



# Consumer evaluations of CSR authenticity: Development and validation of a multidimensional CSR authenticity scale

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## ABSTRACT

Authenticity is a critical concept affecting consumers' judgments of brands, as well as CSR programs. However, while much research has examined the impact of authenticity, there is less understanding regarding the dimensions that influence consumers' perceptions of authenticity, especially within the CSR domain. Thus, the purpose of this research is (1) to identify the dimensions of CSR authenticity and (2) to develop and validate a multi-dimensional scale to assess it. Our findings support a seven-dimensional scale with the following dimensions: community link, reliability, commitment, congruence, benevolence, transparency, and broad impact. In addition, our findings support the efficacy of CSR authenticity for predicting positive consumer attitudes and intentions toward the firm. Marketing implications are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

Organizations commonly expect to reap the benefits from their corporate social responsibility (CSR) endeavors. However, insincere initiatives may leave a negative or conflicting impression on stakeholders if consumers feel the organization is not really committed to the cause (Wagner, Lutz, & Weitz, 2009). Indeed, although increased attention has been given to CSR as the main vehicle by which organizations address stakeholders' social concerns, some research has shown negative consequences of CSR such as mistrust and skepticism surrounding the attempts of doing good (Wagner et al., 2009). Thus, although CSR endeavors are supposed to benefit society and support communities, they are increasingly viewed as a tactic for covering up companies' societal harms (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). For example, the National Football League (NFL) has long and explicitly presented itself as a devoted ambassador of promoting the breast cancer awareness campaign. Although this public gesture seems to be driven by philanthropy, further investigation reveals that only 8% of the revenue generated by the pink campaign goes to the American Cancer Society; the remaining 92% percent goes to the NFL (Gaines, 2013). Consequently, critics have suggested the NFL's tactics are over the top 'pink washing' at best and a deceitful charitable practice at worst (Sternberg, 2013). As such, it is not enough for an organization to behave in a socially responsible manner. Rather, its CSR endeavors need to be considered genuine if the organization expects to obtain desired outcomes.

Surprisingly, the CSR literature has paid little attention to authenticity and there is a dearth of empirical studies exploring why consumers view an organization's CSR actions as authentic or inauthentic. Indeed, although authenticity has been described as one of the vital concepts of modern marketing in consumer research (Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry Jr, 2003; Gilmore & Pine, 2007), there exists limited research to examine and explore its position in a broader light in marketing and consumer behavior (Alexander, 2009). In particular, there is a need to better understand the dimensions that influence consumer perceptions of authenticity with regard to an organization's CSR endeavors. While Alhouti, Johnson, and Holloway (2016) identify four antecedents that influence consumer perceptions of CSR authenticity, they use a unidimensional approach that may not be consistent with prior literature that argues that authenticity is a multidimensional construct (Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015; Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2014; Spiggle, Nguyen, & Caravella, 2012). Further, the Alhouti et al. (2016) scale was not developed using formal scale development techniques and it was tested through snowball sampling using a student sample at a single location which may limit its generalizability.

Consequently, the purpose of the current research is three-fold. First, we build on prior research by seeking to uncover the multiple dimensions of CSR authenticity. Second, we develop and validate a new multidimensional measure of CSR authenticity using both student and national consumer samples. Finally, we test the effects of CSR

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authenticity on a variety of consumer outcomes and identify the differential effects of distinct CSR authenticity dimensions on these outcomes.

We begin with a review of the existing authenticity literature, identifying six potential dimensions (community link, reliability, commitment, congruence, benevolence, transparency) for inclusion in our scale development. We then conduct focus group interviews to validate these dimensions, adding a seventh factor (broad impact) and one control variable (personal connection) to our measures (study 1). Next, we test (study 2), validate (study 3), and apply (study 4) our multidimensional CSR authenticity scale, ending with a discussion of implications and future research directions.

## 2. Conceptual background: CSR, authenticity, and CSR authenticity

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been defined as an organization's endeavors and standing in regard to its societal or stakeholder obligations to increase its positive impact and minimize its negative impact on society (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Due to various market forces such as severe competition, increased media scrutiny, and growing expectations among various stakeholders such as consumers and employees (Cone, 2013), CSR has become a focus of contemporary business practice (Mackey & Sisodia, 2013) leading researchers to advocate examining the context, processes, and outcomes of such social endeavors (e.g., Ellen, Webb, & Mohr, 2006). One factor which has been identified as an important component of the success of CSR programs and which has been found to influence the organizational benefits associated with CSR programs is authenticity (Beckman, Colwell, & Cunningham, 2009; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2014).

Authenticity has been defined as evaluations, judgments, or assessments of how real or genuine something is (Beckman et al., 2009; Grayson & Martinec, 2004) and has been identified as a vital concept of contemporary life (Brown et al., 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). As such, the concept of authenticity has been discussed in various disciplines including marketing (e.g., Alexander, 2009; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Moulard, Garrity, & Rice, 2015), consumer research (e.g., Beverland, 2006; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), tourism (e.g., Wang, 1999), brand management (Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014), culture (e.g., Frazier, Gelman, Wilson, & Hood, 2009), communication (e.g., Molleda, 2010), brand extension (Spiggle et al., 2012), and CSR (Alhouti et al., 2016; Beckman et al., 2009; Godfrey, 2005; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2014). Across these literatures, authenticity has commonly been considered a multi-dimensional construct rather than a unidimensional construct (Beckman et al., 2009; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2014; McShane & Cunningham, 2012; Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014). However, what these researchers measured as authenticity varies. Our research extends the prior literature by using it to identify an initial set of factors of authenticity perceptions and then integrating and expanding this set to construct and validate a scale for measuring CSR authenticity across different contextual settings.

Defining authenticity and its effects on consumer evaluations appears to be complex due to its subjective and contextual nature. Different authenticity perceptions seem unique to specific domains (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Newman, 2016). Indeed, it has been proposed that the notion of authenticity is 'socially-constructed' in which an individual's perceptions and expectations of authenticity depend on the specific situation and context (e.g., Belk & Costa, 1998; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Molleda, 2010). In other words, elements of the context can change views of authenticity, meaning that consumers may respond differently to multiple CSR initiatives by the same company or industry or to the same CSR initiative when moved to a different context (i.e., company or industry) because they judge the authenticity of the initiatives differently. Given the importance of authenticity for the success of CSR programs combined with the potential context-dependence

of its drivers, it is important to understand the dimensions of authenticity within the CSR domain.

Authenticity within the CSR domain has been defined as "the perception of a company's CSR actions as a genuine and true expression of the company's beliefs and behavior toward society that extend beyond legal requirements" (Alhouti et al. 2016, p. 1243). However, the complex nature and dimensionality of consumer evaluations of CSR authenticity have not been explicitly conceptualized in a CSR context. Existing studies of CSR authenticity are mostly conceptual (e.g., Driver, 2006; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2014) or qualitative in nature and largely explore authenticity based on employee perceptions (Beckman et al., 2009; McShane & Cunningham, 2012). A notable exception is work by Alhouti et al. (2016). Alhouti et al. (2016) proposed a unidimensional measure of CSR authenticity with eight items (e.g., the company's CSR actions are genuine, the company is a socially responsible company). However, given that authenticity is commonly perceived as multidimensional (e.g., Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014; Spiggle et al., 2012), there is still a need to better understand and explicate the dimensions which contribute to consumer perceptions of authenticity within the CSR domain. Indeed, we are unaware of any attempt to develop a multidimensional scale of consumer-based authenticity (i.e., one based on consumer evaluations of authenticity).

Building on the previous authenticity literature, we conceptualize consumer-based CSR authenticity as a multidimensional construct including seven different, yet interconnected, dimensions and design a scale to measure it. We test two plausible conceptualizations of consumer-based CSR authenticity as first-order and second-order constructs. In addition, a unidimensional CSR authenticity construct is also examined to compare to our proposed multidimensional constructs in order to better determine its dimensionality.

## 3. The scale development process

In order to develop a multidimensional measure of consumer-based CSR authenticity, we follow traditional scaling procedures as a guide (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Churchill Jr., 1979). The overall process involves the following steps: (1) an in-depth literature review to discover the dimensions that can be used to measure consumer perceptions of CSR authenticity; (2) focus group interviews for an initial validation of these dimensions ( $n = 23$ ; study 1) in order to (3) generate potential scale dimensions and items; (4) a survey to formally pretest the measure ( $n = 216$ ; study 2); (5) an additional survey to test the revised measure with purified items from the pretest ( $n = 609$ ; study 3); and (6) a survey to test the effects of the measure for application ( $n = 720$ ; study 4).

