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Recipe for good: analyzing the authenticity of CSR commitments among the leadership of a parent company to global restaurant brands.

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**Recipe for Good: Analyzing the Authenticity of CSR Commitments Among the Leadership
of a Parent Company to Global Restaurant Brands**

By

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a form of private self-regulation conducted by businesses; CSR aims to contribute to societal goals of philanthropy, activism, and ethics by improving society, policy, and or the environment. Corporate social responsibility is becoming a greater aspect of modern business, but as it becomes part of the modern discourse, it is right to question whether its efforts are authentic to those driving these initiatives? This case study seeks to understand how the leadership within the parent company of a global foods brand depicts authenticity and communicates its social and environmental efforts to stakeholders. Building on existing literature, the study uses qualitative interviews to determine whether the measures portrayed in externally facing reports and the emerging themes were consistent and internalized by the leadership. This study finds that the values espoused in the corporate reports are authentic to leaders creating CSR policies, and that communication across stakeholders and within diverse markets reinforces the authenticity of these efforts.

Recipe for Good: Analyzing the Authenticity of CSR Commitments Among the Leadership of a Parent Company to Global Restaurant Brands

In 1970, premier economist Milton Friedman wrote the social responsibility of business was to increase its profits. While realistic about the aims of business – the last two years have demonstrated that for progress, we cannot operate with a “business as usual” mindset, and thus, social responsibility has shifted from the pursuit of profit to the pursuit of profitable good. With issues of equity and sustainability rising to the forefront of critical conversations, businesses have begun to come forward, being more vocal about social issues and even taking a public stance.

This response has encouraged a shift across the private sector – and businesses have begun to advertise and advocate for a social mission more than ever. From public relations statements and philanthropic efforts to interactive websites and corporate reporting, social responsibility has become an imperative aspect of business. But just because there has been a shift of conversation doesn’t necessarily mean there has been a change of heart. This leaves us questioning whether the external rhetorical shift is a reality seen within the heart of business. We must investigate whether these aspirational moves have authentic meaning to those driving these initiatives – and whether social responsibility has transformed the mission of business to truly serve up good.

To better understand how corporations are making this shift, we need to investigate a company that has outwardly made a commitment to social responsibility. This research builds upon prior investigation of the corporate reports published by a parent company of several global restaurant brands (from this point forward “Bites” or “Bites Brands”). The corporate literature depicts an overwhelming shift towards accountability in CSR pursuits, authenticity of

commitment to these values, and procedural action in making these efforts a vital part of their business operations. This case study intends to determine whether the organizational values and measures of accountability espoused in Bites' recent reports are authentic among the leadership at Bites. Additionally, this study seeks to establish an understanding of what strategies and communications are internally at play to characterize whether these conversations around CSR extend beyond the departments and operations directly related to its practice.

Literature Review

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is defined as the “context-specific organizational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders’ expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance” (Aguinis, 2011). These actions and policies are implemented at the institutional, organizational, and individual level (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012). While a relatively new phenomenon, the practice of Corporate Social Responsibility has become a fundamentally important aspect of business conduct. CSR has become a means for companies to increase positive perceptions and brand awareness among consumers, and for customers to have a sense of pride in purchasing from responsible companies (Soken-Huberty, 2022). Popular media suggests CSR enables businesses to recruit and retain more attractive employees, and those employees perform better (O’Connell, 2020). Investors find socially responsible companies more attractive, likely to be safer, and more accountable (Heyward, 2020). Given these positive outcomes, we see an increased focus on CSR efforts at the institutional level.

It is important to note that while we are framing this around a corporate social responsibility perspective, a common language has not been agreed upon by those enacting, researching, and monitoring these initiatives. From a corporate perspective, we commonly see

these efforts framed as ESG's. This acronym stands for environmental, social, and governance, the three pillars under which a company might conduct CSR (Eccles and Stoeble, 2018). From an academic point of view, we see these efforts referred to as corporate social responsibility or simply social responsibility. From a consumer's perspective, these works are identified through merits and certifications, such as B corps certification. Given these differentiations, we will utilize the terminology "corporate social responsibility," "social responsibility," and "social mission" in our research.

Research on CSR and institutions seeks to understand how regulation, normative behaviors, and cultural constructs influence company performance. Often, this literature focuses on consumer relationships and financial outcomes. Though corporate social responsibility has been an effective, functional business model since the 1980's, little research has been conducted with respect to those who make the social vision a reality: employees. Compared to the institutional and organizational levels, there is minimal research on CSR with respect to the individual. In a review of the research on the CSR model, only 4% of the literature looked at CSR from an individual perspective, and only 5% conducted research addressing two or more levels within the institution (Aguinis and Glavas, 2012). This is an important voice missing from the literature.

Employees make a critical difference in the innovation, organizational performance, company competitiveness, and the ultimate success of a business. To ensure needs are met, it is in a businesses' best interest to understand the motivations of dedicated and creative employees (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008), and their commitment to fulfilling the mission of the organization. A well-developed social mission communicated to employees can lead to increased business performance.

Corporate Social Responsibility can be a tool for maintaining a strong corporate image with employees; when good, this image helps to better employee perceptions of and trust in the company they work for, and has a positive effect on the level of association an employee feels towards their organization (Riordan et al, 1997). Logically, individuals like to be associated with others and groups with good reputations. This association is a powerful aspect of social identity. When individuals find this sense of identity in the workplace, they feel a greater commitment to their colleagues and their work. Among employees, CSR is also the strongest predictor of trust and organizational commitment; employees must sense an exchange of respect and loyalty to values for this commitment to be strong (Farooq et al, 2014; Carlini & Grace, 2021). The field demands nuanced inquiry - which can only be answered by multi-level insights from within the corporation.

Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment is the bond or sense of connection employees feel to the organization by which they are employed; the foundations of this bond may be traced to both social identity and social exchange theory. Social identity theory explains that individuals find a sense of purpose based on belonging to a group, and that one gravitates towards institutions that embody one's identity and perceptions of self (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Social exchange theory suggests that individuals connect with others based on reciprocity of economic or social means (Cropanzo and Mitchell, 2005). When employees perceive their organization to be socially responsible, they have a heightened sense of belongingness to the organization and find their work to be more reputable (Turker, 2009). They also sense greater pride in their relationship to the organization and more fulfillment. This commitment is motivated by either an

economic exchange or an intrinsic social need. Kolodinsky et al (2008) described this internalized commitment as workplace spirituality.

Workplace spirituality – the framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ connection to workplace mission – may also be indicative of organizational commitment. Exhibited in cultural values and mission, it positively influences employees motivation and adaptability. Workplace spirituality was also found to be positively related to job involvement, organizational identification, and work satisfaction (Kolodinsky et al, 2008). Organizational cultures that demonstrate a greater sense of workplace spirituality benefit from more effort from employees. Further, organizations with a keen sense of workplace spirituality exhibit increased collaborative efforts toward common goals (Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2004). This may especially be effective when working towards socially responsible outcomes alongside business profitability. Employees experiencing workplace spirituality are also more creative in problem solving, meeting goals, and in their contributions to the workplace. Corporations with clear social values communicated to employees see increased workplace spirituality.

