# Communicating D&I:
# Managing Corporate Reputation Through
# Diversity and Inclusivity Messages

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**Abstract.** In an environment where different races, nationalities, and genders are present, it is important that there is a good representation of different people in an organization and to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to bring out their individuality while being safe at work. The research aims to determine how diversity and inclusion messages manage corporate reputation by analyzing an organization's diversity and inclusion messages, gathering employee insights on the extracted messages, and lastly, assessing if there is convergence between the employees' perspectives on the diversity and inclusion messages and the built reputation. The researchers used a qualitative research design by focus group discussion, and analyzed data through textual analysis. The study found that diversity is conceptualized as visible and invisible differences in attributes. Inclusion required more focus as it can be overshadowed or merged with diversity. Employees were not familiar with the messages but provided insights through their experiences with the company's inclusive and equal opportunities and lack of discrimination. There was no symbolic convergence found between the perspectives on the messages and the corporate reputation but there was group cohesiveness in the built reputation. Further, the diversity and inclusion messages managed corporate reputation by communicating the company's adaptability, transparency, corporate identity, built reputation, and communication improvements. Hence, as revealed in the findings that corporate reputation management consists of different factors and antecedents that were also interconnected to one another such as governance and sustainability efforts.

*Keywords: Diversity and inclusion, Corporate Reputation, Corporate Social Responsibility, Corporate Governance, CSR messages*

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the whole world. From financial worries due to job loss (Basyouni & Keshky, 2021) to adapting work arrangement and other company policies for a healthy and safe workplace (Carnevalea & Hatakb, 2020), no one was spared from employment and unemployment damages (Antipova, 2021). Moreover, there were significant shifts on employees' work preferences, such as more Filipinos wanting to work for foreign remote employers according to the Decoding Global Talent Report by JobStreet, Boston Consulting Group, and The Network entitled (2021). Thus, increasing the global and mobile talent trend and bringing in more challenge in managing and retaining talents (Sundararajan et al., 2024). One matter that can be both an issue and a solution as well as an opportunity is diversity and inclusion (D&I). More employees preferring to work for foreign employers inevitably creates an environment with people representing different races, nationalities, and genders.

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) are terms used interchangeably, but they have different contexts. The workforce may be diverse, but not automatically inclusive and vice versa (Cooks-Campbell, 2021). Diversity is commonly seen through recruitment and retention of employees from varying age, race, religion, nationality, sex and gender orientation, and physical conditions (Saxena, 2014). Inclusion is more complex since it is necessary regardless of being diverse. Being inclusive is evident through upholding employee rights for all job roles while ensuring individuals feel good about their jobs, their co-workers and environment, and in being part of the company (IPAG Business School in Europe, 2021; Coqual, 2020).

Fostering D&I is crucial to corporate reputation. People's collective association of images and experiences with an organization that is built overtime makes the reputation (Cornelissen, 2014). A good reputation is earned within and outside the organization through trustworthiness, authenticity, and consistency in doing right and positive actions (Jabal, 2022). Both workplace diversity and inclusion create an open, safe, and fair environment. This can also manifest a more favorable relationships with employees who are also stakeholders or individuals and groups affected by the business's operations and practices (Freeman, 1984 as cited in Cornelissen, 2014). Gender diversity builds better reputation (Wilton et al., 2019) as stakeholders also prefer diverse and inclusive brands.

Moreover, D&I overlap with different aspects of the organization. They can be part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs (Chohan, 2017) especially for people-centered initiatives (Hirode, 2019). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) on "Transforming the World" have areas focused on Gender Equality and Reduced Inequities ("Sustainable Development Goals", n.d.; "Sustainable Development Goals | The United Nations in Philippines", n.d.; Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d). Another is the connection with corporate governance which is about the management of the organization, specifically by the Board of Directors, including the stakeholder relationships (Chen, 2024). Further, both CSR and corporate governance are antecedents of corporate reputation (Hetze, 2016; Kumaran & Thenmozhi, 2016) as they both deal with managing the interest and fulfilling expectations of stakeholders.

Managing reputation also require informing the stakeholders on the ongoing efforts of the organization towards creating a fair and safe workplace, whether as CSR initiatives (Wan Afandi et al., 2021) or integrated within policies to show effective governance (Ganapathi, 2016). Communication that is well-cascaded along with the company's consistent performance are needed for a stronger, positive reputation (Kumaran & Thenmozhi, 2016). Reputable organizations have more visible internal and external communication and are authentic, transparent, and consistent in beliefs and actions when communicating with different stakeholders (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004, as cited in Cornelissen, 2014).

## Statement of the Problem

Diversity and inclusion, corporate reputation, CSR, governance, and communication have been previously studied, if not individually or separately, but connecting two or more concepts together especially with reputation. But focusing more on D&I, specifically on communication, showed certain research gaps that produced findings significant on different areas. Guided by Semiotic and Symbolic Convergence Theory, the study explores the D&I communication by: 1) analyzing what is communicated in the organization's D&I messages, 2) gathering employee insights on the extracted message on its own and with the corporate reputation, and 3) assessing if there is a convergence of perspectives between employees' perspectives on the diversity and inclusion messages and the built reputation.

