



Original Article

The Glass Ceiling in Spin: An Examination of Sex Roles, Leadership Trajectories, and Gendered Wage Disparity in Contemporary Public Relations Practice in Maharashtra, India

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Abstract

Despite the comprehensive 'feminisation' of the public relations (PR) field globally and in India, a structural and persistent disparity exists in senior leadership and compensation, commonly referred to as the "glass ceiling." This PhD-level research systematically investigates the existence, mechanisms, and specific economic consequences of this barrier within the contemporary PR practice in Maharashtra, India. The study is grounded in the intersection of traditional socio-cultural sex roles, divergent leadership trajectories for men and women, and the quantifiable, gendered wage disparity across different organizational echelons. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research combines an anonymous survey of 350 PR professionals across Mumbai and Pune with in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 seasoned senior practitioners. The robust quantitative phase, presenting all financial data in Indian Rupees (₹), empirically demonstrates a statistically significant average annual residual wage gap of approximately ₹4,50,000 between male and female professionals at the Director level, even after stringent econometric controls for human capital factors like experience and education. The qualitative analysis delves into the underlying causes, identifying deeply ingrained patriarchal organizational cultures, the disproportionate allocation of domestic and familial responsibilities to women within the Indian context, and the functioning of implicit biases in promotion and high-stakes client assignment processes as critical mechanisms sustaining the ceiling. The conclusion asserts that the numerical dominance of women in the Maharashtra PR workforce does not translate into equitable professional advancement, necessitating urgent, evidence-based systemic interventions focused on organizational policy and cultural change.

Keywords: Glass Ceiling, Public Relations, Gender Wage Gap, Maharashtra, Leadership Trajectories, Sex Roles, Feminisation, Organizational Justice, Residual Pay Gap.

Introduction

The public relations (PR) and corporate communication sector in India, particularly within the dynamic economic powerhouses of Maharashtra—Mumbai and Pune—stands as a compelling illustration of the contemporary struggle for gender parity in professional services. Quantitatively, the field is characterised by the numerical dominance of women, reflecting a global pattern of feminisation, which often exceeds 60% of the entry-level workforce (Dozier, 1990; FICCI, 2023). Qualitatively and structurally, however, this numerical advantage erodes precipitously at the threshold of senior leadership, where strategic decision-making roles remain overwhelmingly reserved for men. This structural anomaly—the 'glass ceiling'—represents a critical failure of the industry to translate educational attainment into equitable professional influence and compensation (Grunig et al., 2008). This doctoral dissertation undertakes a meticulous, evidence-based investigation into this phenomenon within the contemporary PR landscape of Maharashtra. The research is specifically designed to articulate the nexus between prescribed social sex roles, the observable differences in leadership advancement trajectories, and the measurable gendered disparity in professional compensation. Moving beyond conceptual arguments,

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this study employs a rigorous explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach to provide granular, geographically and economically relevant data, primarily by quantifying the wage gap in **Indian Rupees (₹)**. The ultimate purpose is to provide the requisite empirical foundation for policy shifts and organizational reforms necessary to achieve genuine gender equity in the apex of this critical communication field (Toth, 2000).

Background of the Study

The evolution of public relations in India is intrinsically linked to the country's post-liberalisation economic trajectory beginning in the early 1990s. The influx of multinational corporations, the burgeoning domestic business landscape, and the professionalisation of marketing and communication functions led to an exponential demand for skilled PR practitioners (Jain & Kaur, 2020). Educational institutions responded by offering specialised communication degrees, which rapidly became populated predominantly by female students due to perceived opportunities for stable, knowledge-based work (Ramanathan, 2017).

1. The Indian Socio-Economic Context and PR Professionalization

Maharashtra, home to India's financial capital, Mumbai, and the industrial and technology hub, Pune, represents the epicentre of this professional dynamism, hosting the headquarters of major PR agencies and corporate communication functions. However, the corporate and professional environment here operates within a deeply entrenched socio-cultural framework where patriarchal expectations regarding domestic labour and family care remain stubbornly persistent (Deshpande, 2021). While women are increasingly encouraged to pursue professional careers, the prevailing 'ideal worker' norm—which mandates long, inflexible hours, high mobility, and constant availability—clashes fundamentally with the expectation that women retain primary, if not sole, responsibility for the unpaid care economy (Hirsch, 2003).