When intrinsically motivated, external control is unnecessary: the employee has an interest in completing the activity because it is congruent with personal goals and identities. They see the act not as producing their livelihood, but an extension of their livelihood. Once individuals identify and emotionally regard their work, they will exhibit the strongest sense of organizational alignment (Gagné & Koestner, 2002; Gagné & Deci, 2005). There is also a positive relationship between CSR and employee affective commitment (Bouraoui et al, 2019). Affective commitment captures an individual’s identification, engagement, and attachment. Further, their obligation to the organization is then informed by the sense of justice they feel

from its work – contributing to greater retention and performance. It is apparent that an organization's commitment to a set of principles and culture has a positive effect on employees. While employees may have a heightened sense of alignment with the organization, there is still more to be said on employee participation in mission achievement – especially as their work aligns with corporate citizenship.

Corporate Citizenship

Corporate citizenship, the caring for the well-being of all stakeholders and the environment, is manifested in the strategies and operating practices that a company develops in its relationships (Waddock, 2004; Glavas & Piderit, 2009). For instance, a company that promises sustainable sourcing in the supply chain is exhibiting a commitment to corporate citizenship.

When a company demonstrates corporate citizenship, employee engagement increases. Employee engagement is conceived as a state where employees feel a vested interest in the company's success; this commitment leads to internal performance standards that exceed stated requirements, and even strong personal satisfaction and inspiration from working with the organization (Bakker and Schaufeli, 2008). Employees who perceive higher levels of corporate citizenship will report higher levels of engagement, high quality connections, and creative involvement (Glavas & Piderit, 2009). Demonstrated corporate citizenship results in added value for businesses.

Companies which are good corporate citizens also attract hardworking, good individual citizens. In a study of 25,000 people across 25 countries, 80% of the people who reported to work for large companies said they felt more motivated to work and more loyal to the company

the more socially responsible their organization became (Zappala, 2004). Socially responsible companies also signal certain values and norms, which attract more socially aware employees committed to doing good (Turban & Greening, 1997; Supanti & Butcher, 2019; Waples & Brachle, 2020). One part of the business case for CSR is to attract better employees.

A corporation's commitment to good has been associated with a heightened sense of meaning in employee work. In sensing their work to have purpose and believing to be part of something worthwhile, employees care more about outcome (Amabile, 1983). Working towards a meaningful mission inspires workers to utilize more talent, creativity, and innovation in their productivity. When employers are supportive and offer real world challenges, employees are driven to provide more of themselves because the work they are doing has a deeper meaning. Schullery (2013) found corporate citizenship has a strong positive effect on retention, product quality, and customer satisfaction. This is vital for the success of the business and its internal stakeholders.

Introducing employees to CSR efforts via corporate citizenship has a positive effect on more than just profits and productivity. Even if the business is engaging in these efforts for financial reasons – such as profitable marketing and stronger recruitment – employees can still see how they make a direct impact and experience a greater sense of social justice from their work (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008). Social responsibility in business helps to influence employee perceptions of worldly issues. Corporate citizenship gives employees a lens to see how their organization can make change and the means to benefit society through their work.

Communication is key to demonstrating to employees their organization is a good corporate citizen. CSR embedded in organizational practices and job design is most effective for this outcome (Glavas, 2016), and high visibility of these efforts and internal branding is also

necessary for greater performance (Carlini and Grace, 2021). Branding enforces that employees must both understand and enact conscious behavior to be sure their work supports the mission.

Managers must implement a strong “tone at the top” of mission-centeredness to shepherd an organization to be more favorable to CSR (Slack, 2015). Though corporate citizenship is impactful on its own, for holistic investment from all facets of the organization, social responsibility must be embedded in missions and value statements – but also the fabric of the organization’s practices and work (Collier, 2007). For this reason, we must understand how central CSR is to an organization – and to have significant measures of accountability as a business works to become the best corporate citizen.

Organizational Accountability

One aspect of being a good corporate citizen is accurate and transparent public reporting. Publicly traded companies must report their earnings and securities. As corporate social responsibility is a growing practice, companies have also begun to voluntarily publish the successes of their CSR efforts alongside financial information (Uyar, 2016). These are informative and useful communication tools for both internal and external stakeholders, as they help investors and partners to better understand the organization’s work. These also offer internal stakeholders an opportunity to have pride in good corporate behaviors. These reports can be an effective means of benchmarking and holding an organization accountable to their publicly stated social mission.

When discussing the businesses social mission these reports are often positive in nature, highlighting ongoing commitments to social responsibility and their robust commitment to continually improving in the future (Dhanani and Connolly, 2015). While honest in their

disclosures, these reports are written in the businesses' self-interest to portray their work in a positive light, regardless of its outcomes.

The narrative espoused by these reports then must be carefully reviewed for authenticity, as organizations' claims are subjective. Further, studies suggest the best way to hold businesses accountable in this reporting is to make the subjects of these reports part of regular moral discourse (Reynolds and Yuthas, 2007). It's important to see within these reports how businesses are driven by different stakeholders to understand the legitimacy and intent of their actions. Also, they are used to determine how responding to societal issues before powerful interest groups may point to the legitimacy of an organization's actions (Palazzo and Scherer, 2006; Chen and Roberts, 2010). As these reports evolve – we must explore how they bring legitimacy to the business' actions and be mindful of the audiences influenced by the literature (Ogden and Clarke, 2005). While these reports point to the nature of their work and the goals set for an organization, they should also align actions with words.

In addition to defining measures of accountability, these corporate reports often depict a set of values espoused by the brand. These work values are “the evaluative standards relating to work or the work environment by which individuals discern what is ‘right’”(Smola & Sutton, 2002). Where there is a strong fit between a person's values and the values of an organization (P-O fit), work attitudes, job satisfaction, and employee turnover are all positively affected (Kolodinsky et al, 2008). Shared values generate a greater commitment to goals and a stronger sense of validation when social missions come to fruition. However, the externally communicated values of the organization are not necessarily the same values of its employees, which makes it imperative that further investigation be conducted. If a brand states its values but those leading the mission do not believe in it, then there is a lack of organizational authenticity.

Organizational Authenticity

Organizational authenticity is the consistent expression of a genuine experience to a business's stakeholders. Because one's sense of authenticity is derived over multiple engagements with the business, the salience of an organization's perceived authenticity can change as its product and actions change (Peterson, 2005). The degree to which a business' stated values align with its actions is also a factor in perceived authenticity. When in reference to CSR practices, prior research claims the most authentic efforts among brands are those built upon personal values. Brands with the most success internally have widely available knowledge of these values and their directives, using a "lead by example approach," to bring their employees along in the mission (Debeljak et al, 2011). Voluntary disclosure in reports is also a signal of increasing authenticity of values (Neher et al, 2021). However, the rhetorical presence of values and consistency does not equate authenticity in corporate social responsibility.

Brands are pushed to engage in CSR by many stakeholders as a cue of social change; however, it's not enough to simply engage, these efforts must be authentic (Aguilera et al, 2007; Alhouti et al, 2016). For CSR efforts to be considered authentic, they must encompass an equilibrium of two core dimensions: distinctiveness and social connectedness, or alignment with the brand's core mission and an embeddedness to issues in the broader social context (Mazutis and Slawinski, 2015). When a brand conducts CSR without considering both aspects, it harms overall authenticity. Further, CSR efforts ought to be well-timed, well-situated, collaborative, and realistic. Those that are will effectively ward off potential negative associations from those intending to do good (Samuel et al, 2018). Just as good responses to CSR contribute to a business' success, the consequences of inauthenticity - or the authenticity gap - can be drastic.

