Cross-Cultural Differences in Online Corporate Communication About Diversity

A Comparison of Companies From 15 Countries on the Way How They Communicate About the Workforce Diversity on Corporate Websites

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ABSTRACT

A globalization of the modern world and demographic shifts in the society have led to a
growing interest of organizations in the topic of workforce diversity. Research in the fields of
management and corporate social responsibility (CSR) reveals that managing diversity at the
workplace has the potential implications for organizational outcomes, depending on how
companies approach it. At the same time, organizations worldwide have started to
communicate about diversity issues on their corporate websites, making implicit their
motives to tackle workforce diversity. Yet, little to no advancements have been made in
terms of researching cross-country differences in the way organizations address and approach
the topic of workforce diversity and the role of a national culture in shaping the latter.

Applying a theoretical framework provided by Thomas and Ely (2001), the study
compares companies from 15 countries with the biggest economies in the world regarding the
way they report on workforce diversity on their corporate websites. Countries are compared
based on their cultural set of values, defined by Hofstede (2001) as level of individualism.
The paper employs quantitative content analysis as a research method and analyses 150
corporate websites by evidence of workforce diversity communication, type of diversity
addressed, and diversity management perspective applied by a company. The study
contributes to the underdeveloped literature on the topic of online workforce diversity
communication by revealing cultural patterns in organizational reporting on the topic. It is
then revealed that the level of individualism in the country positively correlates to evidence
of online diversity promotion. Moreover, even though for most of types of diversity reported
the association with individualism scores was not identified, the analysis showed significance
for promoting equal rights for people with any gender identity and sexual orientation, and for
those with different educational and professional backgrounds. Finally, there is a significant
relationship between diversity perspectives applied by a company and level of individualism
in the country.

KEYWORDS: *Diversity, Culture, Individualism, Diversity perspective, Online
communication*

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Introduction

There is evidence that in a modern global world workforce diversity is a trend which reflects migration and demographic shifts in society (Mor Barak, 2013). Organizations become more and more diverse, attracting and hiring employees with different characteristics and thus increasing the potential of a company to change in the context of a modern complex environment (Cox, 1993; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Workforce diversity is therefore developed in an organizational reality, demanding from employers an implementation of diversity management practices (Bellard & Rüling, 2001). They should discourage intercultural communication and ethnic diversity, suppress racial and gender stereotypes, as well as involve aging populations in their workforce (Simon, 2000).

On a corporate level, there are two dominant lines of reasoning for adopting a diversity-driven approach. In some cases, promoting diversity at the workplace is treated as an ethical obligation of a company (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012; Johns, Green, & Powell, 2012). Such organizations are motivated by moral imperatives for supporting equality and justice and acting in a line with the governmental legislative policies (Deane, 2013). Another approach towards diversity management is rather a proactive strategy for maximizing the exploitation of employee potential (Smith et al., 2004). An increasing number of businesses tend to value workplace diversity as a source of competitive advantage due to its impact on enhancing innovation (Ferdman, 2014) and creativity in workgroups (O'Leary & Weathington, 2006).

Managing diversity could be a corporate challenge, as different approaches have different effects on a company's performance (Kirton & Greene, 2005). A tactic which a company applies while dealing with a workplace diversity provides lenses through which employees not only perceive the notion of diversity, but also see each other, appreciating or denying intercultural differences (Van Knippenberg, Van Ginkel & Homan, 2013). For instance, Kochan (2003) states that in some cases managing diversity could lead to more conflicts among employees, when minority voices are being suppressed, or not being heard. The way how members of a stuff behave towards each other has an impact on their emotional and psychological wellbeing, consequently affecting workplace performance (Jansen et al., 2016). Similarly, plenty of studies revealed that an organizational approach towards diversity is a mediator between workplace diversity and performance outcomes (De Dreu & West, 2001; Van Knippenberg, De Dreu & Homan, 2004).

To avoid negative consequences of managing diversity, an organization should pay more attention to communication about diversity to its employees and external stakeholders (Olsen & Martins, 2012). The way how diversity is addressed by the organization reflects the philosophy of a company and represents a clear vision of a value of workplace diversity, thus also revealing the approach taken by organization while dealing with diversity (Stevens, Plaut & Sanchez-Burks, 2008).

Ely and Thomas (2001) in their qualitative research on cultural diversity in American firms identified and labelled approaches towards corporate communication about diversity. They defined three different perspectives on workplace diversity, namely the discrimination-and-fairness, the access-and-legitimacy, and the integration-and-learning one. The discrimination-and-fairness perspective considers providing diversity at a workplace as a social responsibility of a company, not valuing its instrumental link to business outcomes. Instead of acknowledging differences between employees, it dictates viewing everyone as equal, ignoring personal identities of workers. In such organizations a color-blindness vision of personnel is adopted, which leads to assimilation of underrepresented groups to a prevalent culture (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

In a contrary, the access-and-legitimacy and integration-and-learning approaches value workplace diversity as a business opportunity. Firms taking an access-and-legitimacy paradigm believe that attracting more diverse workforce will help to gain access to, and legitimacy with culturally diverse stakeholders. Hereby, personnel are seen as a recourse to understand and meet needs of a market (Thomas & Ely, 1996; 2001). Organizations which apply the integration-and-learning perspective are the most successful in terms of managing diversity, as they fully value it and learn from diverse insights, experiences, and skills of their workers. Such companies take advantage of managing workforce diversity and incorporate its distinct aspects into their core corporate practices (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

In order to reveal an organizational perspective on communication about workplace diversity, corporate diversity statements could be used as assets for analyzing. They are similar to mission statements, also being symbolic texts using for impression management to express the firm's purpose and ambition (Campbell, 1997). Diversity statements aim to guide corporate behavior internally, as well as show evidence of having a socially responsible management to stakeholders (Edwards & Kelan, 2011). Being publicly accessible tools for organizational communication, diversity statements are usually placed in various sections of corporate websites (Kirby & Harter, 2002; Singh & Point, 2006; Uysal, 2013).

Scholars aimed to investigate an online corporate communication about diversity mostly focused on one specific country, such as the United States (Kirby & Harter, 2003), the United Kingdom (Guerrier & Wilson, 2011); the Netherlands (Heres & Benschop, 2010); Finland (Meriläinen et al., 2009); and Brazil (Vasconcelos, 2017), which makes impossible a cross-country comparison of workforce diversity promotion due to different measures and dimensions of studies. There are plenty of papers revealing differences between online promotion of diversity issues, but they are limited to Western cultures (Bellard & Rüling, 2001; Jonsen et al., 2019; Singh & Point, 2003; 2004). Non-western companies remain under researched, and, therefore, the worldwide context of reported diversity across firms from different countries is missed. In order to bridge this research gap and to make broader comparisons between different cultures, a current study aims to investigate fifteen countries with biggest economies in the world (the United States, China, Japan, Germany, India, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Brazil, Canada, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Australia, Mexico). The research is framed by the cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism developed by Hofstede (2001), which makes explicit aspects of differentiation of one country from another.

Countries will be compared not only on the basis of evidence for online corporate communication about diversity, but also on the way *how* organizations address diversity issues. The first dimension is comparison of reporting on different types of diversity, which was explored in studies of Singh and Point (2003; 2004) but lacks further explanation of its correlation towards a national culture. Another facet of the focus of the current paper is cultural differences in adopting diversity approaches defined by Ely and Thomas (2001). No identified research was found regarding how applying a specific perspective on diversity management relates to a national culture. Therefore, study at hand will give more insights on how online diversity communication is shaped by a national culture on different levels.

The research question is following:

'How does a cultural context affect the way organizations communicate about diversity on their corporate websites?'.

