SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring the challenges encountered in managing diversity and inclusion in the telecommunications industry by selected multinationals in Ghana

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Abstract: This study investigated the challenges encountered as well as examined the elements influencing the management of diversity and inclusion by multinationals in the telecommunications industry in Ghana. A qualitative (case study approach) approach was employed to answer the research questions and realise the objectives. There were three in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions conducted in the selected organisations, being the two market leaders in the telecommunication industry (MTN—Ghana and Vodafone—Ghana) in Ghana. Coding and thematic analysis were employed to identify the challenges and elements influencing the management of diversity and inclusion in the selected organisations. In practice, the findings of the study point to the fact that corporate policies or strategies are not adequately aligned to the societal context. A proposed framework was created out of the findings of the study, aiming at mitigating the identified challenges. Arising from the findings of the study, it was recommended that further studies are needed to make the socio-cultural dynamics more explicit and align it to corporate strategies. Additionally, the study needs to be broadened by employing mixed-method and include the entire number of organisations in the industry to obtain a conclusive result.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

An inclusive organization or society has a huge competitive advantage; however, a diverse environment poses a significant challenge in ensuring inclusion. Ghana is increasingly becoming attractive to multinationals due to its enhanced democratic credentials. The phenomenon has increased the already existing diversity, therefore, deepening the complexity regarding socio-cultural, economic and political dynamics within the country. These complexities are associated with challenges which impede the creation of an inclusive organization or society. Further, the challenges prevent organizations from possessing the needed competitive advantage. This study explored the challenges encountered in managing diversity and inclusion by selected multinationals in the telecommunication industry in Ghana in the context of demographics, organizational and socio-cognitive diversities. A framework was created out of the findings, assisting in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.
Subjects: Sociology of Culture; Sociology of Knowledge; Gender Studies; Cultural Studies;

Keywords: diversity; inclusion; demographics; socio-cognitive diversity; organisational diversity

1. Introduction
Diversity and inclusion have evolved to be a strategic management tool with emphasis on emerging markets, the creation of effective as well as efficient teams which are global and the proper management of the organisational image. Diversity can broadly be seen through the lens of “similarities and differences” coupled with its associated tensions and complexities and constitute a mixture that takes the shape or form of any nature (Thomas, 2010: 106, p. 111). Diversity has been a major topic in management discourse for the past couple of decades and researchers such as Cox (1991), Taylor (1995), and Richard (2000) have highlighted the benefit of managing this effectively. The importance of effectively managing diversity and inclusion is evident in its associated socio-economic implications in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa (Appiah et al., 2018).

As the global business environment is changing rapidly, multiculturalism with its associate diversity in organisations is increasingly being accepted as a critical management issue regarding international business and this has gained currency due to the impact of globalisation on all departments of the national economy (DeLancey, 2013). Subsequently, diversity and inclusion management are now accepted as prominent areas for management research and important elements in human resource policies in companies (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). Besides, studies have emphatically underscored the need for an all-inclusive, instead of an isolated approach regarding diversity management to derive full benefit and realize the goals of an inclusive work environment (Scott et al., 2011).

Diversity and inclusion are fields of academic study, spanning disciplines such as management, psychology, and sociology (Farndale et al., 2015). This makes it imperative for organisations to respond to this trend, with valuing diversity approach (Cox & Blake, 1991). This has been put aptly by Mor Barak (2015, p. 8) as “diversity makes business sense.” It has further been identified as a tool for making quality decisions as well as producing superior creativity (Cunningham, 2007; Gruenfeld et al., 1996; Phillips et al., 2004). In this regard, countries such as the United States have enacted legislation and policies geared towards the creation of a work environment which is equitable (Mor Barak, 2014). Further, governments of various nations have also embraced legal frameworks regarding equality and diversity because of the competitive advantage it could derive from a highly participated labour market (Sharma, 2016).

However, empirical evidence revealed in various studies highlights the challenges encountered in managing diversity and equality in organisations. These challenges are evident in sectors such as health (Ali et al., 2013; Hunt, 2007), sports (Spracklen et al., 2006), local councils (Senyucel & Phillpott, 2011), hospitality (Gröschl, 2011), public (Harris & Foster, 2010), and as well as private sectors (Colgan, 2011; Hvidman & Andersen, 2013; Lee Cooke & Saini, 2012). Ample evidence found in research also indicates a negative aspect of diversity which is attributed to organisations and groups who drive away individuals who differ from the majority (Milliken & Martins, 1996).

It may be concluded at this point that organisations need to be prudent when managing their workforce due to the rapid change in the work environment (Ghosh, 2016). Further, the organisational and institutional distance which is the difference between an institutional profile of the home country and the country of operation are investigated. The country institutional profile provides indicators for regulatory, normative and the cognitive institution of a nation (Ferner et al., 2005).

To this end, in explaining workplace diversity, which is relatively relevant to a different cultural context, Mor Barak (2014, p. 136) puts it as “; the segmentation of employees into various groups that are of similar characteristics regarding national or cultural setting”. Inclusion, on the other hand, is aptly described by April et al. (2009) and Giovannini (2004) as the appreciation and usage
of the differences found among employees so that the employee feels involved and the individuals' potential is unleashed. Dwelling on the individual sense of belongingness, inclusion can also be defined as the employee's degree of being an integral part of the organisation in both formal and informal aspects (Mor Barak, 2014). In this regard, in achieving equity in employment, regarding managing diversity and inclusion, organisations should embrace and utilise the differences found in the workforce (Daya, 2014). The narration above supports the assertion by Shore et al. (2011, p. 270) which states that; for an individual to be fully part of a workgroup, two scenarios should be present: “belongingness and uniqueness.”