The authenticity gap is the gap between a stakeholder's expectations of a brand's authenticity and their actual experience. This sense that a business' values do not align with its public statements can lead to media criticism, loss of consumer trust, and disengagement from stakeholders (Samuel et al, 2018). To avoid such consequences, Wicki and Kaaij (2007) suggest CSR ought to be more than mere legal compliance, with the caveat that projections cannot deviate too broadly from what can realistically be done. For internal stakeholders to find these actions credible, trust must be built. Communication through the transition to being more socially responsible must be consistent and rooted in the organization's true identity (Wicki and Kaaij, 2007; McShane and Cunningham, 2012). Organizational authenticity enriches both the employee and consumer experiences. Therefore, it is critical to determine whether businesses that continue to publish measures and a narrative of care have fully integrated CSR into their internal values, conversations, and practices.

Guided Questions

The literature offers a robust understanding of CSR and its positive impacts across the many facets of business. Scholars who have previously studied mission alignment have attempted to understand it from the perspective of employee performance, awareness, and positive outcomes. Others have taken the approach of analyzing how corporate social responsibility affects organizational commitment. These foundations lead us to question the impact of reported initiatives on employee perceptions of CSR and CSR alignment. We wish to carry on the conversation started by prior literature, conducting a case study to understand how the values enumerated in externally facing reports might be internalized by those directing CSR initiatives.

Former case studies have been imperative to understanding the internal implications of CSR; in light of the national and international crises of the last two years, we hope to understand how the transformation of Bites Brands has become an authentic part of the company's consciousness. Having read the annual Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability reports, and recognized the shift in both language and measures, we identified the following overarching research questions:

RQ1: How do the leaders at Bites Brands participate in CSR initiatives?

RQ2: In what ways do leaders sense authenticity of CSR in relation to Bites Brands' overall business strategy?

RQ3: What has a moderating effect on CSR, and does CSR maintain its integrity across brand, globalization, and franchisee relationships?

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to better understand the value alignment between espoused organizational values and those values held by the drivers of the organizational mission. Therefore, interpretive methods were used in this study because they explore employee commitment by helping members to "identify and resolve pressing problems, reflect on the premises that guide sensemaking, and develop cultures that successfully balance the tension between individual and organizational goals" (Kreps & Herndon, 2001, p. 7). Interpretive methodology provides a richness of data often missing from previous studies of corporate social responsibility.

Case studies allow a researcher to dive into a broad category, in this case social missions, by examining a particular organization. Glavas and Piderit (2009) encouraged future research on

employee-centered corporate citizenship strategies be conducted as case studies, stating “...That kind of research could be used to explore how corporate citizenship is integrated into performance criteria, or how corporate citizenship has been brought into the everyday discourse in the company and with its stakeholders”(p. 67). Bites Brands first peaked our interests when a guest speaker introduced its social mission during a Corporate Social Responsibility class. We then dove into its social mission by exploring Bites Brands annual Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability reports and reached out to a representative of the organization to propose this research project. As the parent company of several global brands, Bites Brands can serve as a benchmark for other corporations looking to strengthen their social missions.

Glavas and Piderit (2009) also suggest that [sustainability] programs were most successful “only when employees began designing and driving them,” and that CSR developed beyond a good public relations strategy as more stakeholders were involved with the work. For this reason, we surveyed employees both leading and adjacent to these initiatives. We looked for interviewees that had an array of experience before driving the mission so we could best grasp the growth of the brand in the CSR arena.

Most fundamental to this approach were the findings of Slack (2015). In interviewing employees about the company’s CSR work, Slack found that employee understanding of CSR was muddled, and their commitment to the organization for social or economic reasons was inconclusive. They suggested that to remove this confounding relationship, future research on CSR – particularly case studies – review both employers and employees. These findings drove our multi-level approach, our analysis of the internal and external communications, and our search for authenticity of commitment. Given these considerations, we designed a study that

would take a multifaceted approach from document analysis to interviews with drivers of the organization to a future study that will conduct focus groups with employees.

Data Collection

Data collection began in Fall 2021. Using publicly accessible data, we first conducted a rhetorical analysis of Bites' reports. We then determined three themes of the literature; these helped to understand the organization's history of CSR and propose relevant questions in future interviews. This guided our perceptions of Bites and our future analysis (See Appendix A).

Document Analysis

Before conducting interviews, we performed a document analysis of the organization's annual Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability reports to better understand Bites Brand's external communication about their efforts. Documents can be a rich source of data for the researcher in establishing the goals and priorities of the organization. As noted by Lindlof and Taylor (2002) documents "often embody social rules that govern how members of a social collective should behave" (p. 117). Using Hoffman and Ford's (2010) steps for identifying rhetorical strategies in organizational texts, the researchers identified several rhetorical themes of the documents. We read over the texts, noting where the brand used particular rhetoric to demonstrate a sense of community, highlight the corporate identity of Bites, Bites' competence in CSR, Bites' values, and where there was a need for CSR that Bites could fulfill. Relevant quotes and data were noted to support these criteria. These included authenticity, accountability, and action. The document analysis provided us with a deep understanding of the external communication of Bites Brands in relation to their social mission. It also gave us a starting point as we engaged with our interview participants.

Participants

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, participants for the study were selected based upon their role with Bite Brands. Working with a representative from the organization, researchers identified those individuals who were responsible for driving the organization's social mission and communicating it to both internal and external stakeholders. As qualitative studies focus on social practices and meanings of people in particular situations, it is unnecessary to sample in a way that tries to gain a representative sample of a particular population. Instead, we requested that our contact within Bites Brands select our interviewees. We believed that an approach from within the organization to participate in our research would both build participants' trust and heighten our credibility. When our research took us in a new direction, we asked to connect with drivers of the particular component of the organizational mission.

With four brands under one parent company, we proposed 12-20 interviews: 5 respondents would come from Bites Brands Headquarters, and an additional 3-5 employees would be selected from each subsidiary. We believed this would give an appropriate array of opinion and experience for an accurate understanding of the leadership's commitment to CSR. If our conversations led to more questions, we would conduct more interviews. Our contact was asked to select members from across the brands with flexible criteria: the interviewees should come from different contextual backgrounds; have different roles with respect to the pillars of each subset of the organization's social mission; and different levels of experience.

Once notified of the study, each member was emailed a message thanking them for their interest in participating (see Appendix B), as well as a copy of the Preamble (see Appendix C)

and a set of proposed questions – some of which had additional questions tailored to the respondent’s role or brand. Interviews were then scheduled accordingly.

We had a total of six interviews due to timing and international issues that took precedence of the leadership’s time. Of our participants, two were males and four were females; all were mid-career professionals or older. They had perspectives from across the US: respondents were located in DC, Louisville, Chicago, Texas, and Colorado. Additionally, at least two of the respondents had prior international work experience. Three interviewees worked for Bites Headquarters, one having prior experience with a subsidiary brand. One interviewee worked for Bites’ philanthropic foundation, and two interviewees worked with distinct subsidiary brands. It is important to note that this is ongoing research and the researchers will continue to solicit diverse voices.