Theoretical framework

Defining workforce diversity

Diversity, being a socially constructed concept, is complex, dynamic and not limited to a one universal definition (Zapata-Barrero, 2009), as its meaning is always dependent on a context (Triandis, 1995). The Oxford English Dictionary defines diversity in a broad sense of "unlikeness, different kind, variety". The context of a social identity and social-group membership is important for understanding the discourse of diversity (Tajfel, 1969), as it is widely used for differentiating individuals based on their group-identity classifications (Mazur, 2010). As a research concept it has gained popularity since the early 1990s and was defined by most researchers as referring to any characteristics of an individual that may be perceived by others as being different from their own attributes (Jackson, 1992; Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994). Those who possess a set of characteristics fitting the majority, are in-group, on a contrary to those who are out-group and thus perceived as other, different (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Originally, the concept of workforce diversity took its roots in the United States in the 1960s, when the government established quotas for organizations, aimed for employment and advancement of Black and female employees (Bellard & Rulling, 2001). Firstly being introduced as a way to suppress gender and racial discrimination (Beckwith & Jones, 1997), it was then integrated in diversity business practices worldwide (Edelman, Riggs Fuller, & Mara-Drita, 2001). According to Thomas & Ely (1996), workforce diversity should be conceptualized as a set of "varied perspectives and approaches to work that members of different identity groups bring" (p. 80).

Diverse organizational workforce is then seen as one that reflects the medium or high degree of objective and subjective differences between employees (Jonsen et al., 2019; McGrath, Berdahl & Arrow, 1995). Differences can be both easily observable (e.g., gender, age, race, physical disabilities), and hidden, intrinsic ones (such as political, religious, or sexual preferences). Moreover, some scholars also indicate subjective work-related differences, such as educational and functional backgrounds (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999), as well as differences in personal attitudes and values (Bowers, Pharmer, & Salas, 2000; Harrison & Klein, 2006).

Although some researchers defined different discourses in corporate communication about diversity, such as maintaining equality, providing inclusion and suppressing discrimination (e.g. Vasconcelos, 2017), this distinction is not the focus of a current study. Therefore, to avoid vague definitions and ambiguity, diversity promotion in the research is conceptualized as promotion of valuing "any significant difference that distinguishes one individual from another" (Kreitz, 2007, p. 101).

Dimensions of workforce diversity

Workforce diversity was categorized into different dimensions, identified by previous researches and combined by similar characteristics. Bhawuk and Triandis (1996) stated that diversity is "difference in ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and personal perspectives" (p. 85). Sha and Ford (2007) divided it into "categories of people based on differences that cannot be altered, such as age, race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and physical abilities/qualities; and differences that can be altered, such as class, language, income, marital status, religion, geography, and military experience" (p. 386). Litvin (1997) characterised these dimensions as primary and fluid, which differentiate by a degree of visibility. Primary attributes are more visible, while secondary could be even invisible, especially if they are psychological and job- related. McGrath et al. (1995) see diversity at the workplace as a cluster of attributes, which are demographic (e.g. race, gender, age etc.), task-related knowledge and abilities; values, beliefs and attitudes; personality and cognitive and behavioural styles, and status in the organisation. Kreitz (2007) also highlighted these areas as important for making a distinction between individuals in a work-related setting, calling them personality, internal and external characteristics, and organizational characteristics.

All these dimensions are dynamic, interactive and dependent on the environmental context. For instance, in a social setting gender might play a more important role than educational background, while at the workplace education is more dominant than sex (Mazur, 2010). Therefore, diversity management is usually not limited to simple directions of gender or race, but rather tends to enclose the widest set of characteristics (Klarsfeld et al, 2016). However, as historically a workforce diversity emerged from endorsement of females and Black minorities, the categories of gender and race are the dominant dimensions of diversity among companies worldwide, followed by age, ethnicity, disability status and religion

(Herring, 2009; Jonsen et al., 2019; Singh & Point, 2003). In the last decades diversity dimensions of sexual orientation and gender identity have also gained more and more popularity (Qin, Muenjohn, & Chhetri, 2014; Sabharwal, Levine, & D'Agostino, 2018).

However, while diversity traits are limited simply to including minorities to a workforce, they lead to a belief that only specific groups could represent diversity, and a dominant group within an organizational workforce does not contribute to diversity (Janssens & Stayert, 2001). Instead, only when a company takes an inclusive approach to diversity and define it in the broadest sense, as all possible differences between people, the full potential of the human resources could be reached and full benefits of diversity could be distinguished (Ferdman, 2014; Subeliani & Tsogas, 2005; Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Although there are countless ways to differentiate individuals, in an organizational practice workforce diversity is rather a selective concept, meaning that management programs incorporate only limited amount of diversity dimensions (Burgess, French & Strachan, 2009). Point and Singh (2003) in their study on communication about diversity through corporate websites, revealed that the most mentioned categories of differentiation are gender (sex), race (colour) and ethnicity, age (generation), physical and mental abilities (disability status), culture, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, educational and professional background. They will be also investigated in this paper.

Importance of diversity practices at the workplace

For most organizations worldwide dealing with diversity becomes a key principle, as diversity management aims to potentially profit from attracting more diverse workforce and having diversity-related practices (Ng, & Burke, 2005). There are several arguments supporting the importance of promoting diversity at the workplace. First of all, tough market conditions complicate the process of seeking the most competent employees in the global talent area (Rosenzweig, 1998). Studies revealed that potential employees from both majority and minority groups value companies with diversity policies more (Avery, 2003; Casper, Wayne, & Manegold, 2013; Williamson et al., 2008), so diversity strategy can help organizations in branding themselves as employers of the choice (Pfeffer, 1998).

Another strong argument for implementing diversity strategy at the workplace is corporate social responsibility (CSR), which, along with other socially responsible practices,

consider providing equal employment opportunity and creating safe and inclusive space for women, people of colour, members of LGBTQ community, employees of different ages, and people with disabilities (Ely, & Thomas, 2001; Reskin, McBrier, & Kmec, 1999). CSR positioning of the firm is especially important when it comes to reporting to stakeholders, such as current and potential employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders, and investors (Singh, & Point, 2003). As there is a demand for "positive records in community involvement, environmental management, and employee relations", diversity management can be perceived as a part of that set of socially responsible practices (Singh, & Point, 2003, p. 750). In this context promoting diversity at a workplace is a proactive strategic business reaction to changes in culture and society.

Finally, recognising diversity as a business opportunity and a valuable resource for the company can develop a competitive advantage, as it gives an organization the ability to maintain its superiority in attracting the greatest human potential (Dass & Parker, 1999; Jonsen, Point, Kelan, & Grieble, 2019). Cox (1993), analysing work groups with diverse cultural backgrounds, reported on the findings about the positive impact of capturing a broader set of views, beliefs and values, stating that diversity can open a space for more creativity and flexibility, better decision making and problem solving.

Investigation of online corporate communication about diversity

Managing workforce diversity and valuing differences among employees is a widespread CSR practice that has been endorsed as "one of the foremost competencies of tomorrow's organizations" (Weaver, 2008, p. 111). Roberge et al. (2011) insisted on highlighting the importance of diversity for organization by using it in a form of symbolic management and incorporating diversity statements into corporate mission statements. Hence, a simple fact of having diversity practices does not have such a great positive outcome as combining it with successful reporting and promoting workforce diversity.

A number of studies revealed that the presence of diversity policies leads to more positive evaluations of the company (Bauer & Talya, 1994) and enhances its attractiveness (Madera, Dawson, & Nea, 2016). Such an effect is especially great among minorities, while diversity is promoted on the moral basis and equal opportunities are provided (Avery & McKay, 2008).

With the growing use of the Internet, companies increasingly allocate more resources to their websites as a primary public relations medium for communicating with

diverse stakeholders and promoting corporate values to the public (Kent, Taylor & White, 2003; Signitzer & Prexl, 2007). Bart (2001) even found a significant positive correlation between the usage of websites for promotion of corporate mission and values and organizational performance. Various studies on the topic of online corporate communication reveal that websites do not only establish a presence for a firm (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007), but also deliver relevant information for the media (Pettigrew & Reber, 2010) as well as various corporate messages (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007), especially about corporate social responsibility initiatives (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). Heres and Benschop (2010) proposed that research on usage of corporate websites for a formal communication could give positive insights into "how the company wishes to present and identify itself" (p. 453).

Diversity statements from corporate websites are powerful tools for reporting on diversity as a company value. The tone of communication there could reveal the motives for providing equal opportunities for underrepresented groups at the workplace. Therefore, researchers have investigated corporate websites and annual reports in order to define how workforce diversity is promoted online.

