

Shifting the Paradigm: Diversity Communication on Corporate Web sites

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By Nur Uysal¹

Marquette University

Abstract

In recent years, diversity has been one of the prominent issues that companies have addressed on their Web sites. Yet, few studies have investigated public relations efforts on diversity communication via corporate Web sites. Using *S&P* 500 companies as a sample, this study examined how corporate-level public relations efforts position diversity in Web communication with the public. The results of this study suggest that diversity communication on the *S&P* Web sites reflected a diversity management paradigm, positioning diversity as requisite variety and competitive advantage. Occasionally, diversity was linked to corporate social responsibility. Based on the results, this article argues that, beyond requisite variety or moral responsibility, diversity should be conceptualized as a core company value established through dialogue.

Keywords: Diversity, public relations, corporate communication, requisite variety, CSR

¹ Address correspondence to Nur Uysal, Assistant Professor, Diederich College of Communication, Marquette University, 1131 W. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53233; Email: nuysal@ou.edu.

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After recent examples of racial discrimination class action suits, like those against Texaco, which paid \$176.1 million, and Coca-Cola, which paid \$192.5 million, to settle racial discrimination litigation, corporate diversity issues in the United States have received close scrutiny from both public and private entities. Corporate diversity successes and failures are frequently cited in the popular press, and major news outlets release rankings based on corporate diversity performance (e.g., CNN Money's Top 100 Most Diverse Companies to Work For, DiversityInc's Top 50 Companies for Diversity). Diversity issues have gained publicity and stakeholder attention, increasing the need for efficient diversity communication in corporate organizations. Against this background, public relations practitioners can play a key role in communicating approaches to diversity, thus advancing a genuine dialogue with primary stakeholders—employees, investors, customers, suppliers, and community residents (Clarkson, 1995).

Today, corporate organizations increasingly use Web sites as primary public relations tools to communicate with stakeholders (Coombs, 1998; Esrock & Leichty, 1998, 2000; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent, Taylor & White, 2003). As the use of the Internet has grown, corporations have allocated more resources to public relations efforts via Web sites for establishing a presence for their organizations (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007); providing information subsidies to media (Callison, 2003; Pettigrew & Reber, 2010); delivering a competent corporate image (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007); and communicating corporate social responsibility information (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Esrock & Leichty, 1998, 2000; Sitnigzer & Prexl, 2007). Corporations also increasingly communicate their diversity policies on corporate Web sites (Kirby & Harter, 2002; Point & Singh, 2003; Singh & Point, 2006). However, despite the increasing importance of diversity issues in recent years (Hon & Brunner, 2000; Kirby & Harter, 2002; Sha & Ford, 2007; Toth, 2009), little research has specifically examined how corporate-level public relations efforts address diversity via Web sites.

In the public relations literature, diversity is considered a complex issue that strategic management and communication functions of public relations should address (Grunig, 1992; Hon & Brunner, 2000; Sha & Ford, 2007; Toth, 2009). In public relations, diversity has been addressed mainly within two theoretical frameworks: *requisite variety* and *corporate social responsibility* (CSR). While requisite variety, an organizational management theory, is more prevalent in discussing diversity in public relations literature (Grunig, 1992; Sha & Ford, 2007), a few public relations scholars point to the possible conceptualization of diversity as a component of social responsibility in organizations (e.g., Grunig, 2003; Hon & Brunner, 2000; Heath, 1994; Sha & Ford, 2007). In fact, Hon and Brunner (2000) suggest that the juncture—diversity as social responsibility—is where “public relations and diversity are linked most meaningfully” (p. 309). However, a close reading of the literature suggests that a more comprehensive conceptualization is needed to address diversity communication in today’s complex, volatile, and interconnected society.

The main goal of this study is to explore the link between diversity and public relations practices in corporate organizations. The study extends the existing literature on diversity in public relations by evaluating how corporate-level public relations efforts position diversity on Web sites, the “windows” of corporate organizations (Singh & Point, 2006). It is important for public relations practitioners, who rely primarily on communication to negotiate meanings (Botan, 1992), to understand what companies say they believe about diversity, and why they say they believe it, in the digital medium of corporate Web sites. Using data from the KLD Research & Analytics social performance dataset on diversity, this study examines how *S&P 500* company Web sites’ public relations efforts address diversity issues. The paper begins with a literature review of the existing knowledge about addressing diversity in corporate organizations. The second part reviews the public relations literature on diversity in relation to corporate organizations. The third part provides a discussion of the methods that guided the content analysis of *S&P 500* manufacturing companies’

Web sites. The final sections present the results, discussion, and implications of the findings for public relations practice.