In as much as diversity management is geared towards ensuring fairness, acceptance of differences and discourage discrimination, this study further investigates convergence and divergence in the management of diversity within the multinational organisations under study. The development of this study is premised on the following paradigms and theory:

- Discrimination and fairness paradigm; the paradigm is premised on equal opportunity, fair treatment, recruitment, and compliance with the requirement of equal employment opportunity (Thomas & Ely, 1996).
- Access and legitimacy paradigm; the paradigm is predicated on the acknowledgment and appreciation of differences (Thomas & Ely, 1996)
- Learning and effectiveness paradigm; this paradigm focuses on a learning approach which aligns work and employee perspectives (Thomas & Ely 1996)
- Balance theory: this theory argues that there should be a balance between the chaos and the bureaucratic traps to ensure organisational competitiveness (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1998)

2. Challenges in managing diversity and inclusion

2.1. Global challenges
The development of strategic and robust programmes for managing a diverse workforce is increasingly becoming a great challenge because of globalisation. One of the challenges associated with diversity is to provide opportunities for various groups while maintaining aspects of their cultures and creating a national in which these groups are systematically included and feel that they belong (Banks, 2009). Similarly, defining diversity and inclusion within a specific context and linking it to human resource management remains a challenge. This can be seen in a number of studies trying to unearth the cause of inequalities in organisational settings (Block & Noumair, 2015).

To mitigate this challenge, organisations incur high costs in training programmes (Rainey, 2010) but they do not yield the needed results (Kalev et al., 2006). Consequently, a context-specific study on diversity and inclusion will be needed to analyse and interpret outcomes (Farnsdale et al., 2015). For example, as asserted by Strydom and Erwee (1998) in Syed and Özbligin (2009, pp. 2447–2448), South Africa requires a context-specific strategy in managing diversity; that is, an approach that aligns with the socio-cultural, political and historical texture of the country. This has also been indicated by Brewster and Mayrhofer (2012) that context-specific research which ensures a deeper insight into a phenomenon and eschews universalistic assumptions is a suitable approach. Also, emphasis needs to be placed on employee-level perspectives to understand perceptions and behaviours towards various aspects of diversity and inclusion across national contexts (Farnsdale et al., 2015). Another teething challenge is the underrepresentation of women in management positions, although diversity policies are now an integral component of many organisational management structures. This signals a paradox as diversity is being accepted by managers as an enabler for positive outcomes, but companies tend to keep top management teams homogeneous (Knoppers et al., 2015).
The lack of the conceptualisation of diversity and inclusion has also been identified as a challenge by Farndale et al. (2015). In their view, it is important to explore diversity and inclusion practices in various nations by assessing divergent and convergent practices based on institutional or cultural influences. Further, they suggest that it is essential to expand the knowledge of diversity and inclusion by investigating practices that are being employed by organisations in other parts of the world, where to date, little is known about it. Although there is sufficient evidence regarding the reliability and credibility of diversity tools (Mor Barak, 2015), further research is needed to make the concept more relevant to the socio-economic dispensation (Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007). This indicates that a lot more is hidden and many needs to be investigated (Block, 2016; Noumair & L. F., 2004).

2.2. African challenges

The diverse nature of Africa calls for a sound approach towards diversity and inclusion in the workplace, but literature in this respect is limited (April & Blass, 2010; Pelled et al., 1999; Roberson, 2006). More importantly, the advent of the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) buttresses the assertion by Appiah and Adeyeye (2020a) to properly manage diversity and inclusion since it has a significant impact on trade. Furthermore, the African context is characterised by uncertainty (Munene, 1991; Ugwuegbu, 2001; Zoogah & Nkomo, 2012) and this creates a challenge in managing diversity. A project was undertaken by Kaggwa et al. (2013) confirmed that the phenomenon of diversity and inclusion management is not widespread on the continent, although most African countries are signatories to United Nations conventions in this regard. This can be found in the declaration of human rights by the United Nations (United Nations, 1948, pp. 73–76) which states that: “These are inherent rights to be enjoyed by all human beings of the global village—men, women, and children, as well as by any group of society, disadvantaged or not and not to be withdrawn, withheld or granted at someone’s whim or will”.

2.3. Ghanaian challenges

The global and African challenge concerning diversity and inclusion management is also peculiar to Ghana. The literature of Ghana in this regard, so far as diversity is concerned is very limited, with few concentrating on gender, social inclusion, and education, consequently leaving out what pertains to the workplace (Agbenyega, 2007; Agyare-Kwabi, 2013; Dei, 2005). Notable of Ghana’s diversity is the number of languages spoken by the citizens and its need to be managed properly to ensure inclusion (Appiah & Adeyeye, 2020b) Although diversity and inclusion management are relatively new phenomena in Ghana, it has been adopted by a sizable number of organisations as part of their core management practice, notable among these organisations are Ecobank (Ghana), Shell (Ghana), IFC, Ashesi University College, and Vodafone (Ghana). It, therefore, suggests the unavailability of a suitable approach and a low appreciation of the phenomenon by a larger portion of corporate Ghana.

