Diversity Discourse Analysis on Top Romanian Organizations

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Abstract – **Although the Anglo-American notion of diversity management is dominating most of the global corporate discussions, this concept still has ample room for improvement in the Eastern European context. Having this in mind, in the current study, the websites of the top 20 organizations located in Romania were content analysed in search of statements and definitions related to diversity, equality, or inclusion. The main findings suggest that there are notable differences between how the top Romanian organizations address different diversity dimensions together with how elaborate the diversity discourse is presented. Throughout the research in the Romanian context, 19 diversity dimensions were identified. The majority of the analysed organizations have at least one diversity statement on their official website, addressing a minimum of three diversity dimensions, however, in the case of seven organizations, there was no statement referring to diversity, equality, or inclusion.**

Keywords – **diversity management, diversity statements, diversity dimensions, inclusion, Romania.**

1. Introduction

Diversity management first appeared as a new concept in the North American context, representing the precursor of equal employment opportunities and affirmative action [32].

Diversity management is becoming a subject of increased relevance in human resource management studies and it represents the process in which the various dimensions of diversity are being embraced and cherished with the goal of creating an inspirational work environment where everyone has the opportunity to reach their true potential while substantially contributing in achieving the organizational goals.

Diversity, equality, and inclusion are three different concepts, but rather often they are used interchangeably for the reason that their meanings and implementation partially overlap. The existence of workforce diversity coupled with diversity management practices represents the initial step in creating the proper setting for inclusion [27]. Inclusion involves removing all obstacles in creating an environment in which all members feel valued and represented [28]. Equality, on the other hand, is considered an indispensable component in stipulating and legitimizing the moral value of diversity and inclusion [15].

Workplace diversity is becoming an embraced and expected organizational component in today's professional environment, especially when considering the needs of Generation Z, a young cohort expected to become the most active working segment in the next decade [20], [26]. Some employers go one step further by using diversity management as a strategic tool to attract talented workers, thus transforming diversity into a competitive advantage [21]. Several studies have found diversity management to be positively correlated with job satisfaction and job performance, offering additional arguments for the advantages brought by efficiently managed workforce diversity [1], [17], [24].

The current study will analyse the diversity discourse and related statements in the Romanian business environment. Discourse is "a term used for linguistic and other semiotic elements (such as visual images) of a social phenomenon" [30, p. 364]. Consequently, diversity discourses represent all above-mentioned elements and the method in which they should be managed by the responsible

diversity initiators and valued by all involved parties, including current employees, stakeholders, customers and the general public. For the current study, the focus will be solely placed on textual data.

The studies of Mor Barak [23] suggest a strong relationship between diversity management and mission statement. These findings indicate that statements about diversity represent a key tool for the successful management of workforce diversity. Diversity statements might include phrases related to the organizational position on diversity, diversity definitions, reasons for diversity management implementation, as well as past and present policies related to diversity and inclusion, together with future plans and strategic objectives on the topic. Carnes *et al.* [3] recommend using motivating diversity statements fixated on the collective journey of creating an equal and inclusive environment, rather than stating that the company is already diverse and inclusive. The authors also inform that achieving a diverse and inclusive working setting is rather complex, diversity statements representing only a small initial step in achieving the planned diversity goals.

This paper is organized into four sections. The first one explains the research methodology and presents the main characteristics of the selected companies. The second section presents the findings of the study separated into three relevant subsections. The third section presents the main conclusions of the study. The paper closes with a section that presents a number of managerial implications and suggestions for future research in diversity management.

2. Methods, Sample and Objectives

The current study focuses on a comprehensive website examination of the top organizations located in Romania in search of statements and definitions related to diversity, equality, and inclusion. Emphasis was put on websites instead of annual reports as the web presence of companies is considered one of the primary tools of communication in today's digital era. In the 2000s, websites became the most utilized means of communication with stakeholders [13], particularly because these web pages can store a large quantity of data, aimed at creating an idealistic image meant to persuade targeted audiences [10]. Diversity statements from the press release segment were excluded from the current paper. The website data was collected in July 2021.