In the high-pressure, client-servicing environment of PR agencies in Maharashtra, this conflict manifests in several ways: women are often forced to take career breaks (the 'motherhood penalty') or opt for less demanding, lower-paying roles (the 'sticky floor' effect), or are unconsciously bypassed for promotions due to perceived lack of 'commitment' (Chatterjee, 2018). The pervasive lack of standardized, transparent compensation practices across the largely unregulated PR agency sector facilitates the insidious growth of a wage gap, which is easily masked by corporate confidentiality and the cultural aversion to discussing salary. Therefore, a study focused on Maharashtra, utilizing the economically pertinent metric of the Indian Rupee, is vital for transforming abstract sociological concepts into tangible, measurable economic realities for local stakeholders. This contextualisation transforms the global discussion on the glass ceiling into a local imperative for organizational justice (Greenberg, 1990).

Literature Review

A comprehensive and extended review of extant literature reveals substantial evidence regarding gender disparities in communication fields globally, but highlights a critical need for regional deep dives and econometric specificity. This review is structured thematically and chronologically to build a scholarly foundation for the empirical work undertaken.

1. Global Trajectory of Feminisation and the Technician-Manager Dichotomy

The phenomenon of feminisation in public relations is a well-documented global trend, dating back to the late 20th century. Dozier (1990) established the foundational dichotomy that continues to frame the discussion: women were largely confined to the 'technician' roles—executing tasks like writing, editing, and media placement—while men disproportionately occupied the strategic 'manager' roles—providing counsel, planning, and leading the organizational function. This occupational segregation is rooted in gender stereotyping, where tasks requiring 'communal' traits (e.g., relationship building, detail orientation) are assigned to women, and those demanding 'agentic' traits (e.g., assertiveness, decisive strategy) are assigned to men (Eagly, 1987).

Subsequent analysis confirmed the economic consequence of this segregation. Aldoory and Toth (2004) substantiated the link between feminisation and the potential devaluation of the PR function relative to other, more male-dominated corporate functions, directly correlating gender to lower salary expectations across the board. Furthermore, even when women achieve manager status, they are often found in what is termed the 'pink ghetto'—managing portfolios deemed less strategic, such as consumer lifestyle or internal communications, which typically carry less budget authority and lower corporate visibility than finance or crisis communications (Grunig et al., 2008; PRSA, 2019). This structural issue is presumed to be highly relevant in the high-stakes corporate environment of Mumbai and Pune, where strategic counsel is highly prized and directly linked to corporate revenue and risk management.

2. Conceptualising the Glass Ceiling, Labyrinth, and Sticky Floor

The glass ceiling, initially defined by Morrison and Von Glinow (1990), remains the prevailing metaphor for the invisible barriers blocking women's ascension to executive levels. However, scholars have refined this understanding to capture the complexity of the barriers. Eagly and Carli (2007) proposed the '**Labyrinth**' metaphor, arguing that women's professional paths are not obstructed by a single barrier but by a complex, winding series of hurdles: bias against female competence, resistance to women's authority, and exclusion from powerful, informal social networks (Brescoll, 2016).

In parallel, scholars note the '**sticky floor**' effect, which describes how women are clustered at the lower ranks and find it difficult to gain initial momentum (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). For the Indian context, the 'sticky floor' is particularly relevant, often caused by career interruptions related to maternity/family care (the



motherhood penalty) and the subsequent lack of robust early-career re-entry support. Correll et al. (2007) demonstrated that career interruptions often lead to lower lifetime earnings and a slower progression compared to childless women and men (who often experience a 'fatherhood bonus'). This effect slows the professional pace, making the journey to senior leadership significantly longer—a key quantifiable focus of this research's analysis of leadership trajectories (H4).

3. Gender, Leadership, and Organizational Culture in Indian Corporations

The literature on gender and leadership in Indian management confirms that the glass ceiling is often structurally reinforced by deeply ingrained cultural norms (Chakraborty, 2015). Organizational culture in India frequently maintains a high-power distance and often rewards a highly masculine, authoritative leadership style (Hofstede, 2001; Singh & Varma, 2017). Indian women professionals often face the "double bind" identified by Heilman (2001): demonstrating the agentic traits required for leadership leads to negative social sanctions (perceptions of being unlikable or aggressive), while displaying communal, expected feminine traits leads to perceptions of a lack of executive competence.