Three Models of Addressing Diversity in Corporate Organizations

Corporate diversity programs have evolved and become an inherent part of corporate organizations over the past decades (Swanson, 2002). The organizational management literature suggests that corporations approach diversity through three possible paradigms: the discrimination and fairness paradigm; the access and legitimacy paradigm; and the integration and learning paradigm (Kalev & Dubbin, 2006; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Thomas & Ely, 1996). Building on organizational and marketing literature, Mazzei and Ravazzani (2008) have elaborated on the three approaches to diversity: the assimilating diversity approach; the diversity management approach; and leveraging differences. The first approach, assimilating diversity, follows an anti-discrimination effort through a systematic and planned policy to recruit ethnic or racial minorities and female employees to promote assimilation and equality in organizations.

The second model, the diversity management approach, goes beyond legal mandates to focus on the bottom line—the business performance (Mazzei & Ravazzani, 2008). From this perspective, managing diversity is economically beneficial to the organization because of increased employee productivity, innovation, creativity, job satisfaction and customer satisfaction. The primary rationale for the diversity management approach is to achieve competitive advantage through requisite variety—the principle that the variety within a system must reflect the environmental variety in which it operates (Weick, 1979). However, Hon and Brunner (2000) suggested that one of the reasons organizations adopt diversity management programs is to achieve moral advantages. Accordingly, corporations, driven by ethical and moral concerns, embrace diversity as a part of their CSR agenda. According to this perspective, corporations could maintain a reputation as morally “good corporate citizens” by promoting interactions with minority groups and countering prejudices and discriminations (Mazzei & Ravazanni, 2008, p. 10).

Examples of diversity management programs are work-life balance policies, part-time work plans, tele-commuting, and flexible hours; philanthropic activities reflecting diverse employee groups; and communication across and between cultures (Mazzei & Ravazanni, 2008, p. 6). However, from a critical perspective, Kirby and Harter (2003) argued that diversity management—a managerial metaphor that implies power—emphasizes achieving competitive advantage and leads to a “quick-fix” orientation toward diversity (p. 29). In addition, the researchers asserted that diversity management could marginalize the perspectives and uniqueness of diverse employees. Similarly, Swanson (2002) argued that diversity management programs often lack an in-depth dialogue engaging organizational members in a quality discussion to address diversity issues.

The third model of diversity — leveraging differences — is a proactive approach that has emerged to improve the limitations of the assimilation and diversity management models. In this third model, the organization grows “with differences—not despite them” (Thomas & Ely, 1996, p. 7). Mazzei and Ravazzani (2008) argued that in the leveraging difference approach, minority groups are not the target of managerial programs; on the contrary, they are “the protagonists that use their own differences and knowledge to interact with clients, suppliers, stakeholders and colleagues” (p. 13). Thomas and Ely (1996) emphasized the role of leadership’s vision to have a paradigm shift from the first two models to the third one. Dialogue plays a key role in leveraging diversity in organizations. Swanson (2002) argued that corporate organization members should advance a quality discussion on diversity issues which could be labeled as “dialogue” (p. 264). According to Swanson, accomplishing dialogue hinges on interactions among members of a work group based on “listening carefully and listening together” (pp. 264-265).

Regarding the first approach to diversity, the human resources department in organizations is responsible for maintaining equal opportunity, fair treatment, recruitment, and compliance with federal requirements (Society for Human Resource Management, 2011); therefore, there is little room for the public relations profession. Currently, public relations seems to play an important role in

organizations within the realm of the second approach—diversity management. However, achieving the third approach, leveraging differences, should be the public relations practitioners' ultimate goal to properly address diversity in organizations. To further analyze the role of public relations in the diversity management model and possibly in the leveraging differences model, we first have to explicate the concept of diversity in the public relations literature. The next section discusses definitions of diversity and then the role of public relations in addressing diversity in corporate organizations.

Defining Diversity in Public Relations

Diversity in the public relations literature is an ambiguous term that is being used to refer to a set of complex issues, including gender, racial, and other forms of discrimination, and to the social and legal responsibility of the corporate world to manage workers proactively (Hon & Brunner, 2000). Sha and Ford (2007) argued that public relations scholarship has a limited understanding of diversity, focusing only on racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. The researchers defined diversity as “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).

Bhawuk and Triandis (1996) described diversity as “difference in ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, age, national origin, and cultural and personal perspectives” (p. 85). Johnson and Rivera's (2007) definition of diversity also contributes to the conceptualization of diversity in this study: “Diversity is a commitment to the ethical norms of representativeness, equity and differences as opposed to actions that are merely a matter of legal obligations and risk management, such as equal employment and affirmative action regulations” (pp. 15-17). The conceptualization of diversity in the public relations literature resonates with the diversity management model explained above. Consequently, this conceptualization of “managing diversity” is

likely to affect how public relations practitioners understand their roles in addressing diversity in organizations.