Inadequate insight in this respect makes it difficult for multinational organisations to appreciate and approach it with the needed accuracy. This situation requires the exploration of the challenges that multinational companies encounter in managing diversity in Ghana to have an insight into the phenomenon. Currently, the lack of adequate literature in sub-Saharan Africa makes it difficult for multinationals to approach diversity and inclusion management. This retards progress and deprives the countries of the full benefit of diverse and inclusive work environments. Nishii and Özbilgin (2007) maintain that most multinational companies replicate their home strategies in the regions in which they operate. This is because only half of the surveyed firms had global stakeholders in mind when formulating their diversity programmes.

Hence, diversity and inclusion programmes that are run by multinational companies in the telecommunications industry in Ghana may not necessarily be designed to run in this country but have been employed because of the absence of local alternatives. Nishii and Özbilgin (2007) vigorously affirmed that this has been proven to be problematic. They further suggest that local frameworks or models should be developed which will ensure the creation of a diverse and inclusive environment in every region. Most diversity and inclusion programmes applied in other regions have not yielded the
needed results since companies do not normally incorporate diversity and inclusion management strategies in their programmes when they venture abroad (Dunavant & Heiss, 2005).

3. The need to study Africa
In as much as research in management has made strides in globalising its coverage, most African organisations remain uncovered (Zoogah et al., 2015). The globalisation of management research can be seen in the reduction of the skews towards Western advanced economies. This is evident in the increase in research in geographical areas such as Asia (Bruton & Lau, 2008; Carney, 2013; Peng, 2007), Central and Eastern Europe (Meyer & Peng, 2005; Woldu et al., 2006), Latin America (Martinez & Kalliny, 2012; Vassolo et al., 2011) and Middle East (Zahra, 2011). These geographical areas feature prominently in management journals with Africa conspicuously missing from the mix (Jackson, 2004).

This places Africa in obscurity, because it is home for over a billion people, consisting of 54 countries and vibrant economies found in countries like Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Rwanda, and South Africa (Hoskisson et al., 2013; Kehl, 2007; Roxburgh et al., 2010). Further, statistics reveal a significant average in GDP growth of 4.7%, which translated into an impressive purchasing power of 860 USD billion in 2008. This outstripped India by 35% and more than what the Russians spent that is 821 USD billion (Mckinsey Global Institute 2010). A renowned journal, The Economist, in the year 2005, 2011 and 2013 revealed that there are numerous opportunities in areas such as agriculture, retail, banking, infrastructure, natural resources, and telecommunications (Chironga et al., 2011; Zoogah et al., 2015). More importantly, the enactment of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AFCFTA), which has come into force (Hartzenberg & Erasmus, 2019), deepens the already existing diversity due to the movement of goods, services and individuals within the region. It further makes Africa one of the largest single markets in the world and therefore a robust approach is needed to manage diversity and inclusion since it is the basis for integration. The latest development on the continent predicts by the Economist Group in the year 2013, that Africa will be the home of the 20 fastest growing economies in the world in the next 5 years a foregone conclusion (Zoogah et al., 2015).

Similarly, the positive image of Africa, which is evident in publications focusing on the growth and viability of African economies (Roxburgh et al., 2010) and the exponential growth of African markets (Chironga et al., 2011) makes the continent attractive to global businesses which deepens the diverse nature of the continent. Furthermore, most global businesses are attracted to Africa due to the continent’s ability to meet investors’ expectations in terms of returns. This has motivated multinationals such as Unilever and Nokia to increase its footprint on the continent (Chironga et al., 2011). This development calls for the exploration of the situation and challenges about diversity and inclusion management on the continent.

Concerning diversity, Africa has more than 1 000 ethnic groups, which makes it the continent with the most diverse groups of people (Awedoba, 2005; Collier, 2007). In this regard, diversity strategies employed by multinationals in Africa may not align with the ethnic beliefs regarding traditional or tribal practices on the continent (Mbiti, 1999; Ugwuegbu, 2001). This requires an investigation into the management of diversity and inclusion to unravel the complexities.

As the gap between the African continent and the world becomes narrower through telecommunication, it is imperative to investigate the industry to gain a deeper insight into the phenomenon. The viability of the telecommunications industry in Africa is evident in the expansion in Sub-Saharan Africa, bridging the gap between the continent and the industrialised countries. Further, in 2004, there were more people using telecommunications in Africa than entire North America (Parker, 2005). This makes telecommunications an important sector of African economies and needs to be studied in this regard.
4. Justification for choosing Ghana
The need to take a critical look at the case of Ghana is very important due to its vibrant economy (Hoskisson et al., 2013; Kehl, 2007; Roxburgh et al., 2010) and current ability to attract global businesses. The country’s stable political environment, a vibrant democracy and the discovery of oil and gas in commercial quantities account for its economic growth in the past decade. Consequently, the economy was therefore projected to grow by approximately 6% in the year 2016 and over 8% in 2017 (Okudzeto et al., 2016).

