The nexus between Online Diversity Awareness Training and Internal Service Delivery at MNE subsidiaries in emerging markets: A structural equation approach

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Abstract

In recent times the domain of diversity awareness has developed as a significant area for the leadership of MNE organisations in emerging markets.This study was conducted to determine the nexus between online diversity awareness training programs and internal service delivery at a selected ICT MNE subsidiary in South Africa. The study will inform decision makers on the most preferred contents for online diversity awareness training, as well as the impact it has on improving internal service delivery at MNE in emerging markets. A quantitative study was conducted consisting of an electronic questionnaire circulated to n=159. Structural equation modelling detected that there is a strong congruency between internal and external online diversity awareness training topics, which were furthermore found to be good indicators for improving internal service delivery. The most defensible internal diversity awareness training topics to include in an online program were found to be ethnicity, race, age, and gender, whilst results for external diversity awareness topics favoured family status, socio-economic status, and geographic location. The results also reveal that internal service delivery topics that are beneficial to emphasise in an online diversity awareness training program in the context of MNE subsidiaries includes the alignment to strategic objectives, developing a service culture, recognition for service delivery, and communication. The study recommends that MNE subsidiaries in emerging markets should align online diversity awareness training programs to service delivery.

Keywords: Online training; Diversity awareness; MNE, Internal service delivery; ICT sector

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times the domain of diversity awareness has developed as a significant area for academics, business writers, and the leadership of organisations. There is robust evidence that introducing, monitoring, and evaluating proper diversity awareness training, strategies, structures, and systems at organisations has significantly enhanced service delivery to internal customers (Akinnusiet al., 2017; Bukowski andRudnicki, 2018; Naidoo andRamphal, 2019). In addition, according to Carter et al. (2020), organisations invest approximately8billion USD per annum in diversity training. Diversity awareness training has traditionally been presented as contact training sessions, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shift to online training and development offerings emphasising technologically driven multimodal learning (Gharama et al., 2020). A vast number of studies have been conducted on diversity awareness training in the context of MNE subsidiaries, such as Bohonos and Sisco (2021), Kufidu and Vouzas (1998),Shen and Lang (2009), Shen and Tang (2018), and Throsby (2017). However, a gap exists with regards to contextualising these findings to multi-national enterprise (MNE) subsidiaries operating in emerging markets, especially during the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has necessitated the shift from face-to-face training to online offerings. Furthermore, to monitor a change in employee behaviour related to diversity awareness training has been challenging and increasingly organisations are aligning diversity awareness to other key performance indicators such as internal service delivery, which are relatively easier to measure (Bohonos and Sisco, 2021).

Ngcamu(2019) aver that in the last decade service delivery in the information communication technology (ICT) sector has received vast publicity due to increased demand,especially in emerging markets. Furthermore, Ndinga-Kangaet al. (2020)explain

that the ICT sector has become an important pillar of development in Africa and is regarded as a source of employment, community upliftment and economic growth. The Grand View Research Report (2021) reveals that the global ICT market was valued as 1,657.7 billion USD in 2020 and an annual growth rate of 5.4 percent is forecasted from 2021 to 2028. Moreover, 2.9 percent of the projected annual growth rate for the industry is expected to be contributed fromemerging markets (Grand View Research Report, 2021). Also, the COVID-19 pandemic has benefitted global ICT service providers due to the industry type and the business model (Bohonos and Sisco, 2021). The pandemic has caused a shift to remote working that requires a renewed emphasis of ICT providers offering customer service excellence (Wong et al., 2020). This in turn has also renewed the emphasis on internal service delivery and its importance on ensuring that an organisation meets its objectives (Grand View Research Report, 2021). Furthermore, the importance of aligning objectives of training programs such as diversity awareness training to internal service deliveryinitiatives have received more attention since COVID-19 due to organisational co-ordination and planning challenges (Saroha and Diwan, 2020). Studies on the MNE ICT sector in emerging markets on the African continent are minimal and it is beneficial to explore contributing factors to enhance service delivery in this context, especially related to training and development programs such as online diversity awareness training (Bohonos and Sisco, 2021). In addition, studies focusing specifically on online diversity awareness training programs offered at MNE subsidiaries as a result of COVID-19 are extremely confined.

This study explores employees' perceptions relating to the impact that online diversity awareness training has oninternal service delivery at a selected MNE ICT subsidiary in South Africa. To investigate this research statement a quantitative research approach has been followed focusing on robust inferential statistics, which includes Structural Equation Modelling. The results of this study will also inform MNEs on the considerations required to ensure that online diversity awareness training is perceived as a return on investment when implemented via online platformsin other emerging marketssuch as regions in Asia, Europe, and Oceania. The rest of the article is structured as follows: First, the extant literature on MNEs' and subsidiaries, online diversity awareness training and internal service delivery are reviewed. This is followed by a description of the research methods and procedures used in the study. The results are then discussed, which is followed by implications, limitations and directions for future research are offered.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Multi-national enterprises (MNE)in emerging markets: South Africa

