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Exploring Diversity Management to Avoid Social Washing and Pinkwashing: Using Bibliometric Analysis to Shape Future Research Directions

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Abstract

Objectives: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been a significant focus of environmental, social and governance sustainability research. Diversity management is one of the challenges faced by corporate governance in achieving SDG 4, 5, 8, and 10. However, rapid demographic changes in the global workforce create significant challenges for human resource development professionals when focusing on diversity management. This paper aims to define the different perspectives of diversity management to avoid sustainability distortions such as social washing and pinkwashing, which promote the perception that policies or products of a given company are socially responsible.

Methodology: The analysis of the existing literature can provide the information necessary to answer the research questions using rigorous scientific research methods. In the present study bibliometric analysis was used to enable a thorough and reliable analysis of knowledge on the topic and the identification of future progress. Bibliometric analysis was used to investigate the final pool of 126 peer-reviewed articles.

Findings: Contributions include advancing the understanding of diversity management, highlighting the dominance of communication bias, and strengthening the connection between social sustainability and the individual by identifying social exchange theory as a tool for explaining the ongoing changes in corporate governance.

Value added: The paper aims to answer research questions related to the journals relevant to the study of diversity management, the geographical structure of the research flow on diversity management, and the possible implications for future research on this topic.

Recommendations: In light of the clusters identified, it is recommended that forthcoming researchers explore the fitting theories that can be used to elucidate the phenomenon of diversity management. In addition, interdisciplinary research can facilitate a deeper understanding of issues concerning identity and gender, thereby enhancing the knowledge of diversity among managers. The paper recommends that future studies emphasize the differences in diversity management between national and multinational companies expanding the knowledge by conducting multiple case studies.

Key words: diversity management, social washing, pinkwashing, literature review, bibliometric analysis

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have sparked much research in environmental, social and governance sustainability (Pizzi et al., 2020; Stevens & Kanie, 2016). The United Nations Agenda 2030, adopted by all member states, aims to provide a shared agenda for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and in the future, through 17 goals, 169 sub-goals and 232 indicators (Haslegrave, 2016). The effects of sustainability policies depend on how states and other stakeholders, such as businesses which played a key role in the development of the goals (Scheyvens et al., 2016), translate and attempt to address specific indicators and goals through legal, policy and institutional reforms in and across particular sectors (Biermann et al., 2017; Hirons, 2020). Among the governance challenges, diversity management falls under the domain of Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; and Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries (Sadraei et al., 2022). The international focus on the

topic makes diversity management one of the main challenges for corporate governance (Yadav & Lenka, 2022).

Diversity management is an effective corporate strategy to address global workforce diversity issues in organisations (Richard, 2000). However, rapid demographic changes in the worldwide workforce create significant challenges for human resource development professionals to focus on diversity management (Yang & Konrad, 2011). These demographic changes are due to inherent differences in the workforce, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity and value system, which may lead to divisions among the workforce, as well as disagreements, dissatisfaction and conflicts (Harrison et al., 1998). The high focus risks turning social sustainability into lofty marketing campaigns by activating distortions such as social washing (Rizzi et al., 2020) and pinkwashing (de Gennaro & Piscopo, 2023). The term 'social washing' defines the misleading use of advertising strategies to promote the perception that a policies or products of a company are socially responsible (Rizzi et al., 2020). The term 'pinkwashing' originates from a combination of 'whitewashing', which means hiding crimes and vices, or exonerating through a distorted presentation of evidence, and 'greenwashing', which is the marketing of products under the pretence that they are environmentally friendly (Schulman, 2011). Recently, the term 'pinkwashing' has been linked to discriminatory governance practices regarding homophobic policies and gender stereotyping in general (Blackmer, 2019).

In this context, it appears necessary to understand the meaning of diversity management to avoid the proliferation of distorted communications such as social washing and pinkwashing. Therefore, this paper aims to define the different perspectives of diversity management to avoid sustainability distortions. Its objective is also to rationalise the current literature on the topic and answer research questions from the previous assumptions. Journals drive the academic debate and influence the flow of research on a topic (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Therefore, the first research question (RQ1) is as follows: Which journals are relevant for studying diversity management to avoid communication bias?