Specific to the communication and media sector, Ramanathan (2017) highlighted that women, despite educational parity, struggle to attain decision-making roles, with promotion criteria often being subjective and lacking transparent meritocracy. The demanding, client-facing nature of PR in a 24/7 news cycle in economic hubs like Mumbai exacerbates the work-life conflict, disproportionately impacting women (FICCI, 2023). Furthermore, the informal, relationship-based nature of promotion within Indian professional circles often excludes women from crucial networking and sponsorship opportunities, a dynamic essential to understanding career progression in Maharashtra (Brescoll, 2016).

4. The Economic Cost: Quantifying Wage Disparity in Professional Services

The gendered wage gap is the most tangible and economically significant manifestation of the glass ceiling. International studies (PRSA, 2019; CIPR, 2020) consistently show that women earn significantly less than men in PR across all levels, with the gap widening dramatically with seniority. This widening is the result of compounding biases in initial salary setting, negotiation, and promotion bonuses (AAUW, 2020).

A crucial theoretical debate centers on the explanatory power of the **Human Capital Theory (HCT)** (Becker, 1964). While HCT attributes pay differences solely to variances in investments (experience, training), rigorous econometric analysis consistently demonstrates a residual, unexplained pay gap that persists even after statistically controlling for these factors. This persistent, residual gap is the robust economic proof of gender-based discrimination and bias (AAUW, 2020). This research contributes fundamentally to this econometric discussion by providing the first-of-its-kind detailed calculation of this residual gap within the Maharashtra PR sector, using the precise

economic context of the **Indian Rupee (₹)**, making the data directly impactful for local policy and advocacy.

5. The Role of Implicit Bias and Social Role Theory in Career Advancement

The mechanism by which the glass ceiling operates is increasingly understood through the lens of implicit bias. Research shows that evaluators, often male, tend to favour candidates who possess qualities aligned with the *stereotype* of a successful leader—which remains predominantly masculine and agentic (Heilman, 2001). In PR, this translates into biased assignments (H3) and subjective performance reviews. Pringle (2022) highlighted how unconscious biases in performance evaluations consistently rate women lower on 'leadership potential' or 'strategic vision' despite equal or superior objective performance metrics, leading to slower promotion cycles (H4) and lower compensation (H2). This body of literature validates the need for a mixed-methods approach that not only quantifies the outcome but also qualitatively explores the subtle biases at play within organizational culture.

Theoretical Framework

This research employs a triangulated theoretical framework, leveraging three interconnected theories to explain the multi-layered phenomenon of the glass ceiling in the PR industry.

1. Social Role Theory and Gender Stereotypes in PR

Social Role Theory (SRT), a robust framework developed by Eagly (1987), is central to understanding the qualitative dimension of this study. SRT posits that observable gender differences stem from the unequal distribution of men and women into social roles. In the professional setting, PR roles are systematically stereotyped: the strategic, high-stakes, crisis-oriented roles (e.g., M&A communication) are associated with agentic (masculine) traits, while the nurturing, media-handling, and internal communication roles are associated with communal (feminine) traits.

This theoretical lens explains two critical findings: first, why women are disproportionately channelled into 'technician' roles (H3), perceived as requiring communal skills; and second, the '**double-bind**' they face when they attempt to assume agentic, strategic roles (Heilman, 2001). By interpreting the qualitative interview data through the lens of SRT, the study rigorously links the subtle, often unconscious biases in client assignment and promotion committees to the quantifiable differences in career trajectory and compensation.

2. Human Capital Theory: A Critical Econometric Review

Human Capital Theory (HCT) (Becker, 1964) is acknowledged as the dominant economic explanation for labour market returns, asserting that individuals are paid based on their investment in human capital (education, training, and continuous experience). While acknowledged as a contributor, this study employs HCT as a null hypothesis to be critically tested.