The Role of Public Relations in Addressing Diversity in Corporations

In public relations literature, diversity is considered a key issue that the strategic management and communication functions of public relations should address in organizations (Hon & Brunner, 2000; Sha & Ford, 2007; Toth, 2009). In fact, “diversity management” is considered to be one of the roles of public relations in organizations (Sha & Ford, 2007, p. 384). Sha and Ford (2007) argued, “multiple diversities must be appreciated and managed within organizations as part of a strategic human resources effort to attract the best talent from diverse backgrounds” (p. 393).

Diversity often has been addressed in relation to organizations’ relationships with external and internal publics. For example, Fry (1992) discussed the role of public relations practitioners in advancing diversity issues in organizations. Fry asserted that the public relations practitioner should advise management, help to create strategies to develop greater diversity, communicate with a culturally diverse workforce, and foster understanding among worker groups. Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) discussed diversity as a component of organizational culture and argued that when the culture of an organization provides support for gender and cultural diversity, public relations is likely to be more effective. The researchers emphasized the role of public relations in creating such an organizational culture to manage diversity.

As such, existing literature charters a role for public relations in diversity management—the second model that emphasizes diversity as a business case and a competitive advantage. In this realm, two prevailing rationales that dominate the diversity management discussion in public relations literature are *requisite variety* and *corporate social responsibility*.

Diversity as Requisite Variety

Requisite variety in organizational theory (Weick, 1979) is often considered as the link between diversity and public relations theory (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992; Grunig, 1992; Heath, 1994; Sha

& Ford, 2007). Requisite variety theory holds that variety within a system must be at least as great as the environmental variety against which it is attempting to regulate itself. Therefore organizations are most effective when they are diverse enough to manage the diversity in their external environment. Weick (1979) suggested “organizations have to be preoccupied with keeping sufficient diversity inside the organizations to sense accurately the variety present in ecological changes outside it” (p. 188). Weick (1979) also asserted that organizations with requisite variety are more adaptive because they “align their actions and beliefs retrospectively and achieve an unequivocal behavior orientation with regard to a greater proportion of the environment. . . . No one is ever free to do something he can’t think of” (p. 193). Thomas and Ely (1996) rendered the theory arguing that a diverse workforce “increases profitability, but beyond financial measures, encompasses learning, creativity, flexibility, organizational and individual growth, and the ability of a company to adjust rapidly and successfully to market changes” (pp. 79-80).

Within the Excellence Study framework, Sha and Ford (2007) argued “requisite variety is critical to an organization’s ability to resolve organizational problems by placing it in the context of an open systems approach to organizational adaptation to its environment” (p. 382). Requisite variety entails a matching process between an organization’s public and characteristics of the organization and its employees. To some, this point is where requisite variety, organizational culture, and public relations intersect. Scholars discussed this intersection by emphasizing the important role of public relations in this process. For example, Heath (1994) argued that requisite variety becomes beneficial for the organization when “enough points of view are incorporated into the culture” (p. 43). He explained that requisite variety allows organizations to function best because sufficient interpretations or shared meanings can exist to allow all organizational stakeholders to successfully coordinate their activities with one another, and public relations can help this process.

Grunig, Grunig, and Ehling (1992) discussed requisite variety in the context of the segmentation of publics. According to the researchers, diversity as a characteristic helps organizations

identify their strategic publics and encourages productive relationships with each public. Diversity in this perspective, then, helps organizations to recognize their strategic constituencies and to better accommodate their needs.

Diversity as Corporate Social Responsibility

In the 1990s when CSR became an indispensable component of corporate organizations, the idea that diversity should be addressed as a moral responsibility started to emerge in the public relations literature. CSR in essence encompasses “the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point of time” (Carroll, 1979, p. 500). Jones (1980) posited that “CSR is the notion that corporations have an obligation to constituent groups in society other than stockholders and beyond that prescribed by law or union contract” (p. 60). Conceptualizing “diversity as social responsibility,” Hon and Brunner (2000) argued that public relations practitioners should have a responsibility to represent publics’ interests, and diversity might help public relations better fulfill its unique role as “dual advocate” for an organization and its publics (p. 336). According to this perspective, diversity as social responsibility should be organizations’ and public relations’ ultimate goal. Hon and Brunner (2000) argued that addressing diversity through the CSR lens is where the public relations profession can help organizations the most. However, the integration of diversity as social responsibility has not been further explored in public relations theory and practice since then. Both requisite variety and social responsibility approaches to diversity function within the realm of diversity management. Thus, public relations efforts on corporate Web sites are expected to address diversity in the context of diversity management.

Diversity Communication on Corporate Web sites

Corporate Web sites have become an important means of communicating corporate values and policies to the public (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Coombs, 1998; Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Esrock & Leichty, 2000; Signitzer & Prexl, 2007). For example, Esrock and Leichty (1998) examined how large corporations are using the Web to present themselves as socially responsible citizens and to advance

their own policy positions. The researchers found that a majority of the Web sites (82%) addressed at least one corporate social responsibility; however, diversity, as an aspect of CSR, was at the bottom of the list in terms of frequency of promotion.