The study that pioneered the topic of diversity discourses on corporate websites and in annual reports belongs to Bellard and Ruling (2001). They investigated German and French top companies and found out that in Germany the focus of diversity is on international experiences, whilst French organizations tend to value cultural and professional differences. They also revealed that firms from both countries superficially adopted US-driven diversity approaches. Kirby and Harter (2003) in their study of textbooks, handbooks and websites of American business consultants identified that diversity was promoted as a beneficial feature and competitive advantage for companies.

Inspection of diversity statements of organizations across Europe of Point and Singh (2003) gave an insight on places where companies publish diversity promotion on their websites. Diversity-related documents were found in the sections on careers and employment, business profile and corporate values pages, as well as in reporting on corporate social responsibility. Interestingly, a quarter of the websites in the sample regarded diversity as a universal notion and did not explain its scope for the company.

A later study of Singh and Point (2004) on diversity statements disclosed significant differences among European companies on drivers and stages of diversity management. Authors defined drivers as corporate performance enhancement, strengthening company's reputation, and meeting needs and expectations of firm's stakeholders. Stages of diversity management were defined as follows: diversity as a competitive strategy, invisible, DM,

respect for individual, equal opportunities, and avoiding discrimination. Then, Singh and Point (2006) focused on social constructions of gender and ethnicity in corporate diversity statements and found that these types of diversity were presented either as a liability in need of protection or as a competitive advantage. Notably, those diversity statements which were coupled with pictures or figures supported stereotypes about females and ethnical minorities. Wallace, Hoover and Pepper (2014) examined companies from the list of "100 Best Companies to Work For" in 2012 in order to explore a shift in a rationale for diversity management. The study primarily focused on the ethics of care and identified evidence proving it in 70% of the statements in the sample.

A number of studies also investigated and compared online diversity promotion in the context of one country. Meriläinen et al. (2009) examined Finnish organizations and indicated that only a quarter of them proposed a detailed discussion of diversity initiatives on their websites, and, therefore, did not address the topic properly. In contrast, the UK companies diversity policies are not only sophistically and comprehensively portrayed on their websites, but also communicated as a business case (Guerrier & Wilson, 2011). Moreover, findings indicated that in most organizations young women are presented as a *face of company*, even though older males constitute the majority of a workforce. Similarly, organizations in the Netherlands actively use corporate websites for reporting on workforce diversity initiatives in recruitment, career and CSR sections as well as promote it in annual reports (Heres & Benschop, 2010). However, in all cases communication was moderate or limited and was rather a part of a CSR strategy of a company than a separate practice.

Vasconcelos (2017) focused on Brazilian context and investigated how companies which were regarded as best places to work address the topic of diversity, inclusion and discrimination in corporate statements and documents published on their websites. Almost half of studied firms showed some interest in reporting on diversity online and proposed a compelling or somewhat acceptable diversity discourse. The author concluded that a topic of workforce diversity is not a priority for Brazilian corporations, even though they targeted their websites in the international community.

Finally, Jonsen et al. (2019) inspected websites of major companies in France, Germany, Spain, the UK and the US and described how organizations take advantage of workforce diversity. and inclusion branding while attracting a diverse talent pool or aiming to become employers of choice. An important contribution of the research is that there is a distinction between diversity and inclusion branding in driving motives for providing diversity management. Companies focusing on diversity branding aim for attracting a diverse

talent pool, while those who adopt an inclusion approach are more likely to become an employee of a choice. Moreover, Jonsen et al. (2019) also characterized how diversity is categorized by companies to signal that specific dimensions are relevant to them.

All in all, studies considering online diversity promotion were focused on diversity statements both on websites and in annual reports (which are usually published as separate documents). Even though they inspected different dimensions of workforce diversity promotion, it could be concluded that types of diversity and organizational motives for providing equal opportunities for employees are the most researched areas. In the current study, corporate websites across countries will be compared on three levels: evidence for diversity promotion; types of diversity mentioned; and approach to diversity management (Thomas & Ely, 2001), which reveals drivers for organizational shift towards diversity promotion. The main contribution of the paper is bridging the research gaps on linking national culture to online diversity communication and revealing how differently fifteen countries from around the globe respond to workforce diversity issues.

Organizational approaches to workforce diversity

Even though workforce diversity has evolved and become an important part of organizational culture over decades ago, companies view, value and implement it differently, which results in a scope of different approaches towards diversity practices and initiatives (Swanson, 2002). These perspectives, applied by executives, shape organizational processes and define the extent to which individuals feel respected and valued at the workplace (Bader, Kemper, & Froese, 2019). Accordingly, the way the idea of diversity is perceived and acted among employees affects a firm's "ability to leverage the potential of a diverse workforce and diminish potential negative effects" (Bader et al., 2019, p. 203; Van Knippenberg, Van Ginkel & Homan, 2013). As organizational approach towards diversity has a direct outcome for an organizational performance and group productivity, there is a societal and practical relevance to examine it.

There are two dominant perspectives on workforce diversity management, namely the Equal Opportunities Approach (EOA), and the Managing Diversity Approach (MDA) (Ewijk, 2011; Johns et al, 2012; Saini, 2007). Organizations which adopt the first one perceive diversity as a moral obligation of a company and are driven by considerations of shared responsibility and fair treatment towards all employees regardless of their gender, age,

ethnicity, sexual orientation and any other factors (Groeneveld & Verbeek, 2012; Verbeek, 2011). The Equal Opportunities Approach was developed as an organizational response to protests against limited access to workforce resources for gender and racial minorities. However, by declaring that everyone is equal, organizational cultures facing this paradigm neglect differences between employees and restrain their ability to show a talent potential (Singh & Point, 2004).

In contrast, the Managing Diversity Approach regards diversity as a business case and encourages capitalizing on the full potential of a diverse workforce (Kirton & Greene, 2017). Companies with an MDA paradigm take an advantage of workforce diversity by appreciating the variety of different backgrounds, ideas and skills it can offer. Driven by internal and economic purposes, these firms treat employees as valuable resources for enhancing an organizational performance (Wise & Tschirhart, 2000; Wrench, 2007).

Even though the Equal Opportunities and the Managing Diversity approaches provide a reliable framework to examine workforce diversity promotion, it lacks complexity and elements in-between lines. Therefore, this study opted for the conceptualization of diversity perspectives of Thomas and Ely (1996; 2001). Analysing interviews and observations of members of the staff of three different organizations, they defined three organizational approaches to diversity: the discrimination-and-fairness perspective, the access-and-legitimacy perspective, and the integration-and-learning perspective. The perspective of choice had implications on how traditionally underrepresented minority groups felt valued by their colleagues, which, in turn, influenced the work group functioning.

The discrimination-and-fairness perspective, in a line with the Equal Opportunities Approach, regards workforce diversity promotion as a moral obligation of a firm to treat equally all members of a society and supress discrimination (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Therefore, in organizations adopting this perspective a culturally diverse workforce is considered as an evidence of social responsibility of a firm (Thomas & Ely, 1996) and to some extent as a tool to achieve moral advantages (Hon & Brunner, 2000). While countering prejudices and discriminations, companies aim to portray themselves as moral corporate citizens that comply with law (Mazzei & Ravazanni, 2008). Progress in diversity management is then focused on and measured by accomplishing recruitment and retention goals, leaving behind acknowledging differences and viewing diversity as a valuable resource (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Companies applying this perspective embrace colour-blindness and ignore differences between employees (Jonsen et al., 2019). Consequently, minorities perceive

themselves devalued and disrespected, as they have to assimilate to the dominant culture (Mazzei & Ravazanni, 2008). They cannot integrate properly in an organizational culture, perceive hostility and resentment from members of a majority group. All of this results in perceived *victim mentality*, increases segregation and turnover of minorities (Syed & Kramar, 2009). Such an approach to workforce diversity leads to permanent conflicts related to differences among employees and establishes an own identity of minorities as a source of powerlessness (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Hence, having a diverse workforce that is unable to express "work-related but culturally based differences" (Ely & Thomas, 2001, p. 3), companies limit their potential for improving practices and enhancing performance.

