Diversity on Display? Internal and External Coherence in DEI Communication Among Leading Companies in Italy

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Abstract

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) have become important topics for corporate reputation and employee engagement. However, DEI communication can expose organizations to reputational risks when customers perceive a misalignment between words and actions. This study investigates how the 20 most virtuous companies operating in Italy — recognized as Best Workplaces for DEI by Great Place to Work in 2024 — communicate their DEI commitments across different external channels that include LinkedIn, their corporate websites and CSR reports. Employee perceptions were analyzed using Glassdoor reviews. The study aimed to evaluate the consistency, authenticity and strategic integration of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) messaging, and to examine its relationship with employees' perceptions. The analysis emphasizes the importance of consistency across channels, inclusive language and credible storytelling, while highlighting the limitations of performative communication. The combination of qualitative analysis and content comparison made it possible to assess the effectiveness and internal consistency of DEI communication. The results only partially confirm the five hypotheses drawn from the existing literature. In fact, multichannel integration and storytelling can improve the credibility of communication, but this is not always reflected in organizational practice. The analysis also identified a pool of companies that adopt a low-profile strategy, i.e., they decide to communicate little on these issues despite DEI values being an integral part of their organizational culture. This suggests a strategy that embodies the tension between protecting reputation and meeting the demand for transparency from target audiences.

This study contributes to DEI communication research by integrating discursive, strategic and perceptual dimensions.

Keywords: DEI, DEI communication, Italian companies, Great Place to Work, authenticity, organizational identity, employee perception, employee satisfaction

1. Introduction

In the first few months of Donald Trump's second US administration, there was much talk of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). The concept was accompanied by fierce criticism, which led to significant cuts in DEI programs (Ng et al. 2025, White House, 2025).

However, the promotion of diversity, equity, and non-discrimination is a fundamental principle of human rights (United Nations General Assembly, 2015) and is recognized as one of the guiding values of the European Union (EU, 2024). The approach adopted by European and international legislators therefore differs greatly from the divisive rhetoric described in recent months by the US government; rather, it moves towards an inclusive conception of organizations, as proposed by Shore et al. (2011), who describe inclusion as a process in which "individuals are treated as insiders in the work group when they conform to organizational/dominant culture norms and downplay uniqueness." What the authors and legislators describe, therefore, is a way to promote talent in a supportive organizational environment in which everyone can fully express themselves. This polarized landscape raises a key question for contemporary organizations: how to communicate DEI authentically and effectively, without risking reputational backlash or being accused of 'diversity washing.'

From a business perspective, DEI represents a real competitive advantage (Bourke, 2018; Gallup, 2022). A study by McKinsey & Company (2023) found that companies with greater gender and ethnic diversity in their management teams are more likely to achieve better financial results than their less diverse counterparts, showing that diverse and inclusive organizations tend to be more innovative and perform better. Diversity of perspectives and experiences stimulates creativity and problem-solving, resulting in improved decision-making and stronger results (Hundschell et al., 2021). Companies with a strong DEI culture are able to attract and retain the best talent, thereby increasing their competitiveness in the market (Deloitte, 2024; Seijts and Milani, 2022). DEI, therefore, is not only an ethical principle but also a crucial strategic factor that contributes to the success and sustainability of the organization. Adopting this kind of DEI practices can improve business performance, employee satisfaction, reputation, and innovation, thereby creating a more equitable and productive work environment (Ferraro et al., 2023).

Thanks to the literature review and the empirical analysis of collected data, a framework to guide companies in DEI communication was developed with a specific focus on the authenticity and effectiveness of communication strategies.

This study focuses on the top 20 Italian companies included in the 2024 Best Workplaces for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion ranking (Great Place to Work Italy, 2024). Organizations were selected based on the following criteria: a minimum of 50 employees and past collaboration with Great Place to Work between 1 May 2023 and 15 April 2024. The ranking is constructed using 25 items from the Trust Index questionnaire to evaluate the experiences of individuals belonging to four key demographic categories: organizational level, gender, age, and contractual status (full-time/part-time). These items were used to calculate the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Index, which determines each company's position in the ranking.