Ghana has the typical characteristics of Africa regarding diversity. The country is multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural and it is estimated to have over 90 ethnic groups (Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). This indicates a complex situation when it comes to managing diversity and it is worthwhile investigating the phenomenon. Various studies have underscored the importance of a nation’s sociocultural and political background regarding the management of diversity and inclusion since it defines the phenomenon (Calas et al., 2009; Nishii & Özblin, 2007; Syed & Özblin, 2009). This fits squarely into the dynamics within the Ghanaian society concerning the various regimes and a wide spectrum of ethnic groups.

A unique characteristic of the Ghanaian society is that there is no homogeneity regarding ethnicity in any part of the country. Similarly, a very significant feature is the ethnically polarised nature of the north and southern regions, where the south has a competitive advantage regarding politics and economics. This culminated into ethno-regional inequalities found in the country (Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). Past regimes worked around the clock, enacting policies to bridge the economic and political gap (Osei-Amponsah et al., 2006). Notable among these policies meant to address the imbalance are the centralisation of resource distribution by government, and regional balance regarding key government appointees and political power (Gyimah-Boadi, 2003; Gyimah-Boadi & Daddieh, 1999). Further, the erstwhile Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) regime tried to level the playing field by promoting the Ewe ethnic group in the government and public sector, but this was halted by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government (Gyimah-Boadi, 2003).

Ghana has approximately 92 ethnic groups (Asante & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004). This diversity is further intensified by globalisation where other nationals find their way into the country. The major ethnic groups are Akans (49.1%), Mole Dogbane (8.0%), Guan (4.4%), Gurma (3.9%), Grusi (2.8%), Mande-Busanga (1.1%) and others (1.5%) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2000). This needs to be considered in defining a suitable approach in managing diversity and inclusion in society. The interplay of ethnic and national identity is very important in the management of diversity and inclusion since it indicates how differences are appreciated to foster inclusion. As indicated by the Afrobarometer (Zoogah, 2016), 23% of Ghanaians identify themselves with only national identity, 4% exclusively identify themselves with their ethnic background, 8% identify themselves with national identity more than ethnicity, 6% identify themselves with ethnic identity over nationality and 59% identify themselves equally with both nationality and ethnicity.

It is important to investigate this phenomenon to assess how it impacts diversity and inclusion management since the 4% who claim to see themselves through the ethnic lens has been disputed by Zoogah (2016), indicating that more hidden attributes need to be investigated. This gives a pointer to the fact that diversity in Ghana is pervasive and the influx of multinational companies in the country due to the nation’s enhanced democratic credentials creates a fertile ground for complexities regarding diversity and inclusion and needs to be deeply understood.

5. Justification for studying the telecommunications industry
A study by Hardy (1980) and Norton (1992) indicates that the growth of telecommunications investment has a positive correlation with economic gains. Similarly, the telecommunications industry is an important sector of an economy as it helps in realising the macroeconomic goals of economic growth and advancement in nations. As a consequence, most African countries in recent times have paid attention to the telecommunications industry to ensure efficiency and
productivity since it has a ripple effect on other sectors of the economy (Salisu & Ibrahim 2014). Further, Salisu & Ibrahim (2014) argue that investment flow in the telecommunications industry is directly proportional to economic performance. Consequently, an efficient and productive telecommunications industry in emerging markets is a prerequisite for any nation to effectively participate globally and attract investments (Jacobsen 2003). This underscores the outcome of a study by Sridhar and Sridhar (2007) that there is a positive link between telecommunications and national output in developing countries.

In the case of Ghana, a study conducted by Price Water House Coopers on behalf of the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications, indicated a 5.4% and 6.9% contribution to government revenue in the year 2013 and 2014, respectively, creating 5000 direct and 1.5 million indirect jobs. This makes the telecommunications industry in Ghana one of the main economic sectors and worthwhile investigating.

6. Problem statement
Diversity and inclusion are a critical aspect of global business in the twenty-first century. Organisations encounter challenges when they venture into other societies which have a different approach in managing diversity. This normally impacts negatively on the operations of the organisation and its effectiveness. Notable challenges identified by researchers in this field are as follows:

- The failure of diversity strategies applied in the different region due to the absence of a local framework and universalistic assumptions (Brewster & Mayrhofer, 2012; Dunavant & Heiss, 2005).
- The lack of adequate literature to help understand the phenomenon and the generalization of strategies (Farndale et al., 2015; Mor Barak, 2015; Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007).
- Employees do not feel that they belong since their socio-cultural values are not appreciated by organisations (April & Bloss, 2010; Block & Noumair, 2015).
- Organisations struggle to appreciate the dynamics within diversity, either implicit or explicit and this ambiguity needs to be investigated (Thomas, 2010).
- Diversity and inclusion, as a phenomenon, is not widespread in Africa coupled with high uncertainty of the African context (Kaggwa et al., 2013; Munene, 1991; Ugwuegbu, 2001; Zoogah & Nkomo, 2012).

These challenges can be as harmful as any other issue affecting organisations but are less likely to be detected by the management. Yet, to date, there has been little, if any, formal identification and evaluation of the challenges encountered in managing diversity and inclusion by multinationals in the telecommunications industry in Ghana. To understand the complexity of the challenges, qualitative multiple-case study of the multinational companies is needed to identify the challenges concerning the socio-cultural, political and economic environment and to determine its impact on the telecommunications industry’s well-being. Furthermore, this study proposes an antidote by presenting a framework to mitigate identified challenges encountered within a diverse work environment. The proposed framework seeks to ensure inclusion and foster enhanced performance in an organisation.

