an ad hoc basis.

Trying to achieve both distinctiveness and social connectedness of CSR efforts may present a firm with difficult to resolve tensions. Indeed, this tension is referred to frequently in the authenticity literature given that being unique is often contradictory to being connected to the familiar, including one's social context (Liedtka 2008). In the case of CSR efforts, a company's approach to CSR based on its values may be at odds with the needs of stakeholders, such as NGOs. On the other hand, when firms work through such tensions, they often arrive at a creative solution that addresses both goals (Lewis 2000; Smith and Lewis 2011). Such an approach requires firms to be open to uncertainty. As Jackson (2005, p. 320) notes "confronting dilemmas authentically means that a deliberator squarely faces the openness and indeterminacy of the situation."

Interface carpets provide an illustration of CSR efforts that are likely to be perceived as authentic by key stakeholders. The organization has made a very public promise to eliminate any negative impact it has on the environment by 2020 and has taken large, concrete steps, in order to achieve these goals (Werre 2003). Adopting principles from *The Natural Step*, an international non-profit organization working to accelerate global sustainability, the company redesigned its business model around the question "If nature designed an industrial process, what might it look like?" This approach is, therefore, deeply embedded in the carpet manufacturer's social and environmental context. Furthermore, Interface has explicitly rendered CSR part of its core purpose (Lyon and Maxwell 2011), and hence its distinctiveness, by stating that its vision is: "To be the first company that, by its deeds, shows the entire industrial world what sustainability is in all its dimensions: People, process, product, place and profits—by 2020—and in doing so we will become restorative through the power of influence." By being both embedded in its social context and part of its distinctive core values, Interface's CSR efforts are more likely to be perceived as authentic by key stakeholders.

To summarize, in evaluating the authenticity of a firm's CSR, stakeholders look for both evidence that the firm is considering the needs of others, or society more broadly, and that the firm is committed to executing on its CSR activities. Thus,

P1 When a firm's CSR efforts are both socially connected and distinct, they are more likely to be perceived as authentic by stakeholders.

Inauthentic CSR

Firms that are disconnected from their social context are more likely to engage in CSR practices that ignore stakeholder goals (Shrivastava and Kennelly 2013). These firms are less likely to engage with stakeholders, given they view the firm as physically and socially autonomous (Hoffman and Bazerman 2007). Without stakeholder input, and with a simplified self-concept focused on singular goals such as profit maximization, disconnected firms tend to view CSR as an expense and will only focus on those activities that yield economic returns or on reputational benefits (Brickson 2005). In addition, the scope of their CSR activities may be limited. For example, Brickson noted that individualistic firms' involvement with stakeholders tends to be arms-length and consequently their CSR activities tend to be limited to philanthropy, which can improve the firms' reputation (Brickson 2007). Firms that focus on CSR activities that only benefit themselves are also more likely to engage in greenwashing, which refers to the "selective disclosure of positive information about a company's environmental or social performance, without full disclosure of negative information on these dimensions, so as to create an overly positive corporate image" (Lyon and Maxwell 2011, p. 9). Such greenwashing is often called out by stakeholders and environmental activist groups (Delmas and Cuerel Burbano 2011).

For example, a Canadian mining company operating in Peru, Bear Creek Mining, was accused of polluting Lake Titicaca by communities living near the lake. The company's proposal to mine silver was approved by the Peruvian government after the company adhered to a formal process which included over 100 stakeholder consultations. However, Bear Creek failed to engage in a genuine dialogue with community members or the NGOs representing the communities around Lake Titicaca. As a result, the company's CSR activities, which included treating water for local community consumption, may not have appeared genuine, as these activities did not address the bigger problem of the overall pollution of the lake. What followed were mass protests by the community and the government eventually revoked the company's licence (Dangl 2011).