This study begins with a review of the literature aimed at identifying the key variables for constructing an effective DEI message. Then, the Great Place to Work Diversity, Equity and Inclusion ranking (2024) made it possible to identify the twenty companies to focus on for analysis. External communication, company websites, LinkedIn profiles and the content of sustainability reports (CSR) were taken into consideration to enrich the analysis and provide a more complete overview. Finally,

an assessment of the consistency between the stated message and internal perception was conducted by analyzing employee opinions published on the Glassdoor platform. The present study has some contextual and methodological limitations such as the companies' location (Italy), the period examined (1 year) and the lack of impact measurements such as retention or internal demographics.

2. Review of the literature

The growing importance of DEI issues within corporate strategies has stimulated considerable scientific research aimed at investigating how organizations communicate their DEI commitment to external stakeholders. On the one hand, DEI communication is a key strategic tool for building a company's reputation, brand identity, and stakeholder trust. On the other hand, it raises significant concerns for companies and may lead them to refrain from communicating their initiatives in order to avoid backfire phenomena (Illia et al., 2013; Baker et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2024).

2.1 Channels

Companies that decide to communicate their DEI commitment do so through various channels. The most common include:

Institutional websites, where DEI policies, employee testimonials, and measurable results are often found in the 'about us' or 'social responsibility' section (Mundy, 2019; Ravazzani et al., 2023);

ESG or CSR reports, which are formal tools for communicating DEI practices and metrics (Gray et al., 1995; Adams, 2002);

Social media platforms, which enable participatory and narrative communication through visual campaigns and storytelling (Verk, 2021) and promote dialogue and inclusion (Boulouta & Pitelis, 2014);

Public events and partnerships, such as participation in Pride or adherence to the Diversity Charter (Noh et al., 2024).

Integrating different types of channels helps to make communication more effective and credible (Judd & McKinnon, 2021).

One of the essential prerequisites for effective DEI communication is segmenting the target audience in order to tailor messages to the needs and expectations of different stakeholders by focusing on a specific audience (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Ozdemir et al. 2023). In particular, some studies show that each group experiences exclusion and inclusion in different ways and, therefore, a highly personalized message is needed on these issues (Nishii & Leroy 2022; Holvino et al., 2004). In any case, the content of the DEI message must be clear, consistent, and transparent (Alhouti et al., 2016) because this increases the value of authentic storytelling (Pless & Maak, 2004).

2.2 Content

Regarding content, personal stories and testimonials are powerful tools that reinforce the credibility of a company's perceived commitment to DEI (Byrne, 2022), while consumer-facing brands that integrate DEI narratives into their strategic messaging, especially when they highlight employee voices, tend to be perceived more positively (Mills Cox, 2025).

In fact, in the contemporary context of corporate communication, employees are no longer simply an internal audience of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policies, but are emerging as key players in

the co-construction of the company's reputation and public identity. In this sense, the literature is increasingly emphasizing the active role of workers in shaping the organization's external perception, particularly through individual and collective narratives, articulated across various formal and informal communication channels (Bisel, 2010; Frandsen & Johansen, 2011). On these occasions, their testimonies are perceived as more authentic by other users and therefore not only enrich the narrative but also legitimize it. However, when the aspirational image does not correspond to the internal reality, the risk of backlash increases (Walwema & Bay, 2023). Other studies show that the dissonance between institutional narratives and the daily experiences of employees can trigger skepticism, even accusations of diversity washing (Nishii, 2013; Baker et al., 2022).

The content of the message, which must be clear, transparent, and consistent with corporate values and other initiatives, is another important element. In particular, it is fundamental to pay attention to this aspect to avoid reputational damage caused by accusations of 'greenwashing' or 'diversity-washing', eroding the organization's credibility and reducing stakeholder engagement (Baker et al., 2022). In addition, messages must be emotionally engaging, capable of evoking positive emotions and building a strong bond with stakeholders. The importance of telling authentic and personal stories to enhance the perception of these initiatives and strengthen the emotional connection with the public has been emphasized in recent research (Pless & Maak, 2004, 2019). Moreover, transparency and consistency in DEI messaging are considered essential to avoid accusations of hypocrisy and to maintain stakeholder trust (Byrne, 2022).

