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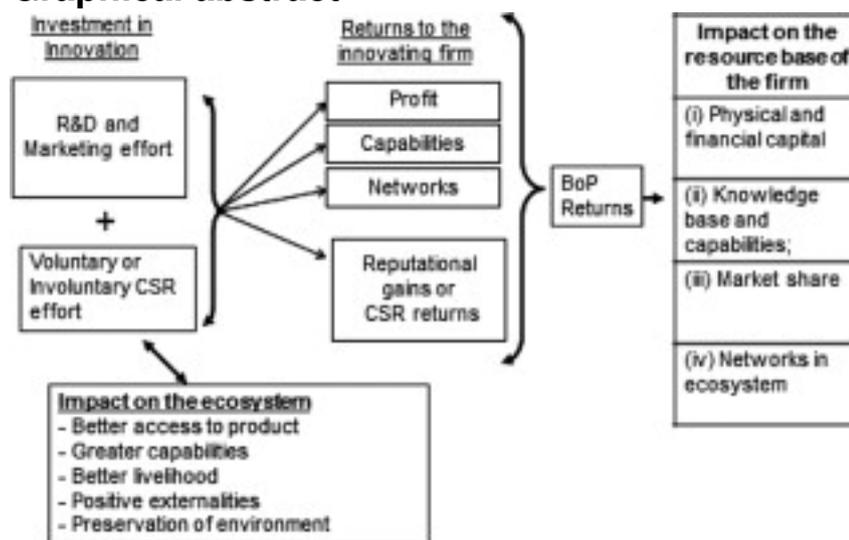
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Though radical and complex reengineered product innovations are not discussed much in either the 'Corporate Social Responsibility' (CSR) or the 'Base of the Income Pyramid' (BoP) literature, both support the premise that if an innovation serves the poor, then it will generate CSR gains. To test this assumption with respect to breakthrough technological innovations, the present paper proposes a theoretical construct and uses it to examine two innovations launched in India, namely genetically modified cotton seeds and a HIV/AIDS drugs cocktail. Because firms decide on innovation outlays to maximize profit without including an explicit CSR component, it develops indicators to examine if any involuntary CSR effort was embedded in the innovation strategy. It confirms that though firms do not invest in innovation to earn CSR credit, some breakthrough technological innovations, not all, can trigger CSR returns. There are tradeoffs between CSR effort and BoP innovation market value. Higher the consumer surplus generated by the innovation, better the bargaining position of the innovator vis-à-vis contestations. The windows of opportunity for generating BoP market value and CSR value are context specific. A robust business strategy rather than philanthropy is needed for breakthrough technological innovations to be marketed to BoP communities.

Graphical abstract



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