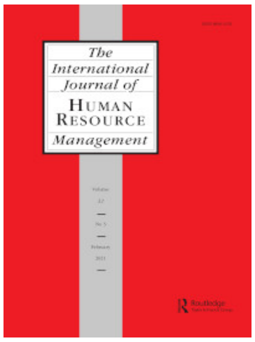

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Diversity and inclusion branding: a five-country comparison of corporate websites

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ABSTRACT

In their quest to attract talent and appear as an employer of choice, organizations must articulate the benefits of having a diverse and inclusive workforce. By communicating the attractiveness of the workplace, a company increases its exposure to the environment as an employer of choice. Within the context of employer branding, we highlight two emerging concepts that encompass corporate communication in the form of diversity and inclusion statements: diversity branding and inclusion branding. We examine the websites of 75 major companies in five different countries (France, Germany, Spain, the UK and the US). The article highlights that organizations use diversity and inclusion branding to attract talent, become employers of choice and dimensionalize diversity to signal that specific dimensions of diversity are relevant to the organization. We show that diversity and inclusion branding has become 'mainstream' and how a focus on diversity is particularly useful to attract talent while to appear as an employer of choice a focus on inclusion seems particularly beneficial.

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Introduction

On its mission to attract talent and to appear as an employer of choice, a company espouses the benefits of diversity and inclusion (Guerrier & Wilson, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2015; Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007; Roberson, 2013). Not surprisingly, diversity and inclusion has been firmly on the corporate agenda for many decades (Özbilgin, Jonsen, & Tatli, 2015; Mor Barak, 2013). Analyzing the difference between diversity and inclusion, Roberson (2006) suggests that diversity commonly describes the composition of groups or the workforce, such as demographic differences or observable and non-observable characteristics. Inclusion, by contrast,

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refers to the way individuals are included in networks and in decision-making processes (Roberson, 2006). This means that while diversity focuses on differences among individuals (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999), inclusion looks at how people work together (Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Shore et al., 2011). Talking about diversity and inclusion enables an organization to attract talent and potentially profit from having a diverse workforce, increase its talent pool (Ng & Burke, 2005) and appear as an employer of choice (Pfeffer, 1998). Diversity and inclusion statements can promote the firm as a 'diversity-driven employer' and a 'great place to work' to attract diverse candidates (Edwards & Kelan, 2011). While diversity branding is sometimes talked about (Edwards & Kelan, 2011), inclusion as part of the corporate brand is less well explored. The concept of diversity and inclusion branding is thus not established in the literature and this article seeks to remedy this. While diversity and inclusion is something that organizations increasingly include on their websites, there is limited research on how the diversity and inclusion brand is used by organizations in different countries. We therefore ask in this article, how diversity and inclusion branding differ in various countries and to what extent.

Employer branding is a central performance discourse for HR (Lane, 2016; Martin, Beaumont, Doig, & Pate, 2005), including practitioners (IESE, 2017), and employer attractiveness is a key outcome of employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Berthon, Erwing, & Hah, 2005) because branding influences decision processes, albeit moderated by the national contexts (Baum & Kabst, 2014). Employer branding is defined as 'the package of functional, economic and psychological benefits provided by employment and identified with the employing company' (Ambler & Barrow, 1996: 187). A number of authors have noted other aspects and definitions of employer branding (Lane, 2016; Martin et al., 2005; Moroko & Uncles, 2008), yet most definitions of corporate branding aim to convey a desirable image to the outside as well as to the internal organization (Kowalczyk & Pawlish, 2002; Schultz & De Chernatony, 2002). Many definitions also emphasize a working environment that shows potential for development, rewards and a sense of belonging. In other words, employer branding suggests differentiation of a firm's characteristics as an employer from those of its competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004), for example, by fostering an inclusive environment where people feel valued and well treated.

We investigate and compare the way companies disclose diversity and inclusion statements on websites to attract talent, by providing an analysis of how diversity branding and inclusion branding is used by organizations in different countries. We explore the concepts of diversity branding and inclusion branding theoretically and empirically. We thus contribute to the relevant body of literature and theory with regards to diversity and inclusion branding. As research states, talent attraction is a key driver for diversity management (Konrad, 2003), but to what extent do companies use diversity statements in their quest to attract people? In order to investigate how critical diversity and inclusion are for companies with strong global employer brands, we first consider the literature on diversity and employer branding. Second, we detail our data collection of the diversity statements of 75 companies in five different countries (France, Germany, Spain, the UK and the US). Third, we examine how companies brand and value diversity and people of difference on their websites. Finally, we discuss how the findings of the study expand the literature by first showing that diversity and inclusion branding is now mainstream and second, highlighting how diversity branding can be used to attract talent, and inclusion branding can be used to appear as an employer of choice. We also outline the limitations of this study and opportunities for further research.

Diversity branding and inclusion branding

While the literature has largely focused on corporate branding and employer branding, the concepts of diversity and inclusion branding are less well explored. In this section, we outline how corporate, employer, diversity and inclusion branding can be conceptualized focusing specifically on the development of the concepts of diversity branding and inclusion branding. We also outline the relevance of websites to understand diversity branding and inclusion branding and how it differs between countries.

Corporate and employer branding

A brand is a name, design, symbol, term or any other feature designed to identify an organization’s services and goods and to differentiate them from those of its competitors (according to the American Marketing Association). Corporate branding, or strategic corporate identity branding, has distinct benefits and provides competitive advantages (Balmer, 1995; King, 1991), such as consumer demands, employer image and increased financial margins, and the corporate brand acts as a centripetal force informing and guiding the organization (Balmer, 2012, 2013; Elving et al., 2013) at all levels (Martin, Gollan, & Grigg, 2011). Corporate brands differ significantly from product brands (for review, please see Balmer et al., 2017).

Historically, branding began to grow in importance in the 1970s (Olins, 1978) adding a strategic layer to the classic product brand management including a variety of corporate concepts: mission and philosophy; identity; personality; visual identification; and image (Balmer, 1995). Importantly, corporate branding has a multi-stakeholder orientation (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Schultz & Hatch, 2003) compared with the more narrowly defined customer orientation in the case of product branding, with organizations highly mindful of the transactional, emotional and relational importance to all stakeholders (Balmer, 2013). The communication is based on sensing the information that stakeholders need (Schultz & Kitchen, 2004). Communication is one of three pillars of corporate branding (Balmer, 2001). The other two are differentiation from competitors, and enhancement of the esteem and loyalty held by stakeholders. Despite the focus on differentiation, however, some authors have noted a *contradiction* insofar as most organizations do not differentiate themselves in any material way from their competitors (Backhaus, 2004; Elving et al., 2013).

'The objective of corporate brand management is to establish a favorable disposition towards the organization by its various stakeholders and, as such, this is likely to lead to a propensity to buy the organization's products or services, to work for or invest in the company' (Balmer, 1995: p. 30). Employer branding is a distinct framework incorporating both marketing and HR (Verma & Ahmad, 2016; Moroko & Uncles, 2008), including talent management (Kaur et al., 2015), defined by Martin et al., 2011, as 'a generalized recognition for being known among key stakeholders for providing high-quality employment experience, and a distinctive organizational identity which employees value, engage with and feel confident and happy to promote to others.' (p. 3618).