Geographical analysis based on the number of publications and author affiliation can provide evidence of collaboration and produce the social structure of the sector. However, collaboration is not always treated as co-authorship, and

studying homogeneous areas can allow interesting inferences about a topic (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Therefore, the second research question (RQ2) is: What is the geographical structure of the research flow on diversity management to avoid communication bias?

Finally, thanks to keyword analysis the connections between concepts that co-occur in document titles, keywords or abstracts are found (Zupic & Čater, 2015). The analysis of the words entered by the authors represents a tool to conceptualise a topic through previous literature (de Bem Machado et al., 2021; Secinaro et al., 2022a). Therefore, the third research question (RQ3) is: What seems to be the possible implications for future research on this topic?

The analysis of the existing literature can provide the necessary information to answer the research questions using rigorous scientific research processes (Biancone et al., 2022; Massaro et al., 2016). The present study uses bibliometric analysis to enable a thorough and reliable analysis of knowledge on the topic and the identification of future progress (Paul & Criado, 2020). Articles published in peer-reviewed journals written in English were considered, resulting in the final pool of 126 articles. For the analysis, the authors used Bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), an R-Studio package, which was the interface used by the authors to interpret data with the R language (Yan et al., 2000).

This research has several contributions. From a theoretical perspective, it first advances the understanding of diversity management by examining the numerical aspect concerning the number of publications and reference journals. Secondly, it approaches diversity management by highlighting the dominance of communication bias and discouraging fallacious disclosure through increased academic knowledge of the research areas. Thirdly, it strengthens the connection between social sustainability and the individual by identifying social exchange theory as a useful tool for explaining the ongoing changes in corporate governance. Moreover, the study aims to provide implications for managers and policymakers. Firstly, the research emphasises the crucial role of social equality in international policies, and the fact that managers should incorporate social policy-related indicators into their evaluation plans. Secondly, the research offers information on various inclusive diversity governance approaches. Managers should adopt a mix of governance approaches to avoid

fallacious communication paths leading to social washing and pinkwashing biases. The top-down approach is ideal for driving change in corporate vision and mission, while the bottom-up approach encourages staff initiatives that promote effective employee inclusion. Thirdly, the importance of the hybrid approach for fostering employee work-life balance is highlighted.

Methodology

This section defines the research methodology applied to explore the topic of Diversity Management.

Specifically, a hybrid methodology, qualitative and quantitative one, was adopted for the study, combining bibliometric analysis and thematic keyword analysis (Cobo et al., 2011; Massaro et al., 2016). This approach allows research variables to be explored objectively by providing a state of the art of publications to date and providing future research implications (Korzeniowska et al., 2022).

Bibliometric analysis, which has become an essential part of modern scholarly productivity assessment, allows authors and journals to be assessed on the subject reference for variables such as the number of publications, number of citations, and impact factor providing insights for the development of a research stream (Choudhri et al., 2015; Donthu et al., 2021). Therefore, bibliometric variables help understand which elements are critical in multiple fields of research (Giovannini & Marcuccio, 2012; Secinaro et al., 2022b; Stanczyk, 2016).