More specifically, Singh and Point (2006) investigated how large European companies promoted diversity on their Web sites, focusing on social constructions of gender and ethnic diversity in statements. The researchers found the notions of gender or ethnic diversity were positioned either as a liability in need of protection or as a source of competitive advantage. The researchers showed that diversity statements, coupled with symbols (e.g., photographs, statistics) reinforced existing business stereotypes of women and people from ethnic minorities.

Research Questions

Building on the literature, a useful way to understand corporate-level public relations efforts in communicating diversity is to examine corporate Web sites. Although previous research studied CSR communication on corporate Web sites (e.g., Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Esrock & Leichty, 1998, 2000) and few studies have examined the social construction of diversity on the Web (Kirby & Harter, 2002; Singh & Point, 2006), these studies have a limited scope of analysis. In addition, the existing literature on diversity has lacked a clear understanding of diversity communication in relation to broader diversity models and themes identified in the literature. The foregoing theoretical background led to the following research questions:

RQ1: Which diversity models (assimilation, diversity management, leveraging differences) are reflected on the corporate Web sites?

RQ2: Which rationale—requisite variety or CSR— is dominant in diversity communication on corporate Web sites?

RQ3: What components of diversity—as an aspect of CSR—are mentioned in diversity messages on corporate Web sites?

The literature reviewed in this study emphasized the importance of dialogue for advancing a mutual understanding about diversity in organizations (Kalev & Dubbin, 2006; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Swanson, 2002; Thomas & Ely, 1996). Corporate Web sites can be a useful way to advance dialogue about diversity. Public relations scholars suggest that organizations should adopt dialogic communication available through the Web sites in order to improve organization-public relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Taylor, Kent, & White 2001) and to open quality discussion on issues such as CSR (Esrock & Leichty, 1998, 2000; Signitzer & Prexl, 2007). Yet, the existing literature suggests that corporate Web sites employ one-way communication. The Web sites disseminate corporate values and policies, relying heavily on graphics, statistics, and audiovisuals more than interactive and dialogic features (e.g., Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). Thus the last question examined the extent to which S&P Web companies initiate two-way dialogic communication on their Web sites:

RQ4: To what extent do corporate Web sites engage stakeholders in an open discussion about issues?

Methods

The research questions of this study seek to explore the use of corporate Web sites in communicating an organization's diversity stance to its publics. To answer the research questions, this study deployed a content analysis of corporate Web sites. The content analysis method is a valuable research technique to gain an objective and systematic description of the manifest content of communication (Krippendorff, 1990; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 2005). Thus, the method allowed the researcher to systematically study the content of diversity communication via corporate Web sites.

Operationalization of Variables

Building on the literature in addressing diversity in organizations (Hon & Brunner, 2000; Kalev & Dubbin, 2006; Mazzei & Ravazanni, 2008; Thomas & Ely, 1996), two categories were developed: (1) Diversity models: Assimilation (basic), diversity management (medium), and

leveraging diversity (high); (2) Rationale: requisite variety or CSR. The assimilation model was operationalized as the basic level that focuses on maintaining equality and fairness in compliance with legal requirements such as those set by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1998). The diversity management model was operationalized as the medium level with a focus on “inclusion” of diversity and display of programs, such as diversity training, diversity councils, work/life balance, identity-based employee networks, etc. Leveraging differences was operationalized as the high level, addressing diversity in organizations with a focus on “integration” of diversity through “dialogue,” enforced by top management.

Based on the literature (Hon & Brunner, 2000; Kirby & Harter, 2002; Singh & Point, 2006), the rationale for diversity was operationalized by the questions such as whether companies discuss diversity as “a business case” and “a competitive advantage” (requisite variety) or as “a moral responsibility” (CSR). To further analyze the components of diversity within the CSR rationale, this study used the KLD Research & Analytics Inc. (KLD) social performance dataset. The data are updated annually for large companies belonging to either the *S&P 500* or *Domini Social Index 400*. The KLD provides information on corporate social performance to a large number of money managers and institutional investors who integrate environmental, social, and governance factors into their investment decisions (Graves & Waddock, 1994). Finally, to examine the ways in which corporate Web sites provided opportunities for engaging stakeholders in an open discussion about issues, Web site design features were coded.

Coding Procedure and Sampling Frame

To answer the research questions, this study involved two phases of assiduous coding procedures. In the first phase, a Web site content analysis was performed on the companies listed in the *S&P 500* index in 2011. The *S&P 500*[®] is a comprehensive gauge of the large cap U.S. equities market. The index includes 500 leading companies in leading industries of the U.S. economy, capturing 75% coverage of U.S. equities (S&P 500, 2011). S&P companies in the manufacturing industry (with SIC

codes between 2000 & 3999) constituted the sample of this study ($N = 171$). Prior research has drawn attention to the differences in corporate Web site communication across industries (e.g., Esrock & Leichty, 1998; Kim & Rader, 2010). One potential explanation for these differences can be corporate concerns on organizational reputation. Kreps and Wilson (1982) noted that the value of a reputation is positively related to its fragility. As manufacturing companies heavily depend on end-user consumers, their reputation can be particularly vulnerable to losses resulting from social sanctions (Reid & Toffel, 2009). Thus, manufacturing companies direct more attention and resources to express their positions on prominent social issues, including diversity. Therefore, focusing on large manufacturing companies provided an excellent research setting to assess public relations efforts on diversity communication via corporate Web sites.