The link to human relations and resources is pertinent to our study and was firmly established by Turban et al. (1998) who found a positive relationship between brand image and job applicants' perceptions of the recruiter (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993). Since then, a range of studies have explored employer branding as a phenomenon (Theurer et al., in press for a review). In a study of companies in the United States, India, Germany and China, Dögl and Holtbrügge (2014) found that employer reputation is not only relevant to attract but also to retain qualified employees, based on signaling theory. Further, Maxwell and Knox (2009) concluded, based on social identity theory, that employer branding motivates employees to 'live the brand' and that the attributes of the workforce influence the perceived attractiveness of an organization's employer brand.

Social identity theory stipulates that belonging to a perceived distinct group stimulates a feeling of pride in being part of that group or in this case an organization. In order to create such distinct groups, similarities among group members and differences between groups are exaggerated (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Thus, an organization's employer brand can be used to create pride in an organization by minimizing differences between employees and differentiating itself from other groups. Other research has shown that not only leadership of top management but also corporate social responsibility are central for employer branding (Biswas & Suar, 2016).

Research has also highlighted that an employer brand can decline quickly if, for instance, promises are not kept (Elegbe, 2017). This correlates positively with application intention (Knox & Freeman, 2006) and, according to these authors, a key attribute of the employer brand image is to have a *diverse* mix of colleagues. Similarly, Windscheid et al. (2016) explore the different impression management tactics used by German businesses to attract women as an underrepresented group. The idea of employer branding relies on the fact that the organization's employer brand is presented with potential that current employees are attracted to. If the company reflects the targeted employees, they are more likely to be attracted to this company. The attraction is argued to lead to an affinity that motivates both current and potential employees to link themselves to the organization (Edwards, 2009), and thus, the communication may help the organization expand its potential talent pool. Given that a strong employer image has a positive influence on perceived employer attractiveness (Baum & Kabst, 2014; Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Sehgal & Malati, 2013), companies seek to create an image of employer of choice to make people want to work for them (Pfeffer, 1998). For instance, companies often seek to portray themselves as attractive places to work for both men and women and for people from all ethnic backgrounds (Guerrier & Wilson, 2011), as well as for millennials (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010).

Noticeably, it has been questioned whether employer branding and diversity are compatible concepts at all (Edwards & Kelan, 2011). On the one hand, diversity is implemented to support individuality and bring out the best of groups by encouraging differences in background, thinking, etc. (Dass & Parker, 1999; Bell, 2011). On the other hand, employer branding fosters a coherent brand that possibly discourages employee lateral thinking and encourages a homogenous workforce or at least exerts some pressure on employees to conform (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). This apparent *contradiction* is often not explored and it is presumed that as long as websites show and emphasize a range of diverse people, this will function as enough of a pull to attract diverse talent.

Another important contradiction in relation to corporate branding is rooted in the classic global integration versus local adaptation (Rosenzweig & Singh, 1991). Martin et al. (2011) describe local versus global tensions in the context of employer branding noting different strategic HRM approaches, such as being distinctive from others and mimetic branding processes in order to achieve (often within a local context) social legitimacy. The authors also point to the exclusive versus inclusive HR strategy tension within the context of talent management wherein exclusive talent management focuses on the few (carefully selected) rather than the many, and with different negative consequences in different markets (pp. 3626-3628). Finally, the authors note that employer branding is an evolving practice by which there is increased focus on authenticity, equivocal branding of global and local values (see also Price, Gioia, & Corley, 2008) and a complex layering of national cultural identities (pp. 3629–3632).

Defining diversity and inclusion

Diversity management is an increasingly well-researched subject (Bell, 2011; Hofhuis, van der Zee, & Otten, 2016; Farndale et al., 2015; Ozturk & Tatli, 2016; Roberson, 2013), including performance effects (Catalyst, 2004; Nielsen & Nielsen, 2013; Post & Byron, 2015; Stahl et al., 2010), primarily based on the resourced-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991), and other important factors motivating diversity and its management (Jones, King, Nelson, Geller, & Bowes-Sperry, 2013; Jonsen, Tatli, Özbilgin, & Bell, 2013; see also Trittin & Schoeneborn, in press). Workforce diversity – if approached in a way that maximizes inclusion and minimizes resistance (Dass & Parker, 1999) – presents organizations with opportunities to create and communicate change that nourishes the positive human potential of their employees (Stevens, Plaut, & Sanchez-Burks, 2008).

There are clear similarities between the ways in which inclusion is conceived as conceptually distinct from managing diversity, and the way in which managing diversity has been portrayed as distinct from equality (Oswick & Noon, 2014). Inclusion is the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2009). So, whereas diversity focuses on individual differences (as a count), inclusion aims to increase the participation and commitment of all employees (Roberson, 2006). We can expect the inclusion discourse to continue to grow even further in popularity, as well as the rhetorical distancing from diversity, in parallel to a relative decline in the diversity discourse (Oswick & Noon, 2014; see also Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2011). From this definition of inclusion, it also emerges that inclusion is more advanced than diversity because inclusion moves beyond counting demographic differences to showing how these demographic differences can make a difference if people are working together to achieve organizational objectives (Roberson 2006, see also Shore et al., 2011).

While some HR practitioners distinguish between diversity and inclusion, both terms are often used as a standing term in corporate communications. Roberson's (2006) study aimed to find out how human resource officers distinguish between the terms diversity and inclusion and concludes that HR professionals define diversity as demographic group composition, whereas inclusion is understood to be the organizational processes that aim to increase the participation of all employees and to ensure that diversity benefits are harnessed. This indicates that diversity and inclusion are two different concepts in the eyes of HR practitioners, where diversity is often the prerequisite for inclusion but where diversity does not automatically lead to inclusion. While those distinctions between diversity and inclusion are important and valuable, it has to be noted that diversity and inclusion are increasingly used as a shorthand for any policies and practices that relate to aspects of diversity and inclusion, particularly in corporate communication. It has been suggested that diversity, and now also inclusion, are used as a marketing device to show the organization in its best light (Gatrell & Swan, 2008). It is therefore notable that in everyday usage in relation to corporate communications, diversity and inclusion are used as a standing term and nuances in meaning are less pronounced.

From diversity branding to inclusion branding

In corporate communication, diversity and inclusion are often used as a standing term where diversity and inclusion are not distinguished *per se*. Although we suggested earlier that diversity and inclusion have differentiated meanings (Roberson, 2006), in relation to branding, diversity and inclusion seems to be used as a standing term. This means that the conceptual difference between diversity and inclusion is lost. Losing this conceptual distinction means that it is reasonable to talk about a diversity and inclusion brand but that within this diversity and inclusion brand different aspects might be stressed. For instance, an organization might talk about diversity and inclusion but most of its activities are centered on increasing demographic diversity, whereas another organization might focus more on inclusion. This means that one can talk about a diversity and inclusion brand but that this brand might emphasize either diversity or inclusion, or both. It also means that diversity branding and the inclusion branding can differ.

