



Corporate perspectives on diversity: Engagement, communication motives, and the Diversity-Washing Dilemma

Johannes Beckert  and Thomas Koch 

Department of Communication, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Mainz, Germany

ABSTRACT

Organizations face increasing pressure to reflect societal diversity in their workforce, prompting them to intensify both their diversity initiatives and related communication to strengthen public perception. However, many companies are accused of ‘diversity-washing’, meaning their stated commitments to diversity do not align with their actual practices. This study examines how companies approach diversity, exploring their motivations, communication approaches, and views on the challenges of diversity-washing. Findings from 18 semi-structured interviews with diversity managers in German joint-stock companies reveal that diversity initiatives are driven by both internal factors – such as increased creativity and productivity – and external pressures, including stakeholder expectations, societal norms, and job market competition. Companies employ a mix of internal and external communication strategies, often linked to key events, to highlight their diversity efforts. Respondents also acknowledged risks associated with diversity-washing, including potential credibility loss and reputational damage. To mitigate accusations of diversity-washing, companies emphasize authentic, credible communication that prioritizes transparency and closely aligns with their actual diversity practices.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 10 June 2024

Accepted 18 February 2025

KEYWORDS

Diversity; organizational diversity; diversity-washing; diversity communication; CSR

Organizations increasingly face expectations to reflect societal diversity within their own structures (Wolfgruber, Einwiller, and Brockhaus 2021, 2022). Consequently, the workforce’s composition should reflect society’s diversity across gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and other attributes rather than represent a homogeneous group (Köllen 2021; Milliken and Martin 1996). As a result, organizations strive to diversify their workforce and communicate these efforts, anticipating positive outcomes such as improved reputation, employee engagement, and motivation. However, this communication is challenging for organizations (Crane and Glozer 2016). Despite strong stakeholder demand for greater diversity, skepticism remains about the authenticity of these initiatives. Many stakeholders perceive a gap between an organization’s stated diversity commitments and its actions, leading to accusations of ‘washing’ (Bernardino 2021;

CONTACT Thomas Koch  thomas.koch@uni-mainz.de  Department of Communication, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Jakob-Welder-Weg 12, Mainz 55128, Germany

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Champlin and Li 2020; Heras-Saizarbitoria, Urbieta, and Boiral 2022; Keilmann and Koch 2024; Wulf et al. 2022).

Although diversity and inclusion are increasingly prioritized in organizational contexts, the communication aspects of diversity have often been overlooked in research. Existing literature has mainly focused on the benefits of diversity within organizations, such as enhanced innovation and decision-making. However, there is a significant gap in understanding how companies communicate their diversity initiatives – a gap that is crucial, given the rising importance of corporate communication in shaping organizational reputation and stakeholder perceptions. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the motivations behind corporate diversity efforts, the communication strategies companies use to convey these initiatives, and the drivers behind their diversity commitments. Additionally, the study investigates corporate perspectives on diversity-washing and how it influences their communication strategies.

Diversity in organizations

Diversity in organizations refers to the extent to which people within an organizational social structure (such as in the boardroom, teams, or the entire workforce) share certain characteristics or differ in these characteristics (Köllen 2021; Milliken and Martin 1996). These characteristics can vary and depend on the organizational, cultural, and historical context (Hebl and Avery 2013; Köllen 2021). Despite this variation, groups of characteristic categories that create diversity can be identified. A common distinction is made between characteristics at the Surface and Deep Levels (e.g., Harrison et al. 2002; Harrison, Price, and Bell 1998; Jansen and Searle 2021; Mohammed and Angell 2004). The Surface Level encompasses obvious, primarily demographic characteristics such as age, gender, ethnic origin, and other phenotypic aspects. Therefore, O'Reilly, Caldwell, and Barnett (1989) also refer to these characteristic categories as demographic diversity. In contrast, characteristic categories at the Deep Level describe individual differences in psychological traits, such as personality characteristics, values, and attitudes. Unlike Surface-Level categories, Deep-Level categories are less obvious; they are rather expressed through verbal and non-verbal communication in social interactions (Harrison, Price, and Bell 1998; Mohammed and Angell 2004). Deep-Level categories are also more changeable and often depend more on the interpretations and perceptions of the interaction partners (Jackson, May, and Whitney 1995; Milliken and Martin 1996).

Gardenswartz and Rowe (2009, 36–37) present the concept of diversity through four interconnected layers, with each layer having the potential to foster inclusion or exclusion. At the core of the model are (1) individual personality traits, which refer to characteristic features of each person. These traits, such as introversion or extroversion, influence how individuals integrate into the social fabric of an organization, how colleagues perceive them, and their career progression. The second layer describes (2) personal attributes over which individuals have little to no control, such as age, gender, sexual orientation, physical appearance, or origin. These attributes also impact individuals' positioning within organizational structures and how they are perceived by others. While the first two layers describe immutable or highly enduring personal traits, the third layer focuses on the so-called (3) external dimension. These traits, which include lifestyle choices, income level, habits, leisure activities, religion, educational background,

work experience, appearance, parenthood, and marital status, ultimately influence individuals' social integration within an organization. Finally, the model delineates factors forming the (4) organizational dimension, which arise from individuals' positions within an organization. These factors, including job function, department, seniority level, location, union affiliation, and managerial responsibilities, similarly shape individuals' integration into the organizational fabric and how others perceive or interact with them.

It is crucial to distinguish between the factual distribution of traits and their perception in understanding diversity within organizations (Allen et al. 2007; Harrison et al. 2002). Perception of diversity can vary between different stakeholders and even within stakeholder groups: External stakeholders may prioritize certain diversity traits differently than internal stakeholders. Similarly, members of the leadership may prioritize diversity traits differently than non-leadership members. Moreover, individuals who align with the majority of the workforce in certain diversity traits may perceive diversity differently than those who are in the minority (Shemla et al. 2016). This diversity of perspectives highlights that diversity in organizations cannot solely be determined by the factual distribution of certain traits but rather by how internal and external stakeholders perceive these traits and their distribution (Allen et al. 2007).