### 3.1. Phase 1: Dimension discovery – Literature review

To determine the dimensions of consumer-based CSR authenticity, we began with an extensive literature review. Based on this review, we identified six potential authenticity dimensions: community link, reliability, commitment, congruence, benevolence, and transparency. Five dimensions were primarily derived from a close reading of research on authenticity in the context of CSR based on the seven factors that were proposed in Beckman et al. (2009) as well as the three indicators that were discussed in Godfrey (2005). One factor from Beckman et al. (2009) (taking a holistic view of the impact of business on all stakeholders) was eliminated given that the current research focuses on consumer perceptions of authenticity rather than a holistic impact of business on all stakeholders (e.g., employees, the investors, the suppliers). Two factors (tailored to social needs of the country and visibly enacted in the community) from Beckman et al.'s (2009) study were combined as one dimension and categorized as *community link* in the current research given that these two factors are both closely related to meeting the social needs of the CSR recipients. The concept of *community link* dimension was also discussed in Mazutis and Slawinski

(2014), labeled as ‘social connectedness’ and in Godfrey (2005), labeled as ‘responsiveness.’ Among the remaining four factors proposed by Beckman et al. (2009), two factors (more than just a business case and transparency) appeared similar to two indicators noted in Godfrey (2005) (stability and transparency); we incorporated these as two dimensions of CSR authenticity labeled *commitment* and *transparency*, respectively. The remaining two factors (consistency and deeply embedded in the fabric of the firm) from Beckman et al. (2009) were also deemed relevant and thus included in the current research as *reliability* and *congruency*, respectively. The notion of the *congruence* dimension was also noted in Mazutis and Slawinski (2014; labeled *distinctiveness*) and in Alhouti et al. (2016; labeled *fit*).

We also attempted to uncover any missing facets of authenticity perceptions through an examination of the authenticity literature in other disciplines. We reviewed > 33 aspects that researchers have proposed contribute to or reflect authenticity across various disciplines (e.g., marketing, brand management, leadership). While a majority of these aspects appeared similar or redundant (e.g., transparency and congruency in authentic leadership; consistency in brand management) to the five dimensions identified from reviewing authenticity in the CSR literature (and discussed in the prior paragraph) or relevant only within a specific context – but not within the CSR context – we did identify one new element from marketing that seemed meaningful. In the context of brand authenticity, it has been proposed that displaying excessive commercial motives is viewed as one of the cues that contribute to inauthenticity (Beverland, 2006; Beverland, Lindgreen, & Vink, 2008; Holt, 2002; Spiggle et al., 2012). Indeed, Moulard, Raggio, and Folse (2016) define brand authenticity as the degree to which brand managers are perceived as being internally motivated, while external motivations (e.g., money, profits) are associated with brands and artists being seen as inauthentic (Moulard et al., 2015, 2016; Moulard, Rice, Garrity, & Mangus, 2014). For example, based on self-determination theory, Moulard et al. (2014, 2015, 2016) argue that those who are true to themselves (i.e., authentic) are motivated by intrinsic motivations, while those driven by extrinsic motivations are often seen as not true to themselves (i.e., inauthentic). In a similar vein, previous CSR literature indicated that when CSR programs are viewed as over-commercialized, such insincere gestures could lead to unfavorable consumer evaluations (Ellen et al., 2006; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). In contrast, Ellen et al. (2006) noted that when there is a perceived altruistic motive, an organization's CSR actions are judged more favorably. Thus, we added the dimension of *benevolence* as the desire of an organization's CSR endeavors to be perceived as altruistic. Thus, our review and synthesis of the existing literature yielded 6 potential dimensions of CSR authenticity (see Table 1), which we then submitted to additional testing.

### 3.2. Phase 2: Study 1 – Testing and refining dimensions

Having identified potential dimensions of CSR authenticity, we next conducted focus group interviews with a broad range of consumers in order to confirm that the dimensions sufficiently reflect actual consumer perceptions and to ensure that no dimensions had been overlooked. Five focus groups (total  $n = 23$  with 5 per group for all but one group with 3 participants) were conducted. Focus group participants ranged in age from 20 to 55; 91% were Caucasian; 52% were female. Participants were recruited via announcements in two graduate and two undergraduate business classes at a large northeastern US university. Additional adult participants were also recruited via snowball sampling at the same institution.

Three CSR programs from the NFL (Play 60, Heads Up Football, A Crucial Catch) were used as the context. These programs provide an appropriate context for researching both CSR and consumers' search for authenticity for several reasons. Sport organizations are considered public goods with a built-in responsibility to give back and support their communities (Siegfried & Zimbalist, 2000) and are unique for being both social and economic institutions. This need to balance social and

economic goals makes sport organizations well-suited for researching CSR issues (Bradish & Cronin, 2009; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2014). In particular, the NFL has been the most popular sport in North America for more than three decades (Schwartz & McGarry, 2014) and contributes a high expenditure to diverse types of CSR programs (Extejt, 2004).

The focus group moderator provided descriptions of the three CSR programs as well as definitions of CSR and CSR authenticity. Participants then discussed their ideas about authenticity regarding these three programs. Specifically, the group was asked open-ended questions including: Which of these programs seem most genuine or authentic in your opinion? What aspects of these programs make them authentic in your opinion? What aspects, if any, make any of these feel inauthentic to you? and How would you rank the three different CSR programs based on your authenticity perceptions? Additional follow-up questions were asked for clarification, when needed.

Responses were analyzed by moving back and forth iteratively between the transcriptions and the extant literature to identify patterns of meaning and emergent themes (Boyatzis, 1998). We first coded the transcriptions using codes not based on any preexisting notions or dimensions from the literature (e.g., high involvement, donation proximity, cause importance, altruistic motives, profit seeking motives, pursuing own benefits, hypocrisy, actual impact, personal relevancy). In the second step, these codes were then compared to the dimensions identified in the authenticity literature; 83 of the initial 97 codes corresponded to the 6 dimensions we had identified from the literature. An analysis of the remaining 14 codes suggested two additional dimensions, as discussed below.

Thus, analysis of the focus group interviews led to three insights. First, the vast majority of participants generally accepted the proposed six dimensions as meaningful components in evaluating an organization's diverse CSR programs. Second, two additional factors – *broad impact* and *personal connection* – were identified as meaningful dimensions of perceptions of CSR authenticity. However, because one's personal connection to a specific cause may vary depending on his/her personal experience and/or situations, this factor is treated as a control variable rather than being added as an additional dimension. Lastly, the data indicate that all of the focus group participants unanimously agreed that perceptions of CSR authenticity are an important concept when assessing an organization's CSR programs.

Thus, based on our analysis of the literature combined with the results from our focus groups, we propose a seven dimension consumer-based CSR authenticity scale. The definition of each dimension and examples of evidence for these dimensions from the focus groups are discussed below.

### 3.3. Dimensions of CSR authenticity

The seven dimensions of our proposed consumer-based CSR authenticity scale are: community link, reliability, commitment, congruence, benevolence, transparency, and broad impact.

#### 3.3.1. Community link

Community link refers to the degree to which stakeholders perceive CSR initiatives to be connected to their communities (Beckman et al., 2009). Initiatives are perceived as more authentic when they serve stakeholders' interests and/or benefit the local community and support the people within the community (Beckman et al., 2009; Driver, 2006; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2014). Indeed, Mazutis and Slawinski (2014) argue that social connectedness to communities (the degree to which an organization's CSR activities are linked to the social context in which the organization operates) is one of two core dimensions of authenticity perceptions.

Consistent with these ideas, focus group participants used the degree to which CSR programs met social needs and benefitted the local community as a criteria for assessing their authenticity. As participants commented,

**Table 1**  
Six consumer-based CSR authenticity dimensions and their definitions identified from the literature.

Dimension	Definition	Related dimension(s)/literature
Community link	The degree to which stakeholders perceive CSR initiatives are connected to their communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsiveness (Godfrey, 2005)</li> <li>• Tailored to the social needs of the community (Beckman et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Visibly enacted in the community (Beckman et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Social connectedness (Mazutis &amp; Slawinski, 2014)</li> <li>• Communal commitment (Leigh et al., 2006)</li> </ul>
Reliability	The degree to which stakeholders perceive the CSR program actually does what it promises to do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The CSR program actually does what it promises to do (Alhouti et al., 2016; Basu &amp; Palazzo, 2008; Wagner et al., 2009).</li> <li>• Consistency between a company's CSR endeavors and all other aspects of the company's operations (Beckman et al., 2009)</li> </ul>
Commitment	The degree to which stakeholders perceive the organization as dedicated or steadfast in the CSR initiatives as opposed to adjusting initiatives to meet current trends.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A company's consistent CSR engagements are an important indicator to avoid inauthentic perceptions of the company's CSR endeavors showing the company's long-term commitment to such CSR efforts (Godfrey, 2005)</li> <li>• An organization's commitment to a designated CSR program (e.g., Beckman et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Guru's altruistic communal commitment preserves the authenticity subculture of consumption among MG owners and furthers the collective's level of commitment (Leigh et al., 2006)</li> </ul>
Congruence	The degree to which stakeholders perceive an alignment between an organization's CSR efforts and the vital core of its own business.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deeply embedded in the fabric of the firm (Beckman et al., 2009)</li> <li>• Aligned with organization's true identity (McShane &amp; Cunningham, 2012)</li> <li>• Distinctiveness (Mazutis &amp; Slawinski, 2014)</li> <li>• Fit (Alhouti et al., 2016)</li> </ul>
Benevolence	The degree to which stakeholders perceive CSR initiatives as altruistic as opposed to commercial (profit seeking).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downplaying commercial motives (Beverland, 2006)</li> <li>• Avoiding brand exploitation (Spiggle et al., 2012)</li> <li>• The lack of marker involvement strengthens MG owners' commitment to the brand and subculture (Leigh et al., 2006)</li> </ul>
Transparency	The degree to which stakeholders perceive CSR decisions, practices, outcomes, etc. to be open and available to public evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be open and available to public evaluation (e.g., Basu &amp; Palazzo, 2008; Beckman et al., 2009; Godfrey, 2005)</li> </ul>