For Edwards and Kelan (2011), understanding differences in diversity and inclusion branding is particularly important. So far, it has mainly been explored how the diversity brand is communicated, but less research exists on whether inclusion branding is done in a similar way. This might be due to the fact that inclusion is a more recent phenomenon. Inclusion *should* address the fact that employees are not only diverse but actually work well together and are thus included. Nevertheless, it could be seen as important for organizations to not only stress that they are attracting diverse employees but also that those employees are welcomed in the organization. For this to happen, they not only need to communicate their diversity brand but also their inclusion brand (Edwards & Kelan, 2011).

This also raises the question, to what extent organizations use diversity branding and inclusion branding. While diversity branding focuses on stressing difference, inclusion branding highlights how employees feel valued and included in an organization. However, as highlighted by Oswick and Noon (2014), diversity and inclusion remains codependent, since diversity is ‘considered as a necessary precursor to inclusion, while inclusion is the required antecedent of diversity’ (p. 26). In this vein, branding diversity can be seen as a precursor to inclusion branding: Companies seek to highlight what there are actually doing in terms of diversity, before emphasizing how the environment and the corporate culture integrate and benefit from differences. It is thus possible the diversity branding and inclusion branding achieve different goals. The article therefore raises the question how diversity branding and inclusion branding differ and what consequences of this difference might be.

Diversity and inclusion branding through websites

The internet is often the first point of contact a potential employee has with an organization and is fast becoming the communication medium of choice when it comes to recruitment (Allen, Mahto, & Otondo (2007); Backhaus, 2004; Windscheid, Bowes-Sperry, Jonsen & Morner, 2016). The advantage of web-mediated communication for companies is that the content over the web is not filtered before it reaches its audience (White & Raman, 1999). In terms of recruitment, a company can post the relevant information on its own recruitment website since the internet offers recruiters a chance to convey a large quantity (almost unlimited) of information to job seekers (Braddy et al., 2006). The authors argue that website content plays an important role in forming a perception of the organizational culture in the job seekers' minds (Windscheid et al., 2016).

Diversity and inclusion are central elements that many organizations feature on their websites. Prior research has shown that advertising human resource policies that appeal to deep level diversity is more successful in encouraging potential applicants to apply than policies appealing to surface level diversity (Casper et al., 2013). In relation to race, it has been shown that a prospective applicant's reaction to advertised support for diversity practices are moderated by the applicant's race, by his or her earlier experiences of discrimination, as well as by how the organization explains its diversity practices (Williamson et al., 2008). They mention that by making specific references to valuing diversity, having a global workforce community, being an equal opportunity employer, encouraging minority applicants to apply for current job vacancies, and listing advantages associated with diversity in the workplace, a company can influence potential employees' perceptions about how it values diversity. Furthermore, including pictures of and testimonials from diverse groups of employees on its recruitment website or frequently citing statistics on current minority employment seems to influence the audience's perceptions on diversity even more (Braddy et al., 2006, p. 539).

In general, diversity cues on recruitment websites influence the way job seekers process website information (Walker, Feild, Bernerth, & Becton, 2012; Windscheid et al., 2016), thus analyzing websites to understand how diversity is communicated is a well-established process (Heres & Benschop, 2010; Point & Singh, 2003, Sing & Point, 2004) that can be used to show how diversity branding takes shape. This is also in line with recent cross-cultural research on espoused values and underpinned by the importance of values articulation on corporate websites (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Jonsen, Galunic, Weeks, & Braga, 2015). Given that diversity policy is often framed and justified using the language of the business case (Guerrier & Wilson, 2011; Heres & Benschop, 2010), corporate websites highlight this trend across a range of indicators, including better performance, added stakeholder value, enhanced corporate reputation and a better environment (Jonsen et al., 2015; Singh & Point, 2004).

Point and Singh's (2003) comparison across eight countries highlights a divergence in the dimensions of diversity as constructed by European companies on their corporate websites. UK companies promote diversity the most on their websites, covering a broad range of diversity strands (Point & Singh, 2003; Guerrier & Wilson, 2011). However, diversity statements seem to be less developed on Dutch companies' websites (Heres & Benschop, 2010). Another example is that diversity as a competitive advantage discourse is most strongly used in top UK companies, with gender and ethnic diversity most often explicitly addressed. By contrast, the discourse of diversity used in Germany and France is seldom explicitly related to gender and ethnicity, but to cultural and international diversity (Singh & Point, 2006). Similarly, Barbosa and Cabral-Cardoso (2010) analyze websites of companies in Portugal and show how that the equality and diversity messages follow the dominant US discourse of diversity with little adaptation to the local context. In addition, many native companies who largely target the local labor market, do not talk about diversity at all (Barbosa & Cabral-Cardoso, 2010). Thus, companies seem to craft their message to fit the norms of the country in which they want to communicate, and they tailor their messages to fit the typical candidates they are trying to attract (Caligiuri, Colakoglu, Cerdin, & Kim, 2010).

In sum, websites are a key resource for prospective employees to explore potential employers in relation to their diversity and inclusion orientation, yet the literature on human resources has so far not sufficiently researched this field.

Methodology

Official company documents, such as the corporate website, provide solid cues for current and future staff and managers of the organization regarding 'what is important around here,' and electronic storefronts, such as websites, are considered a solid image-building tool for transmitting impressions and influencing visitors and stakeholders (Connoly-Ahern & Broadway, 2007). Corporate websites are thus considered important data sources and a valuable tool for public relations, and effective website communication can provide sustainable competitive advantages in talent recruitment (Gröschl, 2011; Williamson, King, Lepak, & Sarma, 2010).

We explored the official websites of 75 major companies in five different countries (France, Germany, Spain, the UK and the US)[1]. In each country, the companies we selected were among the largest, and they all belong to the top group of their respective national stock exchanges. The amount of diversity information displayed by each company on its website was an important feature in the selection. The lead researcher is proficient in all the four languages of the countries, which proved to be helpful for the collection of documents and the coding of websites. These countries were carefully selected according to their cultural differences and to the way diversity has developed over the last decade: Germany belongs to the Germanic 'model', while France and Spain belong to the Latin European 'model', and the United Kingdom and United States are part of the Anglo-Saxon 'model' (Ronen & Shenkar, 1985). The dissemination and diffusion of diversity in these countries are also specific to the socio-historical power discrepancies of each cultural context, since the concept of diversity has no universal fixed meaning but is contextual, contested and temporal (Tatli, Vassilopoulou, Ariss, & Özbilgin., 2012).

The statements were found on the official corporate websites or official career web pages of the companies under investigation. To assure that no statement was missed, the research included searching through the web pages with the help of search engines; either those integrated into the webpage or other search engines such as Google and Bing. For the search, key terms like 'diversity', 'diverse', 'equal opportunity', 'inclusion', 'differences', 'values', 'equality' etc. were used and generally provided sufficient results. Overall, 110 websites, files and documents from websites, and other related materials were downloaded, converted and stored in PDF format for documentation and further evaluation.