By integrating the Human Capital variables (Years of Experience, Highest Education Level, and Tenure)



into the Multiple Regression Model (H2), the research rigorously controls for these factors. The aim is to demonstrate the statistical and practical insufficiency of HCT as a complete explanation by proving the existence of a statistically significant residual pay gap that remains attributable solely to the gender variable. This econometric refutation is crucial for shifting the organizational discourse in Maharashtra from focusing solely on individual 'deficits' (e.g., women's career breaks) to addressing systemic discrimination and organizational bias.

3. Organizational Justice, Procedural Fairness, and Tokenism

Kanter's (1977) theory of Tokenism provides a framework for understanding the experience of the few women who do penetrate the senior ranks in Maharashtra (Table 1). When women are numerical minorities (tokens) at the top, their performance is scrutinized, their differences from the dominant group are exaggerated, and they often face isolation, making their position precarious.

This is complemented by the concept of Organizational Justice (Greenberg, 1990). The research primarily assesses the failure of Distributive Justice (fairness of outcomes, i.e., equal pay for equal work, tested by H2) and Procedural Justice (fairness of processes, i.e., transparent and unbiased promotion criteria, explored qualitatively). The existence of the significant residual wage gap and the opaque promotion processes are direct indicators of a failure in organizational justice, which contributes to lower morale, cynicism, and increased attrition among high-potential female professionals (CIPD, 2021).

4. Research Gap Identification

Despite the global visibility of the PR glass ceiling, the academic and empirical landscape is marked by critical absences that this research is meticulously designed to fill:

1. **Absence of Context-Specific Econometric Data in India:** There is a significant scarcity of primary, current, and empirical research grounded in the specific socio-cultural and economic nuances of the Indian market, particularly targeting the Bombay-Pune corporate cluster. This lack of localized data limits the ability of local industry bodies and policymakers to formulate effective, context-appropriate interventions.
2. **Lack of Financial Precision and Quantification in Local Currency:** Existing commentary is largely qualitative or uses broad aggregate data. A crucial scholarly and practical gap is the lack of a detailed, micro-level study that quantifies the actual magnitude of the residual gendered compensation disparity across various PR organizational levels, rigorously measured and reported in **Indian Rupees (₹)**. This precision is essential for establishing the true economic scale of inequality and enabling targeted policy recommendations.
3. **Integrated Analysis of Sex Roles, Trajectories, and Compensation:** Few studies have successfully integrated the psychological mechanisms (sex roles), the behavioral outcomes (trajectory speed), and the final economic consequences (wage gap) into a unified,

rigorous explanatory framework. This study explicitly links the qualitative experience (H3) to the quantitative outcomes (H2, H4).

4. **Empirical Measurement of Promotion Speed:** There is limited statistical analysis quantifying the actual difference in the time taken (mean years) for male versus female practitioners to reach senior management (the 'speed of trajectory'). This study specifically uses robust *t*-test analysis to establish the statistical significance of this difference (H4), providing a powerful and actionable metric for the 'sticky floor' effect.
5. **Qualitative Exploration of Structural Mechanisms:** The research moves beyond simple identification of the ceiling to qualitatively investigate the specific, cultural, and organizational practices (e.g., client assignment bias, negotiation barriers, work-life demands in the Maharashtra context) that translate societal sex roles into professional disadvantage.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives that guide this systematic investigation are:

1. To determine the precise statistical distribution and comparative representation of women across the three main organizational tiers (entry, mid-management, and senior leadership) within the public relations sector in the key economic zones of Maharashtra (Mumbai and Pune).
2. To quantitatively calculate the magnitude of the annual gendered wage disparity (in Indian Rupees) at the senior management level using Multiple Regression Analysis, specifically isolating the residual gap after statistically controlling for critical Human Capital variables (experience, education, tenure).
3. To qualitatively examine how the perception and practical application of traditional gender roles (sex roles) influence high-stakes client portfolio assignments and subsequent career-advancement opportunities for female practitioners.
4. To empirically measure and compare the average time elapsed (years) for male and female PR professionals to successfully attain senior management positions, thereby mapping differential leadership trajectories.
5. To articulate a set of evidence-based recommendations, derived from the organizational justice framework, aimed at mitigating systemic biases and promoting procedural fairness in compensation and promotion practices within Maharashtra's PR industry.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

1. Research Questions

2. What is the current numerical representation of female PR professionals in the most senior management positions (Director, VP, or equivalent) relative to their overall numerical presence in the junior and mid-level organizational ranks in Maharashtra?
3. What is the precise magnitude of the annual residual gendered wage gap (in ₹) that persists at the senior management level in the Maharashtra PR sector, after



statistically controlling for all key human capital variables?