Bukowski and Rudnicki (2018) espouse that MNEs are forced to seek new ways to re-invent themselves in order to meet the changing needs and evolving expectations of their customers and stay ahead of competition. Gharama et al. (2020) asserts that MNE subsidiaries play a vital role in developing the economies of the countries in which they operate. McKay et al. (2011) adds that in emerging markets, MNE subsidiaries also face socio-economic challenges often prevalent due to changes in the political dispensation of these emerging markets. In addition, Bond and Mottiar (2018) emphasise that MNE subsidiaries also have to contend with the societal needs of the host country, such as promoting democracy, equality, and social justice, which is especially prevalent in the African context. Meyer (2020) states that there are approximately 60 000 MNE worldwide and 800 000 subsidiaries. In 2018 there were 1391 foreign controlled MNE subsidiaries operating in South Africa (Kilumelume et al., 2021). Despite the pandemic, South Africa is still regarded as a potential investment hotspot in emerging markets on the African continent and is expected to attract more foreign direct investment in the future (as shown in Table 1 below), which is anticipated to be driven by MNE subsidiaries (Global Finance, 2020).

Table 1. Countries on the African continent regarded as potential hotspots for foreign direct investment

Country	GDP Growth Forecast 2020 (%)	% Change in FDI 2017-2018	Competitiveness Score 2019-2020	Corruption Perceptions Score 2019	Ease of Doing Business Rank 2020
Benin	4.519	4	45.8	41	52.4
Botswana	-5.379	29	55.5	61	66.2
Mauritius	-6.8	-16	64.3	52	81.5
Morocco	-3.74	36	60.0	41	73.4
Senegal	2.992	7	49.7	45	59.3
South Africa	-5.801	166	62.4	33	67
Uganda	3.52	67	48.9	28	60

Source: Global finance (2020)

Šćitarociet al. (2019) clarify that online diversity awareness training is often regarded as an important intervention to prepare employees at MNE subsidiaries to adapt to the environment and contemplate socio-economic challenges that colleagues, and customers may face. Naidoo and Ramphal (2019) state that these online diversity awareness training programs often emphasises the reliance on human capital, cultural recognition and the cooperation, collaboration, and transmission of diversity awareness knowledge between societies.Mwakatumbula et al. (2019) add that although organisations prefer to offer face-to-face diversity awareness training, in recent times there have been a shift to online programs to encourage self-paced reflective learning. A brief overview of online diversity awareness training and relevant topics now follows.

2.2 Online diversity awareness training

Maphumulo and Bhengu (2019) espouse that the concept of diversity awareness is complex due to an array of aspects that should be considered, such as religion, ethnicity, language, nationality, class, gender, age, disability, and geographic location. Ndevu and Muller (2017) describe diversity awareness as the acknowledgement of various types of cultural groups within society. Diversity awareness training has become a prominent feature on organizational training plans to address the various cultural nuances experienced in organizational settings (Naidoo andRamphal, 2019). An abundance of studies (Akinnusi et al., 2017; Bond andMottiar, 2018; Ngcamu, 2019; and Thomson et al., 2019) have been conducted at organisations to determine how online diversity awareness training emerged to assist line managers in creating more harmonious workplaces by encouraging the integration of different cultures, languages, and traditions.

Rattan and Dweck (2018)suggest that the contents covered in online diversity awareness training programs should be aligned to the organisational objectives such as improved service delivery, minimising workplace conflict, and improving manager-employee relations in order to achieve maximum impact. Furthermore, Saroha and Diwan (2020) emphasise the important contribution that diversity awareness training makes towards internal service delivery in that it can be used to sensitise employees and strengthen interpersonal relations within organisations. In addition, Maley et al. (2020) found that diversity training provides employees with cultural sensitisation and improved communication skills.

Loden and Rosener (1990) developed the Diversity Wheel, as depicted in Figure 1 below, which contains several topics which the researchers recommend organisations should include when offering diversity awareness training. The relevance of The Diversity Wheel for MNE subsidiaries have been documented by Bukowski and Rudnicki (2013), Sofyaniet al. (2020), Saroha and Diwan (2020) andSaxena (2014). Furthermore, Landemore and Page (2015) explain that although the majority of diversity awareness training programs contain the internal and external factors depicted on the Diversity Wheel, the application thereof in an online training environment is limited.
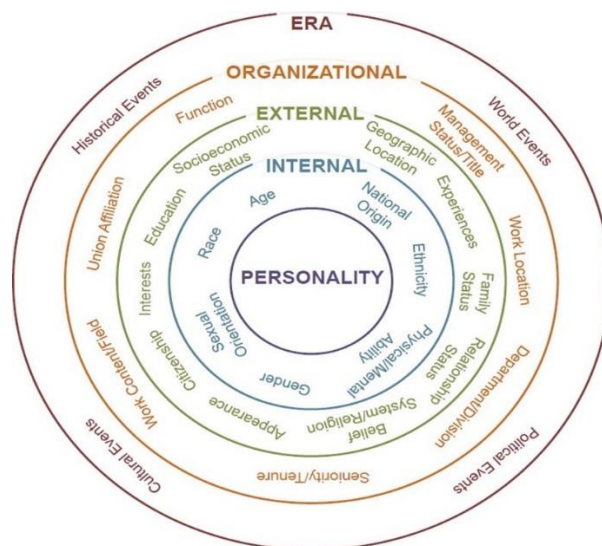

Figure 1. The Diversity Wheel

Source: Loden &Rosener, 1990 (Adapted).