To summarise, the authenticity and credibility of the organization are fundamental to the success of these strategic initiatives. To this end, companies can use testimonials and real stories (Ferdman & Deane 2014) or obtain certifications from recognized bodies (McCandless et al., 2022).

Precisely because of the reputational problems that miscommunication in the DEI field can cause, it is advisable for organizations to continuously monitor their communications. This ensures that the organization's public image remains aligned with its values and actions (Avery & McKay, 2010).

2.3 Language

Another important point to consider in DEI communication is language, whose terms must be chosen carefully and represent elements of justice in themselves (Williams, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2020). In the corporate sphere, language can build or inhibit the participation of represented groups; therefore, adopting inclusive pronouns, non-binary identity references, and giving space to marginal narratives avoids tokenism and supports equity. The need to adapt messages to the local cultural context, paying attention not only to language but also to visual choices, has been highlighted in recent literature (Wolfgruber et al., 2022; Walwema & Bay, 2023).

2.4 Feedback

Feedback from the public also plays an essential role in analyzing the effectiveness of communication strategies, as collecting and analyzing feedback provides a better understanding of public perceptions and reactions. This input helps to adapt strategies based on the results obtained, thus ensuring the success of DEI initiatives (Nishii & Leroy, 2022; Nishii, 2013). Furthermore, creating structured feedback mechanisms enables open and constructive dialogue between the organization and its stakeholders (Podsiadlowski et al., 2013). Scholars (Bernstein et al., 2020; Kaplan and Donovan, 2016) support the idea that responding quickly to feedback and adapting strategies accordingly can increase stakeholder trust and engagement, improving the perception of DEI initiatives.

2.5 Communication in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In summary, the literature review identified the following variables as most important for the implementation of effective DEI communication strategies:

Clarity and consistency of messages to reinforce the perception of authenticity and facilitate understanding of DEI values while avoiding ambiguities that can lead to mistrust or accusations of 'diversity washing' (Alhouti et al., 2016; Baker et al., 2022).

Perceived authenticity as an increasingly important aspect (Illia et al., 2025) in the construction of social messages, which can be aided by the contribution of personal narratives from different stakeholders (Pless & Maak, 2004; Byrne, 2022).

The appropriateness of communication channels, which should integrate different platforms to improve coverage and engagement (Judd & McKinnon, 2021).

Adaptation to the target audience is also important, as DEI communication is most effective when it is targeted and sensitive to the specificities of the audience (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Nishii & Leroy, 2022). In particular, different represented groups need personalised, inclusive, and sensitive language (Nguyen et al. 2020; Williams, 2023) in order to strengthen identification and avoid tokenism.

The presence of metrics and verifiable quantitative data reinforce the credibility of the DEI message and demonstrate a concrete commitment (Gray et al., 1995; Adams, 2002).

Stakeholder engagement and feedback allow strategic adjustments and strengthen engagement (Nishii, 2013; Podsiadlowski et al., 2013).

Reputation and media coverage are important because public perception of DEI commitment influences the legitimacy and effectiveness of communication (Avery & McKay, 2010).

2.6 The strategy of silence

Alongside explicit and proactive forms of communication, a strategic silence is emerging in corporate communication processes, particularly on reputationally sensitive issues such as diversity, equity, and inclusion. In certain political and cultural contexts, companies may deliberately choose not to expose themselves publicly, or to adopt a muted communication strategy, in order to avoid the risk of backlash, media controversy, or polarizing reactions from stakeholders (Crane & Glozer, 2016; Illia et al., 2013). Silence, in this sense, is not an absence of communication, but rather a deliberate form of organizational identity and reputation management. This strategy is particularly evident in socio-political contexts perceived as hostile or polarized, where the adoption of an explicit DEI narrative can generate accusations of ideologization or unsolicited activism. Some organizations, while pursuing concrete inclusion and diversity initiatives, prefer not to emphasize them in public channels, opting for a low-profile communication strategy or focusing on technical, neutral, or low-visibility language (Walwema & Bay, 2024). In these cases, the choice of silence is a form of risk-averse DEI communication (Berkelaar et al., 2022), aimed at preserving reputational capital by avoiding exposure on divisive value issues. However, this strategy can have ambivalent consequences: while it reduces the immediate risk of negative reactions, it can compromise the perception of authenticity and transparency, making the involvement of internal and external stakeholders less effective (Pless & Maak, 2004; Nishii, 2013). For this reason, balancing visibility and caution is one of the main challenges in contemporary DEI communication today.