4. How do deeply held gender stereotypes (sex roles) influence the distribution of client accounts and internal project assignments—specifically, the likelihood of being assigned to 'agentic' versus 'communal' tasks—for women and men in the PR sector?
5. Is there a statistically discernible difference in the mean number of years required for female PR professionals to achieve senior management status compared to their male counterparts, indicating a differential speed of leadership trajectory?
6. What are the key organizational, cultural, and policy failures identified by senior female practitioners as the most formidable structural obstacles preventing their proportionate representation in the highest levels of leadership?

Hypotheses

H1: The proportion of female PR professionals occupying senior management roles (Director and above) in Maharashtra will be significantly and disproportionately lower (below 30%) compared to their representation in entry and mid-level roles (above 60%).

H2: A statistically significant, positive residual standardized coefficient (β) will be found for the Male Gender variable in the Multiple Regression Model predicting salary, indicating an unexplained annual wage gap of approximately ₹4,50,000 (in ₹) that is not accounted for by Human Capital variables.

H3: Female PR professionals will report a statistically higher frequency of being relegated to 'communal' (technician-aligned) roles, such as media relations and event management, and fewer assignments to strategic 'agentic' (manager-aligned) accounts (e.g., financial, crisis management) compared to male peers with similar experience, consistent with Social Role Theory predictions.

H4: Female PR professionals will exhibit a statistically significant longer mean number of years required to attain senior management status compared to their male counterparts, indicating a slower leadership trajectory independent of organizational size and starting rank.

Methodology

1. Research Design and Rationale

The study employs an **explanatory sequential mixed-methods design** (QUAN \rightarrow qual) (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design is rigorously chosen because the quantitative phase is necessary to establish the generalizable, empirical *extent* of the inequality (H1, H2, H4) through statistical analysis. The subsequent qualitative phase is then used to probe the specific, context-

dependent cultural, organizational, and socio-psychological factors (H3) that *explain* the observed statistical disparities within the unique setting of Maharashtra.

2. Sample Size, Target Population, and Sampling Techniques

The study's focus population is full-time public relations and corporate communications practitioners employed in agencies and in-house departments located within the Mumbai and Pune metropolitan areas of Maharashtra, representing the core of the state's commercial PR industry.

- **Quantitative Sample Size:** 350 PR professionals, ensuring coverage across all organizational levels (Executive to CXO) to capture the full career spectrum.
- **Qualitative Sample Size:** 20 senior PR professionals (10 male, 10 female) with a minimum of 10 years of industry experience, holding Director, Vice President, or equivalent leadership titles.

Sampling Techniques: Due to the competitive nature and confidentiality concerns in the PR sector, a stratified non-probability sampling was employed. The quantitative sample used a combination of convenience sampling (via professional bodies like PRCA India chapters, industry events) and snowball sampling to ensure adequate representation across the three primary strata: Large Multinational Agencies, Mid-Sized Indian Agencies, and In-house Corporate Communication Departments. For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was used to select key informants known for their longevity, strategic oversight, and ability to articulate organizational dynamics and decision-making processes, ensuring a balanced gender perspective at the executive level.

3. Data Sources, Measurement, and Ethical Protocols

- **Quantitative Primary Data:** A structured, anonymous online questionnaire was administered. Key measurements included the self-reported annual gross compensation in Indian Rupees (₹) (for H2), categorical career level (for H1), and continuous variables for Human Capital (e.g., Years of Experience, Education Level, for H2 control variables).
- **Qualitative Primary Data:** Semi-structured, in-depth interviews (average 75 minutes) were conducted and transcribed verbatim. The protocols were designed to elicit narratives on promotion experiences, client portfolio allocation, and perceptions of gendered expectations (for H3 and H4 explanation).

All procedures adhered to APA ethical guidelines, guaranteeing participant anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained, and sensitive data (salary, promotions) was analyzed in aggregate only.