To define and dimensionalize diversity – labeling the dimensions of diversity (Point & Singh, 2003) – the content analysis included a coding of diversity statements. After examining a set of different diversity statements prior to the actual research and drawing on earlier research by Point & Singh (2003), a predefined list was established and later adapted for this specific context. All segments of text were imported into NVivo and coded accordingly[2]. New codes emerged from the data and were added to the tree model.

National contexts

France: In France, questions of equality for women, immigrants and minority ethnic groups are at the forefront of diversity debates (Klarsfeld, Ng, & Tatli, 2012). Diversity is often understood and debated in political and organizational discourses in terms of gender and cultural differences (Point & Singh, 2003). The fact that, historically, diversity has spread simultaneously with mandatory anti-discrimination initiatives launched in the early 2000s (Klarsfeld, 2009) encouraged us to include this country in our sample. Also, most management concerns and many voluntary or mandatory initiatives use both the terms 'diversity' and 'discrimination' simultaneously, 'as if they were two sides of the same coin' (p. 366).

Germany: Unlike France, diversity management seems to have nothing to do with anti-discrimination in Germany (Stringfellow, 2012). Diversity management in German-speaking countries did not take off until the mid-2000s (Süß & Kleiner, 2007) when terms such as 'valuing diversity' and diversity management have increasingly appeared in the debate, as the government attempts to bend the meaning of diversity management toward integration and immigration policies (Tatli et al., 2012). Since then, diversity management has mainly been implemented in large companies operating in Germany. The starting point for diversity management in Germany lies in the discussion of equal opportunities for men and women in work life (Süβ & Kleiner, 2007). Also, as in France, the concept of diversity management is not only applied to the employment sphere but involves broader issues of social integration, particularly concerning ethnicity and race (Tatli et al., 2012).

Spain: In Spain, diversity is managed alongside the different dynamics already existing: the processes of recognition of religious and national diversity (Zapata-Barrero, 2010). Historically, the country's population comprises people from different linguistic, religious and international groups. Zapata-Barrero (2010) points out that multinationalism is a historical dimension of diversity inherent to the identity of Spain. However, immigration flows constitute the new element of diversity in the local population. Therefore, Zapata-Barrero (2010: 396) emphasizes four main types of diversity, three old ones (linguistic, religious, multinational) and one new challenge (immigration) that interact with each other. The 'Practical philosophy' (Zapata-Barrero, 2010) of diversity management, which refers to a way of managing diversity with a close link to the question of immigration (i.e. practical questions generated by the immigration context), makes this country interesting to investigate for our research purpose, in a country where diversity management has been guided by anticipation and proactive policies (Zapata-Barrero, 2010).

The UK: Since the 1990s, diversity management in the United Kingdom has become an increasingly popular approach to the multiple differences within the workforce (Tatli et al., 2012). The labor market has also become increasingly diverse with a rising participation of women and ethnic minorities in the workforce and an ageing population (Klarsfeld, Ng & Tatli, 2012). The business-case arguments and the emphasis on voluntary action, particularly for the private sector, have predominated (Tatli, 2011). In other words, in the United Kingdom, the meaning of diversity management is bent and shrunk to a set of performance-driven business outcomes (Tatli, 2011, Tatli et al., 2012), making this an interesting country to take into consideration for our purpose. However, the discursive break from equal opportunities is not followed by a shift in the practice (Tatli, 2011).

The US: Given the fact that the concept of diversity management originated in the United States, where it has been very popular from the early 1990s (Özbilgin et al., 2015), we also included this country in our sample. In the United States, there is more emphasis on diversity management as an overall strategic direction for organizations (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Diversity management tries to encompass words like pluralism, cultural diversity, intercultural education, and multiculturalism (Thomas, 1990).

Findings

The analysis showed three central elements of diversity and inclusion branding: first, statements were used to attract talent; second, the statements were used to promote the organization as an employer of choice; finally, special attention was paid to the individual diversity dimensions that were perceived as particularly relevant. Before we explain those findings in detail, it is useful to contextualize the findings. It proved common to include a list of dimensions not by which people differ per se but according to which they '*will not be discriminated against*', such as: age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marital and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief or absence of religion or belief; 63 companies (84%) present at least a similar list or enumeration. Some lists focused on the generally best-known dimensions, while other companies provide quite extensive lists. Beyond listing these dimensions, 73% of the companies go well beyond a definition solely based on a record of dimensions and describe in their own words what the meaning of diversity is to their company.

The ranges between the countries' display of diversity dimensions, their presence and the 'variance' indicates that some dimensions are *universally* used, such as gender and disability. At the other end of the spectrum, we find *local* dimensions, some of which are not mentioned at all in at least one of the countries we looked at, such as: language; difference in physical appearance; color; education; social class; family status; political opinion; personality and union affiliation. This perhaps indicates a practice-driven approach to the local versus global tensions (Martin et al., 2011), insofar as local responsiveness is granted for the particular dimensions, whereas the universal legitimacy perspective governs other more global dimensions.

In terms of where the information was presented within the website, almost a third were from about-sites where companies present themselves to a rather broad audience of stakeholders. Another third could be found on career sites or HR sub-pages that addressed employment with the firm. Speaking to both internal employees as well as potential recruits, this indicates that diversity statements are directly involved in the process of approaching talents. Finally, the biggest share of statements was located under corporate social responsibility or corporate value sections for 28 companies (37.3% of our sample). The two target groups were, as expected, employees (61 of the statements) and potential recruits (59). Less common were customers (21), others (17) and suppliers (14).

Attracting talent

Attracting talent was one of the main purposes of the statements displayed on the websites. Danone's statement (below) reflects a representative view of what many companies write about the way they see diversity. On the one hand, there is the respect for differences granted by the company and its environment, but on the other hand, with the help of adequate management, diversity will eventually serve business goals in different ways.

> *Diversity must manifest itself in balance, representativeness, respect and even confrontation… We must be able to evaluate it, measure it, and nurture it. The company must promote diversity as an opportunity everywhere; a source of performance and team agility rather than a regulatory requirement.* Danone (France)

Most companies (88%) name competitive advantages, which they expect to be at least in part dependent on a diverse workforce. The most frequently mentioned is to better address a corporation's diverse customer base.

> *We have to understand and connect with our customers and communities. That means having a diverse group of associates who can represent all people.* Walmart (USA)

Problem-solving, creativity, and innovation was reflected in 50% of the statements. By integrating diversity, corporations hope to profit from the below-surface differences in perspectives, characters and experiences.

> *Our global workforce possesses a unique set of experiences and abilities that are critical to our success. And their passion for innovation helps us maintain our role as a technology leader. We must therefore respect the viewpoints of all our people.* Intel (USA)

A quarter of all companies state that their environment of inclusion and accepting diversity will eventually help all individuals to develop to their fullest potential.