I know a lot of people when they think of CSR they usually think about *how it affects them and the area around them*. So if it doesn't affect your community, it may be hard to relate to the CSR. (female, age 20-25<sup>2</sup>)

If you know that the money is going to go to some organizations, there can be trust in that. But if you can see *how it's going to affect me and my community directly*, then there is *even more trust* in that, I think. (male, age 20-25)

### 3.3.2. Reliability

Reliability is defined as the degree to which stakeholders perceive that the CSR program actually does what it promises to do (Alhouti et al., 2016; Beckman et al., 2009; Wagner et al., 2009). It reflects whether the program is what it appears to be and not the result of spin or exaggerated claims (Brown et al., 2003; Grayson & Martinec, 2004). What an organization *does* should be consistent with what it *says* about what it is *doing* to get stakeholders' acceptance and be considered as genuine or real. Relatedly, Wagner et al. (2009) argued that an organization may be perceived as demonstrating hypocrisy (i.e., the belief that a company claims to be something that it is not) when inconsistent information about its own statements (e.g., CSR promises) and observed behaviors (e.g., CSR actions) emerges. In other words, the greater the consistency between what an organization says and what an organization does (or what the CSR program promises to do and actually does), the more authentic the CSR program will be perceived to be (Alhouti et al., 2016; Beckman et al., 2009). Thus, reliability incorporates aspects of both whether a company follows through on its promises and whether it intended to in the first place (i.e., its communications are honest and devoid of exaggeration).

Focus participants reflected ideas about reliability in comments such as:

To me, the most important thing is that they *follow through on their*

*promises*. I don't want to see *empty promises* where you don't actually see anything come out of it. (female, age 26-30)

### 3.3.3. Commitment

Commitment is defined as the degree to which stakeholders perceive the organization as dedicated or steadfast in its CSR initiatives as opposed to adjusting initiatives to meet current trends (e.g., Beckman et al., 2009; Godfrey, 2005). Beckman et al. (2009) describe an organization's commitment to CSR as 'more than just a business case' when an organization's CSR endeavors are embedded in a passion for the cause and moral values, as opposed to when such endeavors are done solely for short-term publicity. In particular, Godfrey (2005) claimed that a company's consistent CSR engagements are an important indicator to avoid inauthentic perceptions of the company's CSR endeavors showing the company's long-term commitment to such CSR efforts. Such intrinsic motivation has also been linked to authenticity in the branding literature (e.g., Beverland et al., 2008; Holt, 2002). For example, Moulard et al. (2014, 2016) find that brands (brand managers) and artists are perceived as authentic if they are passionate and committed to their calling.

Consistent with these ideas, focus group participants were more likely to view programs as authentic if the organization had been dedicated to it for a long time. Indeed, Moulard et al. (2016) argue that longevity positively impacts brand authenticity because it serves as a signal of commitment. This difference in perceived authenticity for programs with a long-term view vs. those that last only a short time is reflected in the following quotes:

October is known for it – for breast cancer awareness and I feel like everyone knows about it and they are just wearing pink because they're told to, not really... like they do donate a lot and stuff but it's just one month instead of it could be a full year thing if they really wanted to make it that. (female, age 20-25)

I think it goes a long way if [the NFL] can say that they've been supporting, to the extent that they want to, breast cancer research [through *A Crucial Catch*] for twenty years. People might feel like they are really committed to it. (male, age 26-30)

<sup>2</sup> Focus group participants provided their age as a range rather than a precise age in an effort to protect their privacy.

### 3.3.4. Congruence

Congruence is defined as the degree to which stakeholders perceive an alignment between an organization's CSR efforts and the vital core of its own business (e.g., Alhouti et al., 2016; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2014). Previous research indicates that, in order to be authentic in the eyes of stakeholders, an organization's CSR actions should be deeply rooted in the core value of the business (Beckman et al., 2009). Mazutis and Slawinski (2014) argue that organizational members must have a clear and shared sense of their organization's values and purpose in order to be true to themselves in their CSR efforts. As such, CSR activities that are congruent with an organization's core values tend to be perceived as more authentic by key stakeholders (Beckman et al., 2009; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2014). More specifically, Alhouti et al. (2016) note that fit is perceived as an authenticity cue of a CSR action when the CSR aligns with the brand's concept (e.g., a company that sells outdoor sports equipment supports the environment) or when the action logically aligns with the company's core business (e.g., a company that donates its products for people in need).

Similarly, focus group participants perceived congruence as a meaningful authenticity factor when the action logically aligned with the organization's core business and the organization's expertise could be integrated with its CSR programs.

[The NFL has] the means and the expertise to make a change and I think if it's congruent with what the business is doing they might be able to do that much better than with the breast cancer [A *Crucial Catch*] which is not very well linked to what they are doing. That makes it even more authentic if they can actually do something about it. (male, age 20-25)

If you're doing something completely left wing from what your company does, it questions why are you doing it. And then it brings up that whole profit seeking versus being authentic. For me, if you have something that *aligns with* your business values then there's no reason why it's not more genuine. (female, age 20-25)

### 3.3.5. Benevolence

Benevolence is defined as the degree to which stakeholders perceive CSR initiatives as altruistic (as opposed to commercial/profit seeking; e.g., Alhouti et al., 2016; Leigh et al., 2006; Spiggle et al., 2012). Downplaying commercial motives has been linked to authenticity within the branding literature (e.g., Beverland, 2006; Holt, 2002). As such, when an organization is not really committed to their CSR endeavors, and just aims to enhance their bottom-line, stakeholders tend to perceive such endeavors as inauthentic. In particular, stakeholders tend to question the authenticity of CSR initiatives when they perceive organizations are primarily implementing these programs for their own benefit as self-centered attribution (Ellen et al., 2006).

Issues of benevolence were particularly salient to focus group participants when evaluating *A Crucial Catch*, the NFL's CSR program linked to breast cancer research. In general, consistent with findings by Barone, Norman, and Miyazaki (2007), participants were more likely to be skeptical when an organization's CSR program linked a social cause (such as breast cancer awareness) to sales (merchandise sales). These concerns are highlighted in the following quote:

I think the merchandising aspect of the breast cancer one [A *Crucial Catch*] makes it less authentic because they're telling – they're promoting sales in order to support breast cancer and it's kind of hard for people to see how that's actually supporting the cause. (female, age 20-25)

### 3.3.6. Transparency

Transparency is defined as the degree to which stakeholders perceive CSR information (e.g., CSR decisions, practices, and outcomes) to be open and available to public evaluation (Basu & Palazzo, 2008;

Beckman et al., 2009; Godfrey, 2005). Strathern (2000) notes that transparency, “making the invisible visible” (p. 309), helps stakeholders understand what is happening within an organization. It helps build trust (Beckman et al., 2009; Godfrey, 2005) and has been identified as a key factor in creating organizationally embedded CSR endeavors as opposed to reactive CSR endeavors under external pressures (Basu & Palazzo, 2008). Transparency is particularly important when stakeholders' mistrust toward CSR actions is prevalent. For example, Beckman et al. (2009) argued that while a lack of transparency in CSR leads external stakeholders to perceive that activities are inauthentic, authenticity perceptions can be achieved by opening the organization's CSR endeavors to various stakeholder groups.

Reflecting these concerns, focus group participants viewed the NFL's alliance with the American Cancer Society as an attempt to increase their bottom line rather than benefitting the cause. This lack of perceived benevolence was frequently linked to a lack of transparency, as illustrated in this participant's views:

[A *Crucial Catch*], the breast cancer awareness one, the fact that we don't know, none of us, well, I know that 95 percent of the pink gear profits are going back to... So we don't know that 100 percent of the money that they raise for the pink gear goes toward breast cancer awareness, so there is a certain *non-transparency* about that program, just because, I haven't heard them say that 100 percent goes... And if they don't say that 100 percent goes, that to me implies that 100 percent is not going... (male, age 50-55)

### 3.3.7. Broad impact

Broad impact is defined as the degree to which stakeholders perceive that CSR initiatives benefit numerous recipients. The more individuals impacted, the more likely the program is to be perceived as authentic. While this dimension has not been identified in prior literature, numerous focus group participants highlighted this aspect in their evaluations of the CSR programs.