Individual Interviews

In conducting interviews with Bites Brands, we provided interviewees the opportunity to frame their efforts in their own words. According to Baxter and Babbie (2004), qualitative research strives “to paint a verbal picture so rich that readers of the study feel as if they had walked that mile in the shoes of group members” (p. 62). Individual interviews elicit open-ended responses from drivers within the organization.

The current study utilized semi-structured interviews which allowed the interviewer to “elicit relevant information or ask follow-up questions to obtain more detail about topics raised by the participant” (Noller & Feeney, 2004, p. 31). An interview guide (see Appendix D) was created and shared in advance with the participants. However, as interesting ideas were discussed by the participants, the researchers used probing questions to dig deeper into the concepts.

Because of the geographical disbursement of participants, all interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams. Each interview began with introductions and casual conversation to build the foundations of a relationship. Once comfortable, interviewees were asked for verbal consent to a transcription and recording of the interview. Interviewees were then informed of the nature of the study with the option to ask questions about our research. Respondents were asked if they had the chance to read over the Preamble and what questions they had, they then delivered verbal consent to participate. Pseudonyms were created at the beginning of the interview to protect the anonymity of the participants (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

The questions in the interview sought to better understand value alignment between the organization's mission and the personal value of the participants. Next, questions focused on communication practices of stated values with internal and external stakeholders and how the reciprocal nature of communication informed value formation of Bites Brands. Based on their response, follow-up questions were asked. Following the questions period, all were given the option to further elaborate on their work with the organization and thanked for their time and insights. Individual interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 55 minutes depending on respondent answers and the amount of follow-up questions that were deemed necessary by the researchers. Throughout individual interviews, the researchers took field notes which highlighted key points of the interview and emerging themes from the discussion.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions from the recorded interviews were used for data analysis. The recorded interviews resulted in 169 pages of transcriptions. After reading and reviewing the transcripts, emergent themes were analyzed by the researchers. The document analysis previously conducted by the researchers was used to align the goals of the organization with those provided by the

participants. Notes were made about lessons learned and what the respondent contributed to the overall theory about the commitments to CSR. Following these notes, a second reading was conducted – during which quotes of significance were highlighted.

Thematic analysis, which looks for themes which emerge based on recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness in textual data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) was utilized to create categories of data. These categories included: Integrated Strategy, Grassroots CSR, and Authenticity. Once categories were identified, a new set of themes arose to explain the commitment of the interviewees and Bites Brand.

Findings

This study reveals that the commitment to social responsibility efforts within Bites Brands are both authentic to personnel and a genuine business strategy for the company. By conducting interviews with the leaders at each of the Bites' brands headquarters, this research provides an insight into how the change in external communications about the organization's mission has transformed internal mission alignment and CSR perceptions. The interviews suggest an emergence of three primary themes with respect to Corporate Social Responsibility and Bites Brands: the presence of an integrated strategy, a grassroots commitment, and authenticity of commitment.

Integrated Strategy

One core criticism of CSR has been that it is often a means of “business plus” rather than a significant function of the business' operations. The literature shows that for CSR to be perceived as authentic, it must be a distinct effort connected to the business' goals (Mazutis and Slawinski, 2015; Alhouti et al, 2016). Rather than serving a social mission in addition to

generating profit, it is key that a business integrate the social mission into its practices. This includes understanding CSR as part of the foundations of the business, recognizing philanthropy as an extension of the business doing good - not its sole means, and consistently pursuing a data-driven and trustworthy social mission in all brands.

With respect to the emergent theme of CSR as an integrated strategy, we found that the organization has worked efficiently to make CSR an integral aspect to the business' operations beyond mere marketing techniques or philanthropy. When speaking about Bites, one respondent noted that Bites' very history stresses the significance of giving back to communities; as CSR has become the push, it only feels natural to continue giving in non-financial capacities to all stakeholders. Lisa said,

Bites has always really believed in giving back. Since we spun off [parent company] 25 years ago, it's always been ingrained in our business. It's been a little bit more focused on the community aspect, but I think over the past ten years, the values of believing in all people and giving back to the world - which are things that are kind of a quarter of business - have evolved, have shaped into more. How we as a business can be good stewards, be innovative, and have ROI in a way where we're able to have impact and in areas that are really important and needed in the world...they've come closer and closer to where the business is.

Since its inception, Bites has been committed to doing good for communities; as a global brand, it is now getting to a place where it can do more and maximize its impact.

One way in which Bites has increased its impact in its host communities has been through its philanthropy with the Bites Foundation. The foundation has been a tool to directly impact communities and uplift members of the Bites team facing significant challenges (such as

economic hardships and natural disasters). In order to ensure that all philanthropic efforts engaged in by the organization make the greatest impact and “protect the passion around doing good,” the brand has worked to make robust governance around the requests and granting of philanthropic dollars. Theresa said, “I'm really proud of what we've done. I think we've been able to do a lot more for the community through the foundation, but it really has been the business as the leader and the foundation as an enabler.” This demonstrates that while significant, CSR at Bites Brands is more than giving to communities through the foundation, but rather rooted within the day-to-day business actions.

The day-to-day business actions of a global restaurant brand consists of both serving food and good. This consists of serving better meals, using energy efficient techniques in stores, and providing packaging that is better for the environment. As a global food brand, Bites admits that to do CSR - particularly to be sustainable - it has to hold itself accountable to data. Frank claimed, “We learn from that process, and the sustainability team has kind of changed even over the last couple of years, too. It's just taking that learning and putting it to use, then continuing to communicate around science based targets.” This is reminiscent of the arguments presented by McShane and Cunningham (2012). This regular communication around science-based targets is key to building trust with franchisees across 50,000 restaurants.

Because Bites is only the parent company to these restaurants, the company has to inspire other stakeholders to commit to CSR. Trust in Bites' data and mission is integral to making CSR practiced at every level of Bites. “A company is only as good as the people can trust in it. If you bring yourself to work distrusting your employer, I don't think that creates personal happiness nor business success... values must align so you can create trust.” (Theresa). While employees within the brand may trust Bites' CSR intentions based on values, franchisees executing the

mission on a daily basis must believe in the mission because they will see the return on investment.

Franchisees see that CSR will generate a return on investment when they see the data. This isn't selling values, but demonstrating that becoming more environmentally friendly is good for business. Horace said,

A lot of what we've done has been the silent hand of sustainability. That work is 100% critical. A concrete example of that is the collection and disclosure of all our data. That tracks how that silent hand is performing: we've continued to make sure that when you build new restaurants, when you renovate old restaurants, the next generation of equipment that you put in there is more energy efficient than ever before. We aren't heavy-handed in their [franchisee] business; they just see the data, which shows that our restaurant energy demand has gone down.

Robust data is key to Bites' social mission.

By voluntarily reporting their data (Uyar, 2016; Neher et al, 2021), Bites has made CSR a possibility in every level of and across their brands. Bites is now asking deeper questions about how that data might be used to harmonize CSR efforts across different brands to truly make an environmental impact. Lisa noted,

Every business is different...we have four very distinct brands, of which 98% franchised. We're in 150 countries. We have 50,000 stores. They have different goals and different consumer groups. We recognize that they're in very different places with their packaging supply chains - brand A is ahead and Brand B is behind. They're in different places in terms of the types of materials they would reuse, their systems, their packaging... So

when you question if Bites can replace plastics in markets across the globe - is 2030 feasible? It's different for every brand, and so we're trying to negotiate that policy together before we say it publicly, so we *know* that we can execute it.