It is important to emphasize that the early months of 2025 have been particularly significant for diversity, equity and inclusion matters. Following the US elections in 2025 and the inauguration of the Trump administration, DEI began to polarize public debate, even in Europe. To understand the influence of these events, an exploratory analysis was conducted using Media Cloud, focusing on content published from January 2025 onwards. It was found that newspapers published a significantly higher number of articles than in previous years: the word 'DEI' was mentioned 1,750 times in January 2025, which is a 90% increase compared to all previous years (average 912). However, this greater visibility is not matched by more articulated content because most of the articles are generic and lack focus on specific initiatives (e.g. gender gap, disability, generational inclusion, etc.). The aim of this study is to understand whether Italian companies have reacted to this new context by aligning with American positions on DEI.

According to the literature review presented, and considering this scenario the following research question is raised:

How do these companies communicate their commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) through external channels, and how consistent is this communication with employees' internal perceptions?

To answer this question, the study analyzed whether:

H1. Employees perceive companies that communicate DEI issues clearly, consistently, and authentically more positively.

H2. Personal testimonials, storytelling and concrete data posted on LinkedIn and corporate websites are associated with highly credible DEI communication.

H3. Companies with greater variety and integration of channels (e.g., LinkedIn, website, CSR) communicate their DEI commitment more effectively.

H4. There is a significant discrepancy between external DEI narratives (e.g. LinkedIn and websites) and internal employee perceptions, particularly in cases of 'diversity washing.'

H5. Companies that use inclusive language adapted to the Italian cultural context in their social media posts achieve higher digital engagement (e.g. more likes and shares on LinkedIn).

3. Methodology

In terms of methodology, the research takes a qualitative, multi-case approach, based on a sample of twenty Italian companies that were classified as 'Best Workplaces for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion' in Italy by Great Place to Work in 2024. Specifically, the ranking includes companies operating in Italy with at least 50 employees that collaborated with Great Place to Work between 1 May 2023 and 15 April 2024.

The websites, LinkedIn pages, CSR reports, internal policy documents, and Glassdoor reviews of these companies were examined. The inclusion of multiple types of documents strengthens the methodological foundation of this study, as using a diverse set of sources allows for a more nuanced and layered analysis of how organizations construct, communicate, and perform their DEI strategies. Document analysis is particularly effective when used in combination with other qualitative methods or sources, allowing researchers to corroborate evidence and capture different facets of the same phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). Each type of document brings a unique discursive layer that contributes

to a more comprehensive understanding of how Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is framed within organizations.

In order to evaluate whether the communication meets the criteria of clarity, consistency, inclusiveness, presence of metrics, and personal narratives, a grid of indicators was developed based on a DEI Glossary (H1 and H2).

In addition, a "channel fit" set was created by calculating the degree of channel integration and the presence or absence of communication between platforms. This made it possible to assess the variety and strategic use of the different channels (H3). Thanks to the review and feedback from Glassdoor, it was possible to detect alignment or dissonance between the external DEI narrative and internal employee experiences (H1 and H4). The data were examined in a quantitative (e.g. sentiment, ratings) and qualitative (e.g. recurring themes of inclusion or exclusion) way. Furthermore, LinkedIn engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares) were analyzed to assess audience response to DEI-oriented posts using inclusive language and culturally adapted narratives (H5).

Reviews were examined both quantitatively (e.g., sentiment, ratings) and qualitatively (e.g., recurring themes of inclusion or exclusion). Moreover, LinkedIn engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares) were collected to assess audience response to posts using inclusive language and culturally adapted narratives. This provided empirical evidence for H5.