> *IBM has embraced diversity, and it gives opportunities for IBMers and our clients to achieve their full potential.* IBM (USA)

Other arguments are of more general nature and use productivity and efficiency gains as reasons (such benefits were mentioned on 17% of the pages). Other benefits were found but not coded separately due to their scarce appearance; they include flexibility, dynamism, sustainability, mutual learning, and cohesion.

The above examples illustrate that not only the differences themselves are supposed to foster creativity. The inclusion and tolerance of differences is expected to overcome barriers to innovation and creativity.

The shortage of skilled workers is a central argument to engaging in diversity, yet the issue seems to be more crucial for some companies than for others.

> *Considering the increasing shortage of skilled workers […] a workforce with a good mix of ages and cultures is becoming more and more important, as is appropriate representation of women within the company, in leadership positions and in young talent programmes.* BMW (Germany)

Even if in some cases the shortage is less pressing, the underlying commonality among the statements is that it is important to 'stick out' as a distinctive employer and to be open to all kinds of talents, and that diversity and inclusion can help tackle these threats.

Promoting the organization as an employer of choice

It was also common to promote the organization as an employer of choice by invoking diversity and inclusion. References to a positive corporate culture and the objective of being an employer of choice in particular seemed to correspond to the intention of any diversity and inclusion branding strategy. Diversity and inclusion are part of the communication of the organizational culture (Trittin & Schoeneborn, in press).

Compared to their European counterparts, German companies are more likely to embed diversity and inclusion statements in corporate culture and values. Interestingly, 63 companies provide practical examples of how diversity is implemented in their corporate culture. These can take the form of support groups for minorities, career options for women, generational learning programs, and awareness raising events to foster mutual understanding, among others.

Table 1 highlights the diversity and inclusion statements we found combined with perspectives for managing differences. As noted in the literature, French and Spanish companies are more likely to base their diversity statements on anti-discrimination perspectives (Klarsfeld, 2009; Zapata-Barrero, 2010). With the exception of US websites, the term '*equal opportunity*' is included in two-thirds (at least) of the diversity statements. This reinforces the idea exposed in the literature that diversity is not always distinguished from other paradigms such as 'equal

Table 1. Proportion of companies combining diversity statements with other paradigms.

	Antidiscrimination/ prejudice free	Equal opportunity	Inclusion	Fairness	Embedding diversity into corporate culture	Be a better place to work
France	67%(10)	73%(11)	27%(4)	20%(3)	40%(6)	60%(9)
Germany	33%(5)	60%(9)	47%(7)	27%(4)	73%(11)	67%(10)
Spain	60%(9)	87%(13)	0%	7%(1)	7%(1)	20%(3)
UK	27%(4)	87%(13)	80%(12)	40%	60%(9)	53%(8)
US	20%(3)	33%(5)	93%(14)	20%(3)	40%(6)	53%(8)

opportunity' (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Twenty percent of the pages also made direct references to fairness. '*Inclusion*' and '*acceptance*' were found in half of the statements, mainly disclosed by Anglo-Saxon companies. Also, Sanofi's (France) definition of inclusion is to '*successfully activate the attributes that each one of us possesses.*' Confirming previous research, this highlights the trend to use inclusion statements to shift away from diversity, as diversity has tended to shift away from equality in the past (Oswick & Noon, 2014).

We also found numerous examples where diversity is claimed to make a company 'a better place to work.' In particular, the following example by Orange coincides with the way the literature describes the process of employer branding (Backhaus & Tikoo 2004; Berthon et al., 2005): The diversity statements communicate the values embedded within the company to future employees, who will then integrate those values in their working lives, thereby reinforcing the corporate brand.

> *Diversity within the Group is key to help make us a preferred employer and attract new talents. We intend to make equal opportunities a trademark of its social policy from the recruitment stage and throughout its employees' working lives.* Orange (France)

Dimensionalizing diversity

It is also common to dimensionalize diversity by pointing to specific diversity dimensions. Here, the focus is much less on inclusion but rather on emphasizing different diversity dimensions that are perceived to be particularly important for the organization. The dimensions that companies use to define diversity can be categorized according to two main categories presented in the literature review. These include, on the one hand, readily detectable and visible differences, and on the other hand deep-level-dimensions (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). While the surface-level diversity dimensions are often clearly defined in websites, the list of below-surface dimensions is quite extensive and has therefore been organized into subgroups, as seen in Table 2. However, excluding geographic differences such as nationality and culture, surface level and below surface-level dimensions were mentioned equally often.

Table 2. Disclosure of each diversity dimension per country.

	D	UK	FR	US	SP	TOTAL
Visible differences						
Gender	100%	100%	100%	93%	73%	**93%**
Disability	67%	60%	80%	60%	60%	**65%**
Age	93%	73%	60%	27%	47%	**60%**
Race/ethnicity	33%	87%	33%	67%	40%	**52%**
Color	7%	13%	0%	20%	7%	**9%**
Difference in physical appearance	7%	13%	0%	13%	0%	**7%**
Geographic differences						
Nationality	80%	53%	60%	40%	60%	**59%**
Culture	73%	27%	47%	67%	20%	**47%**
Language	0%	20%	7%	7%	33%	**13%**
Education & professional background						
Experience	40%	47%	13%	47%	7%	**31%**
Profession/skills	47%	40%	13%	40%	0%	**28%**
General background	20%	40%	7%	47%	13%	**25%**
Education	20%	13%	7%	7%	0%	**9%**
Family situation						
Sexual orientation	33%	80%	27%	67%	27%	**47%**
Parental status	27%	27%	40%	7%	20%	**24%**
Social class/caste	13%	0%	20%	0%	27%	**12%**
Family status	7%	13%	7%	0%	20%	**9%**
Opinions & beliefs						
Religion	33%	67%	20%	20%	40%	**36%**
Perspective/point of view	33%	33%	0%	40%	0%	**21%**
Thinking types	27%	33%	7%	20%	0%	**17%**
Political opinion	0%	20%	0%	0%	20%	**8%**
Personality/character	7%	7%	0%	13%	0%	**5%**
Union affiliation	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%	**1%**

(NB! The percentages are based on a sample of 15 per country)

Branding gender

Overall and among all dimensions, the most often stated issue is *gender* (93%). It is mentioned on 70 of the 75 websites in our sample (and is generally also included in the shortest of the statements). Gender statements are often used to state objectives of increasing the share of women in the workforce and management, or to promote gender equality.

> *We are dedicated to increasing the number of women in managing positions to 25%.* Munich RE (Germany)

> *Promote gender parity in all roles within the Group and especially in technical roles […] ensuring equal pay.* Orange (France).

Except for Spain, all companies mention gender in their diversity statements. This is perhaps surprising since the issue of gender equality has risen on the Spanish political agenda. Yet, this lower rate for Spanish companies might be explained by the employment rate of women, which is lower in Spain than the EU average as is women working part-time (European Commission, 2012). The European Commission highlights that part-time, horizontal as well as vertical segregations, may hurt access to the talent pool. Moreover, there is no evidence of spillover between governmental/political gender diversity and diversity in commercial organizations.