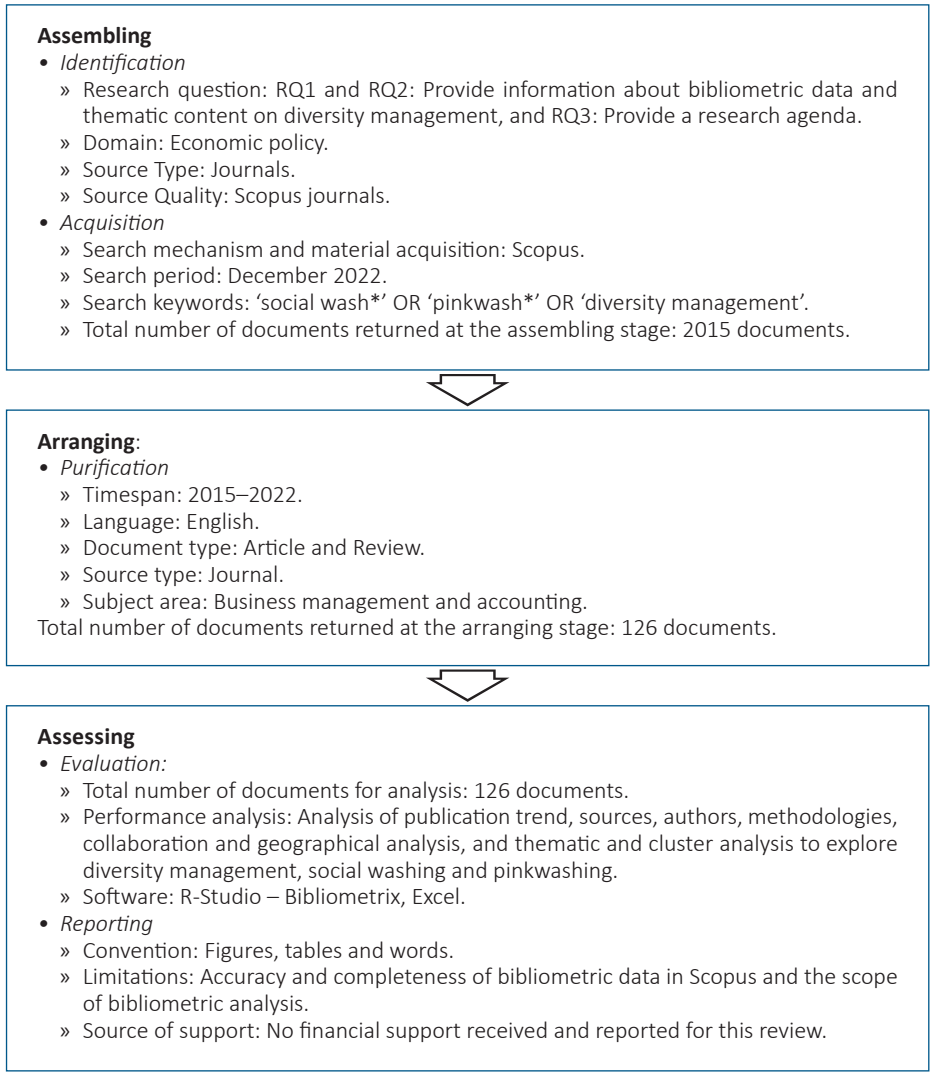
Study design and data collection

This section aims to identify the study design to answer the research questions previously formulated. The Scopus database was used, as it is one of the databases with greater inclusion of topics related to the social sciences and economics (Okoli & Schabram, 2010).

Bibliometric analysis is applied to consider and measure large amounts of scientific data, such as titles, number of authors, keywords, number of citations,

countries of publications and institutions, as well as collaborations in an unexplored and new strand of research (Biancone et al., 2021; Uluyol et al., 2021). The analysis used Bibliometrix R-Package and the Biblioshiny app analysis of bibliographic data (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

Figure 1. Research design



Source: SPAR-4-SLR protocol. Authors' elaboration on Paul et al. (2021)

The analysis was limited to articles and reviews, as they are continuously verified by peer review and published in scientific journals (Calandra et al., 2022; Secinaro et al., 2021). Moreover, it was limited to the time frame of 2015–2022, with 2015 being the year when the Paris Agreement on Sustainable Development Goals was signed. The topic of diversity management has increased the interest of researchers in academia. According to Asatani et al. (2020), scientific research in social sustainability can capture trends in sustainability research and impacts on SDGs. Following these criteria, 126 scientific sources ready for subsequent analysis were obtained.

Results

This section aims to explain the study results by answering the first two research questions. The first paragraph seeks to explore the descriptive literature analysis. In the second one the most relevant sources and the collaboration map analysis will be presented. Finally, the third paragraph is an in-depth thematic analysis based on the keywords.

Descriptive literature analysis

Table 1 shows the information concerning 126 articles extracted from the Scopus database published from 2015 to 2022 in 77 academic sources. The average publication rate was 13.69 articles per year during this publication period. The average time from the publication of paper is 3.71 years, and each paper was cited 76 times. The authors made 9343 references to other authors and the research presents an average of 465 keywords used to identify research stream. Interestingly, the topic is significantly collaborative among the authors. The analysis shows a collaboration rate of 26.19% with an average of 2.72 co-authors per topic. Scientific collaboration is one of the pillars of modern science, bringing essential contributions for the understanding of the factors involved in the creation, dissemination and transmission of knowledge (Gingras, 2010; Kuhn, 2012).