*Play 60* involves *every child* whether they're athletic or not and every single kid should go out and get activity every day. The other two are wonderful, too, but ... *the Crucial Catch* gears more towards women and the other one [*Heads Up Football*] gears towards the sports kids and adults.... It's wonderful but *Play 60* is for *every kid*. (female, age 50-55)

I think also the number of people that are going to be helped from these programs... is a really big key element... Oh, that's a really nice idea but is it really only going to help two people or this is a really great idea and this has the potential to impact a whole world like obesity. (female, age 26-30)

## 3.4. Phase 3: Item generation

Having identified dimensions relevant to CSR authenticity, our next task was to generate items for measuring these constructs. Based on the deductive approach to item generation (Hinkin, 1995), we used the dimension definitions, comments from focus groups, and the literature review to generate 77 initial scale items. Two items related to congruence were adapted directly from prior research (Speed & Thompson, 2000), while the other items were new. A panel of expert judges composed of two marketing professors and three PhD students reviewed the items for clarity and reasonable construction, as well as to make sure that the items properly reflected the construct of interest (Tian, Bearden, & Hunter, 2001). In particular, the experts were asked to focus on redundancy, lack of association, content ambiguity (Hardesty & Bearden, 2004) and scale representativeness of the construct (Zaichkowsky, 1985). Based on these criteria and feedback, the scale was reduced to 48 items – 6 items for each of the seven CSR authenticity dimensions and personal connection. These items were shared

**Table 2**  
Consumer-based CSR authenticity items, loadings, CRs, AVEs, and reliability coefficients.

Factors and items	CR (1)	CR (2)	AVE (1)	AVE (2)
	Loadings (1)	Loadings (2)	$\alpha$ (1)	$\alpha$ (2)
Community link	0.87	0.94	0.57	0.77
(*1) I think people in my community will be helped by [CSR program].	0.56	0.86	0.86	0.93
I can see how [CSR program] impacts my community.	0.73	0.83		
*I think [CSR program] positively affects my community and the area around me.	0.84	0.93		
*I think [CSR program] is valuable to my community.	0.80	0.90		
There is a positive interaction between [CSR program] and my community.	0.78	0.85		
Reliability	0.89	0.94	0.58	0.79
*[CSR program] will actually do what it promises to do.	0.77	0.92	0.93	0.91
*[CSR program] accomplishes what it says it will accomplish.	0.89	0.91		
*[CSR program] achieves its designated goals.	0.83	0.90		
The results of [CSR program] are in line with the desired results.	0.74	0.83		
Commitment	0.89	0.95	0.62	0.80
*The NFL provides a great deal of support for [CSR program].	0.76	0.88	0.89	0.93
*The NFL seems to be highly committed to [CSR program].	0.80	0.90		
*The NFL seems to be highly involved with [CSR program].	0.87	0.88		
The NFL appears to be highly dedicated to [CSR program].	0.78	0.91		
The NFL seems steadfast in their support of [CSR program].	0.75	0.90		
Congruence	0.89	0.92	0.67	0.73
*The NFL and [CSR program] fit together well. <sup>1</sup>	0.80	0.94	0.89	0.89
*There is a logical connection between the NFL and [CSR program]. <sup>1</sup>	0.73	0.77		
*[CSR program] seems to align well with the NFL.	0.89	0.87		
[CSR program] and the NFL seem compatible.	0.85	0.83		
Benevolence	0.69	0.89	0.37	0.67
(*2) The support by the NFL for [CSR program] seems altruistic to me.	0.36	0.81	0.69	0.87
The NFL supports [CSR program] because they care about this cause.	0.76	0.85		
(*3) The NFL is acting benevolently in their support for [CSR program].	0.61	0.85		
(*4) The NFL is being philanthropic in their support for [CSR program].	0.65	0.75		
Transparency	0.83	0.93	0.49	0.73
(*5) The NFL's [CSR program] seems very transparent.	0.60	0.90	0.94	0.90
(6) All aspects of the NFL's [CSR program] are open to public evaluation.	0.66	0.81		
The important features of the NFL's [CSR program] are accessible to the public.	0.78	0.81		
*It is easy to evaluate aspects of the NFL's [CSR program].	0.74	0.82		
(*7) The NFL's [CSR program] exhibits a lot transparency.	0.71	0.91		
Broad impact	0.89	0.95	0.63	0.79
*The NFL's [CSR program] positively impacts a lot of people.	0.76	0.91	0.94	0.93
*The NFL's [CSR program] benefits many individuals.	0.79	0.89		
*The NFL's [CSR program] helps numerous people.	0.80	0.87		
The NFL's [CSR program] positively affects many people.	0.82	0.90		
The NFL's [CSR program] has a broad impact on many people.	0.79	0.87		

Note. \*Final three items for each dimension. (1)–(7). Revised Items from the initial measurement model: (1) [CSR program] helps my community. (2) The NFL's support of [CSR program] is unselfish. (3) The NFL supports [CSR program] to benefit others. (4) The NFL supports [CSR program] to be generous. (5) The public can easily evaluate the NFL's [CSR program]. (6) The public can understand what goes on in the NFL's [CSR program]. (7) It is easy to evaluate the NFL's [CSR program].

<sup>1</sup> Items from Speed and Thompson (2000).

with three PhD students and nine CSR practitioners who qualitatively reviewed the items for face validity. Based on their feedback, we modified several items, leading to a revised pool of 35 items (see Table 2).

### 3.5. Phase 4: Study 2 – Initial scale validation

To assess the validity and reliability of the scale, we conducted a formal pretest with 216 business students (75.9% males, 82.9% Caucasian). Participants rated the items with respect to the NFL's Play 60 program. We conducted the reliability tests as well as confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the factor representation of items for the seven dimensions of the consumer-based CSR authenticity scale. The initial measurement scales indicated adequate internal reliability – reliability coefficients for all measurement items except benevolence (0.67) exceeded the cutoff standard of 0.70 (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2001), ranging from 0.86 for community link to 0.94 for broad impact (see Table 2).

To test construct validity, we began by assessing the assumption of a normal distribution associated with the maximum likelihood method of

estimation. Because this assumption was violated, we used a scaling procedure, maximum likelihood parameter estimates with standard errors and a mean-adjusted chi-square test statistic that is robust to non-normality (Satorra-Bentler chi-square, S-B  $\chi^2$ ) (Muthén & Muthén, 2008). Factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were obtained in the initial CFA results using MPlus.

Analyses suggested insufficient validity for two factors – benevolence and transparency. The composite reliability of benevolence was less than the recommended cut-value of 0.70 and the values of AVE for both benevolence (0.37) and transparency (0.49) were below the recommended criteria of 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009). Discriminant validity of these two constructs was also insufficient, as the AVE for benevolence and transparency did not exceed the squared correlations between that construct and any other (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Construct validity of the remaining five factors was sufficient, with all items in the measurement model showing high factor loadings, ranging from 0.56 to 0.89 (see Table 3A).

We next tested the dimensionality of the proposed scale using three plausible consumer-based CSR authenticity measurement models – a

**Table 3**  
Correlations among the consumer-based CSR authenticity constructs.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A. Initial model							
1.CL	(0.57)	–	–	–	–	–	–
2.RE	0.50**	(0.58)	–	–	–	–	–
3.CM	0.42**	0.67**	(0.62)	–	–	–	–
4.CG	0.24**	0.45**	0.60**	(0.67)	–	–	–
5.BN	0.50**	0.54**	0.67**	0.63**	(0.37)	–	–
6.TR	0.53**	0.66**	0.71**	0.42**	0.63**	(0.49)	–
7.BI	0.57**	0.69**	0.68**	0.50**	0.64**	0.72**	(0.63)
B. Final model							
1.CL	(0.77)	–	–	–	–	–	–
2.RE	0.51**	(0.79)	–	–	–	–	–
3.CM	0.41**	0.72**	(0.80)	–	–	–	–
4.CG	0.32**	0.59**	0.62**	(0.73)	–	–	–
5.BN	0.43**	0.72**	0.55**	0.38**	(0.67)	–	–
6.TR	0.45**	0.77**	0.61**	0.46**	0.57**	(0.73)	–
7.BI	0.61**	0.65**	0.62**	0.57**	0.51**	0.55**	(0.79)

CL = community link. RE = reliability. CM = commitment. CG = congruence. BN = benevolence. TR = transparency. BI = broad impact. Numbers in a bracket on the diagonal represent average variance extracted (AVE).