Despite clear guidelines and recommendations on the content of diversity awareness training programs, various researchers have expressed concern on the effectiveness of online diversity awareness training programs such as Ghaith and Ragy (2018), Maleyet al. (2020) and Saxena (2014). Saroha and Diwan (2020) emphasise the importance of carefully selecting the content for an online

diversity awareness training program to facilitate cross-cultural understanding and build a culturally responsive workforce. Yet, Bond and Mottiar (2018), Maley et al. (2020) and Ngcamu (2019) agree that in the context of MNE subsidiaries, there are no clear guidelines on the content selection of online diversity awareness training programs to address employees challenges and ensure short term financial returns.

2.3 Internal Service delivery

Fernandes and Solimun (2018) espouse that service delivery is the procedures associated with offering a service to both internal organisational clients and customers. According to Wong et al. (2020), service delivery is directly associated with customer satisfaction and service excellence. Furthermore, Gautam (2015) states due to globalisation and increased competition, service delivery has become a focus point for organisations' operational and financial successes. Similarly, Panda and Rath (2018) explain that service delivery has also evolved in the last decade and requires organisations to focus on internal service delivery to ensure synergy between operating units, whilst monitoring effective cost reductions to gain a competitive advantage. Therefore, Morgen and Govender (2017), espouse that internal service delivery in the context of MNE requires advanced analytics, improved utilisation of business resources and minimising risks to enable the organisation to adapt to change, which in turn requires improved interpersonal skills and knowledge relating to diversity. Recent studies on internal service delivery in the ICT sector can be categorised under three themes, namely, operational, and financial aspects, as well as employee behaviour associated with service delivery. Table 1 below presents the three themes and the relevant research items relating to service delivery with corresponding studies in the ICT sector to support thesethemes and sub-items.

Table 2. Internal Service Delivery themes for the ICT sector and associated studies.

Themes	Supporting studies
Operational	
• Efficiencies	Masson et al.(2016); Motlagh et al. (2016); Taleb et al. (2017); Wong et al. (2020).
• Effectiveness	Gautam (2015); Georgakopoulos et al. (2016); Masson, et al, (2016);Pizzi et al. (2021).
• Emphasis on Automation	Al-Zyoud et al. (2021); Lungu (2018); Shah et al. (2018); Yang et al. (2018).
• Alignment to Strategic objectives	Lehrer et al. (2018); Lungu (2018); Panda and Rath (2018);Marsden and Reardon(2018).
• Standards / Quality	Pizzi et al. (2021); Shah et al. (2018); Taleb et al. (2017); Yang et al. (2018); Wong et al. (2020).
Financial	
• Monitoring costs	Alzoubi and Inairat (2020); Gautam (2015); Georgakopoulos et al. (2016); Lehrer et al. (2018); Lungu (2018); Onyeajuwa (2017).
• Customer satisfaction feedback	Morgan and Govender (2017); Panda and Rath (2018); Saroha and Diwan (2020); Valinejad and Rahmani (2018); Verma and Singh (2017).
Behavioural	
• Developing a service culture	Al-Zyoud et al. (2021); Lehrer et al. (2018);Saxena (2014); Sharma et al. (2015); Valinejad and Rahmani (2018).
• Communication	Ghaith and Ragy (2018); Jyoti et al. (2017); Markovic et al. (2018); Sharma et al. (2015).
• Recognition for service delivery	Hayajneh et al. (2021); Izogo (2017); Saxena (2014); Valinejad and Rahmani (2018); Zakari et al. (2019).

Source: Self-generated

Izogo (2017), Lungu (2018) and Sharma et al. (2015) agree that the literature pertaining to internal service delivery in the context of MNE subsidiaries in emerging markets on the African continent is sparse. Rattan and Dweck (2018) specify that various training programs are often regarded as an important component to enhance service delivery within the organisation whilst focusing on synergy and jointly achieving organisational objectives. However, the literature reveals a gap in the current data available on the impact of online diversity awareness training on internal service delivery at MNE subsidiaries, with specific reference to the ICT sector in emerging markets in Africa.

3. Aimand Hypotheses of the Research

The aim of this paper is to develop a model that addresses the relationships between diversity awareness training content presented in an online environment and service delivery. The paper also explores the direct and indirect impact among the variables of the model through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The following hypotheses forms the framework of the paper:

$H0^1$ Internal diversity awareness trainingtopics / factorspresented in an online delivery platform directly improveinternal service delivery at a selected ICT MNE subsidiary.