Apart from a discrimination-and-fairness orientation, an access-and-legitimacy paradigm opens an opportunity for organizations to grow "with differences - not despite them" (Thomas & Ely, 1996, p. 7). This approach to diversity is classified as a business-oriented approach, where "a varied workforce can contribute to a better use of knowledge and skills, since each employee can be put to work where he or she functions best" (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003). An access-and-legitimacy perspective is based on a human capital theory, which considers employees as assets which could bring an added value for a company (Dass & Parker, 1999). It emerged as a response to increased consumer bargaining power of ethnic minorities in the 1980s and '90s. Companies taking this diversity approach achieve a competitive advantage through the principle of *requisite variety*, when the diversity within the organization reflects the diversity of environment it operates in (Weick, 1979). If a company realizes that markets it works with are diverse, it aims to match a workforce composition with key stakeholder and customer groups in order to meet their needs and expectations (Lorbiecki, 2001). Diverse organizational workforce is then manipulated in order to get access to and legitimacy with increasingly multicultural market-segments and rather seen as a "clear opportunity or an imminent threat to the company" (Ely & Thomas, 1996, p. 5).

Although in a comparison with a discrimination-and-fairness perspective an access-and-legitimacy one makes a step ahead valuing differences between employees, it acts "without trying to understand what those capabilities really are and how they could be integrated into the company's mainstream work" (Thomas & Ely, 1996, p. 5). The value-in-diversity then associates with urgent "crisis-oriented needs for access and legitimacy" (Thomas & Ely, 1996, p. 6), which leads to restricting the voice and power of minorities to margins of interacting with specific market segments. Consequently, employees perceive themselves exploited and limited in opportunities.

The last but not least diversity perspective focuses on the business performance and economic benefits of diverse workforce composition. Firms adopting an integration-and-learning managerial approach recognize "identity-group affiliations" of employees as factors which affect their work-related decisions (Thomas and Ely, 1996, p. 6). Diversity is perceived as a powerful resource due to a combination of different insights, skills, and experiences, which leads to increased employee productivity, innovation, creativity, job satisfaction and customer satisfaction (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2008).

Diversity is then directly linked to work processes and strategic decisions, as it creates space for knowledge sharing, adaptive change, and renovation (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Accordingly, these practices redefine and reorganize work habits such as task framing, composition of teams, setting and reaching goals, communicating about ideas, and designing of the whole work process. It gives the company an opportunity to become more adaptable to different circumstances and a changing environment (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Cultural differences are integrated into core activities and operations of a company by questioning and redefining normative assumptions (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). A firm with an integration-and-learning orientation aims to promote an inclusive organizational culture, where all employees are able to reveal their full potential and feel themselves respected and valued due to equal distribution of functions and power (Thomas & Ely, 1996). Therefore, workforce diversity is converted into an important resource for a constant learning and adaptive change.

A key insight from studies of Ely and Thomas (1996; 2001) is that although all three perspectives are successful in motivating managers to promote diversity at the workplace, only integration-and-learning approach is successful in achieving sustainable organizational goals in diverse organizations. Companies that aim for a paradigm shift towards an integration-and-learning orientation should encourage a quality dialogue about diversity issues among employees (Swanson, 2002). Therefore, analysing the way organizations communicate about workforce diversity to their personnel and external stakeholders will help to understand which perspective they take and draw insights on how successful they are in implementing diversity management strategy.

Cross-cultural comparison of corporate communication about diversity

There is an evidence that organizations address workforce diversity issues differently, defining it in variety of dimensions and taking either moral-driven or business-

driven approaches. However, there is a lack of understanding of how to make a distinction between companies operating in different countries. Theoretical framework for such a comparison would make it clear how diversity practices are shaped within an organization, revealing driving forces for change behind it.

The concept which gives an opportunity to reveal cross-national differences is *culture.* Being a complex and dynamic concept with a variety of meanings, it is often conceptualized as *civilization* or *refinement of the mind* and concerns all possible social patterns in thinking, feeling and acting (Leong & Ward, 2006) as well as sets of shared values, beliefs, norms and rituals (Hofstede, 2001). Culture is not an inherited feature; rather, it is unconsciously learned from a social environment and remains unquestionable and undoubtable by a specific cluster of people (Hofstede et al., 2010). Cultural grouping exists on many levels, from national to organizational, and could emerge from environmental or socio-political factors. A culture then represents "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another" (Hofstede, 1984, p. 21).

The relevance of using the concept of culture to explain cross-national differences has been doubted by some scholars, as "culture is a too global concept to be meaningful as an explanatory variable" (van de Vijver and Leung, 1997, p. 3; Samie & Jeong, 1994; Schwartz, 1994). However, defining a limited number of dimensions allows to unpack it and identify its main components. Taking roots in the anthropological perspective on culture, there is an assumption that cultural differences result from societal responses to universal issues, such as "the existence of two sexes; the helplessness of infants; the need for satisfaction of the elementary biological requirements such as food, warmth and sex; the presence of individuals of different ages and of differing physical and other capacities" (Hofstede, 1984, p. 36).

There were a number of attempts to conceptualize and operationalize cultural dimensions (e.g. Bond, 1987; Clark, 1990; Dorfman & Howell, 1988). However, a framework proposed by Hofstede (1984; 2001; 2010) is considered as the most appropriate one both in terms of complexity and comprehensiveness and a number of national culture samples. Hofstede defined cultural orientations and assigned indexes to nations, linking it to demographic, geographic, economic, and political aspects of a society. National value systems of each country are then evaluated by four different cultural parameters: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity. These cultural dimensions are widely used in sociological, marketing and management studies to compare countries and nations, even though in some cases actual indexes are replaced and measured by new or adopted metrics (e.g. Leong & Ward, 2006; Ng & Burke, 2005; Zhang et al., 2007).

Out of all cultural dimensions provided by Hofstede (2001), an individualism-collectivism tension is more than other linked to social norms, personal attitudes, cultural values, and group performing (Dekker et al., 2008). Staples and Zhao (2006) also report on its effect on the communication between team members. Therefore, the value of taking an individualism dimension for the current research is that it has the largest influence on how people from different cultures behave.

Simply described, individualism-collectivism explains relationships among members of a specific society. The individualism index of a country reflects the degree to which "the interests of the individual prevail over the interests of the group" (Hofstede, 2005, p. 74). In nations with a low score people perceive themselves as *we as a part of a group* and demonstrate high levels of conformity and dependence on social norms, allocate shared resources and responsibilities. They usually tend to group harmony and avoid direct confrontations, show loyalty to the group and expect the group to be taking care of them in a turn. Sharing the belief that group decisions are superior to the individual, members of collectivistic societies understand their personal identity through lenses of within-group interactions.

Accordingly, while an individualism index is high, individuals identify themselves as *I* rather than *we* and evaluate themselves based on personal characteristics and not a group membership (Hofstede, 2010). An individualistic culture is then defined as "a society in which the ties between individuals are loose" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 225). Members of such society value autonomy, individual ownership, privacy, ability to express themselves; tend to care about themselves and promote their own interests and interests of immediate family.

There is evidence that an individualism-collectivism distinction attributes to a workgroup performance (e.g. Stamkou et al., 2018; Zeffane, 2017; Zhang et al., 2007). For instance, Darwish and Huber (2003) noted that the level of individualism positively correlates with the processes of learning, reinforcement and social perception. At the same time, collectivists are more productive and cooperative while working in groups, as they perform interdependent tasks and share responsibilities (Sosik & Jung, 2002). In cultures defined as individualistic employees focus on their own goals and thus are independent from workgroup compositions (Cohen & Avrahami, 2006). Therefore, in such societies workforce demonstrates less group affiliation and higher sense of competitiveness (Ramamoorthy et al., 2005).

The impact of national culture on organizational culture

For the current study it is important to differentiate national culture from organizational culture. Oudenhoven (2001) referred national culture to "profound values, beliefs and practices that are shared by the vast majority of people belonging to a certain nation" (p. 90). Organizational culture, on the other side, is a set of assumptions shared among employees which differentiate one company from another. There are also practices related to specific industries that are learned through socialization processes at the workplace (Goelzer, 2003).

The effect of a national culture on organizational structure was examined by various institutional theorists (e.g., Aguilera & Jackson, 2003; Nelson & Gopalan, 2003), as well as provoked debates in the literature on organizational theory (e.g., Gerhart, 2009; Hatch & Zilber, 2012; Stone, Stone-Romero, & Lukaszewski, 2007). It was then hypothesised that the reason why organizations adopt or assimilate to national cultures is to get legitimacy with a cultural environment they operate in (Lee & Kramer, 2016). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) also addressed the concept of *institutional isomorphism*, which explains that organizations working in the same environmental conditions become similar to one another as they seek a political power. In other words, different external processes and forces require an organizational change and strict alignment with a national culture (Zucker, 1977). If an organization deviates from cultural norms, it could be sanctioned by institutional and governmental structures (Lee & Kramer, 2016).