By working with data and realizing where each brand is, Bites has been able to effectively set goals to truly move the needle on environmental and social issues.

Moving the needle would not be possible if CSR were merely a topical approach. The team has been committed to a data-driven approach tailored to the needs of their global franchises. Horace was enthusiastic about this method, claiming, "Whenever setting policies, we set aspirations in ways external stakeholders need and in ways that help us drive change. I remind people what we're ultimately trying to do is move a *system* that has to work from Virginia to Vietnam." This demonstrates that while their reports only discuss the positive narrative behind CSR, the brand is aware of all the challenges involved (Dhanani and Connolly, 2015), they have ensured that the internal discourse is not swept up in intention but tempered by practicality (Reynolds and Yuthas, 2007) and the reality of local and cross-cultural stakeholders. Recognizing the systematic nature of CSR is a challenge, but one that is clearly embedded in Bites' practices and grows in scope as new franchises enter the market.

Interviewees were overwhelmingly appreciative of the growth Bites had made in this arena and its impact. "I'm proud we do that. Even when our remit was smaller, we tried to make the largest impact. As our remit has grown, we're making a bigger impact. We're trying to do it in a really thoughtful and fair way." (Theresa). Leaders at Bites have seen that as CSR has been embedded in procedures and governance, the company has been able to do more for its stakeholders.

While overall positive about the integrated CSR strategy at Bites, all admitted the brand still had room for growth. One individual noted that the business still had room to make CSR a greater part of its model, detailing that the “why” behind social enterprise was widely understood, but making it part of every business “how” was still in tension.

I think there's almost a silent pull for it from the business and we just haven't figured out with the internal stakeholder community. We haven't worked out how to meet those needs. I think people are interested, they hear snippets, but it's an unmet need; we haven't quite got to the root of what they want to know, how they want to know it. There's an issue of reality versus intent. (Frannie).

This critique noted the dissonance is especially seen between those closer to and further from CSR, both internally and externally. This has especially been seen with respect to the investors who drive performance measures. Based on this reality, it may be time for the business to push beyond its comfort zone from pursuing CSR as a reaction to environmental and social injustice and begin truly controlling the narrative within the investor space. This could change not only Bites' role in the CSR space, but also be the push other businesses need to commit to CSR - and even the push investors need to value CSR beyond its lucrative financial benefits.

Overall, all interviewees noted that the organization's use of data and transparency in the pursuit of corporate social responsibility has made this a critical juncture for the business. By balancing their aspirations to make change with their need to generate returns for stakeholders, Bites business strategy is thoroughly shaped by its corporate social mission.

Grassroots

Another core criticism of CSR is the potential for its disregard of voices within the system. The literature shows that for CSR to be effective, it has to be part of a business' regular discourse (Reynolds and Yuthas, 2007), and that it is legitimized by input from stakeholders of all backgrounds (Palazzo and Scherer, 2006; Chen and Roberts, 2010). To ensure that Bites Brands is actually listening to stakeholders as it pursues a social mission, leadership has sought to make CSR a grassroots activity. This includes active listening, regular communication, and attention to global perspectives.

With respect to making CSR a grassroots initiative, Bites is actively listening to what consumers, NGO's, media, creative agencies, and employees are discussing. The leadership understands that by monitoring conversations, they can adapt the brand to overcome potential challenges and fit what vital insights suggest to be the next best move in global restaurants. Johanna noted that this active listening had evolved from a small facet of the business to the function of an entire department. "We try to listen and understand our consumers and what's important to them as individuals, not groups. This bubbles up, and the leadership sets the priorities for the brand and what we should be addressing." This confirms the findings of Debeljak (2011) and Slack (2015). By listening, Bites has been able to address key business needs, thereby making brands more successful and pursuing CSR more intentionally.

Another facet of intentionality revealed itself in the way by which CSR is shaped via global location and brand. Variation to account for diverse populations and markets was at the forefront of each plan. Committees of stakeholders directly impacted by these changes were responsible for determining how the empirical data would relate to the shift in operations.

It's just a different approach and I think listening and understanding how it's going to be built into operations is really important. You know we're running restaurants everywhere and the idea of investing in renewable energy, or thinking about policies that are really going to help employees come to work better, are vastly different depending upon the franchisee and where we operate. And so we just really have to give a lot of thought and care when we make big aspirational goals as an organization, and we're communicating them out. (Horace).

While Bites may want to implement momentous changes, they recognize that without planning based on the reality of internal stakeholders, their CSR pursuits will ultimately fail.

As much as leaders drive priorities, internal stakeholders are the means to bring CSR to fruition. Because the Bites Brands is 98% franchised, leaders understand that these officials must be prioritized as internal stakeholders. According to Johanna, these relationships have to be carefully cultivated; Bites has to engage these stakeholders in both *why* CSR is important *and* encourage them in their participation. "System trust is important; it's not a boss and employee relationship as much as it's a strategic partnership. We're strategic thought partners, and they help us develop policies because they're the ones on the ground doing this and serving customers." Leveraging the insights of those that see direct implications of policy helps CSR initiatives to remain grounded and effective.

Another significant perspective to leverage has been that of external stakeholders such as investors, consumers, and even international policies. With the rise of social media, these voices can be heard now more than ever. This is positive but has also challenged the Bites to show up and respond much quicker to critical issues. Johanna pointed out that this has prompted the business to really collaborate - enabling Bites Brands to really pursue CSR whether investors or

other voices were ready or not. In this way, one of the biggest threats to success has been transformed into the voice propelling it forward.

When there is potential to lose CSR momentum, another external stakeholder has also helped to project Bites forward. Bites has listened to cross-cultural perspectives, particularly those in markets that are more sustainable and greater advocates of social good, to leverage change. Frank spoke to the importance of regulations, saying

Regulations are coming out of the EU, out of Western Europe. These are really on the front side. From a global perspective, I think that gives us a leg up on some of the computation that's just focused here in the US. There's different pressures in different areas of the world; for example, Western Europe is a lot more conscious around animal welfare compared to in the states, but we see that trend starting to grow here too.

By monitoring the markets, Bites has been able to utilize the best trends and apply those to emerging priorities. Modeling CSR after the most advanced regulations is also effective in communicating to stakeholders about trends and success.

Bites has robust communications systems. Internally, each brand has internal networks discussing updates about CSR. Externally, the parent company engages with investors and activists to share about CSR updates. Bites even has direct channels to talk to consumers. These sources all provide critical feedback and enable Bites to make CSR an active part of dialogue. “How do we talk about it? Always, all the time. It's normalized. It's like when someone asks ‘well, how do you show love?’ It's not one specific thing. It's all the things and the way they add up.” (Theresa). This rhetorical consciousness suggests that even those beyond leadership have an understanding of CSR.