The first objective of this paper is to identify which dimensions of diversity are being mentioned throughout the corporate websites of the selected firms. The second objective is to evaluate the extensiveness of the diversity discourse from the sample companies' websites. To respond to the aforementioned research objectives, the chosen methodology of the paper is content analysis. This qualitative research method was selected as it represents an influential instrument in discovering the organizational position on a specific topic [31]. Krippendorff [16] considers content analysis a reliable methodology, with a long history, being the most frequently used technique when investigating textual data. The paper uses a comparable categorization of findings as Heres and Benschop [8], providing a valuable base of comparison with the Dutch context.

The 20 organizations located in Romania were selected using the criteria of annual net turnover (given in billions of euro). Information on net turnover was collected from the website of the Romanian Ministry of Public Finance [https://mfinante.gov.ro], based on the 2020 tax information. The same source presented information on the industry and the average number of employees of the selected companies (see Table 1.). *OMV Petrom Marketing* and *Rompetrol Rafinărie* initially complied with the above-mentioned criteria but were excluded from the sample as they share the same corporate website with *OMV Petrom* (B) and *Rompetrol Downstream* (F), companies that place higher based on annual net turnover. *British American Tobacco Romania* was also excluded from the sample as the company doesn't own a website designated for the Romanian market. The organizations placing 21-23 on the criteria for net turnover in 2020 were selected to replace the three excluded companies previously stated. It is important to mention that the corporations are divided into those with 100% Romanian capital and multinationals, being owned by larger international investors. Related to industry, half of the selected companies are active in retail, four of them in the oil and gas industry, three in the automotive industry, two in the electric utility industry, and one in mobile telecommunications.

Table 1. provides an overview of the sample with an emphasis placed on the industry, the average number of employees, the name of the organization, and its official website targeted for the Romanian audience. A letter was attributed for each firm, essential for following the findings segment of the current paper, in particular when inspecting the information from Table 2. and Table 3. In the case of *Automobile Dacia* (A) and *Dante International* (L), the selected home pages were changed to *gruprenault.ro* and *emag.ro* as they represent the redirecting websites when searching for the mission, policies, and career opportunities of the companies.

Table 1. Sample (by Name, Attributed letter, Industry, Net Turnover, Average Number of Employees, Website Address)

Name	Attributed letter	Industry	Net Turnover	Number of employees	Website
Automobile Dacia	A	Automotive	3,7	13.685	gruprenault.ro
OMV Petrom	B	Oil and gas	3	10.949	omvpetrom.com/ro
Lidl Discount	C	Retail	2,6	8.779	lidl.ro
Kaufland Romania	D	Retail	2,6	13.108	kaufland.ro
Ford Romania	E	Automotive	2,5	6.181	ford.ro
Rompetrol Downstream	F	Oil and gas	1,9	463	rompetrol.ro
Dedeman	G	Retail	1,8	11.374	dedeman.ro
Carrefour Romania	H	Retail	1,8	10.523	carrefour.ro
Profi Rom Food	I	Retail	1,8	17.979	profi.ro
Star Assembly	J	Automotive	1,5	1.746	stcu.ro
Mega Image	K	Retail	1,5	10.964	mega-image.ro
Dante International	L	Retail	1,4	3.088	emag.ro
Engie Romania	M	Electric utility	1,3	753	engie.ro
Metro Cash & Carry Romania	N	Retail	1,2	3.523	metro.ro
Lukoil Romania	O	Oil and gas	1,2	1.608	lukoil.ro
Orange Romania	P	Mobile telecommunications	1,1	2.454	orange.ro
Auchan Romania	Q	Retail	1,1	8.270	auchan.ro
MOL Romania Petroleum Products	R	Oil and gas	1,1	242	molromania.ro
Electrica Furnizare	S	Electric utility	1	781	electricafurnizare.ro
Altex Romania	T	Retail	1	4043	altex.ro

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Dimensions of Diversity and Context

As previously mentioned, the first research objective is to identify which dimensions of diversity are being mentioned throughout the corporate websites of the selected organizations located in Romania. Conceptually speaking, as the diversity research is under continuous development, diversity dimensions are composed of a countless number of elements [14]. Griggs [7] categorizes diversity into primary and secondary dimensions. In the first category, Griggs includes the demographic characteristics of age, ethnicity, gender, physical dis(ability), race, and sexual orientation. These dimensions represent inborn characteristics that shape our identity and values. Following the same logic, secondary dimensions include dimensions that might change with time such as: educational background, work style, economic status, religious beliefs, communication style, job role, and many others [7]. Other scholars opt for different means of categorization for diversity dimensions. Jonsen *et al.* [12] view them as visible and invisible differences among individuals, while Webber and Donahue [36] distinguish these dimensions by classifying them with highly and less job-related diversity.