Some scholars also stated that organizational culture is constrained by a national culture because different social institutions (e.g., schools) provide companies with a human resource, and, therefore, impose them with widely shared cultural norms and traditions (Johns, 2006; Nelson & Gopalan, 2003). While socializing within a working environment, employees reinforce an organizational culture through training, monitoring, and control (Fitzsimmons & Stamper, 2014).

To summarize all the above-mentioned, the impact of national culture on organizational culture derives from governmental and societal institutions as well as delivered by a human capital. Therefore, while organizations from different countries may vary in their corporate practices, they all share the same cultural values and beliefs.

Shaping power of individualism-collectivism in corporate communication about diversity

As stated before, a national culture constrains the organizational culture, and, therefore, also has an impact on diversity management practices (Stoermer et al., 2016). As the study focuses on three aspects of online diversity promotion, namely presence of diversity statements on corporate websites; types of diversity addressed; and perspectives on diversity applied, the possible effect of a degree of individualism in a country on these diversity facets will be examined.

Relationship between the level of individualism and online diversity promotion

Most of research concerned relationship between cultural orientation of individualism-collectivism focus on cultural, national, ethnical, and racial diversity. Study of Lee and Ward (1998) showed that collectivists are more biased towards ethnic minorities. Later on, Leong and Ward (2006) corroborated on these findings and revealed that cultures with a low individualism score express more negative attitudes toward immigrants and multiculturalism. Moreover, they stated that collectivism is linked to decreased support for policies that promote a peaceful social co-existence. De Vries (2002), studying ethnic supremacy aspirations in Fiji, revealed a positive correlation of collectivism to them. She explained it in the way that individualists are more likely to treat other members of societies as those who have the right to obtain and hold power. Finally, Perna (2020), exploring effects of different dimensions of culture on personal behaviour, concluded that members of societies which score high on individualism are more likely to consider cultural diversity.

From the research, it is clear that in overall individualists are more tolerant towards ethical and racial minorities than collectivists. There are a number of arguments supporting this output, as well as explaining why the level of individualism could correlate to a likelihood of workforce diversity promotion. First of all, individualists value freedom and open-mindedness, while collectivists perceive a higher degree of traditionalism and conformism (Hofstede et al., 2010; Ng, Lee & Soutar, 2007). Brewer and Chen (2007) state that in collectivistic countries people are more likely to display stronger bias or exhibit it more frequently than individualists due to higher degree of stereotyping in perceptions of other members of society. Kim and Markus (1999) and later Wolf, Weinstein, and Maio

(2019) argue that those who are holding conservative values, meaning tending towards collectivism, usually display prejudice and negative attitudes toward minority groups. These findings are supported by Özbilgin and Tatli (2011), who detected that high individualism on a personal level provides more acceptance for equality and diversity.

Then, there is an empirical evidence showing that in individualistic societies there is a broader range of acceptable social behaviour and deviant characteristics (Kinias et al., 2014). Consequently, collectivists are more likely to see diversity as a threat to their values and, therefore, tend to downplay it (Sosik & Jung, 2002). Gil et al. (2019) revealed that societies which score higher on individualism are more open to any feature that could be perceived as diverse because they identify themselves as individuals and classify other group members in the same way. They do not tend to protect personal ingroup interests, but rather perceive each individual separately.

De Mooij and Hofstede (2010) linked such a deviant behaviour to the social pressure on individual. They propose that in individualistic societies the influence of social pressure is weaker, as there people tend to refer to their own personal attitudes rather than expectations of other group members. Contrastingly, collectivists value more the social norm component and will likely to do everything in order to 'save face' and 'fit in' to attitudes and behaviours practiced by others (Brown et al., 1992; Leong, 2008). Therefore, while someone's personal characteristics are deviant from what is acceptable as a norm in a society, those who score lower on individualism tend to face more discrimination towards them.

Taking into account all above-mentioned theoretical implications, it could be assumed that there is a relationship between index of individualism and evidence for diversity practices in a company. Therefore, the hypothesis is stated as following:

H1: Individualism score of a country positively correlates to a presence of diversity promotion on corporate websites.

There are no identified studies on cultural dependence of diversity dimensions used in corporate reporting on diversity practices. Sperancin (2010), however, made an attempt to link cultural orientations to social statistics (e.g., employment rate of women, youth employment, level of discrimination) and did not find an evidence for effect of individualism on these scores. Taking into account a different focus of research of Sperancin (2010) and an absence of direct correlation between social indexes and workforce diversity, this paper aims to provide a new theoretical framework for understanding corporate communication about

different types of diversity in a context of individualism-collectivism. A question guiding this explorative part of research is following:

'What are the cross-cultural differences in promoting different dimensions of diversity on corporate websites?'.

Level of individualism as a predictor of organizational approach towards diversity management

Due to the lack of previous research on the topic, individualism-collectivism dimension could only be linked to perspectives on diversity by revealing similarities and differences between cultural attributes and organizational approaches.

In societies defined as collectivistic there is a greater sensitivity to equality and solidarity (Sperancin, 2010; Wheeler, 2002) and "stronger moral feelings towards mutual obligations" (Ng & Burke, 2004, p. 318). As collectivists value shared values, similarities, and commonness, diversities among group members are neglected and deviant opinions are suppressed (Sosik & Jung, 2002). These characteristics totally correspond to the discrimination-and-fairness perspective, which sees differences between employees as a cause of problems and thus remains blind to them (Singh & Point, 2004). Guided by moral imperatives of social justice, companies with a discrimination-and-fairness approach to diversity apply a principle of sameness and thus assimilate all differences among individuals in purpose of better fitting in a group. Therefore, in both highly collectivistic countries and companies with a discrimination-and-fairness paradigm minorities are not able to take a benefit of their differences, as they have to assimilate to a dominant culture.

There is also a common pattern in resolving conflicts in collectivistic societies and firms with discrimination-and-fairness paradigm. In both cases social frictions are minimized, as conflict is seen as potentially dangerous for a group harmony (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Zhang et al., 2007). Accordingly to these similarities, the assumption is following:

H2: Low score of individualism in a country is associated with discrimination-and-fairness perspective on diversity.

In contrast to collectivistic, individualistic cultures highlight and value differences among group members (Sosik & Jung, 2002). People are seen and treated as individuals and

separately from the group context, and their individual rights are appreciated. The cultural standard is then "to express one's uniqueness and to be a free agent that acts according to one's own volition" (Stamkou et al., 2019, p. 948). Coming in a line with principles of valuing diversity, where differences between employees are perceived as beneficial for business, in individualistic societies being different is seen as opportunity to stand out, a sign of a strong character and courage (Hornsey et al., 2006). Therefore, deviance is less downgraded within individualists, as they are more tolerant to those who held a dissenting opinion (Kim et al., 2015)

Goncalo and Staw (2006), while linking level of individualism to creativity in workgroups, highlighted that creativity, being framed by novel and useful ideas, is more likely to occur in individualistic societies. This evidence is supported by the fact that individualists are more self-confident and independent of judgement, which allows them to propose innovative ideas which could be rejected by other group members (Pless & Maak, 2004). Absence of fear to receive negative evaluations from other group members while expressing novel ideas and deviant opinions or maintaining personal points of view in the face of opposition, is therefore a common characteristic of both individualistic societies and organizations with value-in-diversity approaches.

Both access-and-legitimacy and integration-and-learning paradigms value contribution of unique qualities and multiple perspectives to sustainable organizational goals, even though the first one does not incorporate diverse competencies of employees into core corporate values. Therefore, the assumption regarding business paradigms in individualistic societies is following:

H3: A high score of individualism in a country is associated with access-and-legitimacy and integration-and-learning perspectives on diversity.

Methodology

Choice of method

As the research requires a large-scale analysis, it is best fit with a quantitative approach. Taking into account that investigation of online diversity promotion is only possible through examining texts, a quantitative content analysis was chosen as the most appropriate tool. It is defined as "the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods" (Riffe et al., 2019, p. 3). Quantitative content analysis allows to draw conclusions from the representative sample of content using reliable scales.