Within Bites, those outside of the CSR space are especially impacted by Bites' shift. To help those from franchises abroad to employees at different headquarters, the brand has worked to make understanding CSR more accessible, tailoring their narrative and approach to build trust based on what each stakeholder needs. "I think it starts with the framework to make it understandable and meaningful to people. From there we really try to weave it into all the right places at the right times. It's been a journey." (Theresa). Making CSR meaningful has inspired members of the team with varying degrees of attachment to CSR to buy-in to its necessity.

While communication is robust and many have bought into the mission, Frannie noted that there is still room to grow. Some stakeholders currently see CSR to be the icing on the cake; she isn't quite sure how to transition this thinking to recognize CSR as a primary ingredient.

The challenge we have is finding a way to communicate that it feels less peripheral and more intrinsic. And I think we're still working on that. I think people hear it and then think "oh, that sounds nice," but they don't create a link to the rest of what's going on in the business. I think in general, we communicate very well. But, I think there's a gap for both internal and external stakeholders as to how we make it feel as it should - as embedded, as intrinsic a driver of our financial performance or our relevancy or our reputation or whatever, it is. I think that's the sweet spot everyone is struggling with: how do you make it feel intrinsic and natural as opposed to "and now we're going to talk about our recipe for good." It's a lot more symbiotic.

This suggestion could be critical in Bites' future. If stakeholders don't see good and growth as two sides of the same coin, CSR practices may not be executed effectively, or fall by the wayside as new challenges emerge.

This challenge is clearly demonstrated in the franchised nature of Bites Brands. While the franchisee model makes it possible to run a global enterprise, it does make it significantly harder to implement CSR. While tailoring CSR strategies to work at the grassroots level is key to success, it is also difficult to manage when brands are siloed. Frannie pointed out that this is a significant obstacle in bringing businesses along, and that Bites has a responsibility to be both the guide and voice of reason when actors don't see CSR as an integral part of operations.¹ This directly correlates with the writing of Mazutis and Slawinski (2015), suggesting that to be a successful strategy, the policy must be grounded by local and global contexts. Bites must demonstrate the value of CSR in a way that meets brands and franchisees where they are.

This flexibility with regards to CSR is also important across markets. Much like the brands and franchises, each market has incredibly distinctive characteristics, and the CSR strategies must be reflective of the cultural contexts in which they are situated. Bites may have quantitative data, but the best way to implement the practices is to have a qualitative understanding of the people and place. Lisa provided one critical example: palm oil in Southeast Asia. She said, "There are markets where palm oil production is the bread and butter; but, our

¹ At the end of the day, Bites has nothing if it doesn't have the brands. We don't do anything, don't have franchises, or have restaurants. Yes, we have these values set evident in the tone at the top, but it's even more important that it's reflected in the brands... And the brands have this tension: they've been running the business and they've been running their own priorities. It's our job to translate why CSR is important, to give some outside perspective. One of our roles is to pull everyone's heads up and say "look around! Look at what's happening in our restaurant industry! Look at what's happening in the rest of the world! Look at what is happening in our value chain! Hey, are you paying attention?"... We have to look at the brands, their different dynamics, understand who they might understand to be the competition, and understand is the leader of that brand invested, do they believe these things to be important? Have they been able to take the "why," and guard the essence of it - through good times and bad - and be resilient in the pursuit of CSR? This can't be peripheral, or "We will get to it when the business is back up and on steady footing."... I can't give you an ROI and tell you this is going to drive sales tomorrow. What I am telling you is that if we don't stop making progress, there will be no sales in the future. That conversation is much harder to have when the business is bleeding. This is not peripheral, this has to be part of your ruthless prioritization. (Frannie).

franchisees own those farms, and they aren't going to get out of that. We have to understand their needs, and instead of requiring the brand to eliminate palm oil use, we have to ask them to source sustainably. It makes it complicated, but we have to address it. We want to be aspirational, but have to listen, because we can't cut out our markets." (Lisa). The difficulty of setting goals while being respectful of individuals carrying out CSR in tangible ways was evident in this conversation.

The issue of respect also applies to the diverse cultures in which the brand operates. This reiterates the need for flexibility within markets as Bites pursues CSR internationally. For example, Bites sees equity and inclusion to be a key organizational goal; this is a journey that requires varying measures of accountability dependent on location. For developing markets, this requires equity for women in the workplace. Others, especially developed markets, this looks like equity for minorities and members of the LGBTQ+ population. Within these systems, Bites must recognize the two categories are not monoliths, the policies require flexibility to make Bites' aspirations possible (Lisa). This flexibility within markets is a key aspect of enabling CSR to work and franchises to innovate.

Just as listening to the nature of markets is important for making policy, listening to the voices within has been critical to innovation. When asked, Horace said

It's 100% a team sport. You can't do anything in this larger organization without a lot of other people believing in you and driving their own innovative thinking to help move the whole system... and even on the strategy piece - that too is a team sport. There's no one person that is [the team]. There's no wizard behind the curtain, it's a cast of characters behind the curtain. You have to be inclusive and participatory as you do these things, or you'll be blindsided if you don't.

To embody this team mentality, the leadership and CEO of Bites has opened up to weekly conversations with all employees to address concerns and learn more about the brands' actions. Interviewees that worked with franchises and across brands revealed that even store owners have an active presence in these conversations – both in driving CSR interest and implementation. By listening to individual voices and working within the flexibility of different markets, Bites' CSR has been more effective and practical. It was fascinating to see that Bites does not place itself central to these conversations, but listens to franchises to understand what they actually need. This humility and active listening on the part of the brand demonstrates why the integration of CSR has been so natural. While values may be seen as working their way through the business top-down, the integration and passion for CSR has been very much a bottom-up reality.

With regards to the theme of CSR as a grassroots approach, it was evident that conversations with those executing the strategy drive the narrative. All respondents noted that the organization has a robust communications system, often erring on the side of over-communication to ensure all parties are aware of changes and practices. Further, the discussions revealed that the organization takes communication seriously, considering it to be an opportunity to listen to the insights of activists, investors, and employees outside of leadership. Several discussions noted the prevalence of international voices in the CSR conversation, and how they have driven the most recent franchisee goals. Many also revealed that the degree of accessibility within the organization to communicate pride and concerns have increased under new leadership. This builds the case that CSR is driven by those passionate about social and environmental change at Bites and in the world.

Authenticity

One of the greatest challenges to pursuing corporate social responsibility is developing the rapport with stakeholders to demonstrate its authenticity to the organization. As Wicki and Kaaij (2007) and McShane and Cunningham (2012), suggest, authenticity of CSR commitments must be developed by engaging consistently and where the values of the brand meet the values of society. With respect to Bites Brands, this authenticity of CSR is demonstrated both in reports and in the attitudes of leaders. This includes aspirations, values, and a sense of balance between actual and reported good.

As Ogden and Clark (2005) suggest, one way to view the legitimacy of corporate reports is to analyze the audience and regularity of assessments. As Frank notes, the reporting has both evolved and become a deeper piece of literature for the organization. “The trend is ‘go up.’” For Bites Brands, the transition in audience, dedication to continually report more, and rigorous measures all lead to the conclusion that authenticity is at least materially present. Authors Dhanani and Connolly (2015) point out that this regularity is only part of the conversation, as businesses speak highly of their works, even when not successful. For this reason, we have to understand whether the aspirations align with the actual experience.