Branding disability

Physical ability, handicaps, or simply disability is the second most frequently listed dimension among visible differences. Sixty-five percent of the companies mention it and often name concrete measures to promote awareness as well as the inclusion of people with disabilities. French companies disclose more statements than any other country in our sample, presumably because disability employment is a legal issue: large companies must hire 6% of disabled workers otherwise they are financially penalized by having to pay a contribution fee to a specific organization. Indeed, most French companies report action plans for the disabled given that the financial threat for not complying with rules governing disability is high when companies do not reach the desired quota of 6% (Klarsfeld, 2009). Therefore, ‘a fine of about €5,000 per worker (or €15,000 if no disabled person is employed at all) is levied for missing the 6% ‘quota’ for disabled workers, unless a firm undertakes a program to hire disabled workers” (Klarsfeld, Ng & Tatli, 2012: 315). A similar process is in place in Germany.

Website statements are mostly about being a responsible employer that does not differentiate based on physical abilities. For instance, Lloyds Bank (UK) states on its website:

> *… it is society not disability that creates barriers for disabled people.*

Branding age

With demographic changes impacting the workforce composition, generation issues and age are also among the most often mentioned dimensions. Germany, which is heavily affected by low birth rates and a shrinking workforce, integrates this issue in its diversity statements, with almost all companies disclosing such statements. The workforce structure in German companies shows differences from other countries, mainly based on the demographic development and the increasing significance of older employees (Süβ & Kleiner, 2007). At the other end of the scale, young people have been particularly affected by high unemployment (Stringfellow, 2012). Therefore, a specific discourse on aging can bring companies to highlight employment opportunities for people from different generations. According to Bayer (Germany), these demographic changes “*involve opportunities and risks.*” The mix of generations is acknowledged as an added value in most statements.

> *Young employees can benefit from the experience and knowledge of their older colleagues.* Henkel (Germany)

> *We harness the talent of our youngest employees and see the rest of our employees' experience as added value.* Repsol (Spain)

Even if the 'graying workforce' in the United States (and Baby Boomers retiring) is recognized as a key change in the future (Hedge, Borman, & Lammlein, 2006), the age dimension seems of less importance for US companies, with only a third of the companies listing it.

Branding ethnicity and race

Ethnicity and race, including analogous notions of minorities, are most likely to be cited by US (67%) and UK (87%) companies. Although the history of colonialism, and feminist and race equality movements are important in understanding the context of the regulation of diversity in the United Kingdom, recent cases put the issue of race and ethnicity at the forefront of the diversity debate (Tatli et al., 2012). It is then common to list corporate associations and networks for minorities that help to integrate a diverse range of ethnicities and races. BP, for example, presents employee networks to foster its diversity objectives for a wide range of minorities such as employees of Asian and African descent. Lloyds Bank, aside from offering support groups for ethnic minorities, also offers an ethnic minority mentoring program. Both the notions of 'race' and 'ethnicity' may be less used in other European countries because it resonates strongly with the term 'Rasse' used by Nazism to define racial superiority and inferiority.

Branding color and physical appearance

The other two visible dimensions included in the coding, people of color (appearing seven times, mainly on Anglo-Saxon websites) and physical appearance, are, seemingly, of less importance. Reporting on visible minorities is less adopted among French companies than reporting on the other dimensions of diversity that we examined, presumably because counting ethnic diversity is prohibited by French law, and gives way to employers taking considerable precautions (Klarsfeld, 2009). Therefore, it is illegal to distinguish, between people according to specific traits such as color, since this is deemed inconsistent with the republican model, which insists on the undifferentiated status of all citizens (Tatli et al., 2012).

Branding nationality, country of origin and culture

Nationality or country of origin and culture are dimensions that affect international and global companies, and business in general (Schneider, Barsoux & Stahl, 2014). Consequently, it does not come as a surprise, that at least one of these geographically bounded dimensions is mentioned on more than 90% of the sites. Yet, even though nationality is integrated in more than half of the statements, it is rarely defined and usually either solely included in a list of dimensions or presented with figures on the internationality of the firm and its employees

> *A German company with an international team: In 2011, over 70 percent of senior managers at Linde were from countries other than Germany, representing over 40 different nations in total.* Linde (Germany)

Nationality is less emphasized on US websites than on European ones. This could stem from the open labor market within the European Union in which companies also try to address global workers, which could in turn help them to better address their multinational customer bases. However, culture is a term with various meanings, sometimes interchangeably used with geographic references such as nationality, country of origin and local origin.

Our results also reinforce that there is no discourse on identity or on multiculturality in Spain (Zapata-Barrero, 2010). Furthermore, the word ‘multiculturalism’ is rarely used. This might explain why so few Spanish companies mention cultural diversity on their websites. By contrast, Spanish companies disclose the most about language.

Branding knowledge, education, professional skills and experience

Diversity in knowledge, education, professional skills and experience are not mentioned as often as more visible differences. About a quarter to a third of the companies explicitly search for diversity in experience, skill and general background. Education as a dimension is only mentioned in 9% of the cases. Nevertheless, at least one of the four dimensions is included in 50% of companies’ definitions of diversity and 33% even name at least two of them (mostly German, UK and US companies).

> *To master these [challenges], we rely on our employees and their different skills, levels of experience and perspectives. We put together highly diverse teams that complement each other across our entire workforce.* E-ON (Germany)

Branding social classes, parental status, sexual orientation and family status

The family situation category covers other topics such as social classes, parental status, sexual orientation and family status. More common are references to being inclusive irrespective of parental status and family status, except in the United States. French companies in particular address intentions to integrate working parents into their businesses. One explanation could be the proactive approach from a political side: For example, L'Oréal, BNP and Total, among others, are signatories to the French Corporate Parenthood Charter, which states its mission to facilitate the balance between family and career. Other approaches are, for example: Flexible working hours for the 'improvement of the compatibility of family life and work' (Deutsche Bank) and continued annual salary increases despite maternity leave. Looking at both the family status and parental status taken together, roughly one-third of all companies integrate such considerations into their online presence.

Sexual orientation is the most frequently quoted dimension in the family situation category, and the key single aspect in which Anglo-Saxon companies were found to be inclusive, particularly in terms of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender) groups. Yet, few companies give examples of how their promise of not discriminating is further implemented in daily life. One example is Lloyds Bank (UK), which underlines its commitment to sexual diversity by promising the same entitlements, policies and benefits for employees in same-sex relationships as to their heterosexual colleagues.