A qualitative approach was chosen to capture the depth and complexity of DEI communication practices, which often involve implicit meanings, symbolic choices, and culturally embedded narratives that are not easily quantifiable (Eisenberg, 2007).

Triangulation, as a methodological strategy, involves taking different perspectives on an issue under study, substantiating these views by combining linked methods and theoretical approaches, ultimately extending the validity of findings by integrating diverse data sources (Flick, 2018). This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena by compensating for the weaknesses of single methods because results gained from one type of source can be validated or contradicted by another, leading to new insights.

3.1 Methods

The comparative case study method is adopted as it allows for the systematic identification of similarities and differences across multiple organizational contexts (George & Bennett, 2005). This approach helps to understand how different companies approach diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) matters. By comparing multiple cases, contradictions and potential discrepancies between stated intentions and actual perceptions or outcomes can be detected. The approach also enables theoretical generalisation, helping us to understand how DEI is communicated, enacted and perceived within organizational settings.

To gather the data, scraping techniques were employed to extract publicly available information from three main sources: company websites, LinkedIn pages, and employee-generated reviews on Glassdoor. These platforms were selected for their relevance in shaping both the external image, and the perceived internal climate of organizations. Specifically:

LinkedIn was analyzed to assess corporate communication of DEI-related content, including posts, hashtags, campaigns, and leadership discourse.

Websites were examined for mission statements, policy documents, and dedicated DEI sections.

Glassdoor offered valuable qualitative data from employees' perspectives. This triangulation of sources enhances the validity of the findings by allowing for cross-verification and the identification of gaps or alignments between institutional narratives and individual experiences. Web scraping allows for consistent and replicable collection of large volumes of textual, and visual data, capturing how companies describe their DEI commitments across different digital environments. LinkedIn was used to analyze the language and visibility of DEI-related content within corporate posts and profiles, while Glassdoor reviews provided access to the employee perspectives on workplace inclusiveness.

Data were collected over the past 12 months, cleaned, organized into case files, and then systematically compared through thematic analysis.

Using scraping as a technique within a comparative case framework enables patterns to be traced across organizations while retaining sensitivity to context. This pairing of method and technique enables a grounded, data-rich exploration of how diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is performed, narrated and contested in the digital sphere by the twenty most virtuous Italian companies.

3.2 Analysis

A DEI dictionary has been created, collecting 89 Italian and English words taken from the analyzed literature and the Media Cloud website[29].

Posts from LinkedIn published in June 2024 and June 2025 have been scraped for all 20 companies in the last year (June 2024 to June 2025). The words used in these posts have been compared to the dictionary, and DEI-related posts have been counted. All metrics relating to engagement (shares, comments and likes) have been counted to assess audience interest in DEI-related posts. The researchers conducted a search for DEI-related posts to assess whether there were references to specific audiences related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

The companies' websites were analyzed to monitor content related to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), identifying the sections in which these topics were mentioned. The analysis also covered the types of images used.

The number of clicks required to access this information was counted. A thorough website analysis was conducted to ascertain whether they held a 'Best Place to Work for DEI' certification or a comparable designation. A comprehensive search was conducted for references to specific DEI-related target audiences.

The CSR reports, where available (12 out of 20 companies), were analyzed, and DEI-related terms and audience references were examined.

The Glassdoor platform was manually scraped to create a dataset containing all the available reviews for the companies (18 out of 20). The same time period used for LinkedIn (June 2024 to June 2025) was applied here. Due to the focus of this research on the Italian market and the absence of location specifications in the reviews, the Italian language filter has been selected. For each review of every company, the following information has been reported: the date; the overall rating given; the title; whether the review was flagged or excluded for three items (Recommend, CEO approval rating and

[29] https://www.mediacloud.org/

Commercial forecast); the list of advantages and disadvantages pointed out by employees; advice for TLs; and the score for the six dimensions investigated by Glassdoor (Culture and Values, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Work/Life Balance, Senior Executives, Salary and Benefits, and Career Opportunities). For each company's Glassdoor page, the overall rating of the reviews during the specified time period is reported, as well as the percentage of reviews giving 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 stars, the percentage of reviews explicitly recommending the company, and the average score for each of the six dimensions. These values were then compared to the general score given by all Italian reviews without a date filter. Furthermore, it has been highlighted, as reported by Glassdoor, whether the overall value was below or above the average score for the company compared to other companies of the same size and in the same industry.