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

first-order seven-factor model, a second-order model, and a unidimensional model. The fit of the first-order and second-order models were both acceptable, but the second-order model (CFI = 0.892, TLI = 0.883, RMSEA = 0.062, SRMR = 0.079, S-B  $\chi^2 = 836.78$ ,  $df = 458$  (S-B  $\chi^2/df = 1.83$ )) provides a poorer fit than the multidimensional model (CFI = 0.905, TLI = 0.893, RMSEA = 0.059, SRMR = 0.060, S-B  $\chi^2 = 778.434$ ,  $df = 443$  (S-B  $\chi^2/df = 1.76$ )). Consistent with our contention that CSR is a multidimensional construct, both the first-order and second-order models performed better than a one-factor measurement model loading all items on one factor (CFI = 0.689, TLI = 0.668, RMSEA = 0.104, SRMR = 0.121, S-B  $\chi^2 = 1559.18$ ,  $df = 465$  (S-B  $\chi^2/df = 4.66$ )).

### 3.6. Phase 5: Item purification

As a result of the concerns with respect to the convergent validity and discriminant validity of benevolence and transparency, we made minor modifications to the seven items related to these constructs (see note, Table 2). In addition, we revised one item related to community link which had the lowest factor loading (0.56). These revised items

**Table 4**  
Model comparisons: scale dimensionality.

Competing models	S-B $\chi^2$	df	S-B $\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Criteria			< 5	> 0.90	> 0.90	< 0.080	< 0.090
Initial measurement model (n = 216)							
1. Null	4012.21	496	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2. First-order (32 items)	778.43	443	1.76	0.905	0.893	0.059	0.069
3. Second-order (32 items)	836.78	458	1.83	0.892	0.883	0.062	0.079
4. One-factor (32 items)	1559.18	465	4.66	0.689	0.668	0.104	0.121
Final measurement model (n = 609)							
1. Null model (32 items)	12,195.86	496	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2. First-order (32 items)	1067.65	443	2.41	0.947	0.940	0.048	0.047
3. Second-order (32 items)	1240.23	458	2.71	0.933	0.928	0.053	0.103
4. One-factor (32 items)	4462.850	465	12.58	0.658	0.636	0.119	0.115
5. Null model (21 items)	7317.45	210	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
6. First-order (21 items)	337.62	168	2.01	0.976	0.970	0.041	0.036
7. Second-order (21 items)	491.54	183	2.69	0.957	0.950	0.053	0.101
8. One-factor (21 items)	2390.01	190	12.58	0.674	0.640	0.138	0.114

Note. S-B  $\chi^2$  = the Satorra-Bentler scaled chi-square statistic. CFI = the Comparative Fit Index calculated from S-B  $\chi^2$ . TLI = the Tucker-Lewis Fit Index calculated from S-B  $\chi^2$ . RMSEA = the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation calculated from S-B  $\chi^2$ . NA = not applicable.

were reviewed by a panel of experts. We then conducted a new validation study.

### 3.7. Phase 6: Study 3 – Final scale validation

Six hundred and nine national consumers from Amazon mTurk ( $M_{age} = 36.01$ ,  $SD_{age} = 12.03$ , 58.5% males, 79.5% Caucasian) participated in the validation study in exchange for \$0.25. Participants responded to the questionnaire based on the NFL's Heads Up Football Program. The revised scale showed adequate internal reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. All items had high factor loadings, exceeding cut-off point of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2009); reliability coefficients exceeded the cutoff standard of 0.70 (Murphy & Davidshofer, 2001); and AVEs were > 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2009), see Table 2. In addition, AVE for each construct exceed the squared correlations between that construct and any other, indicating discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; see Table 3B).

We again examined the dimensionality of the scale, using a first-order seven-factor model, a second-order model, and a unidimensional (i.e., one-factor) model. To achieve a more parsimonious scale, only the three best-loaded items for each construct was selected (Homburg, Schwemmler, & Kuehnl, 2015). Once again, the first-order multidimensional model (CFI = 0.976, TLI = 0.970, RMSEA = 0.041, SRMR = 0.036, S-B  $\chi^2 = 337.616$ ,  $df = 168$  (S-B  $\chi^2/df = 2.01$ )) provided a better fit than either the second-order model (CFI = 0.957, TLI = 0.950, RMSEA = 0.053, SRMR = 0.101, S-B  $\chi^2 = 491.54$ ,  $df = 183$  (S-B  $\chi^2/df = 2.69$ )) or the unidimensional model (CFI = 0.674, TLI = .640, RMSEA = 0.138, SRMR = 0.114, S-B  $\chi^2 = 2390.01$ ,  $df = 190$  (S-B  $\chi^2/df = 12.58$ )), see Table 4.

Lastly, to establish nomological validity, we examined the association between the seven CSR authenticity dimensions and Alhouthi et al.'s (2016) existing unidimensional CSR authenticity scale. All seven dimensions were significantly related to the unidimensional CSR authenticity scale at  $p < .01$  level, providing strong support for nomological validity: benevolence ( $r = 0.83$ ), reliability (0.77), transparency (0.76), commitment (0.66), broad impact (0.55), community link (0.43), congruence (0.45).

## 4. Testing and refining the scale

### 4.1. Phase 7: Study 4 – Effects of consumer-based CSR authenticity

Having developed and validated a consumer-based CSR authenticity scale, our next step was to show the usefulness of the scale for

predicting meaningful consumer outcomes and for increasing our understanding of the drivers of CSR authenticity. Prior research proposes that authenticity cues influence brand beliefs, brand trust, and brand success (e.g., Brown et al., 2003; Napoli et al., 2014; Spiggle et al., 2012) and can positively impact employees (Beckman et al., 2009; McShane & Cunningham, 2012). CSR perceptions have been found to influence purchase behaviors (Alhouthi et al., 2016; Mohr & Webb, 2005), positive WOM to support the organization (Romani, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2013), and feelings of gratitude toward the organization (Romani et al., 2013). The impact of such CSR efforts, however, should depend on their perceived authenticity.

Thus, in Study 4, we examine the relationship between consumer-based CSR authenticity and eight important customer outcome variables: organization reputation, purchase intentions (operationalized as attendance intentions), WOM toward the organization and its CSR program, intentions to support the organization (i.e., media consumption intentions) and its CSR program, feelings of gratitude toward the organization, and relationship building efforts between the organization and consumers. We anticipate that all CSR authenticity dimensions will be positively associated with these outcome variables.

In addition to testing the proposed effects of CSR authenticity, we seek to understand the explanatory power of this construct for predicting consumer outcomes above and beyond other known influences on CSR authenticity, namely participants' identification with the NFL (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002), football involvement (Ko, Kim, Clausen, & Kim, 2008), personal connection with the cause (McShane & Cunningham, 2012), and gender (Ross, Patterson, & Stutts, 1992). We also take advantage of the multidimensionality of our measure to understand the differential effects of each dimension on the outcome variables. The associations between these dimensions and the outcome variables also provide additional evidence of the nomological validity of the CSR authenticity scale.

#### 4.1.1. Method (pre-test)

In order to test the effects of CSR authenticity, we first needed to identify examples of CSR programs perceived as high and low in authenticity. A pretest was conducted with 135 national consumers ( $M_{\text{age}} = 33.42$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.77$ , 57.4% male, 64.4% Caucasian) recruited from Amazon mTurk and paid \$0.20 for their participation. Using a Qualtrics online survey, participants were randomly assigned to view one of three CSR programs currently used by the NFL: Play 60 ( $n = 44$ ), Heads Up Football ( $n = 45$ ), and A Crucial Catch ( $n = 46$ ). Participants read a brief description of the designated program and then answered the 21-item consumer-based CSR authenticity scale, as well as questions regarding identification with the NFL (Trail & James, 2001), personal connection with the cause, football involvement (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009), and demographic information. See Table 5 for measures.

#### 4.1.2. Pre-test results

A one-way MANCOVA (controlling for identification with the NFL, football involvement, personal connection with the cause, and gender) revealed significant differences among the three CSR programs on the seven CSR authenticity dimensions (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.664$ ,  $F(2, 128) = 3.96$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Play 60 was seen as having higher authenticity than A Crucial Catch across all seven dimensions: community link ( $M_{\text{p60}} = 5.37$ ,  $M_{\text{cc}} = 4.57$ ,  $t = 4.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ), reliability ( $M_{\text{p60}} = 5.04$ ,  $M_{\text{cc}} = 4.67$ ,  $t = 1.91$ ,  $p = .059$ ), commitment ( $M_{\text{p60}} = 5.05$ ,  $M_{\text{cc}} = 4.57$ ,  $t = 2.53$ ,  $p = .013$ ), congruence ( $M_{\text{p60}} = 5.54$ ,  $M_{\text{cc}} = 4.70$ ,  $t = 4.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ), benevolence ( $M_{\text{p60}} = 5.19$ ,  $M_{\text{cc}} = 4.75$ ,  $t = 2.04$ ,  $p = .044$ ), transparency ( $M_{\text{p60}} = 5.07$ ,  $M_{\text{cc}} = 4.46$ ,  $t = 2.67$ ,  $p < .009$ ), broad impact ( $M_{\text{p60}} = 5.33$ ,  $M_{\text{cc}} = 4.58$ ,  $t = 3.55$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Heads Up Football did not differ from Play 60 on any dimension, except congruence ( $M_{\text{p60}} = 5.54$ ,  $M_{\text{huf}} = 5.17$ ,  $p < .06$ ; all other  $p$ 's  $> 0.1$ ) and only differed from A Crucial Catch with respect to community link

( $M_{\text{huf}} = 5.09$ ,  $M_{\text{cc}} = 4.57$ ,  $t = 2.62$ ,  $p = .010$ ), congruence ( $M_{\text{huf}} = 5.17$ ,  $M_{\text{cc}} = 4.70$ ,  $t = 2.45$ ,  $p = .016$ ) and broad impact ( $M_{\text{huf}} = 5.34$ ,  $M_{\text{cc}} = 4.58$ ,  $t = 3.55$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Consequently, we selected Play 60 as our high authenticity condition and A Crucial Catch as the low authenticity condition in the main study.