First, in order to assess the diversity model presented on the corporate Web sites, *S&P 500* companies were coded for their Web site content using three models of addressing diversity in organizations: (1) Assimilation model (low); (2) Diversity Management Model (medium); and (3) Leveraging Diversity Model (high). Company Web sites were coded as assimilation model when they only mentioned diversity as “equal opportunity, fair treatment, recruitment, and compliance with federal requirements.” For example, if the Web site only presented the common statement: “Company Name is an Equal Opportunity workplace,” then it was coded as assimilation model (low). Also, if the Web site did not have a clear item discussing diversity stance of the company, it was coded within this category. If the company Web site emphasized “inclusion” of diversity, mentioning various initiatives (e.g., diversity councils, diversity training programs, a designated chair for diversity issues, work-life balance programs, employee resources networks), then it was coded as reflecting the diversity management model (medium). In addition, companies were coded in this category if they emphasized “competitive advantage” and “market-based motivation” for diversity. Finally, Web sites were coded as reflecting the leveraging diversity model if they emphasized “integration” of diversity and “learning” from diversity and “growing” with diversity (high). This category also looked for initiatives

to advance dialogue about diversity in organizations, as well as the presence of a top management commitment to diversity.

Secondly, the rationale for diversity—requisite variety or CSR—was determined by questions such as whether the Web site mentioned diversity inside the organization as a strategy to manage diversity in its external environment. The requisite variety rationale category emphasized diversity as a “business case” and a “competitive advantage” for organizations. In contrast, the CSR rationale category had an emphasis on “moral responsibility” of organizations to include diversity (e.g., supplier diversity). To further analyze the components of diversity within the framework of CSR rationale, KLD diversity performance indicators were used. The KLD dataset has eight indicators for diversity: CEO, Promotion, Board of Directors, Work/Life Benefits, Women & Minority Contracting, Employment of the Disabled, Gay & Lesbian Policies, and Other Strength. For the purpose of this study, diversity indicators on governance (CEO, Promotion, Board of Directors) were excluded from coding.

Finally, Web site design features were coded to find out whether S&P corporate Web sites provide opportunities for stakeholders to discuss important issues. Following Taylor et al.’s (2001) instrument of Web site dialogic communication with some amendments from other studies (e.g., Callison, 2003; Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Pettigrew & Reber, 2010), this study coded Web sites for Web design features (e.g., presence of stand-alone diversity menu) and for interactive and dialogic features (e.g., social media, opinion surveys) (see Figure 2 for details).

All indicators were coded based on the dichotomy of the message’s presence (e.g., 1 for presence or 0 for absence) in order to minimize possible subjective decisions. In order to maintain reliability of coding, two coders (the researcher and a graduate student who previously received training) independently coded 20% of the research sample. The intercoder reliability was assessed using Krippendorff’s alpha (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). The intercoder agreement ranged from .87

to .96, above the accepted value (.80) for this type of test (Krippendorff, 2004). The coding of the sample Web sites took place between November 10 and December 30, 2011.

Results

Descriptives

Of the manufacturing companies listed in the *S&P 500* ($N = 171$), all of the companies had functioning Web sites. The majority of company Web sites (64%) had a stand-alone menu for explaining their organizations' stance toward diversity. Among the corporate Web sites having a diversity stand-alone menu ($n = 109$), "Diversity and Inclusion" was the most common label (73%) followed by "Diversity" (21%) and "Culture" (6%). The diversity menus usually appeared on/under three locations: Career ($n = 82$), CSR ($n = 14$), About Company ($n = 10$), and front page ($n = 7$). A few companies (e.g., Boeing, Bristol-Myers Squibb, ConAgra) mentioned diversity at all three locations, implying the importance of the issue for these companies. The data showed the majority of company Web sites (94.7%) displayed photographs and symbols to promote their commitment to diversity. Diversity messages were reinforced by use of statistics (32%), awards and recognitions (46%), and company diversity timelines (11%).