**Significance**

This paper benefits different groups, individuals, and sectors and contribute to the different United Nations Sustainable Development Goals such as Quality Education (Goal 4), Gender Equality (Goal 5), Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8), and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (Goal 16). The findings can serve as a reference for organizations in enhancing their internal communication, promoting diversity and inclusion, and managing global and diverse workforce and building more inclusive practices. Further, employees can be made more aware of their significant role corporate reputation management. This paper also adds to the local literature on reputation management, communication, and diversity and inclusion. The findings can be used to study diversity and inclusion communication in other industries.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature on diversity and inclusion found interrelated definitions and categories. Diversity is found to be difference on demographic level such as in nationality, race, gender, sex, socio-economic status, religious affiliations, and other personal distinction (Office for Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement, n.d). Further, the differences can be categorized as "surface-level" or "deep-level" diversity (Lambert & Bell, 2013). The surface-level diversity are more visible differences in attributes such as race, age, gender, and sex while deep-level are less evident differences especially at first such as experiences, beliefs, values. This makes surface level easily observable to group interaction while deeper-level ones may require more time and interactions within a group group (Phillips et al., 2006; as cited in Qin et al., 2014) while deep-level ones may take time to discover through interpersonal and group interactions (Harrison et al., 2002 as cited in Qin et al., 2014; Mohammed & Angell, 2004 as cited in Qin et al., 2014). The range of attributes can also be categorized from social attributes (race and gender), informational (education and experience), organizational or collective level (Pfeffer, 1983, as cited in Qin et al., 2014) or relational encompassing individual to group comparison of similarity or dissimilarity group (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989; as cited in Qin et al., 2014). Aside from the level, the quantity of diversity is also studied to operationalized diversity. Lambert and Bell (2013) used the study and typology by Harrison & Klein (2007) to emphasize that a group is considered diversity in connection to a specific trait. But diversity can also be multiple-attribute differences and more subjective in different levels Qin et al., (2014).

Inclusion is more inherent to diversity as it is about how to make the differences and the presence of such effectively work for both the individual and the group. These are the actions and practices that can make people feel good despite being different and how their differences are valued at different levels (Indiana Arts Commission, n.d.; American Alliance of Museums, n.d.). It's about giving an individual the right to participate in something and be given a respectful and welcoming experience if they choose to do so (Kiuppis, 2018). Inclusion is fairly new compared to diversity but a framework showed their significant connection as inclusivity is also seen when a member of a group can freely show their district attributes. Diversity management can create an inclusive workplace (Shore et al.,2011)

When it comes to corporate reputation, literature cited various factors and drivers of corporate reputation. Some common themes include corporate citizenship, performance, and customer trust (Sandpaper Communications, 2022; Global RepTrak 100 Study, 2022; Almeida & Coelho, 2018; Hetze, 2016; Kanto, 2017). These reputation-building factors are also seen to be connected with one another. Reputation improved through CSR programs under corporate citizenship that also showed a connection with customer trust through satisfying stakeholder expectations and sustaining lives reputation (Rosak-Szyrocka et al., 2022). While social responsibility cannot directly impact the financial performance, it can boost reputation that can still improve some aspects of corporate performance (Ibini et al., 2023). Corporate identity, image, and communication are also essential keys to reputation management. The corporate profile and image communicated can shape stakeholders' perception and consistency can established long-term value in the market (Cornelissen, 2014). CSR, CSR communication, and cause-related marketing can strengthen a good reputation. The antecedents can also be moderators in reputation management. Corporate executives also have integral part in enhancing the reputation. The CEO's communication, through social media platform like Twitter, on corporate vision and leadership and workplace environment gained traction (Mirbabaie et al.,2019).

Existing literature also found the significance of CSR and corporate governance in corporate reputation (Hetze, 2016; Kumaran & Thenmozhi, 2016). CSR is an emergent area in corporate communication (Cornelissen, 2014) that can be defined in different ways which makes it a multidisciplinary concept with various standpoints and approaches (Seele & Locke, 2015). CSR is both for internal stakeholders such as employees and external for communities

and the environment (Bista, 2022). Corporate governance is the system of procedures, policies, and practices to control and manage the company. It is the structure designed to balance the success of the business and consider all of the stakeholders' interests (Chen, 2023). CSR and corporate governance also pull at one another. They are "two sides of the same coin" and "the companies that practice good corporate governance are also those that are socially and environmentally responsible" (Mala & Mathiraj, 2023, p. 172). Governance affects how the CSR polices are approved and implemented while CSR has the main framework in maintaining an ethical, responsible, and successful governance (Vemuri et al.,2023). CSR and corporate governance connect with corporate reputation through the stakeholder trust. Stakeholders expects and benefits from CSR initiatives and are part of ethical and responsible business. But a well-coordinated communication that also show consistency is still necessary for a more sustainable positive reputation (Kumaran & Thenmozhi, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

### Data Gathering

The qualitative approach with both descriptive and analytic design was used to explore the D&I communication in an organization since the study mainly focuses on in-depth understanding of individual and group meanings and experiences (Creswell, 2007; Tracy, 2013; Leavy, 2017). This research design is applicable with its inductive approach that is necessary to identity recurring themes to draw out general findings and conclusions (Creswell, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009; Leavy, 2017).