#### 4.1.3. Method (main study)

Five hundred eighty five national consumers ( $M_{\text{age}} = 35.45$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.40$ , 57.4% male, 80.5% Caucasian) recruited from Amazon mTurk participated in the main study in exchange for \$0.30. Participants were randomly assigned to either the high authentic CSR condition (Play 60;  $n = 289$ ) or the low authentic CSR condition (A Crucial Catch;  $n = 296$ ). After reading a description of the assigned program, participants answered the 21-item consumer-based CSR authenticity scale, as well as questions to assess identification with the NFL, personal connection with the cause, football involvement, the eight dependent measures mentioned previously, and demographic information. Established scales were used for all the outcome and control variables (see Table 5).

#### 4.1.4. Manipulation check

A one-way MANCOVA with program as the independent variable, authenticity scale as the dependent variable, and controlling for identification with the NFL, football involvement, personal connection with the cause, and gender, revealed a significant effect of program on the seven CSR authenticity dimensions (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.719$ ,  $F(1, 579) = 31.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As expected, those in the high CSR authenticity condition rated the program higher than those in the low CSR authenticity condition across all seven of the CSR authenticity dimensions: community link ( $M_{\text{high}} = 4.54$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.20$ ;  $F(1, 579) = 31.92$ ,  $p = .001$ ), reliability ( $M_{\text{high}} = 5.01$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.65$ ;  $F = 13.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ), commitment ( $M_{\text{high}} = 5.40$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 5.16$ ;  $F = 7.36$ ,  $p = .007$ ), congruence ( $M_{\text{high}} = 5.86$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.53$ ;  $F = 177.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ), benevolence ( $M_{\text{high}} = 5.23$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.80$ ;  $F = 16.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ), transparency ( $M_{\text{high}} = 4.95$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.44$ ;  $F = 23.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ), broad impact ( $M_{\text{high}} = 5.35$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 5.04$ ;  $F = 10.88$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Thus, the CSR authenticity manipulation was successful.

#### 4.1.5. Effects of CSR authenticity

As predicted, a MANCOVA revealed a significant effect of program on consumer outcomes (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.972$ ,  $F(1, 579) = 2.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ). More specifically, the more authentic CSR program was associated with more positive consumer outcomes for six of the eight outcome variables: organization reputation ( $F(1, 579) = 6.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $M_{\text{high}} = 4.87$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.58$ ), WOM intentions toward the organization ( $F(1, 579) = 5.49$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $M_{\text{high}} = 5.25$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 5.05$ ) and toward the CSR program ( $F(1, 579) = 11.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $M_{\text{high}} = 5.02$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.67$ ), intentions to support the CSR program ( $F(1, 579) = 3.70$ ,  $p = .055$ ;  $M_{\text{high}} = 4.32$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.10$ ), feelings of gratitude toward the organization ( $F(1, 579) = 5.44$ ,  $p < .05$ ;  $M_{\text{high}} = 5.15$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.90$ ), and relationship building efforts between the organization and consumers ( $F(1, 579) = 9.27$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $M_{\text{high}} = 4.64$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.31$ ). The effects of authenticity on purchase intentions ( $M_{\text{high}} = 4.98$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 4.97$ ) and intentions to support the organization ( $M_{\text{high}} = 5.70$ ,  $M_{\text{low}} = 5.60$ ) were not significant ( $p$ 's  $> 0.1$ ).

#### 4.1.6. Differential effects of CSR authenticity dimensions

Prior to examining the individual effects of each dimension of the CSR Authenticity scale, we first ran a multivariate regression analysis with the consumer outcomes as the dependent variables, the CSR authenticity dimensions as the independent variables, and four covariates (identification with the NFL, football involvement, personal connection, and gender). All of the CSR authenticity dimensions positively impacted the consumer outcome scales: community link (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.931$ ,  $F(11, 573) = 5.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ), reliability (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.954$ ,  $F(11, 573) = 3.38$ ,  $p = .001$ ), commitment (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.972$ ,  $F(11,$



**Table 5**  
A list of scales, items, and their reliability coefficients.

	$\alpha$
Consumer outcome variables and items	
Organization reputation (Gaines-Ross, 1998)	0.924
The NFL is a high-quality organization.	
The NFL is a sound organization.	
The NFL sets an example of how major sport organization should be run.	
I would believe in the NFL if it were under media attack.	
Purchase intentions (i.e., attendance intentions) (Kwon, Trail, & James, 2007; Trail, Anderson, & Fink, 2005)	0.922
I intend to attend the NFL's games.	
I will attend the NFL's games in the near future.	
The likelihood that I will attend the NFL's games in the future is high.	
If I had the funds and lived close to my favorite team, I would attend the NFL's games in the near future.	
Word of mouth intentions toward the organization (Walker, Heere, Parent, & Drane, 2010)	0.937
I will recommend the NFL's games to others.	
I will speak favorably of the NFL to others.	
I will speak of the NFL's good points to others.	
I will say positive things about the NFL to others.	
Word of mouth intentions toward the CSR program (Walker et al., 2010)	0.957
I will recommend the CSR program to others.	
I will speak favorably of the CSR program to others.	
I will speak of the CSR program good points to others.	
I will say positive things about the CSR program to others.	
Intentions to support the organization (i.e., media consumption intentions) (Fink et al., 2002; Trail et al., 2005)	0.935
I will track the news on the NFL through the media (e.g., TV, Internet, Radio, etc.)	
I will watch or listen to the news on the NFL through the media (e.g., TV, Internet, Radio, etc.)	
I will support the NFL by watching or listening to the NFL's game(s) through the media (e.g., TV, Internet, Radio, etc.).	
Intentions to support the CSR program (Grau & Folse, 2007)	0.936
I would be willing to support for addressing [the cause] by getting involved in this CSR program.	
I would consider donating money (or time) to support this CSR program.	
It is likely that I would contribute to tackling [the cause] by getting involved in this CSR program.	
Feelings of gratitude toward the organization (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002)	0.940
I feel grateful to the NFL's effort to tackle [the cause].	
I feel thankful to the NFL's endeavors to prevent [the cause].	
I feel appreciative to the NFL's endeavors to address [the cause].	
Relationship building efforts between the organization and consumers (Reynolds & Beatty, 1999)	0.877
The NFL works hard to strengthen our relationship by their endeavors to tackle [the cause].	
The NFL made significant investments in building a relationship with me by their efforts to prevent [the cause].	
The NFL devoted time and efforts to our relationship by their endeavors to address [the cause].	
Control variables and items	
Personal connection	0.867
I feel a connection to causes related to [the cause] because I, or friends/family members have been affected by it.	
I feel a personal connection to programs designed to fight [the cause].	
My life has been impacted by [the cause] in some way.	
Identification with the NFL (Trail & James, 2001)	0.935
I consider myself a big fan of the NFL.	
I would experience a loss if I had to stop being a fan of the NFL.	
Being a fan of the NFL is very important to me.	
Football involvement (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009)	0.867
Watching American football games is important to me.	
Watching American football games is one of the most enjoyable activities.	
American football is an important part of my life.	
Most of my friends are in some ways connected with American football.	
To me, there is no other sport like American football.	

573) = 2.10,  $p = .034$ ), congruence (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.961$ ,  $F(11, 573) = 2.85$ ,  $p < .004$ ), benevolence (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.807$ ,  $F(11, 573) = 16.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ), transparency (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.937$ ,  $F(11, 573) = 4.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ), broad impact (Wilks'  $\lambda = 0.966$ ,  $F(11, 573) = 2.50$ ,  $p = .012$ ). These results allow separate usages of hierarchical multiple regression analyses for the eight consumer outcomes with the protection of the Type I error rate. Thus, we next conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses, entering the four covariates in the first step and adding the seven CSR authenticity dimensions in the second step. This method allowed us to examine (1) the change in explained variance for each consumer outcome scale after the CSR authenticity dimensions were added to the four control variables and (2) differential effects of the seven dimensions on the different outcome variables.