7. Research objectives
The objectives are to

(1) establish the challenges encountered by multinationals in the telecommunications industry in Ghana regarding, demographic, socio-cognitive and organisational diversity and inclusion concerning the socio-cultural, political and economic environment.
(2) establish the convergence and divergence in diversity and inclusion management in the multinational companies in the telecommunications industry within the socio-cultural, political and economic environment in Ghana.

(3) ascertain the current situation regarding the management of diversity and inclusion of the multinational companies in the telecommunications industry in Ghana.

(4) investigate the strategies in place to mitigate the challenges and suggest appropriate measures as a remedy.

(5) identify the similarities and differences between multinational companies in the telecommunications industry in Ghana, regarding the challenges in diversity management and how it compares to global practice.

8. Study procedure, design and method
An extensive library and internet search were conducted to collect information from the theories that have already been put forward by other authors in the field of study. This formed the basis for the literature review and conceptual framework. Books on diversity and inclusion as well as peer-reviewed articles were consulted and referenced to ascertain how the strategies put in place to mitigate the challenges related to the existing theory. Other published materials in the field of management were also used to explain issues relating to the topic. Theories available were used in explaining the paradigm on which the research is predicated and how the prevailing issue relates to the literature.

Secondly, the study focused on primary data collection. The qualitative method was employed in this approach by using semi-structured interviews and focus groups. In total, three in-depth interviews were conducted in addition to two focus group discussions. Data collected were analysed using both manual and computer aided (NVivo) systems. Further, strict adherence to the standards for trustworthiness was observed. Apart from the data collected, archival materials were also used to investigate the above-mentioned challenges in the phenomena.

9. Findings
The results from this study confirm that selected multinational organisations in the telecommunication telecommunications industry in Ghana encounter challenges in managing diversity and inclusion regarding demographics, socio-cognitive and organisational diversities. This has also been asserted in previous studies within other contexts by scholars such as Cox and Blake (1991), Gershman and Rivera (2018), Kostova (1999), Jones, Pringle and Shepherd (2000), and Syed (2008) among others. In addition, it is found that historical context, national and corporate policies have a relatively adverse effect on the present strategy in managing diversity in the organisations investigated (MTN—Ghana, Vodafone—Ghana).

The additional findings support the claim by Cheong et al. (2007) and Ferner et al. (2005) regarding context and policies, respectively. A major contribution of this study is the identification of factors that influence the strategy of diversity and inclusion management in the organisations under investigation. Further, the results of this study confirm that an individual’s identity can be traced to his or her social construct (Alderfer & Smith, 1982), which is made up of multiple interwoven elements. The social construct of an individual identified in this study influences his or her sense of belonging in a diverse environment. On the other hand, some elements of the constituents investigated proved to pose little or no significant challenge.

The findings are categorised under five different themes, hereunder listed:

**Theme One:** The state of diversity and inclusion management in the selected organisations.

The identification of belongingness buttresses the assertion made by Shore et al. (2011) that “belongingness and uniqueness” drive diversity and inclusion. Utilisation of different background to
achieve a set goal confirms the existence of diversity and inclusion management in the organisation. A study by April et al. (2009) and Giovannini (2004) supports the utilisation of different backgrounds to establish a sense of belongingness which leads to inclusion (McDonald, 2010; Thomas, 1991).

Challenges encountered by the selected organisations in managing diversity and inclusion were mentioned. A significant challenge is the absence of strong structures in the selected organisations. Challenges mentioned by participants from MTN–Ghana are the deep-seated differences found among employees and stereotyping. In the case of MTN–Ghana, diversity and inclusion are managed by corporate services which are not the core mandate of that department. Vodafone—Ghana has a department for diversity but it is not fully staffed since it is manned by one person who liaises with other departments.

**Theme Two:** Demographic challenges

The study revealed that age differences create tension in the workplace, concurring with the argument that demographic dissimilarities create tension in the workplace (Peled et al. 1999). Similarly, employees leave the organisation when there is an age disparity (Jackson et al. 1991).

The findings depicted a situation where older employees find it difficult to submit to younger managers, reducing their sense of belonging. The tension points to a communication breakdown in the organisations as asserted by Zenger and Lawrence (1989) and O’Reilly, Tsui and Egan (1992), indicating that demographic dissimilarities have a negative correlation to effective communication. Similarly, the cultural context depicting a suitable approach in managing diversity and inclusion regarding age is required (Ferndale et al., 2015), suggesting that inclusion is impeded if group formation in the organisation is driven by age differences (House et al., 2004).

Gender is seen to play a major role in the quest to create an inclusive organisation per the response from the participants. The results further revealed that the cultural context dictates the roles played by female employees in the organisation (Aycan 2005; Ferndale et al. 2015). The situation regarding gender challenges in Ghana has forced the government to launch a policy to ensure equality (Ghana News Agency GNA, 2015). Additionally, the results indicate a poor adherence to the discrimination and fairness paradigm since female employees encounter challenges regarding equality in the workplace (Thomas & Ely, 1996). The gender challenges mentioned put the societal context in the high bracket of egalitarianism per the description put forward by House et al. (2004:12) as “the degree to which an organisation or society minimises gender role differences while promoting gender equality”.