Through a case study inquiry, textual analysis and focus-group discussion were utilized. A case study investigates people or groups through a specific issue or contexts (Kothari, 2004). The textual analysis is applicable with its method of understanding linguistic, visual, and symbolic meanings from the texts that people use to communicate life and experiences (Hawkins, 2017). Semiotic is used as the framework for the textual analysis. The indicators in analyzing the text were a combination of modified, contextualized, and synthesized instruments from different literature: the seven standards of textuality by Robert-Alain de Beaugrande and Wolfgang U. Dressler (1981), the reading process from Necat Kumral's (2013) paper, and the

textual analysis for an environmental discourse analysis by Burke, Welch-Devine, and Seth Gustafson (2015).

A focus group discussion (FGD) best combined with textual analysis (Hawkins, 2017). An FGD is a group interview with three (3) to twelve (12) participants being asked to discussed or share about a specific topic (Tracy, 2013). The group interview further explored another set of perspectives through firsthand, varying insights and experiences from the stakeholders. The researcher decided on the use of FGD to ensure the participants are more comfortable and motivate to share and engage in the discussion with their colleagues. The Symbolic Convergence became the guide in testing themes, chains, and group cohesiveness.

There are two sources of data: the corporate website of a publicly listed company where the publicly accessible D&I messages were extracted and the employees from an organization. There are two messages extracted and analyzed. The first is the "Composition, Qualification, Diversity, and Independence" (n.d.) that is under the Board and Governance. The second one is BPI's 2022 Contributions to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals ("Sustainability Reporting", n.d.) focusing more on the Gender Equality area. There are two messages analyzed since there were no single message combining the communication of diversity and inclusion and even CSR.

**Figure 1**
*BPI's Board Diversity Message*

The purposive sampling was used for the FGD since the researcher set the criteria for the participant selection. Five (5) employees with different positions and tenure were interview. Most are long-tenured with ten years with the company, one recently hired during the time of the interview, and two with managerial and officer roles. They are assigned in customer service, marketing, and other clerical tasks.

**Figure 2**

*BPI's Sustainability Contributions*
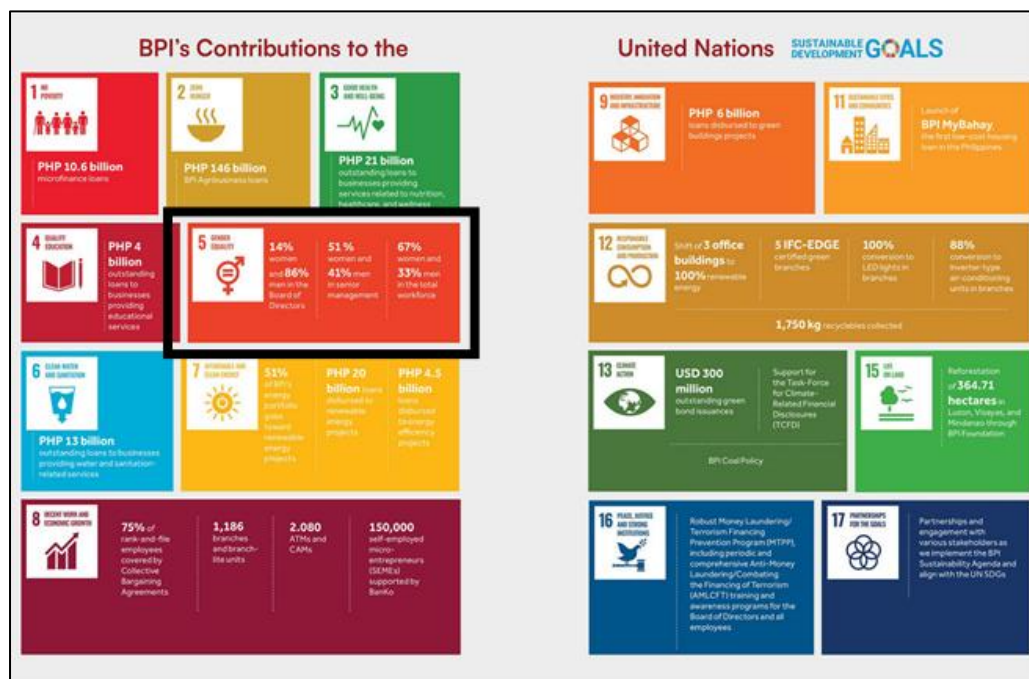


The researcher formulated interview six questions from the semiotic reading of the text covering participant's perspectives on the three main topics: the D&I messages, the corporate reputation, and the communication of the messages. The researcher also adheres to standard ethical considerations prior to the group interview by seeking approval from the authorized person, providing an informed consent and ensuring the participants signed them, seeking proper consent for audio recording of the responses, protecting participants' and the company's identity, and a respectful communication during the interview.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Textual Analysis of Diversity and Inclusion Messages

There are two realities studied through semiotics: the physical and cultural. The physical is the company which is Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) and the cultural is the extracted diversity and inclusion messages from the corporate website. The analysis of the messages revealed that the published messages align more as part of corporate governance and cannot be considered as a CSR campaign. The first message highlights more about board diversity and the second one has a specific area on gender equality. This means that while the second analyzed messages is published within the sustainability page of the website, it is not about workplace diversity and inclusion. This shows that the extracted diversity and inclusion messages may not yet be examined as CSR messages. Specifically, the extracted messages found varied themes in communicating diversity, inclusion, and corporate reputation.