Organizational diversity communication

Internal diversity communication plays a crucial role in promoting diversity and fostering inclusion within organizations (Men et al. 2023; Wolfgruber and Einwiller 2023). As an integral part of diversity management, strategically guided internal communication emphasizes the importance of diversity, informs employees about diversity initiatives, and raises awareness of the need for diversity and inclusion (Mundy 2015; Wolfgruber, Einwiller, and Brockhaus 2021). Selecting suitable content and credible messengers is essential for embedding diversity and inclusion as core values within organizational culture and strengthening employees' identification with these values (Mundy 2015). Furthermore, it is important to convey these messages not only through formal channels but also through informal exchanges that actively involve marginalized groups within the organization (Koch and Denner 2022; Wolfgruber, Stürmer, and Einwiller 2022). Thus, internal diversity communication faces the dual challenge of delivering relevant content and cultivating a supportive communication climate that encourages open exchanges.

Effective internal diversity communication yields numerous benefits, such as fostering a sense of belonging among employees from diverse backgrounds, promoting an inclusive workplace climate, and increasing job satisfaction, commitment, and engagement (Hicks-Clarke and Iles 2000; Luu, Rowley, and Vo 2019; Men, O'Neil, and Ewing 2020, 2023; Mor Barak et al. 2016). These positive effects can be explained by Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Settoon et al. 1996), which posits that social interactions operate on the principle of reciprocity, where individuals respond to positive actions with positive behaviors (Emerson 1976). Over time, this dynamic fosters relationships marked by trust, loyalty, and mutual commitment (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005). When organizations actively communicate their commitment to diversity and inclusion, employees from varied backgrounds feel valued, supported, and empowered (Downey et al. 2015; Mor Barak et al. 2016). This sense of appreciation motivates employees to reciprocate, perceiving the

organization's efforts as an investment in their well-being (Rajput and Talan 2017). In accordance with the reciprocity principle, when individuals receive something of value, they often feel a duty to return the favor, leading to increased engagement, motivation, and dedication to their work (Settoon et al. 1996; Strom, Sears, and Kelly 2014). This positive feedback loop ultimately benefits both employees and the organization (Rajput and Talan 2017).

External organizational diversity communication positions the organization on diversity issues beyond its own boundaries and transparently conveys internal diversity and inclusion efforts to external stakeholders. This external representation may come from different departments, including marketing (Campbell et al. 2023), public relations (Vredenburg et al. 2020), or finance (Baker et al. 2024). Zhang (2022) distinguishes three forms of external diversity communication: compliance-level communication, which informs external stakeholders about the organization's adherence to legal standards and basic stakeholder expectations; promotion-level communication, which highlights the importance of diversity and inclusion without necessarily linking them to specific initiatives, often through profiles of employees from diverse backgrounds; and action-level communication, which emphasizes specific measures promoting diversity and inclusion that exceed legal requirements.

Organizations actively pursue the benefits of external diversity communication, such as enhancing stakeholder perceptions (Lin-Hi and Blumberg 2018; Sen, Bhattacharya, and Korschun 2006; Viererbl and Koch 2022). Achieving these benefits requires communicating diversity initiatives transparently, authentically, and effectively (Ciszek and Pounders 2020; Viererbl and Koch 2022). The effectiveness of these strategies is grounded in Signaling Theory (Spence 1973, 2002), which posits that individuals and organizations use signals to convey information about their attributes or intentions, reducing information asymmetry and influencing perceptions and behaviors (Spence 1973). By sending clear and observable signals, organizations seek to build trust and achieve favorable outcomes (Kirmani and Rao 2000; Spence 2002). When an organization openly communicates its commitment to diversity and inclusion, it signals to external stakeholders that it values responsible and ethical practices (Gotsis and Kortezi 2013). As stakeholders recognize and trust the organization's commitment, its reputation is likely to improve (Jones and Murrell 2001; Lin-Hi and Blumberg 2018). Emphasizing diversity in external communications can enhance corporate legitimacy, strengthen reputation (Seele and Lock 2015), and improve the employer brand (Jonsen et al. 2021). Under certain conditions, it can even boost the effectiveness of marketing efforts (Champlin and Li 2020).

Diversity-Washing

Creating a diverse and inclusive workplace and promoting diversity and inclusion within society are often seen as elements of an organization's corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Jonsen et al. 2021; Kirton and Greene 2021). By committing to diversity and other social responsibilities, organizations aim to build positive perceptions, such as enhancing their credibility or strengthening their image as responsible actors (Lin-Hi and Blumberg 2018; Viererbl and Koch 2022). This potential for reputation improvement incentivizes organizations to communicate their CSR efforts transparently and truthfully. However, almost any CSR claim – whether related to environmental, social, health, or diversity

initiatives – can conflict with the organization’s actual practices, leading to negative consequences. Such real or perceived inconsistencies between an organization’s CSR communications and its genuine commitment are often described as CSR-washing (Viererbl and Koch 2022).

Depending on the area of discrepancy, the literature uses specific terms, such as greenwashing, rainbow-washing, pink-washing, blue-washing, health-washing, or sports-washing, to describe this phenomenon (Freitas Netto et al. 2020; Vredenburg et al. 2020; Wulf et al. 2022). Diversity-washing, as a subset of CSR-washing, occurs when organizations exaggerate their diversity commitments, leading to a gap between symbolic communications and actual practices (Baker et al. 2024; Bothello et al. 2023). The concept of diversity-washing is theoretically linked to corporate hypocrisy, which occurs when stakeholders perceive that a company is pretending to be something it is not (Wagner, Lutz, and Weitz 2009). Through diversity claims, organizations generate specific expectations; however, when stakeholders perceive a discrepancy between these claims and the company’s actual efforts, they experience a sense of expectation violation (Expectancy Violations Theory; Burgoon 1993). This perception of unfulfilled promises can lead to mistrust and skepticism, as the organization’s attempt at social responsibility may be seen as insincere or hypocritical (Wagner, Lutz, and Weitz 2009). In these cases, stakeholders may conclude that the company is merely using diversity as a shield to distract from any social harm it may have caused.

Like greenwashing – which refers to the deceptive portrayal of environmental responsibility (Delmas and Burbano 2011; Freitas Netto et al. 2020) – diversity-washing can manifest at two levels. At the organizational level, it involves misrepresenting a company’s commitment to diversity and inclusion. For example, a company may project an image of high diversity by displaying diverse workforce photos on its website or inflating diversity metrics, while actual diversity within the organization remains limited (Baker et al. 2024). Similarly, a company might publicly pledge support for minority groups but avoid advocacy if it conflicts with its commercial interests (Gündemir et al. 2017). At the product or service level, diversity-washing relates to the misleading portrayal of diversity in offerings. This may include branding or marketing efforts that suggest greater inclusivity than truly exists. For instance, a company might highlight diversity in its advertising while continuing operations in regions where minority rights are suppressed. These examples illustrate how organizations may project a false commitment to diversity while failing to uphold their stated values.