Branding religion, different perspectives, points of view, thinking types, and personalities

Opinions and beliefs statements are rarely disclosed on websites, where different perspectives, points of view, thinking types, and personalities are related to the business case:

> *Diversity is valued because it is about diverse perspectives and approaches brought by employees from diverse backgrounds, which is crucial to our business results.* Allianz (France)

Religion – also part of this subgroup – stands out for having the most references in the subgroup, presumably because it is the most likely to be considered as the basis for discrimination, and is thus included in lists with dimensions that will not be discriminated against. HSBC Holdings (UK) is one of the few companies presenting an example of how religious diversity in its workforce helps its business by serving customers who are:

> *… looking for financial products compliant with their religious beliefs.*

Finally, dimensions were not included in the above results; due to their scarcity: 'military status' and 'smoking habits', although some countries have applied, at certain times, preferential treatment for veterans (e.g. Veterans Preference Act, 1944). Almost half of the US companies include military experience, veteran support and the like in their diversity statements. Another unusual item was found in British American Tobacco's statement, guaranteeing not to hire or promote based on differences in smoking habits.

Discussion

The aim of this article is to provide an analysis of how diversity and inclusion branding is used by organizations in different countries and to relate this to previous multidisciplinary research and noted contradictions. The article has thus far highlighted that organizations use diversity and inclusion branding to first attract talent, second appear as an employer of choice and third stress specific diversity dimensions that are perceived as particularly relevant. The concept of diversity, as disclosed in corporate websites, has been widely explored for over a decade, yet, to our knowledge, no study has explored diversity and inclusion branding across countries, perhaps because corporate branding *per se* is rooted in the marketing discipline (Ambler & Barrow, 1996; Balmer, 1995; Moroko & Uncles, 2008). We have coded and organized diversity and inclusion statements according to functional and dimensional characteristics, which may serve as guidance and inspiration for the diversity branding discourse in organizations, and may also respond to calls from scholars (Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Williamson et al., 2008, 2010) that more insights are needed in terms of how diversity practices are justified and espoused by employers (potential and actual). Adding to existing research, we offer a comparison drawing a sample from 75 companies in five different countries. This provides a unique comparative overview of what corporations mention in different countries, vis-à-vis diversity broken down into: visible differences; geographical differences; educational and professional background; family situation; opinions and beliefs.

Companies can benefit from our findings and suggestions in their strategic hiring process and talent management, perhaps with one caveat in mind: There is a risk related to espoused values that institutional behavior (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991) – mimetic forces in particular – reduces the variance between company statements and creates a similar use of buzz words across countries, companies and industries. A great deal of similarities across nations was indeed noticeable, nevertheless, and thus, we cannot dismiss the labeling of diversity branding as a 'global business rooted in business systems that have only little geographical presence.' This fits the recommendations of McKinsey & Co to take a global view on talent, in order to win the talent war even in local markets (Pettigrew

& Srinivasan, 2012). However, ‘copy-catting’ may not take place in all sectors, for example companies in the hospitality sector are more reluctant to display the business case of diversity online (Gröschl, 2011), and firms may be exposed to different sets of institutional logics and practices over time.

In a global marketplace, the strategic approach to branding raises a dilemma: The logic of distinctiveness and local adaptability versus global standards and legitimacy (Martin et al. 2011). Our results indeed suggest mimetic approaches at a national level and across countries; in which companies disclose similar dimensions. However, some companies (more likely to be headquartered in the UK) embrace as many dimensions as possible to address a value proposition to a widely diverse and different employee group. This is in line with recent findings on espoused values by Jonsen et al. (2015) and also reflects the importance of national diversity and anti-discrimination legislation (for discussions, please also see Özbilgin et al., 2015; Kirton & Greene, 2015). Our results indicate that the aim of distinctiveness – in regard to diversity or inclusion branding – relies mainly on ‘family situation,’ ‘religion’ and ‘opinion and beliefs’ disclosures. As such, we see that most dimensions converge over geographies and there is a tendency to display many of the same values.

Isomorphism and institutional pressures might encourage companies to promote a converging diversity branding: some dimensions are universal and call for a global statement. By contrast, many dimensions of diversity are clearly ‘country oriented’ or ‘cultural oriented’ (Point & Singh, 2003). Given the fact that companies promoting diversity have a variety of legitimacy-enhancing features (Singh & Point, 2009), branding diversity calls for ‘pragmatic legitimacy,’ by valuing the benefit of diversity for organizations. According to these authors, some countries are more likely to emphasize pragmatic legitimacy like Germany and the United Kingdom.

Moreover, local specificities remain dependent on the cultural and legal context in each country. For instance, in the French conception secularism (the so-called laïcité), religion is a private matter and should not interfere with people’s freedom of beliefs and with the laws of the Republic (Bender, Klarsfeld & Laufer, 2014). According to Tatli et al. (2012: 299), ‘the processes of bending, shrinking and stretching the meaning of diversity are still based on a strong association between diversity, integration and immigration.’ Therefore, dimensions like ‘Ethnicity,’ nationality and ‘race’ are covered under the ‘umbrella’ equality legislation upon which the French model of ‘equality’ is based (Bender, Klarsfeld & Laufer, 2014).

Future employees are a clearly targeted audience in a diversity branding strategy, given that a third of diversity statements are published on the Careers and Human Resources pages of company websites. If the way diversity is promoted and valued on websites influences the perception of the audience (Braddy et al., 2006), diversity branding plays a key role in the HR communication process. Previous research claims that diversity statements influence audience perceptions (Braddy et al., 2006) or are used in symbolic ways to attract various types of legitimacy (Singh & Point, 2009). In their research, Singh and Point (2009) show partial support for the institutional perspective while emphasizing companies' legitimacy to be able to deal with the challenges of diversity in a global world. Social legitimacy is increased by mimetic institutional pressures to copy others' strategies and values (Martin et al. 2011), but contradicts the need for distinctiveness rooted in employer branding.

Our results may have several implications in terms of HR: first, diversity and inclusion statements – even if they are just window dressing – can be important for the strategic hiring process and talent management since they can greatly influence the audience; second, employers praise inclusion to underline an environment in which fairness is important and where everybody feels valued and well treated.

The first contribution of this paper is as a comparison with similar studies performed a decade ago. Compared with previous work by Point & Singh (2003), substantially more statements were found on corporate websites. Diversity and inclusion has become mainstream. Moreover, all companies mention at least a few words about the diversity of their employees. In the early 2000s, only half of European companies included the term diversity in their websites (Point & Singh, 2003). This clearly shows that over the years diversity has become an issue that websites address. Gender (not multiculturalism) is currently the most widely discussed dimension compared with one decade ago (see Singh & Point, 2006). Age and disability are also widely mentioned nowadays in comparison with previous work (e.g. Point & Singh, 2003). This relates to the descriptive part of this paper, namely a country comparison as a timely documentation of how diversity is espoused and branded by practitioners. This can guide global organizations with regard to 'what is done' in different countries, whether they play catch-up or try to differentiate themselves from competitors. It can also inspire organizations to 'up their game' in terms of inclusion, and become more explicit about it, in order to become the employer of choice – which may particularly appeal to millennials who increasingly expect diversity and inclusion from their employers (Kelan, 2012; Ng et al., 2010). There might also be other areas where this comparison can help organizations prepare for the future. For example, although American corporations have been leading the way in terms of diversity and inclusion practices, we can observe areas such as parental status, family status and social class (even if the sample is small), where European organizations have, we reckon, more experience and therefore espouse it in order to gain competitive advantages.