### *Diversity as more visible differences*

One of the analyzed messages highlighted more on women's presence and representation with the board while the second message with the Gender Equality section also has numerical report on the comparison between the representation of women and men within the workplace.  Diversity is generally defined as differences that are more on the surface level or visible attributes. These visible differences include race, age, gender, and sex (Lambert & Bell, 2013). This aligns with worldwide increasing focus on gender diversity within the board composition (Diligent Institute, 2022). However, one of the messages also listed another aspect of diversity that is less visible type of differences pertaining to education, qualifications, skills, and work experiences (Lambert & Bell, 2013). Generally, diversity is found to be differences in differences which interestingly leads the similarity of being different. People's diversity may be visible and/or invisible, but they are similar or commonality due to presence of differences that can achieve the goal of creating a heterogeneous environment.

### *Diversity as part of regulations*

Both diversity and inclusion messages seem to be compliance to relevant recommendations or policies. The organization makes diversity part of its governance to adhere to agencies or authorities that are also stakeholder groups. The Security and Exchange

Committee's (SEC) Memorandum Circular No. 19 for Publicly Listed Companies' Code of Corporate Governance recommended establishing a board diversity policy for a more balanced decision-making and setting measurable goals in increasing board diversity ("MC No. 19 s. 2016 –of Corporate Governance for Publicly-Listed Companies," 2016). The publication of BPI's board diversity message communicates the company's adherence to these recommendations. This context of diversity may also stem from legal requirements. Article 3 of the Labor Code of the Philippines (1974) specified the policy to "ensure equal work opportunities regardless of sex, race or creed" while Article 125 prohibits and deems unlawful any discrimination against any female employee in the form of conditions based on sex such as lesser compensation. Regardless of the level of diversity (board or workplace), companies are expected compliance to fostering fairness and avoid any act of discrimination through their corporate policies and practices.

### *Inclusion needs more focus*

While inclusion was not explicitly defined and highlighted, it was subtly implied through words such as "including" when it comes to specifying diverse attributes especially the board composition. Indirect communication about inclusion does not always mean there is no inclusivity, but may mean several things. First, inclusion is too closely linked or even overshadowed by diversity that they are often perceived to be one and the same—diversity is also inclusion so it can be just called diversity. Second, inclusivity may not be immediately visible or achieved because it requires fostering better workplace culture and practices that may time some time to manifest and be understood. Inclusion should not only mean involving someone's presence such as women on boards, but also respecting the potential and contributions of the people involved (Namuddu et al., 2023). Third is the lack of measurable inclusion goals unlike with diversity. Although inclusion is not technically excluded, the textual analysis shows the need for more attention on inclusion, both on the surface through communication and on practice within the work culture.

### *Interconnectedness*

There are inevitable connections between diversity and inclusion that are also necessary despite the overpowering context of diversity. Textually, diversity seemed to be assigned the form of an object that receives actions. The board diversity message centers diversity around what is recognized as diverse, while inclusion pertains to the ideas, practice, or strategies

supporting diversity. This aligns with the definition of diversity as the "what" according to Rita Mitjans (ADP's chief diversity and social responsibility officer), while inclusion is the "how" (Burg, 2018). Similarly, the gender equality area from the second message also visually displays women and men percentage in the company (the "what") while implying the company's strategy of continuously increasing women representation and the practice of upholding representation of both women and men (the "how" or actions) across corporate levels.

D&I are also found to be a concept and a practice that is shared within the company that also go beyond or outside of it. The idea and strategy for D&I are more internal-to-external and vice versa. D&I can have a specific starting point—from fostering diverse employee attributes and cultivating a culture of belongingness, diverse or not, to openness to client diversity and respecting and valuing diverse client background. The board diversity message mentioned customers or clients who are external stakeholders and upholding such policy under governance aims to establish and maintain a favorable reputation with clients. This means that what is shared within the company can also influence and be intended for external communication. This is more relevant to the banking sector that are expected to take part in environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives to increase the lowered social trust and legitimacy from clients (Miranda et al., 2023). The messages also communicated the ongoing or progressive nature of D&I since they need to be sustained as a culture and a practice. There are statements such as "progress toward diversity goals" or board diversity as a way to "realize diversity on an ongoing basis" ("Manual on Corporate Governance", 2024).

### Corporate Reputation Within the D&I Messages

Similar to inclusion, the messages also indirectly communicated about the company's-built reputation. Considering the categories of the messages—under the board diversity and sustainability contribution report—the company has already established its own reputation. The organization that published the analyzed messages is a big, well-known corporation that is publicly listed and the first and oldest bank in Southeast Asia. BPI has been part of the Philippines' history and development and innovated its way to being "one of the most trusted organizations in the country." It has withstood time and grew steadily amid the changes happening in the country with foreign colonizers (Garcia, 2017). BPI is also the Top 3 out of 10 best banks in the Philippines in 2023 according to Forbes ranking (Yu, 2023).