In addition to being socially disconnected, firms often engage in generic CSR, given a proliferation of new international agreements, regulations, associations, and rating agencies as well as increasing stakeholder pressure to improve corporate social and environmental performance (Strike et al. 2006; Waddock 2008a). Firms that do not tie their CSR to their firm values are more likely to succumb to such pressures, engaging in CSR to placate stakeholders or for compliance purposes. When firms engage in generic CSR, they demonstrate a lack of commitment toward their CSR activities. In addition, if they appear focused only on their own economic goals rather than considering the social and environmental goals of others, stakeholders will question the sincerity of such CSR efforts. As such,

P2 When a firm's CSR efforts are socially disconnected and generic, they are more likely to be perceived as inauthentic by stakeholders.

Disingenuous CSR

Some firms may be socially connected and use stakeholder engagement to tap into the needs and goals of various stakeholders in determining their CSR activities but may not tie their CSR efforts to their core values. This scenario could occur for a variety of reasons. First, the firm may not have strong values (Collins and Porras 1994) or may espouse values that are incongruent with certain CSR efforts. For example, some firms may espouse values such as competitiveness (i.e., 'we aim to be number one in our industry') which may be difficult to reconcile with certain CSR activities, e.g., those that require collaborating with NGOs (Brickson 2007). Second, the two functions may occur in different departments. That is, stakeholder relations may occur in one department, whereas CSR may occur in another making coordination of CSR efforts challenging. Lastly, firms may have identified key social or environmental issues that should be tackled as part of their CSR strategy, yet still see these issues as peripheral to their core mission or purpose which may still be purely financial. In this manner, CSR activities deal with the symptoms of social or environmental issues, without really tackling the root causes or acknowledging one's own role in a larger systemic problem (Ehrenfeld 2005).

For example, in 2008, Walmart began an intensive campaign to strengthen its relationship with environmental stakeholders by issuing an aggressive directive to over 1,000 Chinese suppliers to reduce waste and emissions, cut packaging costs and increase the energy efficiency of products supplied to Walmart stores by 25 % in three years' time (Nidumolu et al. 2009). Yet, despite significant changes in its sourcing practices and improving its reputation among environmental groups, Walmart's CSR efforts are still met with cynicism and suspicion. Because the firm's commitment to CSR is not part of its core values, and the organization continues to suffer set-backs with other stakeholders such as employees and local communities, the degree of authenticity of the environmental initiatives is in question (Meeks and Chen 2011).

In the leadership literature, this lack of authenticity is theorized to occur between leaders and followers when there is a lack of value congruence (Gardner et al. 2005; Ilies et al. 2005). In order for followers to attribute as authentic a leader's motives, goals, and behavior, followers must first identify strongly with that leader and his/her vision for the organization, which is then strengthened in the case of value congruence (Eagly 2005; Ilies et al. 2005). Similarly, in marketing, consumers are said to attribute authenticity to products when these are most in-line with their own values and beliefs about what constitutes an authentic product experience. In parallel then, it can be argued that stakeholders will not find a firm's CSR efforts authentic if there is low congruence between the firm's and the stakeholder's values and goals. Having stated that their mission is purely economic (Meeks and Chen 2011), even Walmart's dedicated effort to environmental causes will be incongruent with the core values of the sustainability movement which rests on curbing, not promoting, consumption (Ehrenfeld 2005). Eagly (2005) refers to this disconnect as an inability to inspire identification from others.

As such, even when a firm seeks to "do the right thing" with regards to its stakeholders, such efforts will not likely be perceived as genuine if the activities are not linked to the firm's values and core purpose. Stakeholders may instead perceive such efforts to have been designed only to ingratiate the firm among its stakeholders. The firm's CSR efforts will, therefore, be perceived as insincere or disingenuous by outsiders, such that:

P3 When a firm's CSR efforts are socially connected but generic, they are more likely to be perceived as disingenuous by stakeholders.