While diversity-washing shares conceptual similarities with other forms of CSR-washing, its deeply personal nature distinguishes it as a unique phenomenon (Baker et al. 2024). It goes beyond misleading stakeholders about organizational practices; it involves misrepresenting individuals’ identities – such as race, gender, and sexual orientation – which can have deeply personal consequences (Olbermann, Schrand, and Schramm 2024). Unlike greenwashing, which primarily damages external perceptions of an organization’s credibility or reputation (Keilmann and Koch 2024), diversity-washing directly undermines the very principles of inclusion, equity, and social justice that organizations claim to uphold (Vredenburg et al. 2020).

When stakeholders notice inconsistencies between an organization’s diversity claims and its actions, its credibility and perceived commitment to diversity – much like with other forms of CSR-washing – are likely to decline (Keilmann and Koch 2024). Diversity-washing is inherently subjective, as stakeholders’ interpretations of organizational

behavior can vary widely (Lange and Washburn 2012). While some may overlook minor inconsistencies, others might view them as deceitful practices. In many cases, investigations or analyses by independent entities are required to reveal diversity-washing, as stakeholders often lack insight into the organization's internal operations (Pope and Wæraas 2016).

Research aim

This research aims to explore corporate diversity engagement and the associated communication strategies that shape both internal and external perceptions. The first objective is to investigate how organizations engage with diversity and convey these initiatives to their workforce and external stakeholders (RQ1). Secondly, we seek to understand the motivations that drive organizations to adopt diversity initiatives and how these are communicated (RQ2).

Beyond examining motivations, this study also addresses diversity-washing from a corporate perspective. Research Question 3 (RQ3) explores how organizations perceive diversity-washing and its implications for reputation and stakeholder relationships. Research Question 4 (RQ4) then considers the proactive steps companies take to prevent diversity-washing accusations. This comprehensive approach provides valuable insights into the strategies organizations use to demonstrate their commitment to diversity while navigating the challenges of perception and authenticity in their communications.

Method

The research questions were investigated through a qualitative study using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. We chose a qualitative approach as this research area is underexplored, making the application of standardized quantitative methods challenging. Qualitative methods enable a more flexible and open-ended exploration of participants' perspectives, motivations, and experiences, which is particularly valuable when examining a topic with limited prior research. Furthermore, this approach facilitates a deeper understanding of diversity communication, allowing us to capture the nuances of how organizations conceptualize and implement their diversity initiatives. By employing semi-structured interviews, we can uncover the intricate dynamics that influence their communication practices, especially in the context of diversity washing (Patton 2002). We conducted interviews with 18 diversity managers from companies listed on Germany's DAX or MDAX stock indices, representing sectors such as energy, engineering, aviation, pharmaceuticals, and services. Eligibility required that participants hold responsibility for both strategic diversity management and diversity communication. Participants' roles were in human resources ($n = 9$), organizational development ($n = 1$), and communications ($n = 8$).

The interview guide was organized by thematic sections. It began with questions identifying responsibility for diversity within the company (e.g., 'Who is responsible for diversity in your company?'). Subsequent sections examined engagement in diversity initiatives and their communication (e.g., 'What diversity initiatives has your company engaged in over the past year, and how were they communicated?') as well as the motivations behind these efforts (e.g., 'What motivates your company to engage in

diversity issues?'). The final section focused on diversity-washing, inviting participants to define and discuss the phenomenon (e.g., 'What does diversity-washing mean to you, and what activities would you clearly consider as diversity-washing?'; 'What risks are associated with diversity-washing?'), and to describe how they address and mitigate such accusations.

The interviews were conducted by phone, lasting an average of 39.35 minutes. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality and anonymity in data analysis. Informed consent was obtained for participation and recording. Interview recordings were subsequently transcribed and analyzed.

Data analysis was performed using MAXQDA software, following Mayring's (2014) guidelines for qualitative content analysis. This analysis incorporated deductive categories from existing literature (e.g., definitions and perceptions of diversity-washing) and inductive categories that emerged and were refined iteratively from the data (e.g., specific activities and motivations for diversity communication).

Results

Diversity engagement and communication (RQ1)

Research Question 1 (RQ1) investigates the scope of companies' diversity activities and their strategies for diversity communication. Our analysis shows that responsibility for diversity rarely resides within a single department; instead, it is managed across various organizational perspectives and hierarchical levels. Primarily, diversity efforts involve HR and communications departments, reflecting the backgrounds of our participants. In some cases, other areas such as finance (e.g., controlling), investor relations, sustainability, marketing, and organizational development also play roles. This indicates diversity's broad relevance across departments, as one participant noted: 'I would say that we have touch points in almost all areas. The [diversity] issue is a controlling issue, but it also plays a significant role in marketing, particularly in employer branding. It's a major topic throughout the entire communications area, as well as in sustainability, for example' (I7).

From an internal organizational perspective, many interviewees highlighted that diversity is also a top-management issue. It often falls within the responsibilities of the chief human resources officer and, in some cases, is even addressed by the CEO or discussed regularly in executive board meetings. While less common, some companies have established executive roles explicitly dedicated to diversity (e.g., 'Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer'; I16), which amplifies visibility both internally and externally.

Our analysis revealed a wide range of activities used to communicate and promote diversity internally and externally. Internally, most companies implement formal actions like internal guidelines and gender quotas, and informational initiatives such as intranet articles, employee magazine features, webcasts, talks, and roundtable discussions. More in-depth activities include educational efforts like employee training, as well as representative actions such as creating and supporting employee diversity networks, interest groups, and appointing diversity representatives or councils.

Externally, companies use communication and marketing efforts to promote diversity. These include informational events like talks and roundtables aimed at external

stakeholders. Branding efforts were also mentioned, such as creating diversity-focused corporate designs for special occasions like Pride Month or rebranding to showcase a more diverse image: ‘We moved away from images of “old white men, which did not really represent our staff fully”’ (I1).

Companies also engage in communication activities that address both internal and external audiences. These strategic actions include publicly defining global diversity goals and objectives, as well as setting specific messaging and strategies. Branding initiatives, such as participating in diversity ratings, sponsoring diversity-focused events, or supporting mentoring programs, were common. Additionally, implementing diversity-sensitive language across all communication channels and running diversity-focused campaigns (e.g., social media hashtags, diversity newsletters) were seen as essential.