Table 1. Main information

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	2015: 2022
Sources (journals, books, etc.)	77
Documents	126
Annual growth rate %	13.69
Document average age	3.71
Average citations per doc	11.59
References	9343
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords plus (id)	76
Author's keywords (de)	465
AUTHORS	
Authors	305
Authors of single-authored docs	21
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	27
Co-authors per doc	2.72
International co-authorships %	26.19
DOCUMENT TYPES	
Article	126

Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

Most relevant sources and collaboration map analysis

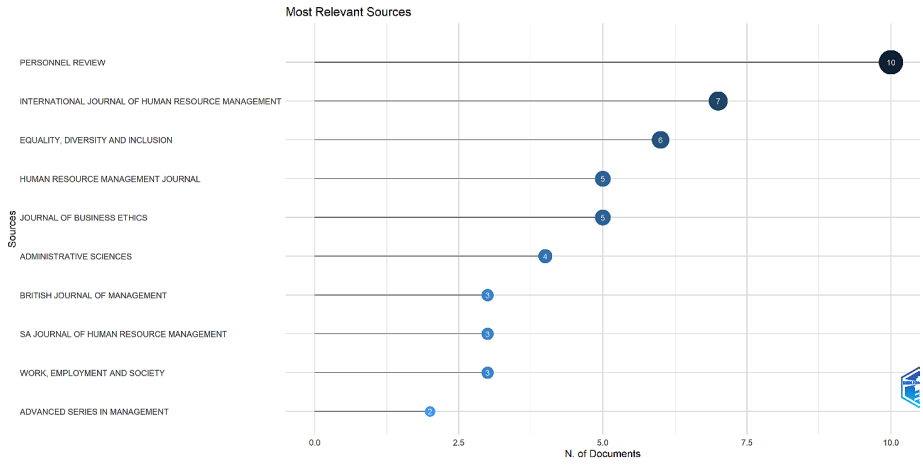
Figure 2. highlights which academic sources are most involved in researching the topic.

The *Personnel Review* source is the first in terms of publications (10). *Personnel Review* (PR) publishes articles that have high originality and engage with contemporary challenges to human resource management theory, policy and practice development.

The second source is the *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (7), a worldwide forum for human resource management (HRM) scholars and practitioners. In the journal, papers on topics covering any aspect of people management and relevant to the field are published.

The third source is *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, an academic journal that publishes research on racial, sexual, religious, disability and age discrimination, equal opportunity and affirmative action.

Figure 2. Most relevant sources



Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

Table 2 and Figure 3 depict the countries with the most significant collaborations. The analysis confirms how much Scandinavian countries are currently

interested in the issue, as they are model countries in Europe as far as policies related to gender equality are concerned. Denmark is known as one of the most gender equality-compliant countries in Europe; the Danish state, with its Strategy for Denmark's Engagement with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) 2018–2022, intends to promote gender equality by strengthening existing regulations and developing its governance systems (UM dk). Furthermore, according to a report compiled by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the welfare system in Denmark is designed to promote and ensure gender equality (OHCHR, 2021).

The United Kingdom emerges as the most collaborative country; this is due to Brexit, i.e., the state's exit from the European Union in 2020, which provoked, not only the in political but also in the academic world, essential reflections on the issues of borders, boundaries, territories and equal opportunities. Brexit is a product of social unease caused by the absence of true equality of opportunity.