From the data shown in Table 2., it is apparent that throughout the current analysis 19 diversity dimensions were identified, of which, not surprisingly, the primary dimensions of diversity were included. Whether mentioning numerous primary and secondary dimensions of diversity in a single statement, or presenting a unique statement for each dimension considered of importance, 12 out of the 20 analysed websites acknowledge at least 3 diversity dimensions on their corporate website. *Automobile Dacia* (A), *MOL Romania* (R), *Lidl Discount* (C), *OMV Petrom* (B), and *Kaufland Romania* (D), are the top five companies when counting the number of diversity dimensions mentioned throughout their website, ranging from 10 to 17 dimensions. The main findings from the current paper suggest that in the Romanian context, the most influential diversity dimensions are gender/sex, age, ethnicity, physical (dis)abilities, religion, social background, and nationality. With 11 mentions, the results confirm the global studies, where gender/sex is considered predominant in diversity management research [9], [19]. Similar trends have been reported by Köllen [14] in their work on diversity management research, his findings suggest that diversity dimensions such as age, disability status, ethnicity, and religion had increasingly appeared in diversity discourse in the last decade.

Table 2. Dimensions of Diversity

Diversity Dimension	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	Total
Age	1	1	1	1				1	1				1			1	1	1			10
Ethnicity	1	1	1	1	1			1	1				1			1		1			10
Gender/Sex	1	1	1	1	1			1	1				1			1	1	1			11
Physical (dis)abilities	1		1	1				1	1				1			1	1	1			9
Race	1		1		1			1								1		1			6
Sexual Orientation	1		1	1				1					1					1			6
Education	1	1				1															3
Family Status	1	1	1															1			4
Geographical location	1																				1
Language	1																	1			2
Nationality	1	1	1	1		1			1									1			7
Organizational Role	1	1							1												3
Personality type	1															1					2
Perspectives/ Thought styles	1	1		1	1											1					5
Political view			1									1						1			3
Religion	1		1	1	1				1				1			1		1			8
Skills		1		1	1			1													4
Social background	1		1	1				1	1				1					1			7
Work Experience	1	1			1	1															4
Total	17	10	11	10	7	3	0	8	8	0	0	0	8	0	0	8	3	12	0	0	105

Findings from several recent papers suggest that context is influential in the ways diversity is managed, perceived, and defined as the concept itself is considered a social construct that is plural in nature [25], [5], [11]. These findings help us understand why in a certain national context there are diversity dimensions that are influential, while in other countries, the same dimensions are of no major relevance. One of the most suitable examples is caste, a unique diversity dimension considered primary exclusively in India [18], [22]. Relevant for diversity management categorization is the fact that religion has more mentions through the content analysed websites than two of the primary diversity dimensions, namely, race and sexual orientation. One reason for this may be the strong influence of religion in Eastern Europe, coupled with the sensitive topics of gender identity and sexual orientation and the fact that Romania has a relatively small percentage of racial minorities (less the 1% according to the 2011 Romanian census). A number of companies created a separated segment designated for one or more diversity dimensions. Five of them tackle the subject of gender diversity and equal job opportunities among genders in separated segments. One example is provided by *Kaufland Romania* (D), where the company discusses about equal and fair payment in a segment entitled *strong women, strong leadership*. Among other diversity dimensions of special interest from the analysed Romanian websites are education, age, and (dis)ability, having two mentions each.

Interestingly, eight out of the 20 analysed companies did not mention any diversity dimension on their Romanian website. Findings suggest no correlation between the existence of diversity statements and the industry of the sample companies, as well as no evident correlation between the organizations with 100% Romanian capital and multinationals, as both categories appear among the eight organizations that has no indications of any diversity dimension.