Diversity Models on the Corporate Web Sites

RQ 1 inquired which diversity models were reflected on the S&P corporate Web sites. The data suggested that the diversity management model (78%) was dominant across the company Web sites ($N = 171$). The majority of the companies seemed to go beyond the assimilation model of diversity to diversity management. Table 1 reports percentages of the categories. In line with the diversity management discourse, the majority of S&P Web sites emphasized diversity "inclusion." For example, Archer-Daniels-Midland Corporation delivered messages with an emphasis on inclusion:

ADM's culture promotes inclusion in all roles, at all levels. Our definition of diversity is broad, encompassing not only diversity in race, gender, ethnicity, economic and educational backgrounds; but also in experiences, perspectives and interests. But while our definition of

diversity is wide-ranging, our focus on inclusion is precise. At ADM, you will not see a diversity program that is about quotas and platitudes. You will see diversity and inclusion, a culture that is open to all ideas and respectful to all, that is evident every day, everywhere.

Table 1*Diversity Models on the S&P Web sites*

Diversity Models	Dominant model based on messages	
	N	%
Assimilation (Low)	10	5
Diversity Management (Medium)	132	78
Leveraging Diversity (High)	29	17

N = 171

The fact that “Diversity and Inclusion” was the most common label for addressing diversity on S&P Web sites points to a prevalence of the diversity management model across the companies. The diversity management model Web sites often displayed diversity management programs and initiatives. The most frequently mentioned diversity management initiatives on the Web sites were “Employee networks” (42%) and “Work-life balance” programs (37%). The employee affinity groups focused on various identities (e.g., Black Employees Association; Hispanics Employees Network; Women Network; Gay, Lesbian, Bi, Transgender Employees & Friends Network). To make diversity management performance more tangible, S&P companies displayed employee endorsements (43%), which were usually very personalized and visually engaging (e.g., ADM, CAT).

The second most prevalent model on the S&P Web sites was leveraging diversity (17%). The Web sites in the leveraging diversity model delivered sophisticated messages that valued differences and reflected a comprehensive understanding of diversity, like Bristol-Myers Squibb:

We view diversity in the broadest sense - including age, ethnicity, gender, appearance, race, physical abilities, religion, social-economic background, political affiliation, sexual orientation, thinking styles and life experiences. Our culture enables us to create a work environment where all are free to fully contribute and reach their maximum potential.

Another good example of diversity definition in this realm is from Xerox: “Diversity goes beyond race and gender. It celebrates and values differences in age, outlook, cultural background, lifestyle, physical ability and sexual orientation.” A few companies emphasized messages such as “integration” and “leveraging” diversity and “learning and growing together” (e.g., messages like “Our company. Your career. Together, we grow” from the Coca-Cola Company).

The analysis showed that Web sites in this category promoted their diversity performance by displaying awards that recognize their high diversity performance (e.g., Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s Corporate Equality Index Best Place to work for LGBT Equality, DiveristyInc’s top 50 Company for Diversity, Working Mother 100 Best Companies). The top management commitment to diversity was displayed on the leveraging differences Web sites, such as this message from a vice-president at Archer-Daniels-Midland:

We believe diversity encompasses a variety of different dimensions beyond those most people typically consider, such as race, ethnicity and gender. To us, diversity is also a product of the experiences, backgrounds, relationships people bring to the table.

The Rationale for Diversity: Requisite Variety or CSR

The second research question asked whether S&P corporate Web sites used requisite variety or CSR as a rationale for diversity. Analysis of the Web sites that had a stand-alone diversity menu ($n = 109$) revealed that the majority of corporate Web sites used requisite variety ($n = 72$, 66%) as the main rationale for diversity programs in their organizations. The messages promoted diversity as a business case. The requisite variety rationale was often manifested in the messages of diversity as an “asset” for the company because it provides “competitive advantage.” For example, United Technologies stated:

As a global organization that relies on teamwork and a multiplicity of viewpoints, we actively seek a diverse work force. For UTC, diversity is a competitive asset that enables us to more closely reflect and respond to the diverse needs of our markets, customers and communities.

Our goal is a workplace where all employees are encouraged to reach their fullest potential and where everyone values, accepts and respects the differences in our work force.

Another example that echoed requisite variety is from Bristol Myers Squibb: “Our customers, suppliers, strategic partners and stakeholders are increasingly global and multicultural. *We must be positioned to relate to them*” [emphasis added]. Some company Web sites even had a label “The Business Case for Diversity” (e.g., Cummins). Executive commitment statements to diversity also emphasized requisite variety. For example, a vice president at United Technologies said:

Only through diverse thinking can we ever achieve higher levels of business and technical performance. The way to get diverse thinking is with diverse people! The way to link diverse people is with an open and honest working environment like we have here at UTC.

The rationale of CSR for diversity was present ($n = 19, 17\%$), but not as prevalent as the requisite variety rationale. To further analyze whether the frequencies observed differed significantly from expected ones, a chi-square analysis was performed (see Sprinthall, 2007, p. 368). The chi-square analysis revealed that diversity menus on the Web sites were statistically significant in their differences regarding the rationale that they emphasized in the messages ($X^2 (df = 1, n = 109) = 3.21, p \leq .05$). The requisite variety (66%) was the dominant rationale for diversity on the S&P corporate Web sites (see Table 2).