Being objective and systematic, this method is particularly useful for analyzing the manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952). Quantitative approach in the case of a current research is also applicable due to the fact that this study is partly based on the theoretical framework of Ely and Thomas (1996; 2001).

Applying quantitative content analysis while studying online diversity statements will let one examine a sufficient amount of data to make cross-cultural comparisons and find general patterns in the way organizations promote diversity on their websites. Moreover, the website material has an advantage over data collected from respondents, as samples theoretically can be obtained from every selected company avoiding bias from respondents (Singh & Point, 2004).

Sampling

In total, 150 corporate websites of companies from 15 countries with the biggest economies worldwide based on GDP were investigated. Companies were selected on the basis of their inclusion in the Forbes global list of the world's largest public companies (Murphy et al., 2020). To have a fair balance between the countries, only top 10 companies from the list for every mentioned country were chosen. The search was limited to the English versions of corporate websites; if a company holding one of ten positions in the list did not have communication in English, it was excluded from the sample and replaced by the next

company in the list. Whenever possible, local corporate websites were preferred to the global ones. In other words, if an organization from a specific country had a website with a domain of a country it originates from and a global website targeted on all international stakeholders, only the first one was analysed. This decision was made in lines with purposes of the research to compare corporate reporting on diversity in a context of national, not organizational, cultures.

To find evidence for online communication about diversity, a search within a website on key words was done. As it was mentioned earlier, the study does not opt for characterising all possible orientations of diversity such as inclusion, equality, and anti-discrimination. Therefore, the search was limited to a wider concept of *diversity* itself.

Then, for finding diversity promotion in a downloadable content, the search was done with a word *report,* as annual, sustainability and CSR reports are popular tools for corporate communication on diversity issues. In principle, only the latest report was analysed. If diversity was promoted in a separate file, it was downloaded and then examined. If diversity promotion was presented in both formats, it was reported as such.

The distinction between the form of diversity statement (online or in downloadable content) was done according to the assumption of Singh and Point (2004) that online promotion of diversity is a more voluntary form and reporting on it in separate documents rather depends on differing legal requirements. Therefore, diversity statements found in any format are included in a study but were analysed separately while examining a dependence of presence of diversity promotion on corporate websites on cultural factors.

Notably, not every mention of diversity on corporate websites or reports was identified as diversity promotion. For instance, discussion about diversity issues in blog posts and articles on corporate websites was not reported. Similarly, simple reporting on numbers (e.g., presenting figures with rates of female employment across organization) without further explanation was not considered as diversity promotion. Diversity policies, codes of conduct or reporting on corporate governance did not detect an organizational approach and therefore were not included in the analysis, as they are rather legislative obligations of companies than determinants of corporate cultures.

Operationalisation

Country

A country is a categorical variable which includes 15 countries, such as the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Canada, Spain, Australia, China, Japan, India, Brazil, Russia, South Korea, and Mexico.

Index of Individualism

Actual scores for every country measuring the level of individualism were taken from a Culture Compass tool provided by Hofstede Insights. Indexes of individualism for each country in the sample are presented in Table 1. For the purposes of the study, it is assumed that scores under 30 are low, scores between 31 and 50 are moderately low, scores between 51 and 70 are moderately high and scores above 71 are high.

Country	Individualism score
the United States	91
Germany	67
the United Kingdom	89
France	71
Italy	76
Canada	80
Spain	51
Australia	90
China	20
Japan	46
India	48
Brazil	38
Russia	39
South Korea	18
Mexico	30

Table 1. National indexes of individualism

Company size

Company size is measured by the number of employees in the company. The quantity was taken from information about the company in a Forbes global list.

Form of diversity promotion

A variable was separated into two dichotomous (Yes/No, manually coded as 1/0 accordingly) variables. *Online promotion* was considered as the presence of diversity statements in any section(s) of a corporate website. *Promotion in a separate document* is then measured through an evidence of a presence of diversity statements in a downloadable content.

Type of diversity mentioned

Dimensions of diversity were measured through 10 dichotomous variables (Yes/No, manually coded as 1/0 accordingly). *Cultural* diversity represents the variety of cultural backgrounds and sometimes also mentioned as *multicultural diversity*. *National diversity*, defined as valuing any national or country origins. *Gender diversity* is characterized by different initiatives supporting and advancing female employees. *Racial and ethnical diversity* is described as not discriminating employees on the base of their colour, actual or perceived race or ethnical heritage. Diversity of *physical and mental abilities* includes integration of individuals with disabilities and mental issues. *Age diversity* is determined by having a workforce which represents different generations. Diversity of *religion* stands against discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs or any other spiritual practices. Diversity of *sexual orientation* and *gender identity* and expression promotes equal treatment for members of LGBTQ+ community. Diversity of *educational and professional background* includes valuing any professional experiences and skills.

Organizational perspective on diversity

A variable was separated into four dichotomous (Yes/No, manually coded as 1/0 accordingly) variables detecting an approach of a company towards diversity management. Perspectives were measured through detailed descriptions of Ely and Thomas (2001).

Discrimination-and-fairness perspective aims to provide a fair equal treatment for all employees regardless of their differences. Companies applying this approach are guided by moral and legal imperatives of justice and equality. Often, they communicate about workforce diversity as "the right thing to do" (e.g., Sun Life Financial, Canada)

Companies following this diversity paradigm might state that they "must ensure compliance with all applicable treaties, laws and regulations, particularly in the areas of human rights and basic freedoms, health and safety, environment and ethics" (Christian Dior, France). Sometimes, however, they admit that ensuring diversity is only a legal requirement:

"*The Company is firmly committed to affirmative action, to bring the 'disadvantaged' people into the mainstream of life. The regular guidelines and instructions issued by the Govt. of India regarding the implementation of the reservation policy are scrupulously adhered to in IndianOil*" (IndianOil, India).

Discrimination-and-fairness approach could be also identified by focusing on inclusion of specific categories of minorities. Success, therefore, is measured through increasing numbers of employment of people from underrepresented groups in a workforce:

"*For the UnipolSai Group, the topic of diversity takes the form of the empowerment of women and the improvement of the conditions of well-being and productivity for the disabled within the company. 53% of employees are women: 16% of executives are women while, considering all positions of responsibility including officers, women amount to 26%, for a total of 548 employees*" (Unipol Gruppo, Italy).

Often, companies treat diversity as a moral obligation to build a fair society:

"*We want to carry on working towards being an organisation and an environment with the same opportunities for everybody. Because together we can drive change and help to build a fairer society*" (CaixaBank, Spain).

In some cases, organizations also see diversity management as something ethically undoubtable:

"*Respecting diversity and promoting inclusion are ethical imperatives, indispensable for a sustainable company*" (Vale, Brazil).

Companies upholding the *access-and-legitimacy approach* recognize the diversity of their markets and stakeholders and want their workforce to reflect or represent this diversity. Typical "trigger" phrases which detect the purpose of diversity management is *meeting needs,* such as in a diversity statement of British American Tobacco, UK: "we have very diverse customers, suppliers and other stakeholders, and want a diverse workforce to meet their needs", or *understanding customers,* as in the case of Daimler, Germany: "a wide range of cultures and lifestyles that helps us to better understand regionally different customer requirements". Some companies also emphasize the importance of *including everyone*, as

shown by Apple, US: "because to create products that serve everyone, we believe in including everyone".

An *integration-and-le*arning paradigm considers a diverse workforce as a business opportunity. An emphasis is therefore on *innovation* and *effectiveness*, as presented in a diversity statement of Cemex, Mexico: "We believe that by valuing the differences among us, we establish a platform for creativity, innovation, and problem-solving that allows us to collaborate more effectively". Other words detecting an integration-and-learning paradigm are *success*, *progress*, *business growth*:

"*We believe that a variety of people with different ideas provide the essential fuel for success and progress. That's why diversity is the essence of our business and growth*" (ICBC, China).

Notably, organizational perspectives on diversity are not mutually exclusive, and companies could apply more than one approach. For instance, in ANZ, Australia, there is an evidence for both access-and-legitimacy and integration-and-learning paradigms:

"*We believe in the inherent strength of a vibrant, diverse and inclusive workforce where the backgrounds, perspectives and life experiences of our people help us to forge strong connections with our customers, to innovate and make better decisions for our business*".