$H0^2$ External diversity awareness trainingtopics / factorspresented in an online delivery platform directly improveinternal service delivery as a selected ICT MNE subsidiary.

A research framework depicting the hypotheses has been developed as presented in Figure 2 below.
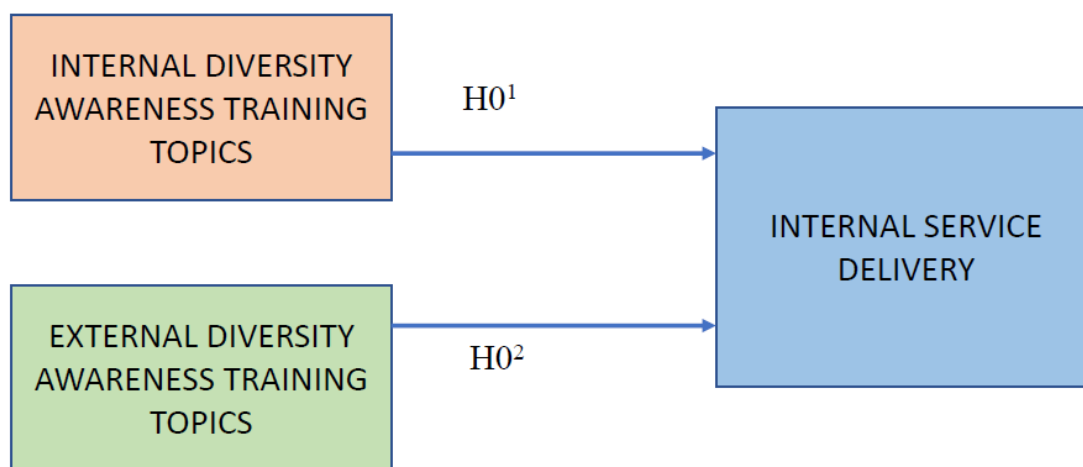

Figure 2. Research Framework

4. METHODOLOGY

Method

A quantitative approach was followed for this study since it allows the researchers to quantify behaviours, opinions, and attitudes from the respondents (GravetterandForzano,2018).

Measuring instrument

Astructured electronic questionnaire was developed in Google Forms to comply with COVID 19 protocols (Bognaet al., 2020). The electronic survey that was used for this study comprised of two sections. Section 1 included three biographical items and Section 2 encompassed three variables, namely, Variable 2.1 consisted of seven items relating to Internal Factors covered in online Diversity Awareness Training (IFODAT) and Variable 2.2 contained 10 items pertaining to External Factors covered in online Diversity Awareness Training (EFODAT). Both the internal and external factors are based on the theoretical framework of the Diversity Wheel developed by Loden and Rosener (1990) as depicted in Figure 1. Variable 2.3coverednine items on Internal Service Delivery (ISD) as presented in Table 2. These nine items were used to ascertain which items on ISD do the respondents regard as important to incorporate into an online diversity awareness training program in comparison to what was presently covered in the current online program. Furthermore, theelectronic survey contained statements where the respondents could indicate their preferred choices using a 5-point Likert scale, which increased the objectivity of the study (Harrison et al., 2017). The structured electronic questionnaire also contained a cover letter confirming adherence to anonymity for the respondents during the study as per the guidelines of Patten and Newhart (2017).

Sample

In this study the population equates to N=1623 consisting of all employees at the selected ICT MNE subsidiary who have attended online diversity awareness training. Systematic random sampling was used due to the ease thereof to select the sample (n=159) based on Sekaran and Bogie's Statistical Computed Table (Sekaran and Bogie, 2014). 142 questionnaires were returned by the sample respondents that equates to a response rate of 89 percent, which complies with Greenfield and Greener's (2016) guideline that a response rate above 75 percent is acceptable.

Pilot test

A pilot test was conducted using 20 employees who were excluded from the sample frame and the responses were used to improve the language and technical aspects of the structured electronic questionnaire (Stokes, 2017).The Cronbach's alpha coefficient statistical test was used to establish the reliability of the electronic structured questionnaire and the results of the composite reliability ranged from 0.81 to 0.86. Based onthe recommendations of Bujang et al. (2018) that a composite reliability range of greater than 0.70 is acceptable, the measuring instrument was deemed reliable. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 and for Windows was used to analyse the responses by conducting robust statistical analyses.

Data analysis Procedure

In Section 1 of the survey, descriptive statistics were used to analyse the responses based on gender and age, as well as the observed indicators using the mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. Inferential statistics were conducted to provide a robust analysis of Section 2 of the survey consisting of three sub-sections (2.1 to 2.3) to determine employees' responses to the three research constructs, namely, IFODAT, EFODAT, and ISD. The two variables, IFODAT and EFODAT were tested statistically to determine whether there is a significant relationship between these variables and improvedservice delivery. The three variables for this study was fully latent, which Everett (2013) describes as a situation where the variables cannot be openly observed but allows for measurement by identifying and conducting observed indicators. Based on the recommendation by Everett (2013), the researchers chose to conduct SEM for further data analysis since it explores the relationships amongst latent variables. The mean- and variance-adjusted weighted least squares estimation (WLSMV) was applied to assess the model based on research findings presented by Suh (2015) on SEM techniques. Model fit was gaged using the root mean square error of the approximation (RMSEA), which should be equal to or smaller than 0.06 as directed by the recommendation of Rigdon (1996). In addition, a comparative fit index (CFI) was used where a value close to 0.95 or higher suggests a close fit as advised by Xia and Yang (2019).