Second, in order to avoid the risk of becoming an eternal 'poor cousin' to CSR (or other areas), diversity and its management can and should increasingly stand on its own feet in the move toward the inclusion of inclusion. The field needs to develop its own agenda rather than emulating and being subsumed under CSR, which is not only somewhat ill-defined but also has complications and 'baggage' insofar as what is socially responsible to some may be irresponsible to others (Armstrong & Green, 2013). As the field matures, and based on our literature review and findings, we propose that in the context of human resources, diversity and inclusion branding can be best used to attract a wide range of talent by stressing the relationship between diversity and talent and by talking about specific diversity dimensions. Inclusion branding can be particularly beneficial to become an employer of choice (see Figure 1). This is perhaps a remedy to ease the earlier noted contraction of employer branding versus diversity (Edwards & Kelan, 2011). Thus, if employers focus solely on diversity this may still run against homogenous and integrated corporate branding. When organizations focus on inclusion, however, this pertains well to the important role of company culture within corporate employer branding (Balmer, 2013; Punjaisri & Wilson, 2017; Sparrow et al., 2011). We therefore suggest that diversity and inclusion branding can overcome the contradiction between the homogeneity required by employer branding and the heterogeneity required by diversity, by focusing on employer branding, which stresses that different individuals are creating something together and are thus included. This chimes with the definitions of diversity and inclusion used by Roberson (2006) in her seminal work.

Diversity branding helps stakeholders (including potential employees) to put a stick in the ground to show an organization's commitment to diversity, as opposed to inclusion branding, which may increasingly help attract talent for whom an inclusive culture matters, and thus become an employer of choice. In other words, companies need to be on the radar of potential employees (talent) to enter the selection process in the first place, and diversity branding seems ideal for that. In our analysis, Spanish and French companies were more likely to favor branding diversity. By contrast, US and UK companies were more likely to focus on inclusion branding. In order to progress in the selection process and be

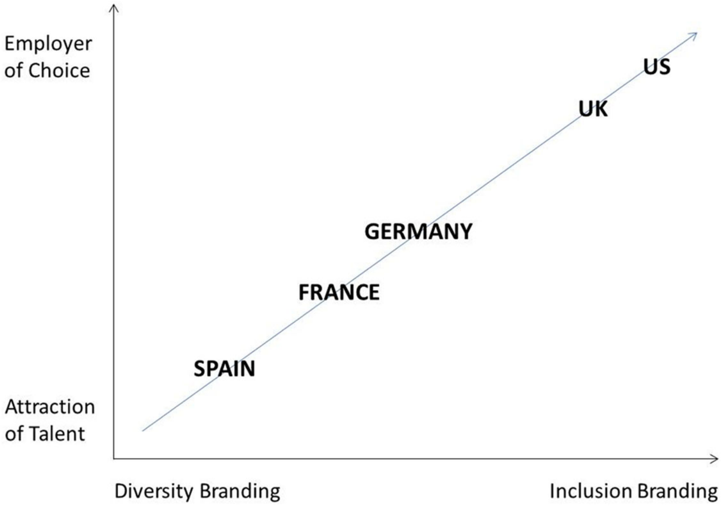

Figure 1. Companies in countries moving from diversity branding to inclusion branding enabling them to capitalize on their branding as an employer of choice.

chosen by potential candidates as an organization to work for, there is a need to show commitment to inclusion in the culture (and key values) of the organization. In this light, our sample shows that companies in Latin regions may need to give more strategic importance to website branding, vis-à-vis their Anglo-American counterparts if they wish to use electronic tolls, such as websites, to become the employer of choice (thus, we must emphasize that the positions of the countries in Figure 1 do not represent 'good' or 'bad'). Importantly, in Figure 1, we consider inclusion as an evolution of diversity with regard to branding strategies, activities and 'maturity' of the organization, and employer of choice as an evolution of attracting talent.

This also relates to what aspect of diversity and inclusion branding is stressed: diversity, inclusion or both. Seen through the lens of an inclusion perspective (Shore et al., 2009), our results highlight that some companies display an open and tolerant corporate culture with the objective of becoming an employer of choice. In other words, aspirations written into diversity and inclusion statements to be an employer of choice, as well as presentations of certificates and awards, further support the conclusion that diversity and inclusion statements are a means of employer branding and a communication channel to internal as well as external recruits. These types of discourses also encourage the expected shift from diversity toward inclusion (Mitchell et al., 2015; Oswick & Noon, 2014; Theodorakopoulos & Budhwar, 2015), a shift that should promote a great work environment (e.g. to attract talents), yet, globally speaking, corporate websites still seem to focus significantly more on diversity aspects than inclusion.

As a limitation to this research, the small number of 15 companies per country is not sufficient to support testing of hypothetical differences between the countries, thus we have not done so. Bigger samples should be used to support (or disconfirm) our findings. Due to the size of the firms, empirical results will not necessarily provide a realistic representation of the overall business sector of a country. However, these big international companies are at the forefront in the fight for a broad spectrum of the best talents. It is likely that in many areas they even compete for the same pool of talent on a global scale and therefore should be a relevant and comprehensive source of information.

Importantly, we have not dealt with any potential 'values gaps' between what companies say and what they do, that is authenticity (Cording et al., 2014). We must critically acknowledge that 'the reality is not necessarily that of appearance' in the context of diversity management (Schwabenland & Tomlinson, 2015: 1930), that there is a sender bias (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011), and that the perceptions of the people involved, minorities in particular, may vary widely between people and groups, vis-à-vis what is publicly communicated – thus a lack of multiplicity of voices (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011). How included those diverse individuals feel is rarely addressed in research (Edwards & Kelan, 2011) and the diversity climate rarely measured (McKay & Avery, 2015). It is also rarely explored whether potential employees feel attracted by those diversity and inclusion statements (Ng et al., 2010).

Our research has shown that the corporate brand dimension affords a lot of scope for further research in human resources management in general and in diversity and inclusion in specific. Future research should examine the territory between 'true intention' and pure 'impression management.' When about a third of German, French, and US corporations have more 'idealistic' connotations, describing it as their responsibility toward society to include all types of people (which leads to promote inclusion, Oswick, 2001), this shift from diversity to inclusion might constitute only a change in language rather than any material change in diversity management practices (Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Roberson, 2006), as organizations bow to normative pressures and political correctness (Goncalo et al., 2015).

Future research could also explore the existing tension between global and local values in large companies (Martin et al., 2011). We have indicated that organizations often copy one another at a global level but that a logic of distinctiveness is supported by disclosing specific elements of diversity such as family situation or opinion and beliefs. It would be valuable to explore what is espoused in the context of the relationship between headquarters and subsidiaries, which could potentially lead to a ‘think global, brand local’ approach: a global diversity strategy ensures that a clear and consistent message is used across the world, yet adapted to local specificities of diversity.

Notes

1. The full list is available from the authors.
2. Coding tree available from authors.

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