3.2. The Extensiveness of Diversity Discourse

The second objective of the paper is to evaluate the comprehensiveness of the diversity discourse for the 20 designated companies' websites. The diversity discourse was evaluated taking into consideration a number of aspects. Firstly, diversity discourse was considered elaborate if the companies presented their own definitions or understanding of diversity and/or inclusion. In addition, specific initiatives and interventions targeted at fostering diversity and inclusion must exist on the website. Finally, dedicated diversity segments were accounted for an elaborate diversity discussion. For the purpose of the study and to offer a base for comparison of findings from different national contexts, the specific website

location of the diversity discourse was also analysed together with the main drivers of diversity management implementation.

In Table 3., the findings on diversity discourse evaluation are presented. Results suggest that the above-mentioned criteria were successfully met by two companies. Three of the analysed companies had a moderate diversity discourse, as all ignored either offering their subjective understanding of diversity and/or inclusion, or they failed to showcase specific initiatives supporting workplace diversity. Eight organizations had a limited diversity discussion, shortly presenting some statements for diversity, equality or inclusion support. There were no statements referring to diversity in the case of the remaining seven organizations. A unique example is represented by the website of *Metro Cash & Carry Romania* (N), in which no mentions of diversity dimensions were found (see Table 2.), however, the company states the importance of diversity and inclusion twice on their website, thus resulting in a limited diversity discourse. These findings suggest limited interest from the top Romanian organizations in utilizing diversity statements as tools for diversity communication and thus transforming them into a diversity management practice that could assist in creating a more inclusive working environment.

Table 3. Extensiveness of diversity discourse

Extensiveness of diversity discourse	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	Total
Elaborate		1		1																	2
Moderate	1								1									1			3
Limited			1		1	1			1			1	1		1	1					8
Not discussed							1			1	1	1			1				1	1	7
Total	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20

3.3. Definition, main drivers for Implementation and Location

As context drives the perception of diversity, Thomas [32] and Van Ewijk [33], provide arguments supporting the idea that all scholars focusing their research on diversity management should create their own definition of diversity. Moving beyond academia, this paper suggests that companies in the private environment shall also create their own definitions of diversity and inclusion or adapt their meaning based on the unique context that they are active in. In the present content analysis, several organizations move past simple statements of support for diversity and inclusion by providing to the online audience their own definition of the concepts. The following statement from *Kaufland Romania* (D) provides a good example describing their unique take on diversity in a dedicated website section:

> For us, diversity is much more than the fact that we are different. Diversity represents a good way to complement each other and form a team in which each person is appreciated and has the ability to put their skills into practice.

Another suitable example is *Automobile Dacia* (A) indicating the connection between inclusion and diversity, providing a subjective definition of inclusion:

> Inclusion means that diversity is harnessed to create a fair, healthy, and efficient organization. An inclusive environment ensures equitable access to opportunities for all. It also allows individuals and groups to feel safe, respected, involved, motivated, and appreciated for who they are and for their contribution to the goals of the organization and the society they belong to.

A topic of concentrated discussion in the diversity literature is represented by the main drivers of diversity management implementation. When answering the question of why companies implement diversity management policies, the literature identifies three main reasons: their moral legitimacy [6], the requirement to comply with legal quotas [34] or their economic benefits [4], also regarded as the business case for diversity. In the current analysis, it was observed that the reasons behind diversity and inclusion support are varied, the results being in line with those obtained in Dutch and Portuguese contexts [2], [8]. The diversity statements written on the analysed corporate websites present appropriate examples and their reasons for diversity policy implementation range from equal opportunities to business advantages. In the case of the 20 content analysed companies, there were no diversity statements suggesting that diversity and inclusion initiatives are created to meet legal requirements. For instance, *OMV Petrom* (B) states openly their vision of the business case of diversity in the following statement:

> We believe that by strengthening our teams through diversity in capabilities, experience,

perspectives, and ideas, we will build a stronger and more competitive company. Therefore, we consider that diversity is a competitive advantage of the OMV Group.

Similar statements showcasing business advantages are found on the website of *Ford Romania* (E), where diversity is correlated with consumer satisfaction. Related to the findings of the current paper, in the case of most analysed companies, the diversity reasoning lean towards the ethical/ moral argument, as seen in the definitions provided above for *Kaufland Romania* (D) and *Automobile Dacia* (A). Another appropriate case is *Carrefour Romania* (H) and their statement supporting equal opportunities and inclusion:

> For us, diversity is not just a word, it is a set of concrete initiatives designed to promote equal opportunities and the inclusion of different people from diverse backgrounds, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age or ability.