Table 2. World collaboration map

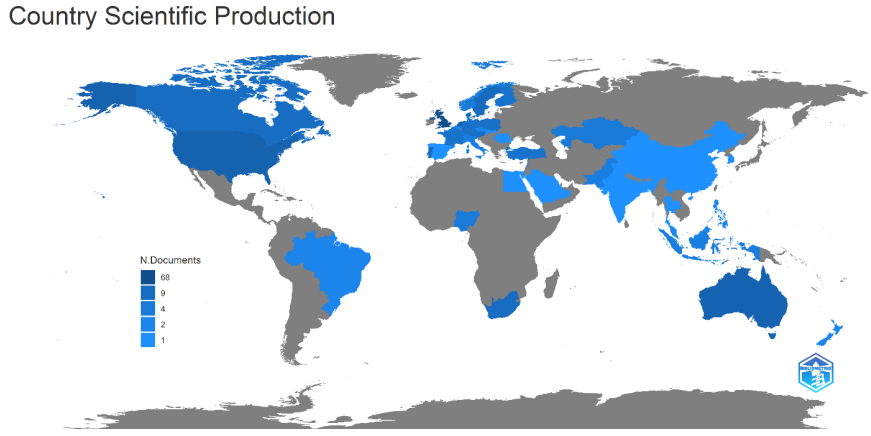
FROM	TO	FREQUENCY
United Kingdom	Netherlands	3
United Kingdom	Turkey	3
Australia	France	2
Denmark	Norway	2
Denmark	Sweden	2
Netherlands	USA	2
Sweden	Norway	2
United Kingdom	Australia	2
United Kingdom	France	2
United Kingdom	USA	2

Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

In Figure 3, higher density of colour corresponds to the better reflection of the topic under research (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). The figure shows that the

density of blue is higher not only in Scandinavian countries but also in Canada, the United States and Australia as they are multicultural countries and have a strong focus on an equal opportunity, even at the level of policy thinking. At the 2018 G7 Canada, gender equality, an essential value which is good for the world economy, was one of the priorities discussed. Jobs, gender equality and economic growth were the cohesive topics around which the leaders of the world's seven industrialised countries united.

Figure 3. Country scientific production



Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

Keywords and thematic analysis

Figure 4 shows a topic dendrogram, a diagram showing the hierarchical relationship between keywords. The dendrogram aims to create clusters by highlighting the match between different keywords.

The dendrogram is composed of four clusters marked with different colours. The red colour defines the theories and areas of application. The blue colour cluster reflects the role of employees, management and diversity management in business. The green colour cluster depicts identity and role – social sustainability, and the purple collection represents the topic of globalisation.

Theories and application areas

In this section, the red-coloured cluster is analysed, and it reflects on the dialogue between different theories and areas of application. The goal is to include a selection of comments to create a discussion around the theme of ethics at the centre of global and local challenges.

According to Böhm et al. (2022), human rights are central to climate change controversies. From the perspective of consumer ethics, Bohm et al. (2022) argue that ecologically sustainable and socially just market systems require cultural change, a reconsideration of future interpretations of the 'consumer society', a challenge to the dominant 'logic of growth', and the stimulation of alternative ways to meet our consumption needs.

Therefore, it is crucial to think about the impact of an inclusive environment, so that employees' performance can be meaningful; one of the leading solutions could be the exchange theory, according to which all human relationships are formed using cost-benefit analysis and comparison with alternatives.

According to Khan et al. (2022), theories and evidence exist that view increasing diversity in the workforce as a positive rather than a negative phenomenon. Evidence from Muslim employees working in different industries in Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada was used to explore the positive outcomes of the inclusive environment proposed by the growing Muslim community in the Western workplace. The results revealed that Muslim workers in Western workplaces feel more comfortable and included in the work climate where colleagues from different backgrounds or orientations are interested and encouraged to openly discuss their faith, values and practices instead of carefully avoiding such conversation in social interaction. Therefore, social exchange relationships can influence managers' perceptions of diversity management (Nachmias et al., 2022).

From the analysis conducted, it arises that gender research and women's leadership are acclaimed in Scandinavian countries and multicultural countries such as Canada, the United States, and Australia. The critical aspect of virtuous development is the support of school programs that protect and promote women's interest toward gender equality (Mooney, 2020).

Role of employees, management and diversity management in the business environment

In this section, the blue cluster is analysed, reflecting on the role of management employees and diversity management in the business environment. Diversity management is currently gaining the spotlight in organizations. According to Köllen (2022), a good diversity manager must possess a virtue-based perspective; a perspective based predominantly on diversity management rules makes most diversity initiatives more or less uniform and thus, at the same time, makes the people responsible for these initiatives themselves replaceable.