The company seemed to also express the value of all shareholders and stakeholder groups by emphasizing on building trust and providing customers' needs amid being in a competitive sector ("Composition, Qualification, Diversity and Independence", n.d.). People matter especially in the context of employee diversity in age and is relevant to work performance (Tjimuku & Atiku, 2024). BPI may also display a level of transparency since the messages can easily be accessed through the website or search engine. It also shows compliance to regulations for publicly listed companies. Aside from valuing people, BPI is also represented as caring for a sustainable future with its contributions to different goals of UN SDGs.

The company is signified as adaptable to changes. Diversity and inclusion as ongoing and progressive, may require consistent revisiting of and modifications to policies, systems, and cultivating better workplace culture. Inclusion is part of the corporate culture as it as one of the inherent practices in a diverse environment (Namuddu, et al., 2023). BPI's board diversity policy and other systems under governance, and the sustainability reporting framework also exhibit the company's adaptability to corporate requirements and stakeholder expectations.

### Textual Standards of the D&I Messages

The textual analysis using the standards of textuality found three main elements used in communicating the diversity and inclusion messages. These are the physical elements or the surface and physical appearance of the messages, the messaging or the idea behind texts, and the use of signs and symbols for the words and visuals and their significations.

The physical elements show the use of use cohesive devices such as grammatical devices and lexical devices to connect the sentences. However, the D&I messages mostly comprise of words so it is found that it contains more lexical devices evident with vocabulary and structure of the phrases and sentences (Bahaziq, 2016). There is more reiteration through repeated words and collocation to ensure the texts are comprehensible and appealing to the readers. The texts also use standard article-type or basic page-type format (University of California Riverside, n.d.) and follow the common content format from its title to the body or descriptions of each topic.

The texts also reached a level of coherence from the cohesive devices used. There is the connectedness and consistency which are two of the three coherence conditions (Reinhart, 1980) on the idea level of the message. There a several ideas written specifically on the board composition message that are connected to the main theme. Each idea contains specific information to expound of the main theme. Despite the lack of visuals, the message is still informative as the readers will understand the entire picture behind the message as they continue going over each part of the message. The information within sustainability contribution message that follows the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals template also connects with the context of each area of goals. BPI aligned the information on the women percentage within the workplace with UN's gender equality goal that is about the empowerment of women and girls through end of discrimination and equal access to opportunities ("Gender Equality and the Sustainability Goals," n.d.). There is also consistency through the use of magic number three (3) as a pattern in enumerating ideas (e.g. balance of power, accountability, and independence in decision-making; skillfully put together, diverse, and well-composed Board; technical, banking, and risk management experience). The number three is a more balanced way of communicating ideas for easy recall and more appeal for audiences even for advertisement (Wraith, 2018). The lack of contrasting and irrelevant ideas from the main themes also shows consistency in the messaging.

The ideas are also presented as explicit and implied goals or targets which shows also shows the company's intention. The board diversity message has a section for Measurable Diversity Objectives and Targets. The sustainability report message is adapted from United Nations Sustainability Development Goals ("Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs", n.d.). There is often the angle of including goals to make the messages more actionable. This approach also helps manage corporate reputation which is under the business goals that can be achieved through CSR

The texts are also informative through communicating more relevant information that are more known and expected by readers. But there are also potentially less-known details to stakeholders. A known and expected information is the basic details about the company that help set the context for the theme of the board message. Complete information makes for a more effective corporate governance communication (Machold and Price, 2013; Jones, 2002;

Deller et al.,1999). Since the message is about the board, it is also expected to list the current board members since not all readers may be familiar. BPI's sustainability awards and reports are expected and can inform more readers since there is a dedicated page for its sustainability efforts and awards ("Awards", n.d.). However, diversity is only on the board level so there is lack of information about workplace diversity considering BPI is also well-recognized for its reputation of giving women more representation across all corporate levels (Kumar, 2020).

The texts were able to set contexts so readers know how updated the messages are. Both messages were able to include the year 2022 as the time when the messages are more applicable. They may not be as recent as of the time of the textual analysis which is done a year after, but they give important highlight and a picture of how things are in the governance and sustainability efforts of the company. The messages can also be applicable to more than one physical environment—from workplace to external business sphere. There are also various target audience for these messages. Anyone who has internet access can read the corporate website contents. Employees connected in the corporate network can be updated to internal affairs and external stakeholders can have ideas to the BPI work culture that may help them decide to be a new customer or stay as a loyal one.

The messages also used intertextuality and hypertextuality to access other related and supporting information. There are five categories of relationship of texts with other text (Genette, 1992,1997). There is intertextuality between the two D&I messages since they connect through the theme of gender. The intention of trust-building also aligns with BPI's corporate identity that is communicated as part of its mission and vision page. BPI's CSR and sustainability contribution and awards have relationship with external websites that mentioned the same message. The pages also used hyperlinks and related information at the bottom part of their webpage that readers may access should they need more information about BPI's governance, board, and sustainability. Establishing these connections between texts may express the company's intention to align and promote a consistent corporate identity internally and externally.