Regarding the location of statements related to diversity, equality, and inclusion, the majority appeared in the Career/ Jobs section, the findings being consistent with those reported by Singh and Point [29] and Wallace *et al.* [35]. In contrast, a similar study from The Netherlands suggests that the most popular location for diversity and diversity management discussions appears to be on the Corporate Social Responsibility section [8]. Other segments where diversity management statements were identified on the analysed websites include: About Us, Legal, Mission, or inside dedicated Diversity and Inclusion sections.

4. Conclusions

Content analysing the websites of the selected companies provided important data in identifying the value placed on diversity management, through identifying the statements associated with diversity, equality, and inclusion. The subjects of the study were the first 20 organizations located in Romania ranked by the annual net turnover, representing more than 130.000 employees. In this specific Easter-European context, the emphasis placed on diversity management is proven to be rather limited.

The results suggest notable differences between how the Romanian organizations communicate their support for diversity, equality, and inclusion. Overall, there were recorded differences related with the main motives of diversity management implementation, with how diversity and inclusion are defined, as well as with the total number of mentions and specific categories of diversity dimensions considered of importance by each organization. Related to the first objective of the paper, a total of

19 diversity dimensions were identified, including those so-called primary dimensions of diversity. The data presented in the study suggest that gender/sex, age and ethnicity represent the most valued diversity dimensions. When compared with findings from other national contexts, it was observed that the analysed organizations based in Romania present an increased interest in diversity dimensions such as religion, nationality, and social background.

Variances were also identified when focusing on the results of the second research objective of the paper, namely, the extensiveness of the diversity discourse. Only five out of the 20 firms met the criteria for elaborate or modest diversity discourse, while surprisingly, seven organizations did not have any mention related to diversity, equality, or inclusion on their corporate website. These findings are rather interesting when we consider the fact that the most influential Romanian organizations in terms of annual net turnover were analysed. The question arising from these conclusions is what value is being placed on diversity, equality, and inclusion by the less economically powerful organizations located in Romania, when clear results implies that diversity support through online statements is not regarded as a topic of importance for the top corporations.

5. Lessons for Practice and Suggestions for Future Research

To address the shortcomings of the findings, this research paper proposes a number of easy-to-implement managerial implications.

In order to reap the benefits of a carefully considered corporate message, one recommendation refers to using diversity statements more frequently, via multiple channels of communication, transforming these declarations for diversity support into successful tools for diversity management. Based on the current findings, the location of the diversity statements is considered optimal when it is spread throughout the varied website segments and not in a particular section. Beside increasing the frequency or complexity of diversity statements, many organizations should reconsider their stand on diversity, equality and inclusion, as in several cases, diversity discourse is not yet considered an important or valuable subject.

Related to the findings of the current paper concentrated on the influence of context, one strong recommendation for corporations is being placed on the creation of unique and personal definitions of diversity and inclusion, based on assumed organizational values, and adapted to the specific context of the firms. A vague conceptualization of diversity is sometimes considered enough by corporations, but superficiality will definitely be

harmful in the long-term. Lastly, it is important to remember that besides the statements and promises placed on diversity support, real diversity management initiatives are the ones that are essential for the organization and its members.

As the current study focused exclusively on the analysis of textual information, the inclusion of the visual data is recommended in future diversity research. In the investigated websites, a wide arrange of pictures and videos were observed, thus a separate study could examine the modern variety of diversity communication adopted by organizations.

In a separate analysis, it was discovered that six out of twenty companies signed the Romanian Diversity Charter, however, the support for diversity was not translated in each of the cases when content analysed the diversity statements available on their corporate websites. Therefore, another research suggestion refers to investigating the rhetoric *versus* reality, by identifying the existing signatory companies of various European diversity charters and their diversity management policies, in search for irregularities between diversity statements and actual organizational practices.

A last suggestion related to the objectives of the present research consists of a comparative analysis of diversity discourse focused on multinational organizations with the scope of identifying the similarities and differences placed on how diversity, equality, and inclusion are managed, defined and valued on websites and reports of the same organizations located in different national contexts.

Acknowledgements

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