Organizations should consider introducing policies related to understanding diversity. Time should be taken to get to know and interact with everyone within the organization. An organization that focuses only on performance-related goals would not function well. According to Albert & Lazzari Dodeler (2022), in organizations of individuals and communities of people, the authenticity and centrality of work identity appear neglected in companies. According to Fletcher & Everly (2021), LGBT employees are more likely to benefit from working in organizations with supportive LGBT practices. Poor organizational policies related to gender diversity create relief among populations and employees of different organizations and companies. According to Richards et al. (2019), managerial neurodiversity has been explored through the role of emotional labor meaning. This study helps clarify the benefits of more inclusive employment for historically disadvantaged groups.

Identity and role: Social sustainability

In this section, the green-coloured cluster is analysed, reflecting on issues concerning social sustainability.

According to the research by FederManager, the National Federation of Industrial Business Executives, 50% of women executives do not have children, as compared to 15% of their male colleagues. Thus, many social barriers limit women's career advancement and cause inequalities between men and women in the labour market. Adopting Diversity Management policies implies a cultural change that challenges traditional systems promoting similarity and

homogenization. Work-life balance concerns all actions put in place by organizations to balance care and work time for employees who are increasingly torn between home and office. Combining office commitments and home duties is one of the most sought-after options when choosing one's career path. In this vein, a central role of smart work also deserves recognition. Until recently considered ancillary, agile work has become an unavoidable step from which it will be difficult to turn back due to the pandemic of Coronavirus disease.

According to Worsham et al. (2021), institutional reforms, inclusive hiring policies and transformation of individual attitudes, are starting points for change. Diversity management policies should be developed to combat discrimination and encourage the free expression of all individuals to improve the productivity of individuals and the organisation's overall efficiency.

Globalisation

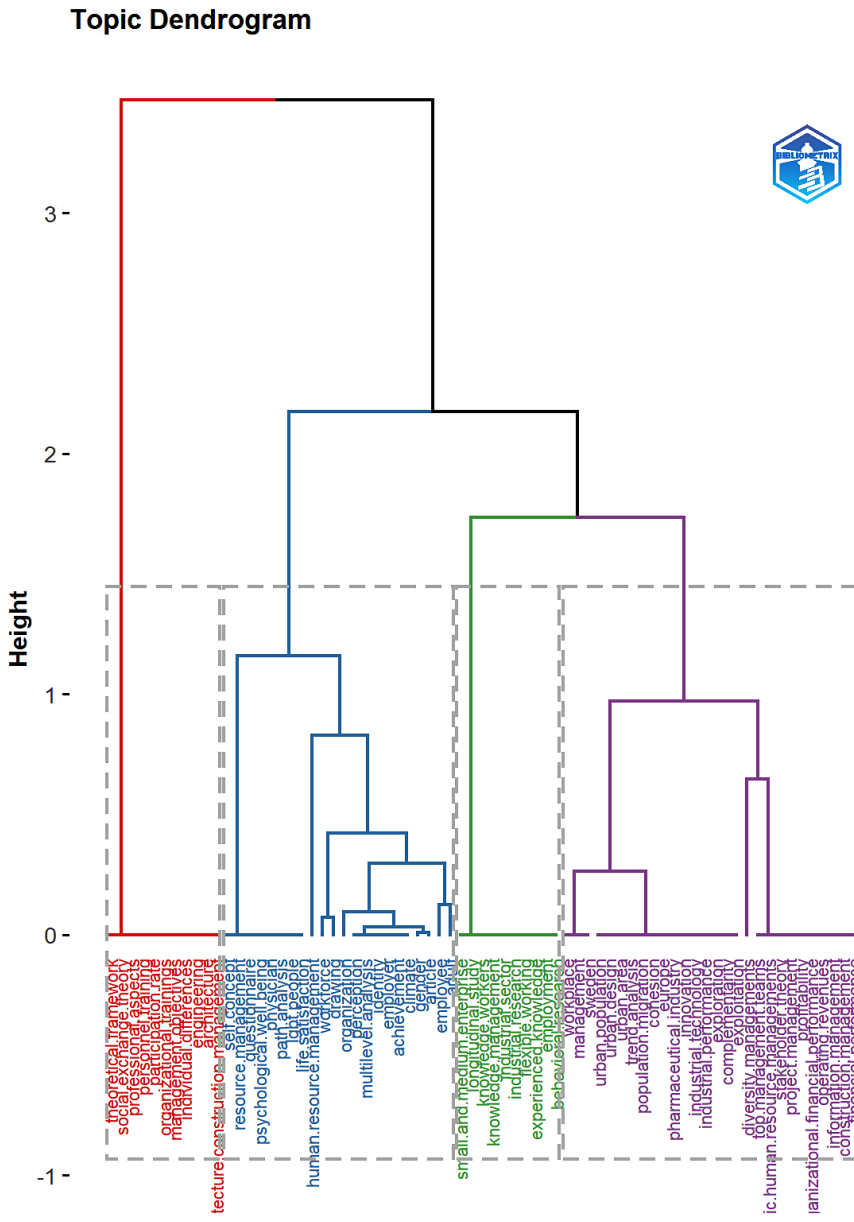
Finally, the last cluster analysed is the purple-coloured cluster, which reflects issues on globalization.