The Web sites promoted the CSR rationale through messages of “good citizenship.” For example, Broadcom delivered this message on its Web site:

As a global company, we are committed to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). This includes exercising responsible governance over our business, as well as promoting respect for the environment within our workplace, through our product innovation and throughout our

communities. By remaining accountable and committed to these high standards, we can enhance not only the lives our employees, customers and other constituents, but the world at large.

Table 2

The Dominant Rationale for Diversity on Corporate Web Sites

Rationale	<i>n</i>	%
Requisite variety	72	66
CSR	19	17
Totals (diversity stand-alone menu) <i>n</i> = 109		

Note. $X^2 (df = 1, n = 109) = 3.21, p \leq .05$. The analysis included 109 Web sites that had a stand-alone diversity menu. The remaining diversity menus on the Web sites (*n* = 18, 16%) had a hybrid approach (requisite variety and CSR or corporate value).

The remaining Web sites that had a stand-alone diversity menu (*n* = 18, 16%) followed a hybrid approach covering diversity both as requisite variety under a *Career* menu and as a social responsibility under a *CSR* menu or as a corporate value under an *About Company* menu (e.g., Archer-Daniels-Midland). Messages of diversity mentioned as a corporate value followed a holistic approach to diversity emphasizing all aspects (e.g., CSR, requisite variety). For example:

Miller Coors is a young company building its corporate reputation. As we develop our own corporate identity, diversity and inclusion rises to the top of the list of defining qualities we strive to enhance. We've built programs that help promote supplier diversity, a highly skilled and diverse workforce, and diversity awareness and education.

Another example is Coca Cola Enterprises, which emphasized workplace diversity under a CSR menu with a submenu labeled "Workplace," and had a "Diversity and Inclusion" submenu under a Careers menu with this message:

Diversity is woven into all aspects of our business – the way we interact with each other, our suppliers, our customers and our planet through Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability

initiatives. And as the world's leading beverage marketing and bottling organization, our true secret formula is maintaining an environment that ensures each one of us has the freedom to contribute ideas and efforts.

RQ3 asked "To what extent are KLD corporate social responsibility indicators for diversity included on the S&P Web sites?" Results demonstrated that among the four CSR indicators of diversity based on KLD ratings, women and minority contracting (48.2%) were the most common issue displayed on the Web site followed by work/life benefits (31.6), gay/lesbian policies (17.3%), and employment of the disabled (2.9%). Supplier diversity including women and minority contracting was the dominant emphasis regarding the discussion on diversity as a corporate responsibility.

RQ4 inquired whether S&P companies provided opportunities for engaging stakeholders in an open discussion on their Web sites. The analysis of the 171 Web sites revealed that more than half of the Web sites ($n = 97$, 56%) provided social media features (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube). Occasionally, the Web sites ($n = 26$, 15%) featured blogs (e.g., Molson Coors's Community Blog, Caterpillar, Coca Cola Enterprises). Few companies seemed to be exceptional in their efforts to display their commitment to stakeholder engagement by allocating a specific space for it like Coca Cola's *Stakeholder Engagement* Web page, where the company seeks "guidance" and "support" from stakeholders by "listening" them. Another example is Caterpillar's "Cat@work" feature designed for employees and retirees, allowing easy access to news and applications. However, majority of the S&P companies failed to provide opportunities for gathering feedback (e.g., surveys, real time chat features).

Discussion

Based on a review of organizational management and public relations literature, the present study found that there are three primary theoretical models that explain organizational approaches to diversity, and the two dominant rationales for diversity management programs in organizations are requisite variety and corporate social responsibility. Consequently, this study explored which diversity

models were present in the real market and which rationale for diversity was more dominantly used by public relations efforts via corporate Web sites.

Diversity Management Model is Prevalent on the Corporate Web Sites

The results suggested that the diversity management model, which is mainly concerned about competitive advantage, is actively manifest in public relations efforts on corporate Web sites. The Web communication emphasized diversity primarily as a competitive advantage, and occasionally as a corporate social responsibility, but rarely as a corporate value. The study also showed that the rationale of diversity programs was often presented as requisite variety. These results could be explained by the fact that public relations theory and practice still conceptualize diversity in the diversity management paradigm. Consequently, this conceptualization of “managing diversity” is likely to affect how public relations practitioners define their roles in addressing diversity in organizations and how they communicate diversity to publics. The business case for diversity (e.g., reaching out different markets, increased creativity, innovation) is certainly an important factor for corporate organizations. However, the rationale of diversity should reflect an understanding that values diversity for its own sake. Otherwise, public relations efforts on diversity communication via corporate Web sites simply imply that diversity is one of the competitive advantage resources that need to be managed by decision-makers.