In summary, while companies engage in both internal and external diversity communication, internal initiatives are often prioritized. One respondent explained: ‘We have many communicative actions, both internal and external. Internally, we occasionally prepare content for events like Women’s Rights Day or Christopher Street Day. However, we don’t engage much in external communication to actively promote these activities’ (I6). This approach reveals that many companies take an event-driven approach to diversity communication, often aligning activities with specific annual events (e.g., Pride Month, International Women’s Day). While these events provide valuable opportunities for engagement, Interviewee 5 noted, ‘It is still important to create your own occasions’ for diversity communication, emphasizing the value of demonstrating a unique and genuine commitment to internal stakeholders.

Motivations for diversity engagement (RQ2)

Research Question 2 (RQ2) examines the motivations behind corporate diversity engagement. Our analysis shows that companies are driven by both pull and push factors, which operate on internal and external levels (see Table 1). Pull factors encompass the benefits that attract companies to engage in diversity initiatives, while push factors stem from pressures that compel companies to commit to diversity.

Internal pull factors

Internally, respondents emphasized the value of a diverse workplace, citing its positive influence on creativity and productivity. Diversity is viewed as essential for fostering

Table 1. Motivations for Corporate Diversity Engagement (RQ2).

	Internal Factors	External Factors
Pull Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Source of creativity and productivity – Organizational development and innovation – Positive effects on employer brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Raising public awareness for diversity – Competitive advantage/customer acquisition – Image/reputation enhancement
Push Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Proactive employee demand for greater diversity engagement – Personnel responsibility – Organizational values and culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Expectations of external stakeholders and shareholders – Public opinion/Corporate Social Responsibility – Legal obligations – Job market/‘war for talents’

organizational development and innovation, directly impacting economic performance and outcomes. As one respondent remarked, 'It's not an end in itself but super important for our company's success' (I9). Another key internal pull factor is the boost diversity provides to a company's employer brand. Many companies see diversity as crucial to their long-term HR strategy, enhancing attractiveness to younger talent and promoting an inclusive work atmosphere. As one interviewee noted, 'Diversity is part of our attractiveness as an employer and therefore part of our long-term HR strategy' (I11).

Internal push factors

Internal push factors are largely driven by employee voices. Respondents highlighted growing demand for diversity initiatives from employees, often voiced through independent employee networks, such as those supporting the LGBTQI+ community. These networks, which operate outside official diversity management structures, provide a platform for employees to express their concerns and expectations. Additionally, diversity managers feel compelled to prioritize diversity as part of corporate social responsibility: 'Diversity is part of our corporate identity, part of our social responsibility' (I9). Many see diversity as a foundational element of corporate identity and social responsibility, essential for inclusivity and empowerment across all diversity characteristics. Furthermore, organizational culture plays a significant role, especially in multinational companies with inherently diverse workforces. Certain industries, such as fashion, feel an added responsibility to champion diversity due to their historical and cultural context: 'In the fashion industry, diversity is prevalent, and our environment is notably vibrant. Fashion designers, for instance, often belong to the LGBTQ community, a fact that is openly acknowledged and embraced. This culture of openness has been a longstanding norm in our industry' (I10).

External pull factors

Externally, respondents acknowledged that diversity engagement enhances the company's public image. While some view this engagement as altruistic, aimed at raising awareness and fostering inclusivity, others cite strategic motives like gaining a competitive edge or attracting customers. Overall, diversity initiatives are seen as beneficial for both public perception and brand reputation: 'It's not merely about image; however, it's undeniable that it also enhances our external image' (I13).

External push factors

External pressures for diversity engagement stem largely from stakeholder expectations, including those of shareholders and the general public. Some respondents frame this pressure as a reflection of societal norms, explaining, 'We promote diversity. And why is that? Because it reflects our stakeholders, our customers, our suppliers, and society' (I4). Others view it as a corporate obligation, particularly for DAX-listed companies: 'On the one hand, it is a moral endeavor, but also, of course, you have to do it as a DAX 40 company' (I13). Less frequently, respondents mentioned job market pressures, noting the need to integrate diversity into employer branding efforts to attract top talent. One manager expressed this necessity: 'Of course, the war for talent doesn't pass us by. (...) I think the generation that's here, or the generation that's coming up, has a high awareness

of these kinds of issues. And at the end of the day, it's about attracting the best talent, and you can control that with this kind of commitment' (I1). This pragmatic approach highlights a shift from purely normative motives to a more strategic orientation in corporate diversity engagement (I16).

Defining and evaluating Diversity-Washing (RQ3)

Diversity managers identified the core characteristic of diversity-washing as a mismatch between a company's actual diversity efforts and its external communication, aligning with definitions from scholarly literature (e.g., Heras-Saizarbitoria, Urbieta, and Boiral 2022; Wulf et al. 2022). Several respondents suggested that diversity-washing is often intentional, with companies deliberately presenting an exaggerated commitment to diversity to gain (financial) advantages. However, not all respondents saw diversity-washing as consistently planned. For example, one respondent attributed it to 'short-sightedness' or 'a lack of infrastructure for such endeavors' (I12), while another described it as a tendency for companies to 'jump on the bandwagon and opportunistically seize opportunities' (I5).

The analysis presents a nuanced view of how diversity-washing is evaluated (Table 2). Most respondents perceived diversity-washing as presenting significant risks. For companies, the risks included potential erosion of credibility and severe reputational damage, which could negatively affect employer branding and create challenges in attracting new talent: 'A growing challenge in attracting new talent' (I12). On a broader level, diversity-washing was also seen as damaging to the credibility of diversity issues overall, particularly affecting communities like the LGBTQI+ community. One diversity manager expressed concern that diversity-washing 'will not bring about any improvements for employees affected by diversity issues within companies' (I5).

While risks dominated the discussion, several respondents acknowledged potential opportunities associated with diversity-washing. Some saw it as a possible catalyst for prompting internal change in companies that had previously overlooked diversity issues, ultimately viewing this as 'a very positive development' (I14). Others suggested that, even if lacking authenticity, diversity-washing could raise public awareness of diversity issues temporarily. Additionally, some respondents felt that, over the long term, diversity-washing might contribute to 'the growth and amplification of the entire community's voice' (I6). However, even among those who recognized these potential benefits, the

Table 2. Evaluations and perceptions of Diversity-Washing (RQ3).