As expected, the CSR authenticity dimensions explained a significant degree of variance beyond the control variables for organization reputation (33.3%), WOM intentions toward the organization (15.7%), feelings of gratitude toward the organization (36.4%),

relationship building efforts between the organization and consumers (39.0%), WOM intentions toward the CSR program (37.0%) and intentions to support the CSR program (26.7%). CSR authenticity also provided a small increase in explained variance for attendance intentions (3.3%) and media consumption intentions (3.6%) as well. See Table 6.

Consistent with the proposed multidimensionality of the CSR authenticity construct, the hierarchical multiple regression analyses also revealed distinctive effects of each dimension on the different outcome variables and none of the seven dimensions predicted all of the consumer outcomes scales. The benevolence dimension was most strongly associated with consumer outcomes, significantly predicting all of the consumer outcomes, except intentions to support the organization (i.e., media consumption intentions) (see Table 7). Community link also had a strong impact on consumer outcomes, significantly impacting five of the eight outcomes (organization reputation, WOM intentions toward the CSR program, intentions to support the CSR program, feelings of gratitude, and relationship building efforts between the organization

**Table 6**  
Summary of the hierarchical regression analyses for the influence of the seven CSR authenticity dimensions.

Variable	$\beta$	$t$	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Organization reputations (H1)</b>					
Step 1			0.46	0.21	0.21
ID	0.11	1.80			
INV	0.31	4.92***			
PC	0.14	3.61***			
Gender	0.10	2.65			
Step 2			0.74	0.54	0.33***
CL	0.14	3.37**			
RE	0.09	1.92			
CM	0.06	1.28			
CG	-0.05	-1.27			
BN	0.44	9.53***			
TR	0.10	2.43			
BI	-0.06	-1.07			
<b>Purchase (attendance) intentions (H2)</b>					
Step 1			0.67	0.45	0.45
ID	0.25	4.66***			
INV	0.39	7.44**			
PC	0.05	1.41			
Gender	-0.01	-0.28			
Step 2			0.70	0.48	0.03***
CL	0.07	1.51			
RE	-0.07	-1.26			
CM	0.04	0.81			
CG	-0.03	-0.79			
BN	0.15	3.11*			
TR	0.02	0.36			
BI	0.04	0.79			
<b>Word of mouth intentions toward the organization (H3-a)</b>					
Step 1			0.69	0.48	0.48
ID	0.21	3.96***			
INV	0.48	9.29***			
PC	0.15	4.83***			
Gender	0.09	3.07*			
Step 2			0.80	0.64	0.16***
CL	0.03	0.87			
RE	0.04	0.78			
CM	0.08	1.92			
CG	0.01	0.4			
BN	0.24	5.77***			
TR	0.09	2.44			
BI	0.04	0.84			
<b>Word of mouth intentions toward the CSR program (H3-b)</b>					
Step 1			0.52	0.26	0.26
ID	0.01	0.121			
INV	0.35	5.81***			
PC	0.32	8.80***			
Gender	0.08	2.13			
Step 2			0.80	0.63	0.37***
CL	0.14	3.77***			
RE	0.03	0.72			
CM	-0.02	-0.52			
CG	0.12	3.40**			
BN	0.23	5.70***			
TR	0.18	4.88***			
BI	0.14	3.08**			
<b>Intentions to support the organization (media consumption intentions) (H4-a)</b>					
Step 1			0.76	0.58	0.58
ID	0.25	5.43***			
INV	0.54	11.73***			
PC	0.03	0.95			
Gender	-0.02	-0.72			
Step 2			0.79	0.62	0.04***
CL	-0.1	-2.47			
RE	0.05	1.06			
CM	0.13	3.33**			
CG	0.05	1.51			
BN	0.03	0.7			
TR	0	-0.09			
BI	0.04	0.9			
<b>Intentions to support the CSR program (H4-b)</b>					

**Table 6 (continued)**

Variable	$\beta$	$t$	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1			0.55	0.30	
ID	0.09	1.51			
INV	0.26	4.33***			
PC	0.38	10.67***			
Gender	0.07	0.07			
Step 2			0.75	0.57	0.27***
CL	0.21	5.09***			
RE	0.11	2.26			
CM	-0.07	-1.69			
CG	0.04	1.05			
BN	0.22	4.89***			
TR	0.09	2.29			
BI	0.09	1.68			
<b>Feelings of gratitude toward the organization (H5)</b>					
Step 1			0.47	0.22	
ID	0.08	1.28			
INV	0.24	3.86***			
PC	0.28	7.52***			
Gender	0.11	2.95*			
Step 2			0.76	0.58	0.36***
CL	0.13	3.24**			
RE	0.01	0.12			
CM	0.03	0.73			
CG	0.1	2.68			
BN	0.31	7.06***			
TR	0.08	2.03			
BI	0.16	3.22**			
<b>Relationship building efforts between the organization and consumers (H6)</b>					
Step 1			0.47	0.22	0.22
ID	0.01	0.19			
INV	0.27	4.28***			
PC	0.34	9.04***			
Gender	0.00	0.05			
Step 2			0.78	0.61	0.39***
CL	0.15	3.87***			
RE	0.15	3.29**			
CM	0.01	0.36			
CG	0.02	0.54			
BN	0.30	7.08***			
TR	0.17	4.25***			
BI	0.03	0.63			

Note. N = 585.

ID = identification with the NFL. INV = football involvement. PC = personal connection. CL = community link.

RE = reliability. CM = commitment. CG = congruence. BN = benevolence. TR = transparency. BI = broad impact.

\*  $p < .00625$ .

\*\*  $p < .00125$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .000125$ .

and consumers). The other five dimensions (transparency, broad impact, commitment, congruence, and reliability) had more localized effects, with commitment the only dimension that significantly impacted intentions to support the organization (i.e., media consumption intentions) (see Table 7).

### 5. Discussion

Authenticity is important for the successful implementation of CSR programs (Beckman et al., 2009; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2014). However, authenticity perceptions are frequently influenced by context (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Newman, 2016) and we lack a complete understanding of authenticity's dimensionality within a CSR context, especially from a consumer perspective. The goal of this research was to identify the dimensions of consumer-based CSR authenticity and then develop a scale which could be used to measure it. In doing so, we contribute to the existing literature by developing a multidimensional CSR authenticity scale using formal scale development techniques, identify additional dimensions of authenticity not previously identified

**Table 7**  
Summary of the influence of the seven CSR authenticity dimensions.

OV	CSR authenticity dimensions						
	CL	RE	CM	CG	BN	TR	BI
	t (Sig.)						
OR	3.37**				9.53***		
PI					3.11*		
WO					5.77***		
WC	3.77***			3.40**	5.70***	4.88***	3.08*
IS-a			3.33**				
IS-b	5.09***				4.89***		
GT	3.24**				7.06***		3.22**
RB	3.87***	3.29**			7.08***	4.25***	

Note. OV = Outcome variables. CL = community link. RE = reliability. CM = commitment. CG = congruence. BN = benevolence. TR = transparency. BI = broad impact. OR = organization reputation. PI = purchase (attendance) intentions. WO = word of mouth intentions toward the organization. WC = word of mouth intentions toward the CSR program. IS-a = intentions to support the organization (media consumption intentions). IS-b = intentions to support the CSR program. GT = feelings of gratitude toward the organization. RB = relationship building efforts between the organization and consumers.

\*  $p < .00625$ .

\*\*  $p < .00125$ .

\*\*\*  $p < .000125$ .

in the authenticity literature, and assess the effects of each dimension independently, enabling an exploration of their differential effects.

A multi-dimensional scale offers several advantages over a uni-dimensional scale. By identifying the multiple components of CSR authenticity, the scale enables researchers and practitioners to investigate distinct effects of authenticity to evaluate an organization's multiple CSR programs among its different target consumers (e.g., gender, age). Further, by assessing the effects of each dimension separately, rather than treating CSR authenticity as a composite or second-order factor, our approach allows researchers and practitioners to examine what aspects of a CSR program are related to overall effects and how to revise the CSR program. Thus, researchers and marketing managers can evaluate if one particular dimension may have more (or less) meaningful effects on certain dependent variables, such as organization reputation, among specific target groups, and may then be able to revise certain dimension(s) to strengthen the CSR program in an attempt to generate more favorable responses among consumers.

Our literature review and preliminary qualitative work identified seven dimensions of CSR authenticity: community link, reliability, congruence, commitment, benevolence, transparency, and broad impact. Of these, transparency (the degree to which stakeholders perceive CSR decisions, practices, outcomes, etc. to be open and available to public evaluation) and broad impact (the degree to which the initiative benefits numerous recipients) were new dimensions not previously identified in the authenticity literature, but found to particularly impact WOM about the CSR program (transparency and broad impact), relationship building efforts between the organization and consumers (transparency), and feelings of gratitude (broad impact). In addition, our preliminary research highlighted the importance of personal connection for influencing perceptions of authenticity, a factor we incorporated as a control variable. While [McShane and Cunningham \(2012\)](#) found that emotional engagement influenced employee perceptions of a company's CSR actions, this concept has not been studied with respect to consumer perceptions of authenticity. Consistent with the focus group discussions, we found this variable explained consumer perceptions toward the organization as well as attitudes toward the CSR program. In addition, personal connection was positively associated with perceptions of the organization's reputation. These results highlight the importance of understanding consumers' emotional engagement toward an organization's CSR actions in order to better understand consumer intentions to support CSR programs. As a whole, our

empirical work confirmed the dimensionality of the authenticity scale and that each dimension uniquely influenced several consumer outcomes.