Ethnicity proved to be very sensitive and therefore there is a culture of silence regarding its discussion. The results indicate stereotyping which breeds friction (Gershman & Rivera 2018). A typical example is the Akan ethnic group which enjoys the dominance in the society and often creates tension in organisations and the larger society (Dei, 2005). The situation in the larger society supports the argument by Zoogah (2016), who disputes the claim that ethnic tension is not significant since studies point to the fact that 59% of Ghanaians identify themselves with both ethnicity and nationality. He affirms that the findings of the study do not reflect reality due to a relatively high level of ethnic tension in society.

**Theme 3:** Socio-cognitive challenges

The commonality within the organisation can be found in the religious bond and accounts for the characteristics of the members as indicated by the socio-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1999; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The subtle nature of the religious challenge enforces the argument made by Kim et al. (1994), asserting that distinct cultural systems suppress differences within a group of people. The results of the study indicate that a corporate culture creates the
assumption that there is no undercurrent but there are deep-seated differences, which can even be found in homogenous societies (Vandello & Cohen, 1999).

Creativity and innovation are the products of a diverse workforce (Nelson, 2014) and this is fuelled by the thinking patterns of the members (Society for Human Resource Management, 2009). The results identified a challenge in this regard where divergent views normally delay decision-making. Further, the findings point to individuals who feel alienated due to their lack of innovation. The monotony of a task has also been seen to be one of the causes of the lack of innovation in the selected organisations. Since diversity creates innovation, the side-lining of employees in the organisation due to lack of innovation may defeat the purpose of utilising different talents to achieve a set goal (April et al., 2009; Giovannini, 2004).

The results paint a gloomy picture of sexual orientation in the social context under investigation and there is little likelihood of reversing this situation anytime soon. Other sexual orientations apart from the natural have no room in either the socio-cultural norms of the society or the legal framework. It is illegal to indulge in any sexual behaviour apart from heterosexual relationships. Although individuals of other sexual orientation are increasing in the global workforce (McPhail et al., 2014), it is a tall order to go public due to the challenges associated with it (Gedro et al., 2013; McPhail et al., 2014) in different contexts. The situation points to a sharp divergence regarding global practice. The results also indicated that individuals have resorted to practising their unorthodox sexual orientation in the dark due to the criminality attached to it.

Turning our attention to personality characteristics, the results indicate that extroverts are normally domineering and subjugate the introverted. The situation does not favour what the discrimination and fairness paradigm seek to address (Gutmann, 2004), where employees are meant to be treated with equal measure to feel belonged. Employees tend to align with like-minded colleagues, favouring the in-groups created at the expense of the out-group (Matsumoto et al., 1996; Yamagishi, 1988). One can, therefore, describe this situation as a challenge since it creates factions among employees in an organisation. It is a tall order to reverse this trend since personality characteristics are formed during one’s formative life and determine later preferences (Loden & Rosener, 1991).

Employees of equal knowledge level tend to bond easily and that defines their relationships (Freeman & Bordia, 2001). The results show that knowledge level creates segmentation in the organisation as employees of the same level of education form groups easily impeding the creation of inclusion in the entire organisation. Another challenge highlighted by the participants’ points to stagnation on the organisational ladder created by the highly educated employee leading to their withdrawal and preventing inclusion.

Language and ethnicity have similar characteristics; participants indicated that employees tend to gravitate towards individuals who speak the same native language irrespective of their ethnic background. In this regard, language can create segmentation (Gershman & Rivera, 2018) and makes it one of the core elements influencing diversity management in the organisations under study.

**Theme 4: Organisational challenges**

Challenges regarding job portfolios are caused by the dissatisfaction of employees’ due to the organisational structures put in place. The situation is seen to be responsible for delays in decision-making as indicated by the findings. Job portfolio challenges can be seen to reduce an employee’s sense of belonging and hamper integration and swift decision-making (Lirio et al., 2008). The situation creates a challenge since the negative aspects of job portfolios promote exclusion or a low sense of belonging which does not help the retention of employees, thereby reducing organisational competitive advantage (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000; Shaw, 1993).
In the case of job status, employees demand respect from their subordinates such as being addressed properly. On the other hand, employees also demand reciprocal respect from their superiors to feel that they belong. Employees who are not accorded the needed respect tend to withdraw, derailing the process of inclusion. In the same vein, employees of supposedly lower status tend to feel alienated when they are not treated with the needed respect by those of higher status. The results paint a picture that all employees demand respect to feel that they belong, leading to the creation of an inclusive organisation. Job tenure mimics that of job status since both require taking the employees’ sense of belonging into consideration. The results show a level of exclusion emanating from job security. In this regard, the organisation should employ a strategy that considers information diversity as put forward by Anderson and Metcalf (2003).

Work and functional experience are the recognition of the level of education and the acceptance of other employees’ views. The organisation’s over-reliance on internal recruitment and the inability of employees to consider alternative views create a non-inclusive work environment. In this case, the nature of the task should be considered when applying a diversity and inclusion management strategy (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2006) since employees’ in-depth understanding of their duties determines the level of appreciation of other’s views.

**Theme 5:** Challenges regarding economic conditions, historical context, government policies, corporate policies, and organisational policies.