	Risk Perception	Opportunity Perception
Company-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reputational damage/erosion of credibility – Negative impact on employer brand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Catalyst for internal diversity-related change processes
Issue-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Erosion of (public) credibility regarding diversity issues – No meaningful improvements for stakeholders impacted by diversity issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – (Short-term) increase in public awareness of diversity issues

consensus was that the lasting negative impacts of diversity-washing – both on company credibility and public perceptions of diversity – outweighed any short-term gains.

Coping with Diversity-Washing (RQ4)

The analysis indicates that most companies in our sample have faced diversity-related accusations at some point, with some encountering these accusations periodically. However, respondents were generally reluctant to admit to intentionally engaging in diversity-washing, likely due to social desirability bias. While there was hesitation in acknowledging deliberate practices of diversity-washing, several respondents expressed a more nuanced perspective regarding their company's accountability for stakeholder accusations related to diversity.

Respondents recognized some accusations as legitimate, particularly those arising from identifiable shortcomings in the strategic planning or implementation of their diversity management initiatives. According to the definition of diversity-washing provided in RQ3, these deficiencies can be considered instances of diversity-washing. However, accusations that lacked credible criticism were often dismissed as trolling or ranting (I5). Moreover, some diversity managers rejected responsibility for diversity-washing when they viewed the accusations as misunderstandings or misinterpretations (I7, I16). One respondent remarked, 'Actually, we don't have much experience with that [diversity-washing]. We describe things as they are. And sometimes people see more in them than there is' (I16). This suggests that companies tend to define diversity-washing as arising only from their own deficiencies, while often dismissing stakeholder complaints that may stem from differing perceptions (Vredenburg et al. 2020).

Despite their varying views on accountability, companies are keen to avoid any accusations of diversity-washing. The strategies discussed by diversity managers align with existing research on best practices (Ciszek and Pounders 2020). It is emphasized that companies should adopt genuine, transparent, and credible diversity communication that accurately reflects their diversity initiatives. One respondent highlighted this, stating that diversity communication must 'emanate authentically from within the company' (I4).

Another key strategy for preventing accusations of diversity-washing is promoting dialogue. Respondents stressed the importance of actively listening to stakeholders and employees, especially by monitoring perceptions through channels like social media. When accusations arise, companies should initiate discussions to understand the legitimacy and basis of these claims. Additionally, some respondents noted the importance of not only listening to criticisms but also respectfully accepting diverse viewpoints (I10, I11).

Finally, some diversity managers suggested that refining the timing of corporate diversity communications could help mitigate accusations of diversity-washing. Instead of making statements indiscriminately, companies should focus their external communications on genuinely significant developments in their diversity efforts that hold real interest for the public and the community.

While companies may not always feel accountable for certain types of accusations (e.g., rants or misunderstandings), fostering dialogue and understanding stakeholder motivations are valuable strategies for avoiding diversity-washing accusations. Unfortunately,

the respondents offered limited insight into the actual effectiveness of these strategies and the practical implications for their diversity management efforts.

Discussion

This study explored the motivations driving companies' diversity engagement, their internal and external diversity communication practices, and their perceptions of diversity-washing. The qualitative analysis revealed a spectrum of internal and external factors propelling organizations toward diversity engagement. These motivations can be further delineated into pull factors, which serve the company's strategic objectives, and push factors, which arise from obligations and constraints. Thus, diversity engagement emerges not only from altruistic impulses but also from organizational imperatives, such as enhancing image or reputation. The surveyed (large) companies regard diversity issues and communication as paramount, frequently addressing these topics with both internal and external stakeholders. While some communication is tied to specific events, most companies underscore continuous communication on diversity matters. Despite occasional accusations of diversity-washing, diversity managers assert their commitment to transparency, authenticity, and dialogue in communication to avert such allegations.

Examining how diversity managers portray their companies' engagement and communication does not unambiguously suggest proactive engagement in diversity-washing, characterized by misleading or incongruent communication regarding actual diversity efforts (e.g., Cizek and Pounders 2020; Wulf et al. 2022). Nevertheless, most respondents reported facing accusations related to their company's diversity engagement periodically. This raises the question of whether robust, transparent, and authentic communication on corporate diversity engagement can shield companies from diversity-washing accusations. Recent research on brand activism and CSR communication suggests that accusations of washed communication stem not only from companies' actions and communication but also from stakeholder perceptions (Vredenburg et al. 2020).

When stakeholders perceive an organization's diversity communication as insincere or superficial, believing that these efforts are more about creating a strategic facade than demonstrating a genuine commitment, it can backfire and lead to perceptions of corporate hypocrisy. Corporate hypocrisy occurs when a company publicly asserts adherence to ethical or socially responsible principles but fails to align its actions with these claims (Wagner, Lutz, and Weitz 2009). This inconsistency arises when the organization's initial statements or actions set a standard that is later contradicted by its actual behavior (Barden, Rucker, and Petty 2005). Such a disconnect between the company's stated values and its real-world practices fosters perceptions of insincerity or deceit (Lenz, Wetzel, and Hammerschmidt 2017). Consequently, if an organization's diversity communication does not match its true practices, it fails to enhance the organization's reputation and may lead to stakeholder and shareholder disillusionment. This results in a loss of credibility (Arli et al. 2017; Wagner, Lutz, and Weitz 2009), in addition to an adverse impact on the organization's economic viability (Baker et al. 2024).

Interviews revealed that many companies use corporate materials – such as websites, reports, and advertisements – to project an image of diversity and showcase an inclusive workplace both internally and externally. This is often achieved through carefully curated images that depict a diverse array of employees. However, our study highlights a fine line

between authentic representation and aspirational messaging. While over-representing diversity risks misrepresentation and stakeholder skepticism, strictly realistic portrayals may fail to signal a strong commitment to diversity (Gotsis and Kortezi 2013). This raises an important question: Should organizations depict diversity exactly as it is, or is it acceptable to present a more idealized image? We refer to this challenge as the '*Diversity-Washing Dilemma*': The tension organizations face between accurately representing their current diversity and presenting an aspirational, idealized image of diversity in order to signal inclusivity. This dilemma is further complicated by the fact that organizations may not always recognize when they have crossed the line from aspirational messaging to diversity-washing, as our findings illustrate. While their intent may be to convey an inclusive environment, stakeholders may perceive these portrayals as performative or even deceptive, resulting in reputational damage and a loss of trust (Wagner, Lutz, and Weitz 2009).