Leveraging Diversity Could be Achieved through Open Dialogue

The results of this study showed that only few *S&P* Web sites went beyond the diversity management model to the leveraging differences model--the ultimate goal for organizations. The leveraging diversity paradigm states that in order to be sensitive and responsive to diversity both internally and externally, an open discussion is crucial (Thomas & Ely, 1996; Swanson, 2002). Corporate organizations should advance an in-depth dialogue about how various identity-group memberships inform and influence an employee’s experience and the organizational behavior. Thus, dialogue can provide a framework to address diversity for public relations practitioners. In fact, Botan

and Taylor (2004) argued that dialogic theories, process, and practices should lead public relations theory and research, with an emphasis on understanding how active and engaged publics participate in a simultaneous meaning-making process. Accordingly, mutual understanding on diversity in corporate organizations could be achieved by maximizing the participation of all competing voices through dialogue.

According to Swanson (2002), accomplishing dialogue hinges on interactions among members of a work group based on “listening carefully and listening together” (264). However, in line with the literature (e.g., Capriotti & Moreno, 2007; Esrock & Leichty, 1998; 2000; Reber & Pettigrew, 2010), this study showed that *S&P* Web sites do not fully use the capacity of the Web site to facilitate dialogic features on the Web sites to listen to stakeholders. Indeed, the corporate Web sites could be a useful public relations tool through which members of an organization can have dialogue on diversity issues. By leveraging dialogic and interactive features of the Web, such as employee networks and community blogs, corporate Web sites could offer an additional means of communication to discuss diversity in organizations.

Implications for Practitioners

The results of this study suggested that corporate-level public relations efforts via corporate Web sites still function primarily in the diversity management paradigm (78%). Public relations practitioners can play a key role to help organizations have a paradigm shift from diversity management to leveraging diversity. Practitioners should proactively be involved in what companies say they believe about diversity, and why they say they believe it through various channels. Being an efficient public relations tool, corporate Web sites should communicate diversity beyond requisite variety or competitive advantage frameworks. The Web communication should encompass all aspects of diversity (employee diversity, supplier diversity, CSR) with an emphasis on diversity as a core company value.

The results also showed that diversity from the CSR angle needs a more refined focus. Even though the composite mean of ratings for the companies' diversity strengths ($M = 4.8$, $SD = 0.9$) was reasonably high, Web site public relations efforts seemed to miss an opportunity, having failed to emphasize these strengths (e.g., Employment of the Disabled). The KLD indicators for diversity used in this study could provide a solid framework for public relations practitioners to approach diversity from a CSR perspective. The KLD dataset can be an important resource for public relations research and practice in relation to CSR communication since the data closely mirror information used by norm-constrained stakeholders (Graves & Waddock, 1994). The KLD data covers diversity as one of the seven CSR dimensions (Community, Corporate Governance, Diversity, Employee Relations, Environment, Human Rights and Product). Using CSR strengths (positive ratings) and concerns (negative ratings) on the KLD data, practitioners can direct their strategies and programs regarding CSR communication.

This study also showed that a few corporate Web sites reflected the leveraging diversity approach in their diversity communication (e.g., Archer-Daniels-Midland, Coca Cola, Caterpillar). Practitioners should heed these changes among some top businesses. For example, the hierarchal level that information is placed within the structure of Web pages could imply the importance that a company gives to an issue (Capriotti & Moreno, 2007). However, this study found that, even though the majority of the *S&P* Web sites provided a stand-alone diversity menu, only a few company Web sites placed a diversity menu on the homepage. Information on diversity was usually placed at the second or third level under *Career*. Corporate-level public relations efforts should focus on creating innovative and dialogic approaches to communicate diversity to publics, such as Coca Cola's interactive "Diverse and Inclusive Culture Quiz" for visitors to test their diversity knowledge.

Conclusion

U.S. society is increasingly becoming diverse (the U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), and organizations are becoming ever more global due to economic concerns (e.g., outsourcing). As diversity initiatives

increase at both federal and civil society levels—such as the Presidential Glass Ceiling Commission (1995), Human Rights Campaign Foundation’s LGBT Equality Index, and the Society for Human Resources Management (2004)—the importance of addressing diversity and communicating corporate diversity policies to stakeholders will increase. Thus, public relations professionals are called upon to deliver effective messages about corporate diversity policies and promote deeper understanding between an organization and its publics.

This study examined corporate Web site communication as one of the many reflections of a corporation’s stance on diversity. Certainly, corporate Web sites are “windows” of corporations, and thus may not fully reflect diversity practices in real organizational settings. However, literature suggests that corporate Web sites are increasingly being used as an efficient means of communicating corporate values and policies, and likewise stakeholders increasingly gather information from corporate Web sites. The variations on the presentation and content of diversity items on corporate Web sites may thus reflect the level of organizational understanding about diversity. This study showed that corporate public relations efforts on Web sites predominantly discussed diversity merely as a business case within the framework of requisite variety. The results call for a more comprehensive conceptualization of diversity as a core company value.

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