As employees are the primary stakeholders in DEI (Ravazzani et al., 2023), companies were consulted directly, albeit in an exploratory manner[30]. The following areas were investigated: which figures in companies are responsible for DEI; the focus areas; the initiatives implemented or planned; the objectives; how long they have been working on these issues; whether there has been a turnaround following the new American positions; the concrete, quantifiable results attributable to their commitment; the obstacles eventually encountered; the commitment of top management to every initiative; the main challenges; and the quantifiable results achieved.

4. Findings

The top 20 Italian companies recognized for their commitment to Diversity, Equity & Inclusion by Great Place to Work (GPTW 2024) were selected to conduct a qualitative analysis that explored how these organizations communicate DEI. In particular, the following channels were analyzed: LinkedIn, institutional websites, sustainability reports (CSR), and the Glassdoor platform.

This analysis made it possible to construct a communication quality index based mainly on two dimensions - narrative consistency across channels and perceived authenticity - which were then compared and analyzed. In particular, narrative elements such as storytelling, personal testimonials, and inclusive language were identified for the LinkedIn channel. Texts, specific indicators (e.g., turnover, minority percentages in the company, gender gap) and policies were extracted and analyzed from company websites and CSR reports. The comparison between narrative and objective data made it possible to generate an indirect indicator of perceived authenticity.

A comparative analysis was conducted for each company, starting with the content published on LinkedIn, where narrative elements such as storytelling, personal testimonials, and inclusive language were identified. At the same time, concrete data, indicators, and policies related to DEI were extracted from company websites and CSR reports. The alignment between narrative and objective data represented an indirect indicator of perceived authenticity.

Three key parameters were then considered to evaluate DEI communication:

Multichannel presence, i.e., the existence of DEI-themed content on all channels examined (LinkedIn, website, CSR report, and Glassdoor). This attitude was taken as an indicator of transparency and structured commitment.

Communicative consistency, calculated as a summary of the narrative Corresponding author between the different channels. Based on topic convergence, consistency of values and the presence

[30] Only five of the twenty companies that were invited to take part in the research have replied.

of any contradictions or misalignments between channels, a qualitative score (High, Medium, and Low) was assigned.

Perceived authenticity, calculated using indicators such as the language used, personalization, and the concreteness of the content across different channels.

Based on the results across these three variables, the effectiveness of DEI communication was calculated and classified as High, Medium, and Low. The comparison of these variables allowed us to validate the research hypotheses.

Consistency and internal perception (H1 and H4): Companies with higher Glassdoor ratings, both in terms of perceived inclusive climate and authentic representation, are those that adopt a clear, consistent, and integrated strategy (e.g., Cisco, American Express, DHL). Companies that show low consistency in their reports or highlight negative employee feedback show signs of narrative dissonance that could damage their reputation in the long term.

Authenticity and storytelling (H2): The inclusion of personal testimonials and the use of storytelling enhance the credibility of communication. On LinkedIn, posts that combine narrative elements with concrete metrics (e.g., ServiceNow, Webranking) achieve greater engagement and are consistent with an authentic perception of DEI commitment.

Channel variety and integration (H3): Companies that use at least three channels in an integrated way (e.g., Cisco, DHL, Mondelez) demonstrate more effective communication, reinforcing their DEI message and reaching different audiences.

Inclusive language and digital engagement (H5): Companies that use inclusive or gender-neutral language, inclusive graphics, and first-person content score higher on LinkedIn (e.g., AbbVie, Hilton).

Low-profile strategies: The analysis also reveals a trend that has been labeled low-profile strategies. In these cases, companies (e.g., Agile Lab, Unfix, Skylabs) communicate little or, in some cases, nothing at all about DEI issues. This choice seems to be motivated by a desire to avoid backlash in politicized contexts. While this strategy may well avoid reputational damage, it also means that the commitment is less recognizable to external stakeholders.