While prior work by [Alhouti et al. \(2016\)](#) identified four antecedents of CSR authenticity, their work conceptualizes CSR authenticity as a unidimensional construct and used a single student sample for validation, which limits generalizability. In addition, Alhouti et al. do not use formal scale development techniques to create and test their scale. Thus, our scale is the first CSR authenticity scale to be developed using formal scale development techniques and the first to adopt a multi-dimensional approach. More generally, our work builds on [Alhouti et al.'s \(2016\)](#) findings by incorporating their antecedents into a broader framework and identifying three additional dimensions (community link, transparency, broad impact) of authenticity perceptions. These dimensions were linked with organization reputation, WOM intentions toward the CSR program, intentions to support the CSR program, relationship building efforts, and feelings of gratitude.

In addition, a comparison of our findings with those of [Alhouti et al. \(2016\)](#) highlights some additional characteristics which may play a role in authenticity perceptions. Alhouti et al. identified four potential antecedents of authenticity: impact, self-serving motive, reparation, and fit. These antecedents are incorporated, respectively, in our dimensions of reliability, benevolence, commitment, and congruence. However, while we find support for all four dimensions of authenticity perceptions, Alhouti et al. do not find a significant relationship between self-serving motive and CSR authenticity. This difference could relate to customers' familiarity with the organization's motives. Alhouti et al. suggest that self-serving motives may not have been a strong predictor due to a lack of consumer knowledge about the companies and their histories; this level of knowledge may have differed in our context due to the greater media attention and use of well-known athletes in the publicity for NFL's Play 60. Finally, the two studies also differed in their sample population (students vs. non-students). Future research could explore the role of these factors (familiarity, age) in affecting the relative importance of different authenticity dimensions.

Another contribution of our work beyond existing literature is that our scale conceptualizes CSR authenticity as a multi-dimensional construct and includes measures for assessing each of these dimensions in the context of CSR. We develop these CSR authenticity measures using formal scale development techniques and assess the effects of each dimension independently instead of treating CSR authenticity as a composite or higher-order construct. In doing so, our scale enables a better understanding of the antecedents of each dimension of CSR authenticity. Our empirical work confirms that a multidimensional model fits the data better than a unidimensional model, a finding which is consistent with theoretical conceptualizations of authenticity ([Morhart et al., 2015](#); [Napoli et al., 2014](#); [Spiggle et al., 2012](#)). In addition, by delineating the multiple dimensions of CSR authenticity, our scale contributes to both theory and practice and allows for the examination of the differential effects of each dimension on different dependent variables. While [Morhart et al. \(2015\)](#) do consider differential effects, most prior research does not (e.g., [Napoli et al., 2014](#); [Spiggle et al., 2012](#)). Specifically, [Morhart et al. \(2015\)](#) find differential effects of integrity, credibility, symbolism, and continuity on emotional brand attachment and positive word-of-mouth (WOM). While integrity and credibility were found to affect both emotional brand attachment and positive WOM, symbolism only affected emotional brand attachment and continuity only affected positive WOM.

Our research further differs from prior literature in the range of outcome variables examined. Prior literature has examined overall positive effects of authenticity. For example, [Moulard et al. \(2014\)](#) show that artist authenticity increases behavioral intentions. [Moulard et al. \(2016\)](#) find that brand authenticity positively impacts expected quality and brand trust. [Spiggle et al. \(2012\)](#) find that brand extension authenticity is an important construct in predicting brand extension success and enhancing brand value (brand extension attitudes, purchase

intentions, and willingness to recommend). In the context of CSR, extant research suggests that CSR authenticity impacts employee perceptions (Beckman et al., 2009; McShane & Cunningham, 2012). In particular, Alhouti et al. (2016) find that while CSR authenticity increases consumers' purchase intent and brand loyalty, it decreases boycott behaviors.

Building on these results, our research also finds positive effects of authenticity, but also tests these effects on a variety of consumer outcomes that were not previously examined (e.g., relationship building efforts, feelings of gratitude) and identifies the differential effects of distinct CSR authenticity dimensions on these outcomes. In particular, we show that our three additional dimensions (community link, transparency, broad impact) of authenticity perceptions were linked with organization reputation, WOM intentions toward the CSR program, intentions to support the CSR program, relationship building efforts, and feelings of gratitude.

However, we also find differential effects of each dimension on diverse consumer outcomes. While certain aspects of an organization's CSR endeavors (e.g., community link and benevolence) had positive effects on organization reputation, other consumer outcomes (e.g., WOM both toward the organization and its CSR program) were predicted by different aspects of CSR practices (e.g., congruence, transparency, and broad impact). Overall, benevolence was the strongest predictor of consumer outcomes (significantly predicting 7 of our 8 dependent measures), followed by community link (predicting five of the 8 consumer outcome variables).

Managerially, our scale enables managers to understand and measure CSR authenticity at different levels of abstraction. Marketers can use the scale as a diagnostic tool to evaluate their CSR programs and to identify which aspects of their programs are strong or weak with respect to impacting perceived authenticity. In addition, through an increased understanding of the multidimensionality of authenticity, our research can help provide guidance to organizations for how to better design and implement CSR programs.

## 6. Limitations and future research

Our research served to identify dimensions of consumer-based CSR authenticity and then to develop, validate, and test a measure for assessing this construct. However, while we successfully tested and validated the scale, a number of areas remain for future research. First, our conceptualization was largely tested with programs drawn from the NFL. The NFL was selected due to the number and diversity of its CSR programs as well as its consistency in charitable contributions across teams. Thus, despite using a single industry, the research was tested and validated using a variety of CSR programs (programs focused on obesity, concussion reduction, cancer research) with a variety of audiences (youth, adults). Further, the identification of dimensions was accomplished via an in-depth analysis of the literature from a wide variety of contexts. The repetition of several dimensions across contexts as well as the corroboration of these dimensions in our focus groups suggest that the dimensionality of CSR authenticity will likely translate to different contexts. Indeed, additional research we have conducted using a baseball context provides evidence that the influence of CSR authenticity is similar across contexts. Nonetheless, future research should explore the degree to which the scale generalizes to other contexts and samples. In particular, future research could further investigate the role that emotional attachment to and familiarity of consumers with organizations plays in authenticity perceptions. Additional research could also seek to expand our inquiry beyond the CSR context. Some dimensions identified in our work (e.g., transparency) are missing from the brand authenticity literature and thus future research might build on our scale by adopting these dimensions in other literatures.

Our research also used a US sample to test the validity and applicability of the scale. Since CSR can be perceived differently across different locations and cultures (Joo, Larkin, & Walker, 2017; Matten &

Moon, 2008), the effects of CSR authenticity on consumer outcomes may vary depending on how well established the organization is. Future research could examine drivers of authenticity in different cultures and with different types of organizations. Even within sports organizations, future research could examine whether the level of the organization (e.g., local sport teams and leagues vs. national ones) influences perceptions and/or the relevance of difference dimensions. The CSR authenticity scale could also be used to explore differences among similar CSR programs offered by different organizations. (For example, both Coca-Cola and the NFL have CSR programs aimed at promoting fitness: “The Troops for Fitness” and “Play 60,” respectively).

A primary goal of the current research was to delineate the dimensions of CSR authenticity and thus we only explored direct relationships between authenticity and consumer outcome variables. Future research could explore more complex relationships among CSR authenticity and variables of interest. For example, CSR authenticity may first generate favorable attitudes toward an organization and the CSR program and then influence various behavioral intentions and actual behaviors, such as purchasing behavior, repurchasing, and brand-switching. Further, while consumers' identification with the organization was controlled in the current study (study 4), CSR authenticity may influence consumer identification with an organization, particularly during the early stages of emotional attachment development with the organization. Future research could explore the impact of CSR authenticity on other outcome variables, such as emotional attachment, ability to counteract undesirable associations with the organization (cf., Wagner et al., 2009), and boycotting behaviors (cf., Alhouti et al., 2016).

Future research could also study additional dimensions and antecedents to those dimensions. Authenticity is related to honesty and lying. Notions of reliability and transparency are both predicated on a firm's being honest in their communications. For example, in the brand authenticity literature, Morhart et al. (2015) conceptualize credibility as “the brand's transparency and honesty towards the consumer, as well as its willingness and ability to fulfill its claims” (p. 202). Future research can explore the role of honesty more explicitly in authenticity and how/if it differs from reliability. Such research may also want to consider the time-orientation of such judgments (i.e., future-oriented, present-oriented, past-oriented).

## Declarations of interest

None.

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