5. RESULTS

The results of the study are divided into two main sections, namely descriptive and inferential results.

Descriptive results

Table 3 depicts the results for Section 1 of the survey.

Table 3. Age and Gender Breakdown of the Respondents

| Age Breakdown | Gender Breakdown | | | | Total | |
| | Male | | Female | | | |
	$f1$	%	$f2$	%	Σ	%
20<25 years	6	4,22	4	2,82	10	7,04
25<30 years	17	11,97	12	8,45	29	20,42
30<35 years	23	16,20	21	14,79	44	30,99
35<40 years	12	8,45	9	6,34	21	14,79
40<50 years	14	9,86	11	7,75	25	17,61
>50 years	8	5,63	5	3,52	13	9,15
Total	80	56,33	62	43,67	142	100

As depicted in Table 3 above, 43,67 percent of the respondents were female, and 56,33 percent were male. Most of the respondents were between 30–35 years of age. Furthermore, Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics of the three variables and the related items.Ordinal ranking was applied by requesting the respondents to rank the related items for each variable, namely, IFODAT, EFODAT, and ISD, based on the perceived importance of the said variables' items in an online diversity awareness

training program. Thereafter, respondents were requested to indicate to what extent did the *current*online diversity awareness training program assist them to develop knowledge, skills and expertise relating to each itemof the three variables with *1* being insignificant and *5* beinghighly significant. In addition, skewness and kurtosis were used to evaluate the normality of the variable distributions (Kim and White, 2004). According to Byrne (2010), data is considered normal if skewness is between-2 and +2 and kurtosis is between -7 and +7.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the Observed Indicators

Variables	Items	Ordinal Ranking	Mean $(\overline{x})$	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
IFODAT	Ethnicity (ET)	1	4.21	0.837	1.988	2.764
	Race (RA)	2	4.29	1.462	1.789	3.922
	Age (AG)	3	2.28	1.267	-0.912	-1.882
	Gender (GN)	4	4.18	1.397	1.922	4.903
	National origin (NO)	5	2.05	0.794	-0.833	-2.143
	Sexual orientation (SO)	6	2.19	1.511	-1.102	-2.744
	Physical / Mental ability (PM)	7	1.18	0.654	-1.998	-3.891
EFODAT	Belief System (BS)	1	3.14	0.332	0.908	-1.102
	Relationship Status (RS)	2	2.98	0.089	-1.902	-2.012
	Geographic Location (GL)	3	4.11	0.022	1.903	2.873
	Family Status (FS)	4	1.65	1.221	-1.564	-4.331
	Socio-economic Status (SE)	5	4.27	0.068	1.883	3.665
	Interests (IN)	6	1.29	0.933	-1.805	-4.993
	Citizenship (CZ)	7	3.98	1.032	0.543	1.906
	Education (ED)	8	2.56	0.664	0.909	1.921
	Experiences (EX)	9	1.90	1.004	-2.001	4.650
	Appearance (AP)	10	4.01	0.322	1.832	4.212
ISD	Communication (CM)	1	4.34	0.018	0.103	0.493
	Developing a Service Culture (SC)	2	2.09	1.209	-0.906	-1.832
	Recognition for Service Delivery (RS)	3	1.87	0.332	-1.933	-5.894
	Customer Satisfaction Feedback (CF)	4	4.19	0.831	1.802	4.872
	Effectiveness (EE)	5	3.93	0.065	0.807	2.404
	Efficiencies (EF)	6	1.94	0.804	-1.904	-4.583
	Standards / quality (SQ)	7	4.43	0.019	0.931	1.890
	Emphasis onAutomation (EA)	8	2.90	1.203	-0.922	-3.902
	Alignment to Strategic Objectives (AS)	9	4.31	0.028	0.937	3.902
	Monitoring Costs (MC)	10	1.65	0.354	-1.983	-4.788

Inferential analyses

Each of the items for the variables IFODAT and EFODAT was statistically compared to the variable ISD. In addition, the Beta Value distribution between [0,1], the Pearson Chi-square test ($p < 0.05$ or $p < 0.01$) and the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Co-efficient (rs> 0.7) were conducted as depicted in Table 5. These results were used to determine whether the hypotheses were supported or rejected.