Even with the best intentions, organizations cannot fully control how stakeholders interpret their diversity efforts (Vredenburg et al. 2020). To avoid falling into the Diversity-Washing Dilemma and compromising credibility, companies must adopt proactive diversity communication that emphasizes transparency and stakeholder engagement (Ciszek and Pounders 2020; Wolfgruber, Stürmer, and Einwiller 2022). Rather than relying solely on idealized imagery and narratives, organizations should provide detailed diversity statistics, acknowledge existing gaps, and outline clear strategies for improvement. Additionally, fostering open dialogue with both internal and external stakeholders allows companies to better understand how their diversity efforts are perceived and adjust their approach accordingly.

Our findings indicate that while some companies are already implementing these strategies, they often do so reactively – primarily as a response to accusations rather than as a proactive initiative. To ensure diversity communication is both credible and aligned with stakeholder expectations, companies must actively address concerns, seek feedback, and integrate diversity messaging into ongoing corporate discourse rather than limiting it to special events. Furthermore, diversity communication should transparently convey how companies themselves benefit from diversity initiatives, as our study suggests that motivations for diversity engagement are not purely altruistic.

Finally, our findings emphasize the need to distinguish diversity-washing from other forms of CSR-washing, such as greenwashing. It involves the misrepresentation of deeply personal aspects of individuals' identities, making it inherently more personal and sensitive in nature (Baker et al. 2024). This distinction is crucial because diversity-washing strikes at the very core of an organization's values and identity (Olbermann, Schrand, and Schramm 2024). Its consequences go beyond traditional CSR concerns, influencing broader societal perceptions of what it means to be an inclusive organization. As such, diversity-washing is a more complex and context-dependent issue than other forms of CSR-washing. By recognizing diversity-washing as a distinct phenomenon, we can better address the unique challenges organizations face in navigating diversity communication.

Several limitations constrain the findings of this study. First, the relatively limited and purposive composition of the sample, which consisted solely of representatives from large German joint-stock companies, may restrict the generalizability of the findings to smaller organizations and those operating in different national contexts. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying these findings to

organizational settings outside the scope of this research. Nonetheless, the findings provide detailed insights into the mechanisms of organizational diversity communication. This can be viewed as a preliminary step toward developing a more general framework for understanding organizational diversity communication and diversity-washing, as well as creating and refining standardized measures for studying these concepts in quantitative research. Future research should focus on theory building and validating these initial findings in research settings that facilitate more generalizable conclusions.

A second limitation arises from potential self-selection bias among interviewees, possibly resulting in the underrepresentation of companies frequently accused of diversity-washing. This bias might have skewed the perspectives presented in the study, impacting the comprehensiveness of the findings. Therefore, interpretations should consider the possibility that companies with a higher incidence of diversity-washing accusations may have been less inclined to participate in the study, affecting the breadth of insights provided. A third limitation of the findings is the sensitivity surrounding diversity and diversity-washing topics. Given the potential for social desirability bias, where interviewees may have been inclined to provide responses perceived as socially acceptable, the accuracy and depth of their insights could have been affected. This bias might have led to underreporting certain behaviors or overemphasizing positive aspects, thereby influencing the comprehensiveness and authenticity of the data collected. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the nuanced realities of diversity engagement and diversity-washing within organizations.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the complex landscape of diversity engagement, communication strategies, and the challenge of diversity-washing within organizations. The findings underscore the multifaceted motivations driving companies to embrace diversity initiatives, balancing internal benefits with external pressures and societal expectations. Moreover, the insights gleaned from diversity managers offer valuable perspectives on the nuanced approaches employed to navigate the intricacies of diversity communication and mitigate the risks of diversity-washing. As organizations strive to foster inclusive environments and uphold authentic engagement with diversity, the study underscores the importance of transparent, credible communication practices that align with genuine diversity initiatives.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Johannes Beckert (PhD) is a post-doctoral researcher in the field of corporate communications and public relations at the Department of Communication at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz.

Thomas Koch (PhD) is a full professor for corporate communications and public relations at the Department of Communication at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz.

ORCID

Johannes Beckert  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1418-0818>

Thomas Koch  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3495-5855>

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all human participants involved in this study. All procedures involving human participants were conducted ethically and in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations. No conflicts of interest exist for any of the authors regarding the research presented in this manuscript.

References

- Allen, R. S., G. Dawson, K. Wheatley, and C. S. White. 2007. "Perceived Diversity and Organizational Performance." *Employee Relations* 30 (1): 20–33. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01425450810835392>.
- Arlı, D., A. Grace, J. Palmer, and C. Pham. 2017. "Investigating the Direct and Indirect Effects of Corporate Hypocrisy and Perceived Corporate Reputation on consumers' Attitudes Toward the Company." *Journal of Retailing & Consumer Services* 37:139–145. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2017.04.002>.
- Baker, A. C., D. F. Larcker, C. G. McClure, D. Saraph, and E. M. Watts. 2024. "Diversity Washing." *Journal of Accounting Research*. Advance online publication. 62 (5): 1661–1709. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-679X.12542>.
- Barden, J., D. D. Rucker, & R. E. Petty. 2005. "'Saying One Thing and Doing Another': Examining the Impact of Event Order on Hypocrisy Judgments of Others." *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin* 31 (11): 1463–1474. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167205276430>.
- Bernardino, P. 2021. "Responsible CSR Communications: Avoid 'Washing' Your Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Reports and Messages." *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics* 18 (1): 102–113. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jlae.v18i1>.
- Bothello, J., I. Ioannou, V.-A. Porumb, and Y. Zengin-Karaibrahimoglu. 2023. "CSR Decoupling within Business Groups and the Risk of Perceived Greenwashing." *Strategic Management Journal* 44 (13): 3217–3251. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3532>.
- Burgoon, J. K. 1993. "Interpersonal Expectations, Expectancy Violations, and Emotional Communication." *Journal of Language & Social Psychology* 12 (1–2): 30–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X93121003>.
- Campbell, C., S. Sands, B. McFerran, and A. Mavrommatis. 2023. "Diversity Representation in Advertising." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-023-00994-8>.
- Champlin, S., and M. Li. 2020. "Communicating Support in Pride Collection Advertising: The Impact of Gender Expression and Contribution Amount." *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 14 (3): 160–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2020.1750017>.
- Ciszek, E. L., and K. Pounders. 2020. "The Bones are the Same: An Exploratory Analysis of Authentic Communication with LGBTQ Publics." *Journal of Communication Management* 24 (2): 103–117. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-10-2019-0131>.
- Crane, A., and S. Glozer. 2016. "Researching Corporate Responsibility Communication: Themes, Opportunities, and Challenges." *Journal of Management Studies* 53 (7): 1223–1252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12196>.
- Cropanzano, R., and M. S. Mitchell. 2005. "Social Exchange Theory: An Interdisciplinary Review." *Journal of Management* 31 (6): 874–900. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206305279602>.
- Delmas, M. A., and V. C. Burbano. 2011. "The Drivers of Greenwashing." *California Management Review* 54 (1): 64–87. <https://doi.org/10.1525/cm.2011.54.1.64>.