5. Discussion

The results partially confirm the hypotheses and have significant managerial implications.

In line with the literature review, narrative consistency and authenticity are two key dimensions of corporate communication in the field of DEI. Indeed, the data confirm that, in order to be effective, communications must be confirmed by internal perceptions and validated by real experiences. Without this alignment, companies risk compromising their credibility (Baker et al., 2022). In addition, storytelling and the ability to humanize communication through real-life stories promote user engagement. Finally, the presence of concrete data increases the credibility of the message (Adams, 2002; Gray et al., 1995). The value of multichannel communication and strategic integration is also confirmed (Judd & McKinnon, 2021). Furthermore, the analysis shows that effectiveness does not depend solely on the number of channels activated, but on their consistency and coordination. Finally, there are also cases of companies that decide not to communicate their DEI initiatives in order to avoid reputational damage (low-profile strategy). This option, while legitimate, can weaken the perception of commitment and leave room for suspicions of 'diversity avoidance.'

The most novel aspect of the analysis is provided by Glassdoor, which was used as a test for authenticity. In this sense, when comparing perceived external and internal communication, this study shows how Glassdoor can serve as a proxy for detecting misalignments and as an indirect measure of authenticity.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive overview of how the 20 companies on the 'Best Workplaces for DEI Italy' list (Great Place to Work, 2024) communicate their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) across multiple channels.

The research aimed to assess the coherence, authenticity, and strategic integration of

DEI messaging, and examined its relationship with employees' internal perceptions. To this end, a qualitative content analysis was conducted, comparing material from

LinkedIn, the corporate website, the CSR report, and employee feedback on Glassdoor. The analysis revealed a fragmented communication landscape, with some companies demonstrating authentic DEI content and others showing significant variability. These findings emphasize the importance of aligning corporate DEI messaging with employee experiences and ensuring communication strategies are multichannel, consistent, transparent, and culturally contextualized.

Reviewing the literature and conducting an empirical analysis of the collected data provided valuable insights for companies on how to communicate DEI matters effectively.

The study also highlights three core dimensions that are important for companies to consider: narrative coherence across platforms, perceived authenticity by internal stakeholders, and the strategic integration of communication channels. It emphasizes the importance of coherence for companies that maintain consistency across multiple channels, aligning internal experiences with external narratives about diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Using inclusive language is often associated with greater engagement on platforms such as LinkedIn, although the relationship is not straightforward. Consequently, companies are generally viewed more positively by employees. The results confirm that using multiple communication channels is ineffective unless supported by coherence and content that aligns with actions and initiatives.

DEI initiatives are therefore essential for building trust and engagement with different audiences. However, communication alone is insufficient; it must be embedded in authentic practices and supported by the feedback. In terms of theoretical and managerial contributions, the findings suggest the need for a more integrated and reflexive approach to communication. This could help to bridge the gap between external representation and internal reality, as well as anticipating reputational risks.

In terms of managerial implications, the findings offer actionable insights. Firstly, multichannel communication is essential, as is ensuring that the various messages on LinkedIn, websites and CSR reports are aligned, in order to be perceived as authentic and coherent by stakeholders. However, variety of channels alone is not sufficient; it must be supported by clear and consistent language in order to build trust. Secondly, organizations should be aware of the reputational risks associated with both overexposure and under-communication. Thirdly, authentic employee narratives across channels can enhance perceived legitimacy, making the employee voice a relevant asset for corporate reputation. Communication strategies should be structurally aligned with organizational identity and leadership behavior.

Finally, the five interviews conducted to explore the issue revealed a range of perspectives that can be categorised into eight main areas relating to DEI. These areas and the specific initiatives relating to them are outlined below. Given the shared commitment of all five companies, the most innovative and unusual initiatives are reported.

Parenting and maternity support: company nursery (currently being implemented by Galileo), flexible working hours, extended paternity leave of one month (utilised by 100% of new fathers), and a return-to-work programme with a support intern (Mondelez). Pink parking spaces reserved for pregnant women or parents with children (Teleperformance).

Caregiving: flexible working hours (Mondelez).