Table 5. Relationships between IFODAT, EFODAT and ISD

Variables	Items	β	rs	χ2	p-value	Hypothesis	Results
IFODAT	Ethnicity (ET)	0.1167	0.8122	72.109	0.000	H0[1]	Supported**
	Race (RA)	0.2119	0.7102	68.338	0.002	H0[1]	Supported**
	Age (AG)	0.2011	0.8441	71.052	0.000	H0[1]	Supported **
	Gender (GN)	0.0682	0.7922	76.326	0.004	H0[1]	Supported**
	National origin (NO)	0.9331	0.2338	22.098	0.092	H0[1]	Rejected
	Sexual orientation (SO)	0.9003	0.4255	22.011	0.075	H0[1]	Rejected
	Physical / Mental ability (PM)	0.8993	0.5662	20.332	0.087	H0[1]	Rejected
EFODAT	Belief system (BS)	0.8232	0.4221	19.226	0.095	H0[2]	Rejected
	Relationship status (RS)	0.7321	0.6988	21.039	0.074	H0[2]	Rejected
	Geographic location (GL)	0.0754	0.8128	82.117	0.001	H0[2]	Supported**
	Family status (FS)	0.1054	0.7882	78.092	0.009	H0[2]	Supported**
	Socio-economic status (SE)	0.0655	0.7968	84.032	0.004	H0[2]	Supported**
	Interests (IN)	0.1223	0.7872	86.022	0.043	H0[2]	Supported*
	Citizenship (CZ)	0.3311	0.5654	19.083	0.094	H0[2]	Rejected
	Education (ED)	0.3221	0.7889	82.902	0.048	H0[2]	Supported*
	Experiences (EX)	0.2125	0.7554	78.165	0.032	H0[2]	Supported*
	Appearance (AP)	0.2443	0.7322	79.409	0.039	H0[2]	Supported*

Note: df = 16, Cut-off parameter: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; Spearman Significance ($rs > 0.7$)

Results of the Structural Equation Modelling

The model fit statistics were satisfactory with a RMSEA value of 0.058, which falls within the acceptable range, whilst the overall CFI value was 0.979, which exceeds the recommended cut-off value of 0.95. For each latent variable, namely, IFODAT, EFODAT and ISD, a standardised factor loading, or exploratory factor analysis (EFA) were conducted for the multiple observed indicators. The path co-efficient of all the observed indicators were included in the model since an exploratory factor analysis were conducted (Hancock and Freeman, 2001) and the level of congruency are depicted in Figure 3.
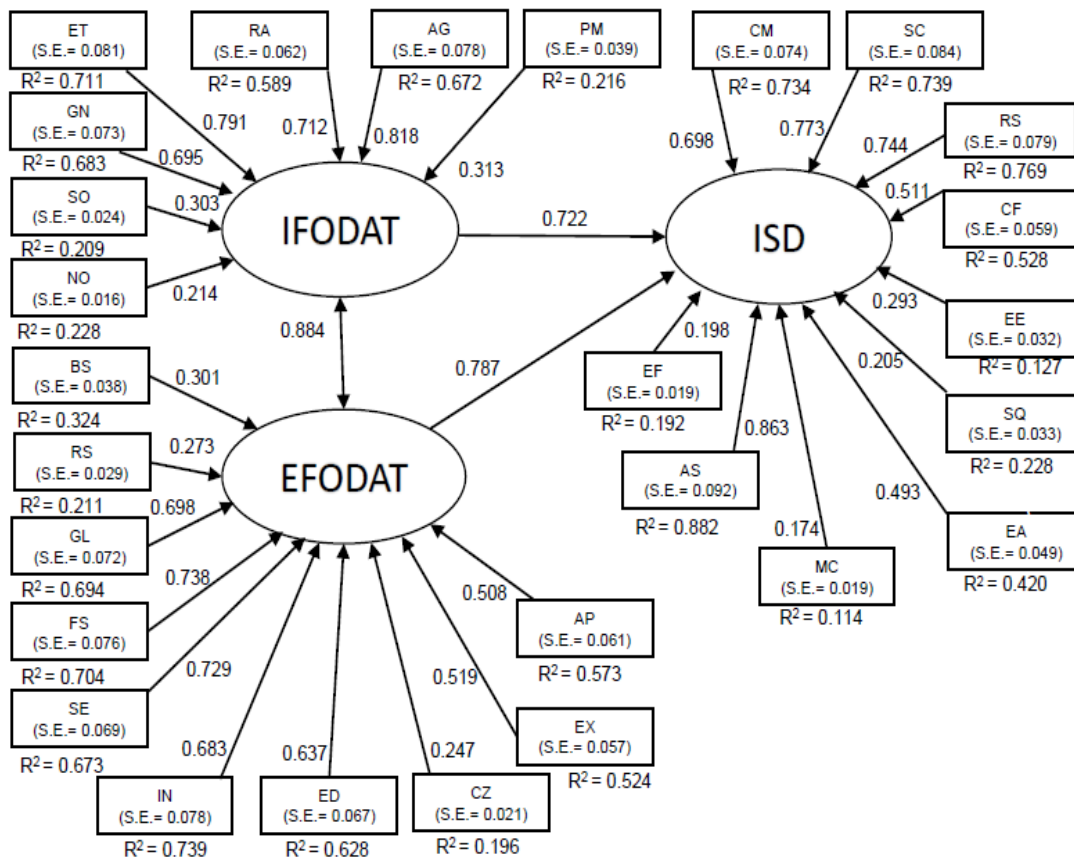
Figure 3. Path-coefficients of the model.