The issue of sexual orientation in the organisation takes its root from the national policy where any other sexual preference other than heterosexuality is prohibited. The policy surrounding LGBT emanates from the national level and organisations have little or no power to reject it. In this regard, the quest by organisations to ensure an inclusive work environment is hampered, since people with alternative sexual orientations may not be fully accepted, defeating the purpose of the access and legitimacy paradigm, which maintains that the acceptance of social differences promotes efficiency and productivity, therefore translating into equality (Knoppers et al., 2015).

The challenge regarding job tenure which has been mentioned earlier is also evident in the case of temporal or casual workers, where they are not accorded full status as employees of the organisation, and for that matter, are not entitled to benefits as permanent employees. The findings point to the fact that individuals who become perpetual contract or casual workers do not feel belonged and the situation foster exclusion.

The challenges regarding organisation policies point to the deficiencies in job tenure, benefits, and administrative procedures. Each of the challenges regarding organisational policy hampers inclusion due to their exclusive tendencies. It should be noted that the promotion of diverse perspectives of employees in an organisation reverses exclusive trends and foster inclusion (Shin & Parker 2013). However, the promotion of diverse employees’ perspectives within the organisational policy should be aligned to the corporate strategy since both are directly connected (Harzing, 2001).

Laws controlling labour and wages have been identified per the findings do not protect the employee, leading to the dissatisfaction of employees in many cases and preventing inclusion. The findings also indicate that laws regarding LGBT hurt creating inclusion since it prevents employees from expressing themselves openly concerning their sexual orientation. The situation regarding laws governing LGBT points to a wide institutional distance where there is a divergence between the regulatory systems of the subsidiary organisation’s country and that of the mother organisation (Ferndale et al., 2015).

The results point to a critical challenge that prevents inclusion, that is, the imposition of more sophisticated policies on the subsidiary organisation. Most of the parent companies are found in a more advanced nation. Therefore, there will be the need to align the corporate policy to the societal context in which the subsidiaries operate due to the institutional profile (Fern et al., 2005).
The historical context of the country has been identified to pose a level of challenges regarding the creation of an inclusive organisation. The result shows a historical challenge which is ethnically based. The situation creates tension in both the larger society as well as within the organisation. The Akan ethnic group has a strong presence in most sectors of the economy (Dei, 2005) and the results point to the fact that they see themselves as superior, creating tension between them and other ethnic groups.

10. Revisiting the research questions
What are the demographics, socio-cognitive and organisational challenges encountered by multi-nationals in managing diversity and inclusion in the telecommunications industry regarding the socio-cultural, political, and economic environment in Ghana?

The socio-cultural environment significantly influences the challenges in managing diversity and inclusion in the selected multinationals. Although the political and economic environment plays a role in the management of diversity and inclusion it is not very profound. A common challenge that cuts across all the elements (demographics, socio-cognitive and organisational challenges) investigated is the deep-seated differences and stereotyping among employees found in theme 1.

Sub-questions

1. How are diversity and inclusion managed presently in the telecommunications industry in Ghana?

Drawing on theme one (the state of diversity and inclusion management in the selected organisations), diversity and inclusion is managed through the appreciation of differences and ensuring the sense of belongingness. Further, the selected organisations work towards the utilisation of the differences found among the employees. To ensure the effective management of diversity and inclusion in the selected organisation, the corporate services department in MTN–Ghana is responsible for the process. On the other hand, Vodafone—Ghana has a designated department responsible for the management of diversity and inclusion.

2. What is the convergence and divergence in the management of diversity in the multinational organisations in the telecommunications industry in Ghana and the global practice?

Convergence in managing diversity and inclusion in the selected organisation and global practice is evident in the appreciation of differences. Secondly, the quest to utilise the differences in both instances signifies convergence. The differences in the selected organisations are socio-culturally or ethnically based and it is elaborated in theme four. Besides, the influence of government policies on the management of diversity and inclusion turn to direct the approach in a different direction from the strategies employed in global practice such as laws governing LGBT.

3. What is the current situation of diversity management and the effectiveness of the strategies employed in mitigating the challenges in the telecommunications industry in Ghana?

Diversity and inclusion management in the selected organisations which exemplify the telecommunication industry is still at its embryonic stage. This is evident in the structures tasked with its management. MTN–Ghana does not have a full-fledge department, rather the corporate services double as the diversity department. In the case of Vodafone, a designated department is in place to facilitate the process; however, it is not fully staffed. Per the archival materials obtained, both organisations have put measures in place to ensure inclusivity. In this regard, MTN—Ghana is working to empower the less privileged in the society by creating a diverse workforce (MTN, 2017). In the case of Vodafone—Ghana, the organisation is working towards reversing the gender imbalance in the workplace, ensuring that by the year 2030, the management force will be made up of 30% female (Vodafone, 2017).
4. What are the similarities and differences between the multinational companies in the telecommunications industry in Ghana concerning challenges in managing diversity?

The selected organisations find themselves on the same page regarding the following; the existence of diversity and inclusion management, the appreciation of differences and the quest to utilise the differences for organisational goals.

(1) How do the challenges in managing diversity in multinational companies in the telecommunications industry in Ghana compare to that of global practice?

The challenges encountered by the selected organisation or the societal context under study may be more complex than what global practice encounter. The societal context is made of numerous ethnic and religious groups which inform the behaviour and the sense of belonging as well as thinking patterns of individuals. On the other hand, a global practice normally turns to contend with racial challenges.