Misguided CSR

Some firms may have strong values, to which they tie their CSR efforts, but if such efforts are disconnected from a firm's social context, a firm's CSR activities may be viewed as misguided by outsiders. This might occur for example when a firm commits to embedding social responsibility into its core purpose, but does not engage with external stakeholders such as NGOs in determining which CSR efforts to focus on and how to incorporate these into the firm. Another example is a firm that engages in mission-driven CSR activities, but that is not open and transparent with its stakeholders about such activities. In such cases a firm's CSR activities are distinct but not connected to the firm's social environment, and thus are internally guided but not responsive to stakeholder demands. Suck lack of responsiveness often leads to a lack of trust on the part of stakeholders (Fulmer and Gelfand 2012; Jahdi and Acikdilli 2009).

For example, Werre (2003, p. 251) describes the situation at Chiquita Brands International in the late 1990s. At the time, Chiquita was often portrayed by the press as a "rapacious, exploitative company without a conscience"; CSR was not part of company policy and the firm was often accused of a "closed and defensive culture towards outsiders" (2003, p. 249). Faced with increasing public pressure to redress past and existing social and environmental grievances, Chiquita launched a major effort to incorporate corporate responsibility as part of the core values of the organization. This included redefining the company's corporate vision to incorporate CSR and an extensive employee engagement exercise to formulate the company's core values of integrity, respect, opportunity, and responsibility. Furthermore, the CSR efforts also included installing a CSR officer, selecting an external measurement standard (SA8000), creating a code of conduct, training employees, and coaching managers to incorporate CSR criteria in decision making processes. However, because Chiquita's CSR efforts were driven entirely by internal processes and disconnected from key stakeholder groups such as the labor unions, these activities were perceived by many outsiders as mere window dressing; suspicion and skepticism of the firm's CSR activities continued. In addition, the lack of transparency with which Chiquita engaged in its integrated CSR program and the ad campaign which was suddenly launched in 2005 after years of silence regarding the company's CSR initiatives led a group of NGOs to write a critical letter accusing the company of misleading the public (Wicki and van der Kaaij 2007). It was only after Chiquita management realized "that support from and cooperation with the labor unions would be essential for establishing broad trust in the sincerity of Chiquita's CR efforts and for the success of these efforts", that a more extended engagement with external stakeholders took place.

The integration of CSR into a firm's core and distinct purpose thus appears to be a necessary yet insufficient condition for these CSR efforts to be deemed authentic. Because authenticity is a relational construct, in order for perceptions of authenticity to be attributed, stakeholders need to be able to identify with the firm's values as well and accept them as appropriate (Eagly 2005). Campbell (2007, p. 960) explains:

> when communication extends beyond corporations themselves to encompass workers, local community leaders, government, and others, it appears that corporations begin to better appreciate the concerns of these other actors and, in turn, take their concerns into account when it comes to making corporate policy. Corporations act in more socially responsible ways as a result. This is because patterns of interaction affect how actors perceive and define their situations.

In addition, the authenticity literature describes the importance of stakeholder engagement and dialogue for not only building trust with stakeholders but also for providing firms with a more balanced view of the societal issues that warrant firms' attention (Driver 2006; Liedtka 2008). Specifically, the organizations literature focuses on engagement with others as critical to developing an authentic strategic intent (Liedtka 2008) and to discovering an authentic organizational self (Driver 2006). By being responsive to stakeholder concerns, firms may be better able to adapt their CSR efforts to changing social and environmental norms.

Without the key elements of engagement and feedback, therefore, CSR efforts are less likely to be fully endorsed, and trusted, by stakeholders who will continue to view the firm's primary values as divergent from their own (Bhattacharya et al. 2009). Eagly (2005) suggests specifically that "it is in the processes that transpire between leaders' value expressions and followers' identification that communities' fault lines are revealed." Without a dialogue with important stakeholder groups, Chiquita closed itself off from this important feedback and thus their CSR efforts were perceived to be misguided. As such, we propose:

P4 When a firm's CSR efforts are distinctive but socially disconnected, they are more likely to be perceived as misguided by stakeholders.