All interviews revealed that Bites Brands often underreported their successes; further, the organization does not publicly announce policies until the team has fully planned how they will be implemented in markets (Theresa). Horace made the claim that this is ultimately to protect the business and the stakeholders. “You get too aspirational that you lose the best in the business case and business realities. At the end of the day, Bites has to do these things the right way for our system, employees, consumers, and for our investors.” Recognizing these key stakeholders

will be impacted helps Bites to show up as a good corporate citizen. Keeping aspirations within the fabric of the business, as Collier (2007) implies, holds the tapestry together. This is what prevents Bites from overcommitting and underperforming.

This nuanced approach suggests that the leaders at Bites have balanced their desire to be a cutting edge brand with the need to generate returns for their investors. This was especially evident when the leaders spoke about sustainability.

On our aspirations, you can't do those things. I just talked about our performance summary and those other disclosures without some sense of data on how your progress is just to me, that's how you really avoid the greenwashing. We're now trying to do the fun stuff of really cool collaborations with our dairy farmer suppliers. And you know, some interesting things and in beef and in palm and I love all those projects, but the fact that we have this tradition and legacy of verified data on how we're making changes overall is 100% crucial to being able to do. If we just do those fun things - you can do really cool projects and look great - but you may not be driving structural change. That's where you're at risk for greenwashing.”(Horace).

This measured approach shows that while CSR may be an effective marketing tool for most companies, Bites prioritizes their integrity (Smola & Sutton, 2002). No creative and sensational project will be undertaken without proof of returns, and they will not approach sustainable efforts without first making the work part of the business model (Collier, 2007). This approach shows that the business has harmonized their desire to make an impact with their need to protect those employed worldwide.

While protecting the business is important, CSR at Bites is more than risk mitigation. In her interview, Lisa noted that Bites has noticed a significant shift in the way the organization views ESG's. With respect to social goals, inclusivity might have been "business plus" before; now, it's a priority that the company - from leaders to franchises - incorporate diversity training into their experience. This isn't to mitigate the risk from not showing up for minority employees, but because the business has transformed its understanding. The same can be said for Bites' commitment to the environment and to partnerships. "Before, CSR was on the risk-management border. Now, it is built into our enterprise. We are a forward looking business and CSR is at the intersection of relevance and growth. Any relevant business is attacking these issues."(Lisa). However, being a relevant business is more than reporting big goals and making sweeping efforts in all markets.

Attacking these issues requires a balance. When working with franchises, Horace noted that Bites could move the bulk of the system by working with the 30 largest members - but only at risk of leaving out the smaller franchises. In moving the needle in some spaces, the organization would hurt other markets significantly. Pursuing CSR with so many requires a delicate equilibrium and humility. "In working with a large multinational corporation, you have to be persistent, have thick skin, and creative thinking to drive change over time."(Horace). Being considerate of players both big and small has enabled Bites to cultivate a relationship of care (Waddock, 2004; Glavas & Piderit, 2009). By meeting this need for internal stakeholders, Bites Brands adds a sense of value.

With respect to the theme of authenticity, these conversations revealed that many of the employees at Bites – especially those whose work is in direct support of or adjacent to social responsibility – find that their personal values are very similar to those of the brand. "Trying to

drive our system to do well in the focus areas that we've got lined up in our CSR absolutely fits with my own kind of view of how we ought to treat the world, the people, the planet.”(Horace). This is reminiscent of the findings of Amabile (1983), depicting that leadership found the combination of their personal values with those of the organization to be important to the pursuit of CSR.

Values are another key way in which authenticity is at play at Bites. As Schullery (2013) noted, employees with the same values as good corporate citizens can attest, working for an employer with the same values makes committing easier and working more fruitful. Johanna, in explaining her history with Bites, expressed “Bites feels like home.” When talking about other employers - especially those not rooted in CSR, Johanna said “I believe in working purpose. Bites is grounded and shows up for the communities that we serve. Not only about our product, but the people that we employ. I feel very aligned to the company I work for.” Bites’ history as a good corporate citizen depicts a convergence of personal and organizational values.

However, there is an unequal sense of alignment based on the leader's relationship to the strategy. While alignment among those directly related to the CSR strategy was strong, those further from the mission experienced less of a connection. Theresa said “What motivates me is the broader connectivity to the world and the fact that I think we should as an organization, be accountable to that. But if I'm honest, it also wasn't something I pursued. I'm just really glad that our company did.” This is compatible with the findings of Bakker and Schaufeli (2008), demonstrating that even among leaders who did not first join the organization based on its alignment with their values are proud to work for the company – and are more committed to its success. This suggests that those most central to the CSR mission might be most driven by

shared values, while those with increasing layers between must have added reasons for their commitment to the brand.

While this varying commitment to the brand might suggest that employees further from the CSR arena do not find motivation from this value system, that cannot be the case. The traditional literature suggests that employees participate in corporate citizenship based on either social or economic exchange. However, all interviewees revealed that the leaders were motivated to pursue their work for both a social and economic reason – with the social reasoning being more important as an internal motivator and economic success being secondary to them though significant for the business.

Unlike traditional literature suggests, the leaders do not buy into CSR for either an economic or social exchange; rather, it is the marriage of the two – a desire to have a profitable business while seeing good in communities – that makes a commitment to CSR flourish.

“We need to do these things as a public company to attract the kind of capital that reflects the appropriate shareholder value in it. And I think there's a big risk of loss of sales, loss of talented employees. Loss of investment. If you don't do these things right. So yes, I want to save the planet. Yes, I want us to have us do these things. Kind of for the right emotional and values based reasons. But I've kind of always approached it with very much a commercial sense of. There are really strong business cases on why we need to do these things for our customers, our employees and our investors.” (Horace).

This passionate convergence between personal values and the business' purpose is what makes the CSR authentic to business success. The primary role of CSR at Bites was not one of risk

mitigation or expanding their market share, but one that is believed to be the best way to show up for people, the planet, and profits.

As the conversations revealed, participating in CSR efforts was just as much supported by the business case as it was by the individual's vision of social and environmental good. The interviews demonstrated that though Bites is motivated to do well to see returns on its investments, one of the greatest investments it has made has been in CSR. Employees care more (Zappala, 2004), and even franchises see the benefit. The research shows that while there is overwhelming business evidence for pursuing a social mission, leaders believe in it for a myriad of reasons - most of which go beyond the understanding of the organization's financial performance.

Discussion

In recent years, Bites Brands' commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility has grown and their communication of such practices has increased for all stakeholders. The leadership at Bites notes that they find CSR practices with respect to sustainability to be integral to their brand moving forward, and that while aspirational, they move in tandem with their franchisees to ensure the transition is an effective and valued practice. Stakeholders are now investing in Bites' sustainable and social mission, both because they believe in its merit personally and understand that it is the best means of generating returns for shareholders and respecting the communities that serve and enjoy the brand.

Bites Brands model also serves as a lesson for those entering the social enterprise space. As an active listener, Bites demonstrates how leading with people's voices - both internal and external to the organization - makes implementing a social mission possible. With respect to

communicating, Bites' transformation demonstrates that regularity is important; when not sure how to proceed, lean in on voices on the frontline. To authentically implement CSR, communication and actions must align.