11. Experimenting with the chosen framework

Experimenting with the chosen framework (relational framework) looks at how the challenges fit into the relational perspective of diversity management. The historical context has led to the socio-cognitive diversity found in society. The organisational level (meso) mirrors the organisational diversity, and the individual level (micro) reflects the demographic diversity. The intersection in Figure 1 may be referred to as core elements (gender, job tenure, age difference, ethnicity, thinking patterns, and sexual orientation) influencing the dynamics in the organisations under investigation within the societal context regarding diversity and inclusion. The findings of the study show that the elements enumerated within the intersection are directly related to individuals’ characteristics or micro (demographic diversity) controlled by the policies found in the organisation or meso (organisational diversity) and at the national level or macro (government policy) and normally directed by the socio-cultural environment or historical context (socio-cognitive diversity).

The elements in the intersection of Figure 1 may, therefore, suggest the core factors that influence the management of diversity and inclusion, representing the theoretical contribution of this study to knowledge. On the other hand, the practical contribution of the study to management is as follows:

- The need to highlight the importance of diversity management through the entire organisation to increase its appreciation.
- The need for management to further decentralize the diversity and inclusion strategies in the organisation.
- The corporate policy needs to be properly aligned to the socio-cultural context of the subsidiary to ensure efficiency.

12. Proposed framework

The proposed framework argues that the social construct of an individual reflects the socio-cultural background and translates into his or her identity. This reveals the incentives needed for one to feel belonged in a diverse environment. The argument can be juxtaposed to what is put forward by Adlerfer and Smith (1982) that, the social construct of an individual is related to the socio-cultural background.

The main socio-construct elements discussed in this framework, as shown in Figure 2, are demographic, organisational and socio-cognitive diversities. There are major sub-elements also highlighted such as

- Demographics—Age, Gender and Ethnicity.
Age, gender, and ethnicity forming the constituents of demographics are the most visible differences in an organisation or society (Shin & Park, 2013). Age is seen to have a significant
impact on values, motivation as well as the performance of employees (Armstrong-Stassen, 2008; Kooij et al., 2009; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). On the other hand, conceptualisation of age has proven to have a solid relationship with “work-related attitude” (Ferndale et al., 2015). The study suggests that the major sub-elements under organisational diversity (job tenure, work experience, job portfolio/status) are directly connected to work-related attitudes which are a derivative of age.

It can therefore be argued that age, gender, and ethnicity are indispensable of each other since age cut across both sexes and all ethnic groups, making the demographic elements very critical in organisational well-being. Cox (1991) supports this argument to an appreciable extent by asserting that, the degrees to which an organisation accepts and appreciate diversity from both sexes have a positive correlation to gender productivity. Roping in ethnicity, age and sex are the units of all ethnic groups, therefore establishing the interrelationship among them.

It should be noted that the dynamics surrounding age, gender, and ethnicity within an organisation or in the society occurs within a context. The context is controlled by socio-cultural diversity which embodies cultural (beliefs) values, religious beliefs, thinking patterns, sexual orientation, language, etc. (Shin & Park, 2013). Further, a socio-cognitive environment creates innovation (Nelson, 2014). Speculatively, this is propelled by organisational diversity with demographics as the basic unit. In this regard, the effect of demographic elements in the organisation or society ripples through organisational and socio-cognitive diversities. The interrelated elements of diversity culminate into an individual’s social construct, defining his or her real being.

13. Conclusion, limitations and recommendation
The study reveals challenges in the management of diversity and inclusion in the societal context under investigation. Further, the elements identified embody the sense of belonging of an individual and therefore, needs to be considered in fashioning out diversity and inclusion strategies. The following are the main challenges identified in the study:

• Demographic Challenges
  o Age differences poses a significant challenge, practically older individuals are reluctant to take instruction from younger superiors preventing inclusion and enhancing performance.
  o Male employees see their female counterparts as subservient, creating a sense of entitlement instead of a competitive environment.
  o Ethnicity is a strong demographic element; individuals strongly identify with it, preventing inclusion. This creates tension and at time subjugation.

• Socio-cognitive Diversity
  o Region and sexual orientation were identified to pose significant challenge in achieving inclusion.

• Organisational Diversity
  o Job portfolio, job tenure, work and function experience pose significant challenge in ensuring an inclusive organisation.

• Economic Condition, Historical Context, Government, Corporate and Organisational Polices.
  o The challenge in this section is characterised by the interwoven nature of the element mentioned earlier. Specifically, the visible challenge is underlined by the invisible element. A typical example is the thinking patterns that drive demographic and organisational diversities.

To this end, critically interrogating the phenomenon to obtain in-depth understanding is important for the creation of effective strategies of diversity and inclusion to mitigate the challenges. In
addition to the main shortcomings of the methodology employed in this study, such as the degree to which the findings can be applied in other contexts, there are other practical limitations of the study that need clarification. A critique of this study should be focused on the lack of adequate data to inform the understanding of the phenomenon under study (telecommunication industry in Ghana).

Going forward, the study concludes with some proposed areas for further investigation:

- The deep-seated differences discussed require further study into the socio-cultural environment of the societal context which is mainly underlined by demographic and socio-cognitive diversities.
- Further study is needed to assist in building strong structures to ensure efficient management of diversity in the organisations.
- Another area of concern is the non-alignment of the corporate policies and the societal context.

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