Having developed a series of propositions that link the dimensions of authenticity with a firm's CSR efforts and perceptions of authenticity, we now turn to a broader discussion on how this important insight might help reconcile the growing divide between business and society.

Discussion

Despite increased attention to CSR by both businesses and society at large, in general, there is still a looming mistrust of corporations that claim to be engaging in CSR for the common good (Basu and Palazzo 2008; Jahdi and Acikdilli 2009). Instead, rather than mending the wedge between business and society (Mintzberg et al. 2002), it appears as though the increased focus on CSR by organizations has paradoxically fueled this divide. In this paper, we have sought to develop a framework to explain why this phenomenon might occur. By highlighting the importance of perceptions of authenticity, we explain how CSR efforts must be both distinct and socially connected in order for these to be perceived as authentic by stakeholders. Without both of these attributes, the increase in CSR efforts by corporations is likely to continue to appear disingenuous, misguided or simply inauthentic.

Our framework contributes to both the "firm-centric" and "society-centric" streams of CSR research. The former stream has focused on testing the relationship between social initiatives and financial performance, thus placing emphasis on the benefits to the firm rather than society (Margolis and Walsh 2003). This research has thus unwittingly encouraged a greater divide between business and society by ignoring the outcomes for stakeholders. By highlighting the importance of perceptions by stakeholders of firm's CSR initiatives, our research provides insights into why firm investments in social initiatives are increasingly scrutinized by skeptical stakeholders and may not yield the positive outcomes that prior CSR research has tested for. Concepts such as authenticity may move CSR researchers away from looking for easy win-wins and toward looking for the underlying reasons for the tensions between business and society.

We also contribute to the society-centric stream of CSR research by offering an alternative perspective. Rather than taking a normative approach to CSR (Donaldson and Preston 1995), we offer a descriptive account of how firms can gain legitimacy and trust from stakeholders. We also offer a different approach from the critical perspective on CSR which is suspect of firms' motives for engaging in social initiatives (Banerjee 2008). We instead suggest that CSR, when it is tied to the firm's core purpose and socially connected, holds promise for having a positive impact on society and for being perceived as authentic by stakeholders.

Our research also has implications for practice. Bridging the divide between business and society requires an approach where the firm's CSR efforts are both tied to a distinct purpose that includes broader society and deeply connected to its social context. Only then are such CSR efforts more likely to be perceived as authentic by stakeholders. In this case, there are likely two paths to achieving perceptions of authenticity of a firm's CSR efforts. Organizations can first tie their CSR initiatives to core values that encompass a broader systems view and then seek to connect these efforts with the needs of the greater system. This seems to be the path that several large corporations such as Ben and Jerry's or The Body Shop took as their CSR efforts were initially tied to their distinct mission, vision and values from inception. Embedding and connecting these initiatives within the broader system seems to have followed, allowing for perceptions of authenticity to flourish, until these firms were acquired.

Alternately, firms' CSR efforts may be seen as authentic because they first sought to understand the deep and connected needs of society and then built their CSR efforts into a distinct core purpose. For example, the strategy of Vestergaard Fransdsen (VF), an international company specialising in disease control products is driven by the needs of societies it serves. VF took its deep understanding and connectedness to its social context and turned it into a unique "Humanitarian Entrepreneurship business model, whose 'profit for a purpose' approach has turned humanitarian responsibility into its core business."[1] By being both deeply connected to its social context as well as aligning its

[1] http://www.vestergaard-frandsen.com/about-us.

CSR efforts to a distinct strategic purpose, stakeholders are more likely to perceive VF's CSR activities as authentic. The path to authenticity for many social entrepreneurs also follows this pattern.