Bites' case also exemplifies the depth of successfully running a global enterprise, as well as the complexity and ambiguity that comes from being in such diverse markets. We were amazed by the rigor and complexity of Bites Brands systems. As one interviewee pointed out, "if you think about it too much, you'll get overwhelmed. We have to make a difference, so we keep pushing." (Frannie). With four brands, one parent company, 150 countries, and 50,000 restaurants worldwide, ambiguity is the norm. To continue moving the needle on social and environmental issues, Bites - and other companies - must embrace this uncertainty while simultaneously continuing to listen and adapt.

This research also offers an insightful contribution to the field of business and professional communication. This field has widely published research on procedures, skills, and cultural boundaries with respect to leadership, but prior case studies have not taken a multi-level approach to determine authenticity of CSR commitments. These findings will contribute to the broader understanding of corporate culture, the role of rhetoric on employee perceptions, and even have the potential to give organizations in transition to socially responsible practices insight on the process. The findings of this case study and its consequential research will also help other international brands with respect to employee relations and conscious enterprising. As the research is being conducted on a brand of national attention and international scope, both domestic and foreign policy makers may find the results important for future work with respect to trade and international business.

While notable, this research has several limitations. There are several voices missing due to personal and international crises experienced by those in CSR spaces. As such, saturation was not reached. This may have led to inconclusive results without enough feedback on the organization's room for improvement. Additionally, only two of the four brands were represented in this study; Bites Brands considers these two brands to be most behind the CSR curve. Had all enterprises been present, a different perspective on CSR may have emerged. Another limitation exists in that all leaders interviewed up to this point worked most directly with the environmental pillar of Bites' CSR. As such, the conversations have a bias to report around data and energy rather than people and evolving food standards. To accommodate for these limitations, the researchers are continuing their investigation and seeking new voices.

Future studies might continue this work by conducting multilevel case studies that understand if this authentic commitment to CSR is also shared among those implementing various policies among Bites' social mission. These studies might look at how the communication of CSR breaks down over levels, and how this might cause - or does cause - tension for business success. Research might also ask investors and executives their perspectives on CSR initiatives to better understand how those driven by the financial benefit might buy-in to the social mission. This research would be critical to provide feedback to the organization, enabling it to change internal dialogues and challenge the discord to prioritize a social mission.

Conclusion

Overall, my understanding of the commitments to Corporate Social Responsibility at Bites are fundamentally richer than when we first embarked on the research. Making a difference is possible with an internationally reaching brand, but the sheer complexity shows that without

intentionality and listening - these efforts are a recipe for disaster. Bites Brands doesn't bite off more than it can chew - and this ultimately helps it to remain profitable while doing good for people and the planet. For the leadership of Bites Brands, this shift in conversation has been accompanied by a change of heart. The rhetorical shift is present both internally and externally, and Bites is all the tastier for it. With authenticity at the core of its efforts, the social mission of business truly does serve up good.

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Appendix A

Overarching Things to Monitor in Review

- Has the rhetorical shift in corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting by Bites Brands been internalized by the employees which direct these initiatives?
 - Is this internalization authentic, as the external reports suggest?
 - Are leaders participating in this mission for a social or economic exchange?
 - How has this internalization contributed to changes in the direction of leadership?
 - How has the shift in CSR intentions contributed to the mission alignment experienced by leaders?
 - How do these leaders envision CSR with respect to their company?
 - How do these leaders see Bites' CSR with respect to their role as an international brand?
 - How does the location of headquarters distinguish leader perceptions of the organization's CSR?
 - How do local community issues influence the CSR work being conducted by each team?
 - How does the role of branding moderate the CSR work of Bites Brands?
 - How has the mission alignment changed following the events of 2020?
 - How has this shift in mission actualization and CSR initiatives been communicated to employees?
-

Appendix B

Email to Interviewees

Hi, _____!

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the study with UofL on Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability and Employee Engagement. We greatly appreciate your time and assistance and look forward to working with you!

Attached you will find a document which covers all possible questions we might ask about your leadership and perceptions of your organization as you pursue positive change with respect to food, people, and the planet. We encourage you to look over these questions and prepare for your interview as you are comfortable. You will also find a document titled Preamble Unsigned Consent. This document discusses the nature of our study and notifies you of your rights as a participant in our study. Prior to the start of your interview, we will ask what questions you may have about the terms and ask for your verbal consent to the document. Please reach out to Dr. Jenna Haugen or myself with any questions or concerns you may have about the study and your participation.

We look forward to working with you!

Best,

Lauren Reuss
University of Louisville, 2022

Appendix C Preamble (Unsigned Consent)

Date:

Dear _____:

You are being invited to participate in a research study by answering questions in the following survey about *Workplace Values, Executive Communication, and Organization Environmental Social Governance (ESG) alignment*. This study is conducted by scholar Lauren Reuss of the University of Louisville under the direction of Dr. Jenna Haugen of the UNC Chapel Hill's Kenan Flagler School of Business. There are no known risks for your participation in this research study. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others. The information you provide will *be used to determine best practices of businesses using models of corporate social responsibility and better understand employee engagement*. Your responses will be stored at *the University of Louisville*. The interview will take approximately *one hour's* time to complete and will be video recorded.

Individuals from the Department of *Management, the Provost's Office*, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO), and other regulatory agencies may inspect these records. In all other respects, however, the data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. By answering survey questions you agree to take part in this research study. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. All your responses will be video-recorded and will be transcribed under new titles to preserve your identity. None of your responses will be used to your economic or social detriment. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research study, please contact either *Dr. Jenna Haugen* (Jenna_Haugen@kenan-flagler.unc.edu; (270)704-0903) or *Lauren Reuss* (lereus02@louisville.edu; (502)648-2463).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office at (502) 852-5188. You can discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also call this number if you have other questions about the research, and you cannot reach the research staff, or want to talk to someone else. The IRB is an independent committee made up of people from the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as people from the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this research study.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24 hour hotline answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Appendix D Interview Guide

Standard Questions

1. Given your own personal values, how do you see those fitting with the values of Bites Brands?
2. How do you communicate CSR to internal stakeholders?
3. How do you communicate CSR to external stakeholders?
4. What drives or motivates you to engage in these CSR efforts?
5. What shifts in organizational leadership strategies have you seen based on CSR efforts?
6. How does CSR shift based on global location?
7. How do internal stakeholders drive the CSR mission?
8. How do external stakeholders drive the CSR mission?
9. Because Bites has distinct brands, and they are franchised, how does that shift the way you think about CSR efforts?
10. How has your reporting of CSR changed or adapted in recent years?

Additional Questions

Interview 4

- How do you see the Bites Foundation becoming more engaged with the community?
 - How do you see employee giving as it relates to the foundation?
 - How has the rhetoric about Bites social mission adapted in recent years?
-

Interview 5

- How has your leadership changed in recent years, if at all?
 - How has your reporting about ESG measures adapted in recent years?
 - How do you see Bites' sustainability strategy changing in recent years?
 - How do you see Bites' social strategy changing in recent years?
 - What challenges exist in pursuing these strategies as an international brand and how has your team worked to overcome them?
 - How has the rhetoric about Bites' mission adapted in recent years?
-

Interview 6

- What are you most excited about in your new role?
 - What specific notes on CSR in your former company will you integrate into your new role?
 - What challenges did you see with your former company that you were able to overcome, and how will you use that in your Bites CSR strategy?
-