Charity and social responsibility: collaboration with Project Next for refugee/migrant mentoring activities and selection processes that have led to the direct recruitment of 14 people (Mondelez); the TP for Inclusion initiative, an annual project now in its fourth edition, addressing issues such as empowerment, racism and disability (Teleperformance). Cultural events with a strong social focus, such as theatre in prison with the Pugliese Association, or awareness-raising activities, such as cooking with children with cancer (Teleperformance). Free training initiatives for young people in the area, such as the Server Security course, to bridge the gender gap in technical fields, and to encourage women to pursue non-traditional technical careers (Vianova). Support for 'Ragazze Digitali' (Digital Girls), with summer camps for female students (Webranking).

Gender equality: Women in Management programme (Mondelez), Gender pay gap eliminated or in the process of being eliminated (Mondelez, Teleperformance), Establishment of a Gender Equality Committee (Teleperformance), Increase in the percentage of women in senior roles (Teleperformance), support for women: breast cancer screening is currently being implemented at Galileo; a protocol has been established with an anti-violence centre to support women leaving abusive situations and fleeing violence, including through job placement at Teleperformance.

LGBTQ+ community: participation in Pride (Mondelēz), collaboration with

Arcigay (Mondelēz), inclusive recruitment guidance with supporting policies

(Mondelēz), establishment of an LGBTQ+ rights committee (Teleperformance), and collaboration with LGBTQ+ rights associations (Teleperformance).

Mental health: free psychological support for employees (Teleperformance), which is also open to their families (Mondelez). Training on mental health and well-being for managers (Mondelez).

Welfare in the broad sense: smart working was already in place before the pandemic in 2018 (Mondelez and Webranking); flexibility with a short working week (Mondelez); flexible holidays (Mondelez); and the elimination of clocking in (Mondelez since 1998); short working week with Friday afternoons off (Mondelez); 100% agile working contract with no obligation to be present (Vianova); flexible hours for most departments (Vianova); internal growth supported by coaching and development-oriented assessments (Webranking); internal growth of managers, many of whom are under 30 years old; cultivation of a culture of listening with an internal feedback and peer evaluation programme, implementation of an internal social media platform for communication and engagement; structuring of teams with small groups to encourage listening; welfare platform with flexible budget that can be used for personal and family needs.

For all these companies, the commitment of senior management was essential to implementing their initiatives, given that they were operating within a shared corporate culture. The reason there has not been a turning point since the USA took its new position is that there is a deep belief in DEI.

In addition to greater satisfaction, some companies achieved concrete results, such as: ● A birth rate higher than the national average (Mondelez, Vianova);

Employee responses to internal surveys reaching 98% satisfaction (Teleperformance);

Absenteeism reduced from around 10–12% to 3% (Teleperformance);

Retention and talent acquisition with a turnover rate of less than a third of the industry average (Webranking);

High retention, even in a context of strong market demand for personnel.

As the most virtuous companies in Italy in this area, it is clear that these dimensions are crucial for developing a people-centred plan to achieve concrete results.

7. Limitations and future research

The present study is not without its limitations. Firstly, the research focuses exclusively on a small group of companies in Italy, which limits the generalizability of the results and renders them potentially specific to the country's culture. Secondly, the sources utilized to explore the discursive and narrative dimensions of DEI do not permit the direct measurement of organizational impacts such as performance, retention or internal demographics. Consequently, companies do not utilize all channels equally, nor do they all have access to them. For instance, only 12 out of 20 companies have a CSR report, and two companies do not have a Glassdoor review page. Furthermore, companies on Glassdoor do not have the same number of reviews on the platform. Thirdly, the sample primarily consists of organizations that are already engaged in DEI activities, which may introduce a selection bias favoring the most exemplary or committed companies. In conclusion, the study is based on a limited one-year period, which restricts the findings to company practices and communication strategies within that period.

Future research could include a more heterogeneous sample of organizations to capture a wider range of communicative strategies and potential misalignments, not only Italian cases. Moreover, the utilization of internal organizational data has the potential to yield more profound insights into the nexus between external communication and actual practices. Additionally, longitudinal studies would provide invaluable insights into the evolution of DEI narratives in response to political shifts over time.

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