The signs and symbols are mostly signified through the words. The board diversity message has a more symbolic relationship between its signifiers and signified (Chandler, 2007), where in the words do not resemble their meanings as words are arbitrary and other texts

are necessary to understand the context of the words and the entire text. This is similar with the sustainability contribution message wherein it used symbols for each goal, but they still don't resemble their meanings so readers need to learn about the gender symbols (female and male) to understand how they were put together to create a new symbol (gender equality).

### Employees' Perspectives on the Messages and the Corporate Reputation

Employees' perspectives reveals that the second reality is more about their experiences and relationship with the company, rather that the website and the messages extracted from it. The discussion about D&I mainly served as a signal for them to reflect on and validate their own encounters. This also highlights the post-structuralist approach with the employees' perspectives showing that there is diversity and inclusivity within the company, despite the lack of proper communication, messages, branding, or campaigns about such efforts.

The employees' responses on the topic about D&I revealed themes on inclusive practices, significant changes, and a balanced approach, and communication issues. D&I is more evident because of the company's inclusive practices from hiring to promotion. Although it was not the same case ten years before as things were more conservative and traditional, D&I became one of the many changes that happened in their company. The company is open to hiring anyone who are in the legal working age and a degree holder regardless of their courses. However, the employees also emphasize the balanced approach towards D&I. The company also prioritize eligibility while fostering the fair and equal workplace. The company prioritizes its compliance with labor regulations and has to maintain the quality of eligibility as part of its standards. However, it does not mean there is discrimination. According to an employee, "Different kasi. Magkaiba kasi yung eligibility and diversity." (It's different. Eligibility and diversity are different.). Communication issues also emerged during the FGD that highlights the lack of employees' awareness to the D&I messages in their website. The issue as mentioned by one employee is, "Kino-communicate lang nila." (They just communicate), especially on the customer side, but internally, employees are having hard processing the messages transmitted to them. However, employees also recognized the communication improvements for the past years. They are required to accomplish an employee engagement survey where they can give feedback on the top issued within the workplace. The results were usually discussed with the supervisor and communication was found to be the number one issue in the workplace.

**Table 1**

*Participant Quotes about the Messages*

| Theme | Code | Participant Quote |
|---|---|---|
| The practice of inclusivity | Inclusive hiring Unrelated courses Inclusive promotion Skills and adaptability | *"…Technically, kung ikaw employer, hahanapin mo is someone na related dun sa klase ng industry mo, yung may knowledge dun. Ako napansin ko, eto makakarelate sakin si (referring to another employee), even hindi related yung course namin, kumbaga hindi yan nagiging hindrance para makapasok ka dun sa company, so may iba ang course is nursing. Technically walang relationship and yet kinukuha siya ni (company name) kasi alam naman din niya na kapag naman naturuan kumbaga madali rin naman siyang maka-adapt kumbaga hindi siya sarado or hindi soya naka-stick lang sa mga courses na dapat related lang sa kanya so isa yung sa mga nararamdaman namin…"* |
| There have been significant changes in the company | Gender discrimination Discrimination on women Company policy changes Leadership changes | *"Yun yung lagi which I think is not fair. It's so discriminatory kasi mas maraming empleyadong babae. Kaya ang tendency nyan, mas maraming waitlist na babae more than kami…"* <br><br> *"Yes, that was before I think 10 years ago. Nung naiba na yung President namin, hindi na. So halimbawa, when you're in a class of OTPs, 50 kayo dun usually mas marami ang babae diba? Mas marami naman talaga ang babaeng empleyadon. Pero sa klase niyo, sampu lang ang lalaki, 40 doon ang babae. Dati 25-25, kung 50 kayo, 25 na female, 25 na male…"* |
| | Difference of eligibility and diversity | *"Kumbaga, eligible ka ba? Kasi siyempre sabihin mo, age ano, may limit si (company) siyempre when you apply dapat at least 19 and halimbawa, retired at the age of 60 pero in some people that is discriminatory kasi when you can still work at 65, why not? Pero* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | *Pero eligibility ang pinag-uusapan, hindi naman yun nagdidiscriminate ka…"* |
| Upholding a balanced approach | Following corporate policies<br>Corporate look<br>Corporate attire | *"So I really agree dun sa sinabi ng lahat ng kasama natin dito na siyempre ako kasi new hire lang din so mostly likely yung basic experience ko nung nag-interview ako.. ang talagang sinabi sa amin is you need to have a corporate attire, even though virtual lang yung interview ko. Kinakailangan din kasi yun siyempre as an applicant, you need to follow lalo na nasa corporate world ka e so katulad nung sinabi ni (Employee 1) kanina yung merong mga hikaw and everything, isa kasi yun sa mga possible na makita ng iba, like let's say makita nila na marami kang hikaw, siyempre iba yung expression nila or iba yung impression nila sayo…"* |
| Communication issues and improvements | Information overload<br>Too much communication | *"When it comes to communication, nako-communicate naman…We… are just being bombarded with so much communication na parang andami-daming communications na parang hindi mo na nga nababasa minsan…"* |
| | Employee Feedback<br>Employee Engagement | *"Tsaka ang gusto ko lang din, eto yung gusto ko naman, yung meron kami ngayon na they can get our insights, o halimbawa kung meron tayong ayaw kasi meron silang ginagawang yearly na study among employees, samin kung ano yung ayaw namin, nakalagay dun diba?"* |
| | Lack of relevant explanations<br>Client communication<br>Information overload | *"Oo, parang later on na lang din nila sasabihin na oh ito para 'to sa ganitong process, mago-offline muna tayo pero para to sa ganung process…exclude ko na yung mga offline post pero in terms of the system, yung mga bagong pinapagawa, pinapa-implement, talagang madalas medyo, nabo-bombard ka na muna ng campaign* |

| | |
|---|---|
| | *bago makarating sayo na bakit may changes, may ganun. Although, ang napapansin ko naman mas nauuna ang client before…”* |