As per Figure 3 above, seven multiple observed indicators were identified for the latent variable IFODAT. For instance, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) from 'Ethnicity' (ET) to IFODAT was 0.791 with a standard error (S.E.) of 0.081. This indicates that one standard deviation unit for 'Ethnicity' led to a 0.791 standard deviation unit increase of IFODAT. The corresponding R^2 value was 0.711, which indicated that 71.1 percent of the variance in 'Ethnicity' as an observed indicator was explained by IFODAT. Therefore, 'Ethnicity' is a good indicator of the latent variable IFODAT since the EFA exceeds the recommended cut-off point of 0.4 (Beauducel and Herzberg, 2006). Further indicators that had significant results were 'Race', 'Age' and 'Gender', whilst 'National Origin', 'Sexual Orientation', and 'Physical/Mental Ability' may be deemed less satisfactory indicators.

Furthermore, the latent variable EFODAT included ten multiple observed indicators of which seven indicators were found to be congruent predictors based on the respective EFA, namely, 'Geographic Location', 'Family Status', 'Socio-Economic Status', 'Education', 'Interests', 'Appearance' and 'Experience'. Three indicators, namely, 'Citizenship', 'Relationship Status' and 'Belief System' were found to have a less suitable EFA fit to the latent variable EFODAT. The latent variable ISD comprised of ten multiple observed indicators of which the EFA for six indicators reported congruency based on the EFA, namely, 'Communication', 'Customer Satisfaction Feedback', 'Recognition of Service Delivery', 'Developing a Service Culture', 'Alignment to Strategic Objectives', and 'Emphasis on Automation'. Less satisfactory indicators for the latent variable ISD were 'Monitoring Costs', 'Standards/Quality', 'Efficiencies' and 'Effectiveness'. The path-coefficients between the latent variables IFODAT and EFODAT were statistically highly significant at 0.884. The constants between IFODAT and ISD (EFA=0.772), and EFODAT and ISD (EFA=0.787) were highly significant at $p<0.05$.

6. DISCUSSION

The research aim of this study was to explore employees perceptions on the impact of online diversity awareness training on internal service delivery at a selected international MNE ICT subsidiary in South Africa. The literature review revealed that online diversity awareness training is deemed as important in the context of MNE subsidiaries in order to promote interpersonal relations and a harmonious workplace. However, due to increased globalisation and competition, MNEs are also expected to offer customer-centred service delivery, which relies upon internal synergies achieved between organisational departments or units. Therefore the need for online training programs to be aligned to internal service delivery has received emphasis in the literature, but a gap exist to determine the contribution that online diversity awareness training makes towards enhancing internal service delivery at MNE subsidiaries (Landemore and Page, 2015; Verma and Singh, 2017). In addition, there was also a gap identified, as

to what will be the most preferred contents for such an online diversity awareness training program in the context of MNE subsidiaries (Onyeajuwa, 2017; Valinejad and Rahmani, 2018).

Results were gathered by conducting four sets of analyses. Firstly, a descriptive analysis revealed that the majority of the respondents were males at 53,66 percent, which coincides with studies conducted by Brimhall et al. (2017) and Franken et al. (2019) which report that the ICT sector is male dominant. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents (30,99 percent) were between the ages of 30 to 35 years, which classifies them as millennials. According to Sofyani et al. (2020), millennials place more emphasis on conducive working environments than any other age category. Similarly, Shim and Park (2018) report that millennials embrace diversity awareness with greater ease than other age groups.

Secondly, as depicted in Table 4, ordinal ranking was used to identify the preferred topics that should be included in an online diversity awareness training program focusing on internal (IFODAT) and external (EFODAT) diversity awareness topics as per the Diversity Wheel developed by Loden and Rosener (1990).The highest preference-based ordinal ranking for the variable IFODAT was reported to be 'Ethnicity' followed by 'Race' and 'Age'. These findings are similar to a study conducted by Shim and Park (2018) and Stone et al. (2020). Respondents also revealed that in the current online diversity awareness program for the variable IFODAT, the emphasis is on 'Ethnicity','Race' and 'Gender', which reveals contiguity to the reported ranked order preference index. Furthermore, topics such as 'Age', 'National Origin' and 'Sexual Orientation'reportedly received less emphasis in the current online diversity awareness training program. A study conducted by Franken et al. (2019) reports that organisations usually focus on ethnicity, gender and age when developing the contents of a diversity awareness training program.