Internationalization, globalization and demographic changes have increased diversity in organizations, making it necessary for many companies to implement diversity management in business. Velinov (2018) argues that diversity management measures vary between headquarters and subsidiaries because national diversity regulations differ from country to country. Therefore, to address these issues, it is opportune that there are partakes within organizations at the corporate level to limit this gap.

The paper by Quach & Frey (2020) presents best practices for implementing diversity management and steps to be taken to increase acceptance of diversity. The results showed that top management support, awareness raising and internal communication significantly improved acceptance of diversity.

According to Batmomolin et al. (2022), diversity management positively affects organizational trust, innovative employee behaviour and employee engagement. Organizational trust has a positive effect on creative employee behaviour and employee involvement, and it mediates the impact of diversity management on innovative employee behaviour and employee involvement.

Figure 4. Topic dendogram



Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

Diversity management is essential for organizations today because it promotes trust, creates innovative employee behaviour, and strengthens employee engagement. Every organization must establish policies related to diversity management practices.

Businesses can reap numerous benefits from investing in Diversity Management: in a society of continuous change, it is possible to produce a significant increase in the commitment of workers and all other stakeholders who interact with the organization, such as shareholders, customers and institutions, towards a company that promotes equality and diversity as the founding values of the organization. Good personnel management can ensure that the company gains access to new groups of workers, attracts the best resources, and reduces turnover costs and absenteeism rates resulting from employee dissatisfaction. Having workers who feel comfortable and free to express their potential in the workplace leads to increased work motivation, but, even more importantly, to a constant increase in business efficiency and productivity.

Discussion and conclusions

Since the publication of the 2030 Agenda by the United Nations, numerous scholars have initiated research intending to foster environmental, social and governance sustainability (Pizzi et al., 2020; Stevens & Kanie, 2016). Businesses have to play a critical role in communicating social and governance aspects to their stakeholders (Hirons, 2020; Scheyvens et al., 2016). Therefore, this paper aims to describe the different strands of research on diversity management to rationalise the concept and help slow down the spread of distorting practices such as pinkwashing and social washing (de Gennaro & Piscopo, 2023; Rizzi et al., 2020). Following a rigorous methodology widely recognised in the academic literature (Massaro et al., 2016; Paul et al., 2021), in the present study a sample of 124 peer-reviewed papers published between 2015 and 2022 were analysed. The annual growth of research in the field is 13.69%, demonstrating that the trend in academic literature is increasing

attention to diversity management. In this sense, the objective of this section is to provide a timely research agenda to foster knowledge growth in a structured manner and answer the third research question (Paul & Criado, 2020). Since scientific collaboration represents one of the pillars for the proliferation of a topic in modern science, the geographical study of collaborations has allowed us to investigate similar patterns of approach to diversity management among different nations. In particular, the results highlight similar regulatory practices among Scandinavian countries regarding gender equality (Brescia et al., 2021). Furthermore, the evolving role of the UK following the Brexit is emphasised. The UK had to deal with the social unrest caused by the abrupt change in regulations in terms of access to land, which resulted in the absence of ready equal opportunity policies.