However, in some cases diversity promotion lacks a detailed explanation, and organizational perspective was then classified as *not defined.*

Intercoder reliability

In order to ensure reliability of measuring concepts of diversity perspectives, two coders (researcher and a peer researcher experienced with conducting content analysis) independently examined ten diversity statements found on corporate websites and in separate documents to identify and label the diversity paradigms within each statement. The intercoder reliability was assessed using Krippendorff's Alpha Coefficient and scored a satisfactory value of $\alpha = .8903$.

Results

To reveal a correlation between an individualism score of a country and evidence for diversity promotion on corporate websites, a bivariate regression analysis was run for both forms of diversity promotion separately (N = 150).

The regression model of presence of promotion of workforce diversity on a website as the dependent variable and individualism score of a country as an independent variable is significant, $F(1, 150) = 45.59$, $p< 0.001$. Index of individualism is thus useful for predicting evidence for diversity promotion on corporate websites, but the predictive power is mediocre: 24 percent of the differences in presence of diversity promotion on corporate websites could be predicted by an individualism value of a country ($R^2 = 0.24$). Index of individualism have a significant, moderate correlation with diversity promotion on corporate websites, $b^* = 0.49$, $t = 6.75$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.12].

Similarly, the regression model for corporate diversity promotion found in a downloadable content as a dependent variable and individualism score as an independent one shows significance, $F(1, 150) = 38.03$, $p< 0.001$. Predictive power of a model is mediocre ($R^2=0.20$). Individualism score is a positive moderate predictor of an evidence of corporate diversity promotion in separate documents located on websites, $b^* = 0.52$, $t = 6.17$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.11].

An index of individualism shapes diversity promotion both directly on a website and in CSR and annual reports, so could predict a probability of any online corporate diversity reporting. Moreover, adding a size of a company in regression models of both forms of corporate diversity promotion and index of individualism did not reveal its significant effect, and, therefore, it could be concluded that a proposed relationship works for any company regardless its size.

In order to investigate country differences in online communication about diversity, an ANOVA analysis was run. A model showed significance for both diversity reporting directly on corporate websites, $F(14, 150) = 8.04$, $p < 0.001$, and in a downloadable content, $F(14, 150) = 11.04$, $p < 0.001$. This result is not surprising, as, whereas differences exist among cultures, it is also evident for countries. The ANOVA output is mostly interesting due to interpretation of different scores on diversity reporting in a sample (Table 2; Table 3). As assumed, organizations from countries with high indexes of individualism, such as the United States (91), the United Kingdom (89), and Canada (80), and moderately high, such as France

(71), Germany (67), and Spain (51), addressed diversity in any form in all cases. South Korea, however, being the lowest on individualism score (18), showed an evidence for online corporate diversity promotion in 8 out of 10 cases. Companies from highly collectivistic society such as China (20) only addressed diversity online in one case, whereas in Russia (39), which scores on individualism almost two times higher than China, no evidence for any form of online diversity reporting was found. For the means plots for country differences in diversity promotion in specific sections of corporate websites and in separate documents located online see Appendix B.

Table 2. Country differences in addressing diversity on corporate websites

	Mean	Standard deviation	N
	Promotion on a website		
US	1,00	,00	10
DE	1,00	,00	10
UK	1,00	,00	10
FR	,80	,42	10
IT	,80	,42	10
CA	1,00	,00	10
ES	,90	,32	10
AU	,90	,32	10
CH	,10	,32	10
JP	,70	,48	10
IN	,50	,53	10
BR	,60	,52	10
RU	,00	,00	10
KR	,50	,53	10
MX	,40	,52	10

Table 3. Country differences in addressing diversity online in a downloadable content

	Mean	Standard deviation	N
	Promotion in a separate file		
US	,90	,32	10
DE	1,00	,00	10
UK	1,00	,00	10
FR	1,00	,00	10
IT	,80	,42	10
CA	1,00	,00	10
ES	1,00	,00	10
AU	,70	,48	10
CH	,00	,00	10
JP	,80	,42	10
IN	,80	,42	10
BR	,50	,53	10
RU	,00	,00	10
KR	,80	,42	10
MX	,40	,52	10

Then, a bivariate regression analysis was run to examine if there is a correlation between level of individualism in a country and promotion of specific types of diversity. Only those cases where diversity was promoted in any form were chosen (N=118). Results revealed a significant relationship for promotion of differences in gender identity and expression, $F (1, 118) = 23.78$, $p< 0.001$, sexual orientation, $F (1, 118) = 11.29$, $p= 0.001$, and educational and professional background, $F (1, 118) = 24.69$, $p< 0.001$.

Taking into account the insufficient significance of a predictive model, it could be stated that for gender, age, disability, religion, nationality, cultural, racial and ethnical diversity an individualism score does not work as a predictor and there should be other cultural factors that affect a promotion of this diversity dimensions. Interestingly, an individualism score correlates with LGBTQ+ diversity possibly because differences in sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are comparatively new dimensions of diversity, and collectivistic societies, being more conservative, still do not fully tolerate them. Differences in promotion of diverse educational and professional backgrounds are possibly linked to a business approach taken by organizations, when they do not focus on hiring minorities but rather tend to include different perspectives and viewpoints in their workforce.

Finally, the relationship between an individualism score of a culture and organizational perspective on diversity was tested through a bivariate regression analysis. Only those cases where diversity was promoted in any form were selected (N=118). Regression model for discrimination-and-fairness paradigm is significant, $F_{(1, 118)} = 24.36$, $p < 0.00$. It is successful then for predicting an application of discrimination-and-fairness approach to diversity by organizations, but predictive power is weak ($R^2 = 0.17$). Index of individualism is a negative moderate predictor of a discrimination-and-fairness paradigm, $b^* = -0.42$, $t = -4.94$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-0.11, 0.05].

A regression model of probability of taking an access-and-legitimacy approach to diversity by an organization as the dependent variable and individualism score of a country as an independent variable is significant, $F_{(1, 118)} = 23.07$, $p < 0.001$. Accordingly, an index of individualism is useful for predicting a likelihood of applying an access-and-legitimacy paradigm, but it could explain only 17 percent of differences ($R^2 = 0.17$). Index of individualism have a significant, moderate correlation with diversity promotion on corporate websites, $b^* = 0.41$, $t = 4.80$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.12]. In a line with these results, a regression model for predicting a probability of using an integration-and-learning perspective by organization through individualism score of a country is significant, $F_{(1, 118)} = 14.53$, $p < 0.001$, but predictive power of it is weak ($R^2 = 0.11$). Correlation between a value for individualism in a country and integration-and-learning perspective is significant and moderate, $b^* = 0.34$, $t = 3.81$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.11].

As assumed, in collectivistic societies organizations treat workforce diversity as a moral case, while in individualistic cultures companies take a business-oriented approach.

Discussion

Workforce diversity, being the key feature of an effective corporate management, reflects increased levels of globalization and migration in a modern world (Klarsfeld, 2009; Konrad, 2003). Being on a high demand, diversity management could bolster an organizational performance of a firm by enhancing creativity and problem-solving abilities of employees (Podsiadlowski et al., 2013), as well as result in intergroup conflicts in case of undermining the value of diversity (Fields, Goodman & Blum, 2005). The consequences of managing diversity are affected by diversity perspectives, applied by a company and reflected in its communication strategy (Thomas & Ely, 2001).

Even though one might argue that every company has its own unique approach towards diversity, there is an evidence for cultural patterns in corporate communicating about diversity (Tatli et al., 2012). These similarities within one country and differences between two and more countries could be explained by widely used conceptual framework for an intercultural comparison proposed by Hofstede (2001). Value components, being relatively stable features of a culture (Hofstede, 2005), could be derived from the tension between individualism and collectivism, which has an impact on diversity practices (Leong & Ward, 2006; Vasconcelos, 2017), and, therefore, on online corporate communication about diversity (Singh, 2003).

Reporting on workforce diversity on corporate websites has a countless possible dimensions for examination, but the current study was limited to three of them. First of all, the impact of an individualism score on an evidence for online diversity promotion was determined, showing its significant predictive power. As it was assumed, in individualistic societies there is more support for diversity management practices, which results in an increasing reporting on workforce diversity issues online.