The employees also shared their insights about their company's reputation that also aligned with their D&I insights. Their responses revealed their company's adaptability, stability, progressive nature, and employees' complicated relationship with their company. Aligned with what they said about changes within the workplace, they witness how the company are able to keep up with the stakeholder demands through openness to diverse hiring and inclusive opportunities. Employees also attest to their company's ability to continuously provide innovative products and service to clients. With this, they affirm that their company has been here for a long time and has established a stable reputation that will always be there. Part of why the employees are confident with the company's stability is its progressive nature. They may not yet achieve everything when it comes to diversity and inclusivity, but there is gradual development. There is also a complicated relationship between the company and their employees that may be liken to a family dynamic. While they recognize the issues internally, the employees will still defend their company's reputation against outsiders. The participants are internal stakeholders as employees and external as clients so they have an overview of both sides which makes it hard to stick to one side only.

**Table 2**

*Participant Quotes about the Corporate Reputation*

| Theme | Code | Participant Quote |
|---|---|---|
| | Sustainability Adaptability Common work issues | *"Nakapagpastay kay (company name) is change…naga-adapt sila sa change kaya nga tingnan mo ang company di mo masusustain yan kung di ka marunong mag-adapt. Nagrereklamo ako na maraming bago sa sistema pero its part of their adaption…* <br><br> *"Nagrereklamo ako pero naisip ko rin, 'oo nga kasi', alam ni (company name) yan, noon pa man na nagche-change yan talaga, na kung di niya ginagawa* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Adaptable to changes | | *yung ginagawa niya ngayon, matagal na siguro silang wala…”* |
| | Pioneer of innovation | *“…hindi naman sa pagba-brag, talagang yung mga first din kasi, halos kay (company name) lahat…* <br><br> *“Oo lahat na lang…litung-lito na ko sa app pero the point is kung meron mang mga downsides katulad nung minemention ni (Employee 1) na medyo mahirap pag nagbabago-bago pero naga-adapt para sa client, para sa economy, tsaka kung ano yung current economic situation or kung ano yung need ng clients…”* |
| Progressive | Gender sensitivity Respectful communication | *“…before kasi parang talagang may discrimination lalo na nung… pero ngayon pag may pumasok dito… alam mong gender ay male* <br> *pero nakasuot ng pambabae, kahit-tawagin mo siya ‘Miss’ kasi mukha siyang babae e pero huwag mo ipilit na ‘Sir’ kasi…”* |
| Stable | Tried and tested Lasting Consistent | *Si (company name) hindi naman nagbago tingin ko. Ang taas ng tingin ko kay (company name), being stable, kasi tumatak yan. (years of service/operation) and when it comes to stability, yung tatag, alam mo hindi siya mawawala, alam mo anong mangyari sa Pilipinas, andyan siya. Kumabaga, subok na matibay yan… When it comes to the company, yung stability niya, kampante ako na nasa (company name) …”* |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Stable | Employee's pride | *"Sakin, Ma'am, ano yung reputation niya, parang dala-dala ko rin kasi siya, kaya ako pag umuuwi ako, talagang sinasabi nila sakin 'hoy, yung ID mo suot mo pa', sabi ko 'who cares'…"*<br><br>*"Oo, proud ako na ito sa (company name) ako nagwo-work ganyan kasi alam ko naman, alam naman ng lahat na isa siya sa big company dito sa Philippines…"* |
| There are differences in perspectives | Downsides and issues<br>Internal and external perspectives | *"…sabi nga nila may mga downsides din like kunwari nagkakaproblem kami…yung mga issues like yung mga glitch, na kahit minsan ang hirap ng ipagtanggol ng (company name), pinagtatanggol mo pa rin kasi nga yung reputation niya, reputation mo din so sa mga friends ko, nae-explain ko na, 'hindi, may ganito ganyan'…"*<br><br>*"Ako, if I'm a client, how will I see (company name), hindi ko masabi kasi empleyado din ako…Siguro pag client ako, 'nako malaki, maganda, ang gaganda ng mga (employee), ang gaganda ng mga new applicant…kasi yun nga, ang antaas ng tingin, ang gaganda ng clients, gusto ko magwork dito, nung nakapasok na ko, ganito pala dito…"* |
| Parent-children or family-like relationship | Complicated relationship<br>Common work issues | *"Parang siya nanay at tatay ko… mataas ang tingin ko sa nanay at tatay ko pero may reklamo ako, parang family lang yan na meron akong ayaw, pwede rin ako na magsabi ng ayaw ko, nagrereklamo, nadidismay din ako pero love ko kasi nga parents ko…mother and father ko ganun lang yun…"*<br><br>*"…kasi sa isang pamilya naga-away-away man kayo, nagrereklamo ka, pero when it comes sa pag may umaway sa kapatid mo…ganun din sa (company name), pinagtatanggol pa rin namin* |

*siya. Pero at the back, parang marami kaming reklamo din pero sa labas, ipaglalaban namin kasi ito yung family, company namin…*

### *Symbolic Convergence of Perspectives*

The analysis on the focus group discussion found no symbolic convergence between the shared perspectives and experience on the D&I messages and the corporate reputation. However, the researcher still found group cohesiveness when participants agree and share related experiences to what other participants shared.