- Downey, S. N., L. van der Werff, K. M. Thomas, and V. C. Plaut. 2015. "The Role of Diversity Practices and Inclusion in Promoting Trust and Employee Engagement." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 45 (1): 35–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12273>.
- Emerson, R. M. 1976. "Social Exchange Theory." *Annual Review of Sociology* 2 (1): 335–362. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.02.080176.002003>.
- Freitas Netto, S. V., M. F. F. Sobral, A. R. B. Ribeiro, and G. R. L. Da Soares. 2020. "Concepts and Forms of Greenwashing: A Systematic Review." *Environmental Sciences Europe* 32 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12302-020-0300-3>.
- Gardenswartz, L., and A. Rowe. 2009. "The Effective Management of Cultural Diversity." In *Contemporary Leadership and Intercultural Competence: Exploring the Cross-Cultural Dynamics within Organizations*, edited by M. A. Moodian, 35–44. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gotsis, G., and Z. Kortezi. 2013. "Ethical Paradigms as Potential Foundations of Diversity Management Initiatives in Business Organizations." *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 26 (6): 948–976. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-11-2012-0183>.
- Gündemir, S., J. F. Dovidio, A. C. Homan, and C. K. W. De Dreu. 2017. "The Impact of Organizational Diversity Policies on Minority employees' Leadership Self-Perceptions and Goals." *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 24 (2): 172–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051816662615>.
- Harrison, D. A., K. H. Price, and M. P. Bell. 1998. "Beyond Relational Demography: Time and the Effects of Surface- and Deep-Level Diversity on Work Group Cohesion." *Academy of Management Journal* 41 (1): 96–107. <https://doi.org/10.2307/256901>.
- Harrison, D. A., K. H. Price, J. H. Gavin, and A. T. Florey. 2002. "Time, Teams, and Task Performance: Changing Effects of Surface- and Deep-Level Diversity on Group Functioning." *Academy of Management Journal* 45 (5): 1029–1045. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3069328>.
- Hebl, M. R., and D. R. Avery. 2013. "Diversity in Organizations." In *Handbook of Psychology*, edited by I. B. Weiner, N. W. Schmitt, S. Highhouse, J. A. Schinka, and W. F. Velicer, 677–697. 2nd ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Heras-Saizarbitoria, I., L. Urbieto, and O. Boiral. 2022. "Organizations' Engagement with Sustainable Development Goals: From Cherry-Picking to SDG-Washing?" *Corporate Social Responsibility & Environmental Management* 29 (2): 316–328. <https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.2202>.
- Hicks-Clarke, D., and P. Iles. 2000. "Climate for Diversity and Its Effects on Career and Organisational Attitudes and Perceptions." *Personnel Review* 29 (3): 324–345. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00483480010324689>.
- Jackson, S. E., K. A. May, and K. Whitney. 1995. "Understanding the Dynamics of Diversity in Decision-Making Teams." In *Team Effectiveness and Decision Making in Organizations*, edited by R. A. Guzzo and E. Salas, 204–261. 1st ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Jansen, A. E., and B. J. Searle. 2021. "Diverse Effects of Team Diversity: A Review and Framework of Surface and Deep-Level Diversity." *Personnel Review* 50 (9): 1838–1853. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-12-2019-0664>.
- Jones, R., and A. J. Murrell. 2001. "Signaling Positive Corporate Social Performance: An Event Study of Family-Friendly Firms." *Business & Society* 40 (1): 59–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000765030104000105>.
- Jonsen, K., S. Point, E. K. Kelan, and A. Griebble. 2021. "Diversity and Inclusion Branding: A Five-Country Comparison of Corporate Websites." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 32 (3): 616–649. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2018.1496125>.
- Keilmann, J., and T. Koch. 2024. "When Environmental Claims are Empty Promises: How Greenwashing Affects Corporate Reputation and Credibility." *Environmental Communication* 18 (3): 266–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2023.2267782>.
- Kirmani, A., and A. R. Rao. 2000. "No Pain, No Gain: A Critical Review of the Literature on Signaling Unobservable Product Quality." *Journal of Marketing* 64 (2): 66–79. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.64.2.66.18000>.
- Kirton, G., and A. -. Greene. 2021. *The Dynamics of Managing Diversity and Inclusion*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003186397>.