The above discussion illustrates, however, that attributions of authenticity are fluid in that these may change over time and place. For example, as Ben and Jerry's and the Body Shop's operations grew globally, their ability to maintain the social connectedness dimension of their CSR efforts became strained and perceptions of authenticity waned. Furthermore, when these firms were acquired by large multinationals (Unilever and L'Oreal respectively), the distinctiveness of their CSR initiatives could no longer be tied to the core purpose of the larger conglomerate resulting in charges of 'selling-out' on their original social missions (Austin and Leonard 2008; Waddock 2008b). At any given time therefore, perceptions of authenticity are being constructed and reconstructed by stakeholders as each CSR initiative is evaluated along these two dimensions.

Limitations and Conclusion

It is important to note that by focusing our discussion at the level of the CSR initiative, it is possible that some activities may be perceived as authentic whereas others may not. Future research should examine such dynamics and their impact on the firm's overall CSR character. Basu and Palazzo (2008) define a firm's CSR character as a pattern of behavior that forms as a result of the firm's cognitive (what it thinks), linguistic (what it says) and behavioral features (what it does). Similarly, Barnett (2007, p. 797) argues that firms are not imbued with a certain CSP state, but rather that "firms make investments that, over time, aggregate into certain CSP postures." It is only at the level of the initiative itself therefore that inferences as to the attributions of authenticity of individual CSR efforts can be made. Whether or not these then aggregate into a more general image of, or reputation for, an authentic CSR character or posture remains to be seen.

In addition, the concept of authenticity is likely related to the concepts of corporate identity, image and reputation. While corporate identity "represents how the organization would like to be perceived" (Markwick and Fill 1997, p. 397) image is what firms believe others see as the central, distinctive and enduring features of the organization (Dutton and Dukerich 1991; Gioia et al. 2000). In this manner, both identity and image are internally shaped constructs. On the other hand, reputation is "defined as stakeholders' perceptions about an organization's ability to create value relative to competitors" (Rindova et al. 2005) and is thus a social construction based on attributes outsiders ascribe to the firm (Dutton and Dukerich 1991). If a firm's CSR efforts are part of its identity and part of the image it creates, attributions of authenticity are more likely to occur. Over time then, a firm may gain a reputation as having an authentic CSR character or posture through the stability, transparency and responsiveness of its CSR efforts (Godfrey 2005). Also, while legitimacy and authenticity are sometimes used interchangeably (e.g., Beverland 2005), they are distinct constructs. Legitimacy refers to "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman 1995, p. 574). In contrast, authenticity refers to both internal aspects of a firm and to its relationship to its social context. In addition, an action can be desirable but not necessarily authentic or it can be authentic but not necessarily desirable. Similarly, trust is a related but distinct concept as we discussed earlier. We leave it to future researchers to determine the relationship between these distinct constructs and authenticity.

Finally, we have focused here on authenticity in corporations; however, there are other organizational forms that may better lend themselves to authenticity. For example, social enterprises, which are usually built around a social mission supported by profit-making activities, are perhaps in the best position to balance social and economic goals. By putting their social mission ahead of their financial goals, however, they are likely in a better position to be true to their values and to connect to society. Future research is needed to explore other such organizational forms and their relationship to authenticity.

As stakeholders increasingly view businesses as contributing to social and environmental problems, and given that the negative scrutiny from stakeholders can quickly damage a firm's reputation in a globalized world, there is an increasing need for business to make meaningful, authentic contributions to society. The challenge, however, is that there are several barriers to authenticity, including globalization which disconnects companies from place, making it difficult for firms to be socially embedded. In addition, the focus on profit maximization often creates a false sense that firms are autonomous, and further disconnects them from society. Finally, with the commoditization of labor and the natural environmental, it may be difficult for firms to engage in CSR activities that truly show compassion for people or the planet. Thus, the wedge between business and society will continue to grow despite increased attention to CSR, unless firms begin to seek authentic ways of engaging with society.

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