Despite the lack of convergence, there are overlapping perspectives (see Figure 3) that contribute to the analysis of corporate reputation management through communicating D&I messages. Both sides of perspectives highlight the ongoing progress and changes towards D&I efforts and in sustaining the built reputation. Employees' perspectives seem to come from both objective and subject views. They remain objective in sharing factual information about their company and their roles and responsibilities, but they are also open to discussing varying cases and other opinions while seeking feedback from some co-workers. There is also the discussion on past and present issues that also impacted their D&I practices and communication within the company. However, the narrative about improvements is also emphasized for more balanced and realistic insights.

**Figure 3**

*Overlapping Employees' Perspectives*
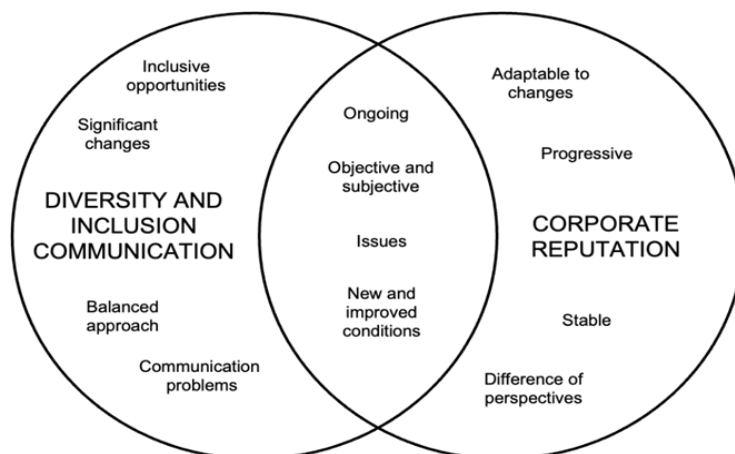
**Managing Corporate Reputation Through D&I Messages**

There are different antecedents of corporate reputation including corporate citizenship or societal involvement, customer trust in security, quality, and governance ("Sandpaper Communications", 2022; Ibini et al., 2023), corporate social responsibility (Hetze, 2016; Almeida & Coelho; 2018; Rashid & Mustafa, 2020), communication (Almeida & Coelho, 2018; Mirbabaie et al.,2019), and leadership (Mirbabaie et al., 2019; "Global RepTrak 100 2022", 2022). CSR involvement can satisfy stakeholder expectations through societal benefits (Rosak-Szyrocka et al., 2022). Good governance and CSR contribute to the overall business success by being driving forces to one another (Vemuri et al., 2023). Effective corporate governance and quality CSR reporting boost corporate reputation (Ghuslan et al., 2021).

These antecedents align with the case analysis findings. Generally, D&I messages can be tool in managing corporate reputation which is within the second or cultural reality of semiotics. It is also found that corporate governance, through board composition and diversity policy compliance and sustainability reporting, has stronger pull in managing corporate reputation than CSR communication. Employees' perspectives are also within the second reality and the post-structuralist also highlighted more inclusive and fair corporate governance through decision-making, policies, and practices when it comes to recruitment, promotion, transitions, and communication. Thus, the second reality with the diversity and inclusion messages and more on the employees' experiences than the website aids in managing the corporate reputation by communicating the company's adaptability, transparency, corporate identity, and built reputation. They also provide the opportunity to evaluate further communication improvements.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Diversity and inclusion are conceptually distinct, but may overlap or predominantly be referred to as diversity in practice. Diversity has spectrum, from more visible differences such as age and gender to deeper level such as skills and experiences that may be surface through ongoing interactions. Both D&I are more highlighted in the governance level. Diversity is currently more measurable with its intended goals. Inclusion needs to be directly communicated with the same level as diversity as an effect D&I only seem to exist with the

presence of the one another. The achievements of diversity goals are only feasible when companies see their distinctiveness and interconnectedness.

People and their experiences make significant difference in analyzing communication issues and the reality within the workplace and where the company's reputation currently stand. Employees may not be fully aware of D&I messages but they still provided another source of information through their experiences that became a more authentic, first-hand, practical evidence of collective views about the company. Even without published D&I messages, what the employees have seen, heard, learned, and experienced during the starting point of their affiliation with the company can offer another side of the reality which may have stronger influence on the corporate reputation, compared to messages that are often promoted. However, the company should still continuously address issues and improve on communication especially when they affect the overall business operations and employee performance. Employees' experiences are valuable and should be more valued, but there is still a need for communication efforts on initiatives such as in D&I so employees do not always rely on their own experience, but rather align what is being communicated to what is being practiced.

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