Respondents reported that for the variable EFODAT (Table 4), they perceived 'Belief System', 'Relationship Status' and 'Geographic Location'as important in terms of the ordinal ranking index. These results coincide with findings reported in studies conducted by Bukowski and Rudnicki (2013) and Park et al. (2013). However, respondents perceived that the current online diversity awareness training program focused on 'Geographic Location', 'Socio-economic Status', 'Citizenship' and 'Appearance', which deviates from the highest-ranking ordinal index reported by the respondents, since they deemed'Belief System' and 'Relationship Status' as most relevant topics to enhance diversity awareness.Similarly, these findings coincides with results in studies on diversity awareness conducted by GhaithandRagy (2018), and Saxena (2014) on external diversity awareness topics incorporated into online training programs.

Respondents also ranked items related to internal service delivery (ISD)(as shown in Table 4) and reported on whether or not the current online diversity awareness training program emphasised internal service delivery. The three highest ranked items for ISD were 'Communication', 'Developing a Service Culture' and 'Recognition for Service Delivery'. According to Verma and Singh (2017) and Valinejad and Rahmani (2018), these three preferred topics identified by the respondents were found to be highly significant to increaseinternal service delivery between organisational departments. However, results reveal that the current online diversity awareness training program, focuses on predominantly four areas applicable to internal service delivery, namely: 'Communication', 'Customer Satisfaction Feedback', 'Standards / Quality', and 'Alignment to Strategic Objectives'. Hence there was only one corresponding item reported between the ranked order identified by the respondents and the significance thereof emphasised in the current online diversity awareness training program, namely, 'Communication'. Shim and Park (2018) espouse the importance of communication to enhance internal service delivery. In addition, Izogo (2017) and Jyoti et al. (2017) explain the importance of all organisational training programs to incorporate as many aspects as possible on service delivery due to the anticipated return on investment.

Thirdly, hypotheses testing (refer to Table 5) were conducted in this study to determine the relationships between the items of the variables IFODAT, EFODAT and ISD. For the items under the variables EFODAT and ISD, the results revealed a highly significant relationship at $p < 0.05$ for the items 'Ethnicity', 'Race', 'Age', and 'Gender' and ISD, which corresponds with the ranked importance allocated by the respondents. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Onyeajuwa (2017). Furthermore, for EFODAT, the results revealed a highly significant relationship at $p < 0.05$ between 'Geographic Location', 'Family Status' and 'Socio-economic status', and ISD. In addition, a very highly significant relationship ($p < 0.01$) was found to exist between 'Interests', 'Education', 'Experiences', and 'Appearance', and ISD. Hence these findings corresponds with the results from the ranked order analysis and the extent to which these items are emphasised in the current online diversity awareness training program. According to Motlagh et al. (2016) and Ohemeng and McGrandle (2015), topics such as education, interests, experiences, and family status were found to be stimuli to promote interpersonal communication, improve diversity and promote a commonality of interests amongst employees.

Fourthly, a structural equation model (refer to Figure 3) was developed to determine the path co-efficient of all the observed indicators. 'Race', 'Age' and 'Gender' were found to be good indicators for IFODAT, whilst 'Geographic Location', 'Family Status', 'Socio-Economic Status', 'Education', 'Interests', 'Appearance' and 'Experience' were positive gauges for EFODAT. Furthermore, six indicators reported congruency for ISD , namely, 'Communication', 'Customer Satisfaction Feedback',

'Recognition of Service Delivery', 'Developing a Service Culture', 'Alignment to Strategic Objectives'. Hence the result for the SEM corresponds with both the hypothesis testing and the perceived emphasis given for specific topics in the current online diversity awareness training program but deviates from the preferred topics identified by the respondents. In addition, the SEM reveals a strong congruency between IFODAT and EFODAT, as well as IFODAT and ISD and EFODAT and ISD.

Managerial Implications

The study recommends that MNE subsidiaries should develop online diversity awareness training programs which include both internal and external topics, whilst incorporating themes relating to internal service delivery. A holistic approach to online diversity awareness training,which includes service delivery as a nucleus, will be beneficial to all ICT MNE subsidiary employees as opposed to a fragmented approach.

Limitations and Future Studies

Firstly, the study was conducted at one MNE subsidiary in South Africa in the ICT sector. In the future a cross-sectional study will be beneficial to explore circumstances at other MNE subsidiaries in South Africa pertaining to this topic. Secondly, only employees who have attended the online diversity awareness training program at the selected MNE subsidiary participated in the study. It will be beneficial to extend this study to all employees gaging their perceptions on online diversity awareness training programs in the context of MNE subsidiaries.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study was conducted to determine the nexus between online diversity awareness training programs and internal service delivery at a selected ICT MNE subsidiary in South Africa. The study reveals that there is a strong congruency between internal and external online diversity awareness training topics, which were furthermore found to be good indicators for improving internal service delivery. The most defensible internal diversity awareness training topics to include in an online program were found to be 'Ethnicity', 'Race", 'Age' and 'Gender', whilst results for external diversity awareness topics favoured 'Family Status', 'Socio-economic Status' and 'Geographic Location'. The results also reveal that internal service delivery topics that are beneficial to emphasise in an online diversity awareness training program includes 'Alignment to strategic objectives', 'Developing a service culture', 'Recognition for service delivery' and 'Communication'.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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