Secondly, an effect of the individualism score of a country on addressing different types of diversity was uncovered. Even though for most diversity dimensions no linkage with cultural values was found, the impact was significant both for promoting rights of members of LGBTQ+ community (diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity) and attracting employees with diverse educational and professional backgrounds. These types of diversity were reported more in companies with individualistic values, as such personal characteristics

are relatively new for addressing in an organizational context (Baack & Singh, 2007) and thus their promotion is associated with less conservative and traditional cultures.

Finally, an analysis revealed a significant power of a predictive model for adopting a specific organizational perspective on diversity based on cultural tension of individualism-collectivism. As stated in the hypotheses, higher level of individualism correlates to a business-driven managerial approaches such as an access-and-legitimacy and integration-and-learning. Similarly, in countries scored lower on individualism there was more evidence for a discrimination-and-fairness paradigm.

Theoretical implications of the research

National differences in online corporate communication about diversity were researched by a number of scholars (e.g., Bellard & Ruling, 2001; Jonsen et al., 2019; Singh & Point, 2003; 2004), but all of them were focused on Western cultures with similar cultural values. Therefore, the worldwide context of differences among countries was missed, thus making impossible to reveal the shaping power of national cultural values on the way how organizations address diversity on their websites and adopt perspectives on diversity. The paper bridges this gap, proposing a new multilevel theoretical model for understanding the influence of individualism on communication about diversity management practices.

Accordingly, this study makes two major contributions to the diversity literature. The first one is that emergence of workplace diversity communication is shaped by national cultural values of the environment a company operates in. Framed by prior studies (e.g., Kinias et al., 2014; Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011; Sperancin, 2010), that have demonstrated an influence of a national culture on the organizational adoption of diversity management, the paper argues that cultural values will facilitate a corporate communication about diversity.

Further, the conceptual predictive model was enhanced by adding perspectives of diversity management defined by Ely and Thomas (2001). This is important as before the relationship between cultural tights and diversity management approaches have not been examined. Therefore, a proposed comprehensive model for understanding diversity communication allows to draw implications for the design of managerial practices in different cultural and national settings.

Limitations and future research

There are some limitations detected in the current research and which could be corresponded in future studies. First of all, a number of units of analysis was limited to only 10 corporate websites for every country, and one might argue that they do not fully represent the situation in a country. Therefore, the research could be extended by enhancing a sample size to include more organizations.

Then, a communication on corporate websites, even though being useful for understanding an organizational stance on workforce diversity, may not reflect the full range of diversity management practices in a real organizational setting. Consequently, the proposed model could be adopted only in terms of predicting online diversity communication and not the whole set of managerial routines.

There are two possible directions to improve the current model. The first one is classifying companies on industries they operate in. Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly (2006) reported that the service industry is one of the main drivers for diversity management, and it could be assumed then that industry plays a significant role in corporate online communication about diversity. Another direction is to include other cultural dimensions provided by Hofstede (2005), such as uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity. These extensions will add more complexity and comprehensiveness of different factors which could influence an online diversity communication.

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Appendix A

Coding frame

Variable	Measurements, descriptions, examples
Country	Categorical variable, includes 15 countries: the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Canada, Spain, Australia, China, Japan, India, Brazil, Russia, South Korea, and Mexico
Index of Individualism	Actual scores taken from Hofstede Insights
Company size	Number of employees, taken from information about a company in Forbes global list
Presence and form of diversity promotion	Online promotion - presence of diversity statements in any section(s) of a corporate website. Promotion in a separate document is measured through an evidence of a presence of diversity statements in a downloadable content.
Type of diversity mentioned	
Culture	The variety of cultural backgrounds
Nationality	Any national or country origins
Gender	Supporting and advancing female employees
Race and ethnicity	Not discriminating employees on the base of their colour, actual or perceived race or ethnical heritage
Physical and mental abilities	Integration of individuals with disabilities and mental issues
Age	Workforce which represents different generations
Religion	No discrimination on the basis of religious beliefs or any other spiritual practices
Sexual orientation and gender identity and expression	equal treatment for members of LGBTQ+ community
Educational and professional background	Valuing any professional and functional experiences and skills

Organizational perspective on diversity	
Discrimination-and-fairness	Providing a fair equal treatment for all employees regardless of their differences. Companies applying this approach are guided by moral and legal imperatives of justice and equality. "The Company is firmly committed to affirmative action, to bring the 'disadvantaged' people into the mainstream of life. The regular guidelines and instructions issued by the Govt. of India regarding the implementation of the reservation policy are scrupulously adhered to in IndianOil" (IndianOil, India). "We want to carry on working towards being an organisation and an environment with the same opportunities for everybody. Because together we can drive change and help to build a fairer society" (CaixaBank, Spain). "For the UnipolSai Group, the topic of diversity takes the form of the empowerment of women and the improvement of the conditions of well-being and productivity for the disabled within the company. 53% of employees are women: 16% of executives are women while, considering all positions of responsibility including officers, women amount to 26%, for a total of 548 employees" (Unipol Gruppo, Italy).
Access-and-legitimacy	A desire to meet needs and expectations of diverse markets, customers, stakeholders. "We have very diverse customers, suppliers and other stakeholders, and want a diverse workforce to meet their needs" (British American Tobacco, UK).

	"A wide range of cultures and lifestyles that helps us to better understand regionally different customer requirements" (Daimler, Germany).
Integration-and-learning	Diverse workforce as a business opportunity, driver for change, innovation, creativity.

"We believe that a variety of people with different ideas provide the essential fuel for success and progress. That's why diversity is the essence of our business and growth" (ICBC, China).

"We believe in the inherent strength of a vibrant, diverse and inclusive workforce where the backgrounds, perspectives and life experiences of our people help us to forge strong connections with our customers, to innovate and make better decisions for our business". |
| Not defined | |

Appendix B

Means plot for diversity communication on a website
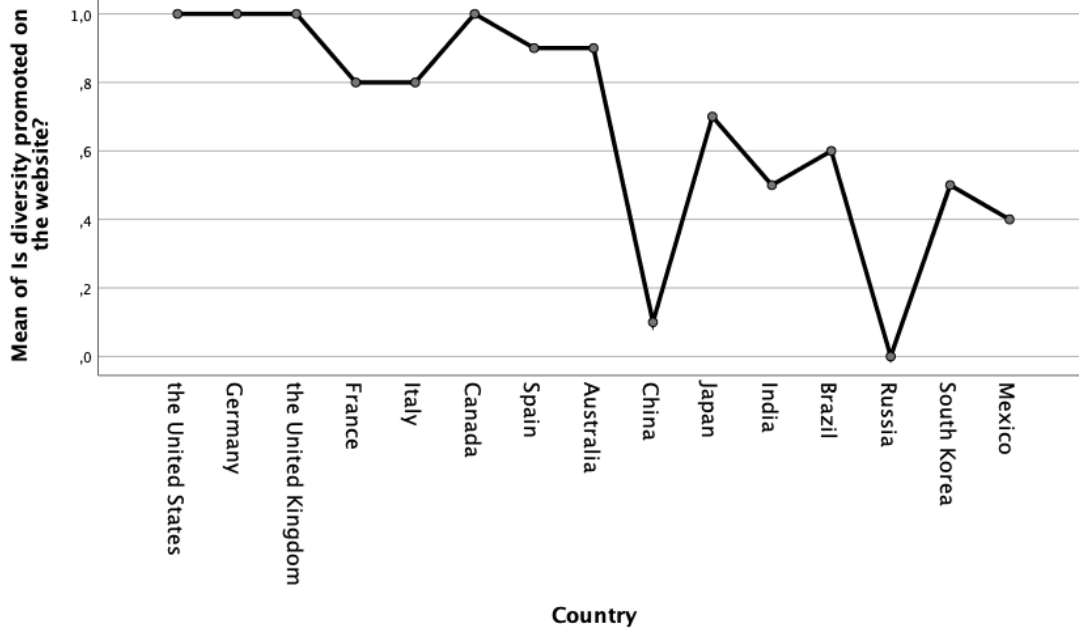
Means plot for diversity communication in a downloadable content