- Koch, T., and N. Denner. 2022. "Informal Communication in Organizations: Work Time Wasted at the Water-Cooler or Crucial Exchange Among Co-Workers?" *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 27 (3): 494–508. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-08-2021-0087>.
- Köllen, T. 2021. "Diversity Management: A Critical Review and Agenda for the Future." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 30 (3): 259–272. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492619868025>.
- Lange, D., and N. T. Washburn. 2012. "Understanding Attributions of Corporate Social Irresponsibility." *Academy of Management Review* 37 (2): 300–326. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2010.0522>.
- Lenz, I., H. A. Wetzel, and M. Hammerschmidt. 2017. "Can Doing Good Lead to Doing Poorly? Firm Value Implications of CSR in the Face of CSI." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 45 (5): 677–697. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-016-0510-9>.
- Lin-Hi, N., and I. Blumberg. 2018. "The Link Between (Not) Practicing CSR and Corporate Reputation: Psychological Foundations and Managerial Implications." *Journal of Business Ethics* 150 (1): 185–198. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-016-3164-0>.
- Luu, T. T., C. Rowley, and T. T. Vo. 2019. "Addressing Employee Diversity to Foster Their Work Engagement." *Journal of Business Research* 95:303–315. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.08.017>.
- Men, L. R., J. O'Neil, and M. Ewing. 2020. "Examining the Effects of Internal Social Media Usage on Employee Engagement." *Public Relations Review* 46 (2): 101880. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101880>.
- Men, L. R., Y. S. Qin, R. Mitson, and P. Thelen. 2023. "Engaging Employees via an Inclusive Climate: The Role of Organizational Diversity Communication and Cultural Intelligence." *Journal of Public Relations Research* 35 (5–6): 450–471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2023.2222859>.
- Milliken, F. J., and L. L. Martin. 1996. "Searching for Common Threads: Understanding the Multiple Effects of Diversity in Organizational Groups." *Academy of Management Review* 21 (2): 402–433. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258667>.
- Mohammed, S., and L. C. Angell. 2004. "Surface- and Deep-Level Diversity in Workgroups: Examining the Moderating Effects of Team Orientation and Team Process on Relationship Conflict." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 25 (8): 1015–1039. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.293>.
- Mor Barak, M. E., E. L. Lizano, A. Kim, L. Duan, M.-K. Rhee, H.-Y. Hsiao, and K. C. Birmhall. 2016. "The Promise of Diversity Management for Climate of Inclusion: A State-Of-The-Art Review and Meta-Analysis." *Human Service Organizations, Management, Leadership & Governance* 40 (4): 305–333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2016.1138915>.
- Mundy, D. E. 2015. "Diversity 2.0: How the Public Relations Function Can Take the Lead in a New Generation of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I)." *Research Journal of the Institute for Public Relations* 2 (2): 1–35.
- Olbermann, Z., H. Schrand, and H. Schramm. 2024. "You are so Much Like Me—You Just Have to Tell the Truth: Impact of User-Influencer Similarity on Parasocial Interactions in the Perception of Diversity Washing in Advertising." *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising* 45 (4): 456–475. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10641734.2024.2310062>.
- O'Reilly, C. A., III, D. F. Caldwell, and W. P. Barnett. 1989. "Work Group Demography, Social Integration, and Turnover." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 34 (1): 21. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2392984>.
- Patton, M. Q. 2002. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks et al: Sage Publications.
- Pope, S., and A. Wæraas. 2016. "CSR-Washing is Rare: A Conceptual Framework, Literature Review, and Critique." *Journal of Business Ethics* 137 (1): 173–193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2546-z>.
- Rajput, N., and A. Talan. 2017. "Interpersonal Trust as the Mediator of Workplace Diversity and Well-Being of Employees." *Indian Journal of Health & Wellbeing* 8 (2): 10–673. <https://doi.org/10.5958/0973-9343.2017.00010.2>.
- Seele, P., and I. Lock. 2015. "Instrumental And/Or Deliberative? A Typology of CSR Communication Tools." *Journal of Business Ethics* 131 (2): 401–414. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2282-9>.

- Sen, S., C. B. Bhattacharya, and D. Korschun. 2006. "The Role of Corporate Social Responsibility in Strengthening Multiple Stakeholder Relationships: A Field Experiment." *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 34 (2): 158–166. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070305284978>.
- Settoon, R. P., N. Bennett, and R. C. Liden. 1996. "Social Exchange in Organizations: Perceived Organizational Support, Leader-Member Exchange, and Employee Reciprocity." *The Journal* 81 (3): 219–227.
- Shemla, M., B. Meyer, L. Greer, and K. A. Jehn. 2016. "A Review of Perceived Diversity in Teams: Does How Members Perceive Their team's Composition Affect Team Processes and Outcomes?" *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 37 (S1): S89–S106. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1957>.
- Spence, M. 1973. "Job Market Signaling." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 87 (3): 355–374. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1882010>.
- Spence, M. 2002. "Signaling in Retrospect and the Informational Structure of Markets." *The American Economic Review* 92 (3): 434–459. <https://doi.org/10.1257/00028280260136200>.
- Strom, D. L., K. L. Sears, and K. M. Kelly. 2014. "Work Engagement: The Roles of Organizational Justice and Leadership Style in Predicting Engagement Among Employees." *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 21 (1): 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051813485437>.
- Viererbl, B., and T. Koch. 2022. "The Paradoxical Effects of Communicating CSR Activities: Why CSR Communication Has Both Positive and Negative Effects on the Perception of a company's Social Responsibility." *Public Relations Review* 48 (1): 102134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102134>.
- Vredenburg, J., S. Kapitan, A. Spry, and J. A. Kemper. 2020. "Brands Taking a Stand: Authentic Brand Activism or Woke Washing?" *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 39 (4): 444–460. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743915620947359>.
- Wagner, T., R. J. Lutz, and B. A. Weitz. 2009. "Corporate Hypocrisy: Overcoming the Threat of Inconsistent Corporate Social Responsibility Perceptions." *Journal of Marketing* 73 (6): 77–91. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.73.6.77>.
- Wolfgruber, D., and S. Einwiller. 2023. "Diversity, Inclusion, and Communication: The Role of Internal Communication in Creating an Inclusive Work Environment." In *(Re)discovering the Human Element in Public Relations and Communication Management in Unpredictable Times* (Advances in public relations and communication management), edited by N. Rodríguez-Salcedo, Á. Moreno, S. Einwiller, and M. Recalde, 81–97. Vol. 6. Leeds: Emerald.
- Wolfgruber, D., S. Einwiller, and J. Brockhaus. 2021. "Let's Talk About Diversity & Inclusion: Fostering an Inclusive Work Environment Through Communication." In *Communication Insights*. Leipzig: Academic Society for Management & Communication.
- Wolfgruber, D., L. Stürmer, and S. Einwiller. 2022. "Talking Inclusion into Being: Communication as a Facilitator and Obstructor of an Inclusive Work Environment." *Personnel Review* 51 (7): 1841–1860. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-01-2021-0013>.
- Wulf, T., B. Naderer, Z. Olbermann, & J. Hohner. 2022. "Finding Gold at the End of the Rainbowflag? Claim Vagueness and Presence of Emotional Imagery as Factors to Perceive Rainbowwashing." *International Journal of Advertising* 41 (8): 1433–1453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2022.2053393>.
- Zhang, X. A. 2022. "What Constitutes Great IDEA? An Examination of Corporate Diversity Communication on Facebook and External and Internal Stakeholder Reactions." *Public Relations Review* 48 (5): 102254. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2022.102254>.