Through thematic analysis and topic dendrogram, it was possible to distinguish four different triggers for studies on diversity management and biased communication. The first cluster concerns theories and fields of application. In this sense, the academic literature has focused on using exchange theory (Calandra & Lanzalonga, 2021) to foster inclusive workplaces that do not discriminate based on orientation and allow open discussion of beliefs and values instead of avoiding such conversations in social interaction. Therefore, it is understood how social exchange relationships can influence managers' perceptions of diversity management (Nachmias et al., 2022). The second research strand identified through the analysis relates to the role of employees, management and diversity management in the corporate environment. In particular, studies in this domain aim to define the characteristics of the diversity manager. According to Köllen (2022), the diversity manager's virtue-based and rule-based perspective on diversity management makes most initiatives uniform and empowers employees. The literature emphasises the outdated correlation between good management and performance, identifying staff knowledge and integration as good practices for business administration (Albert & Lazzari Dodeler, 2022). Despite the increase in non-financial communication (Bondarenko et al., 2020), disclosure, authenticity and the centrality of one's work identity appear neglected in internal corporate policies. Deepening the cognitive and social dynamics within managerial procedures is a pillar to avoid

communication distortions such as social washing and pinkwashing. The third cluster identifies identity and role issues in social sustainability. Institutional reforms, inclusive recruitment policies and the transformation of individual attitudes drive change and the flourishing of social sustainability (Worsham et al., 2021). Among the various social barriers that limit the growth of gender equality, the family dimension related to women's ability to have children stands out. Adopting diversity management policies implies a cultural change that challenges traditional systems promoting similarity and homogenisation. Work-life balance concerns all organisational actions to balance employees' care and work time who are increasingly involved in both family and business activities. Exogenous factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic have accelerated the smart working process for many entities by favouring a reduction in travel and balanced leisure and work time (Harrison et al., 1998). Employees should be provided with the most favourable working conditions to allow equilibrium and reduce communication distortions (Ahmed et al., 2020). The last cluster deals with the topic of diversity management linked to globalisation. In particular, the research stream assumes that internationalisation and demographic changes increase diversity in organisations, making it necessary for many companies to implement diversity management in their business. The approach to social sustainability in business needs to have two phases. On the one hand, a top-down approach is needed to foster awareness and internal communication to significantly increase the acceptance of diversity (Quach & Frey, 2020). On the other hand, the bottom-up approach enables the proliferation of organisational trust and fosters employee involvement and inclusion concerning diversity management (Batmomolin et al., 2022).

This paper has several theoretical implications. Firstly, it enhances knowledge of diversity management by exploring the numerical dimension of the number of publications and journals of reference. Secondly, it explores diversity management by emphasising the domination of communication bias and discouraging fallacious disclosure by providing higher academic knowledge about the explored research strands. Finally, it refines the link between social sustainability and the individual by identifying social exchange theory as a helpful tool to explain the ongoing changes in corporate governance.

This study aims to provide implications for managers and policymakers. Firstly, the research emphasises the predominant role of social equality in international policies. Managers should integrate social policy-related indicators into their evaluation plans based on social factors. Secondly, the research provides information on different approaches to inclusive diversity governance. In order not to pursue fallacious communication paths that lead to social washing and pinkwashing biases, managers should favour a mixture of governance approaches. In particular, the top-down approach favours change in corporate vision and mission. However, the bottom-up approach materialises change in a staff initiative that fosters effective employee inclusion. Thirdly, the importance of the hybrid work approach to foster employees' work-life balance is emphasised.

Like any other research, this study has its limitations. Social washing and pinkwashing are used with different meanings, which may reduce the accuracy of the results. Using the Scopus database alone could result in the loss of results from other databases such as the Web of Science.

Finally, this research aims to provide a research agenda on the topic. Based on the identified clusters, future researchers should investigate the topic of fitting theories for explaining the phenomenon of diversity management. In particular, other authors should explore stakeholder perceptions by applying stakeholder theory. Furthermore, interdisciplinary studies could foster understanding of identity and gender issues to increase managers' knowledge of diversity. The third cluster suggests important future research avenues related to different approaches to work. More personalised approaches to work could result in an increase in employee performance, and enhance the ability to integrate various social and identity factors. In this sense, quantitative methodologies are suggested to explore the correlation between work performance and work-life balance. As far as globalisation is concerned, future studies should emphasise the differences in diversity management between companies with national and multinational sectionalization. In this vein, scholars could expand knowledge on the topic by elaborating multiple case studies to highlight recurring diversity management patterns.

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