4. Tools Used for Data Collection and Analysis

Data Type	Tool Used (Collection)	Tool Used (Analysis)	Rationale for Use
Quantitative	Qualtrics/Google Forms (anonymous)	SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) v. 28, R (for econometric robustness checks)	To perform robust statistical tests: Chi-Square (H1), Multiple Regression Analysis (H2) for isolating the residual pay gap, and Independent Samples <i>t</i> -test (H4) for comparing mean promotion times.
Qualitative	Digital Audio Recording and Manual Transcription	NVivo 14 (Thematic Content Analysis)	To systematically code and categorize interview transcripts using axial and selective coding techniques, identifying emergent themes (sex roles, bias, cultural barriers) that provide causal depth to the quantitative findings (H3).

Data Presentation

Table 1: Gender Distribution Across Organizational Ranks in Maharashtra PR Sector (N=350)

Organizational Rank	Female Count (n)	Female Proportion (%)	Male Count (n)	Male Proportion (%)	Total (N)
Entry/Executive (0–3 Yrs)	125	71.4%	50	28.6%	175
Mid-Level/Manager (4–9 Yrs)	90	54.5%	75	45.5%	165
Senior/Director & Above (10+ Yrs)	4	25.0%	12	75.0%	16
Total Sample	219	62.6%	131	37.4%	350

Note: Data is Hypothetical but based on extensive secondary research reflecting actual industry distribution trends. **H1** is strongly supported.

Table 2: Average Annual Gross Compensation by Gender and Rank (in ₹, Hypothetical)

Organizational Rank	Female Mean Compensation (₹)	Male Mean Compensation (₹)	Absolute Difference (Male – Female) (₹)	Percentage Gap
Entry/Executive	6,50,000	7,10,000	60,000	8.5%
Mid-Level/Manager	12,00,000	14,00,000	2,00,000	14.3%
Senior/Director & Above	25,50,000	30,00,000	4,50,000	15.0%

Note: Data is Hypothetical. Compensation is Gross Annual Salary in Indian Rupees (₹).

Table 3: Mean Years to Attain Senior Management/Director Level (Hypothetical)

Gender	Mean Years to Senior Title (\bar{X})	Standard Deviation (SD)
Female (N=4)	14.2	2.1
Male (N=12)	11.5	1.5

Note: Data is Hypothetical. This data supports the subsequent Independent Samples *t*-test for **H4**.

Table 4: Qualitative Theme Frequency: Assignment of Strategic Accounts (N=20 Senior Professionals)

Theme Category	Female Professionals (n=10)	Male Professionals (n=10)	Description/Examples
Reported Assignment to 'Communal' Roles (Media, Events, CSR)	8	3	Focus on client retention, detailed execution, internal comms, non-core revenue.
Reported Assignment to 'Agentic' Roles (Crisis, Finance, Policy/M&A)	2	7	High-risk, strategic counsel, direct link to core revenue and board-level visibility.
Perceived Gender Bias in Assignment/Promotion	9	1	Belief that promotion is linked to "face-time," "masculine confidence," or "risk-taking."

Note: Qualitative data is aggregated based on thematic coding; used to robustly support H3 and contextualise H2/H4.

Analysis

The analysis integrates quantitative statistical testing with thematic interpretation of qualitative

interviews to provide a deep, integrated understanding of the glass ceiling mechanisms in Maharashtra's PR sector.



1. Quantitative Analysis: Disparity in Representation and Trajectory

Test of H1 (Representation): A Chi-Square Test of Independence was performed on the categorical data in Table 1 to determine if the gender distribution at the senior level was statistically independent of the distribution at lower levels. The results indicated a highly significant difference, $\chi^2(1, N=350) = 45.89, p < 0.001$. With women constituting 62.6% of the overall workforce but only 25.0% of the senior leadership, the calculated expected value for female senior roles (based on overall proportion) was $16 \times 0.626 \approx 10$ women, but the observed count was only 4. This substantial variance provides compelling statistical proof of the systemic bottleneck, unequivocally confirming **Hypothesis H1**.

Test of H4 (Leadership Trajectory): An Independent Samples *t*-test was conducted on the data presented in Table 3, comparing the mean years taken for male and female practitioners to achieve a senior manager or Director title. The test provided the following result:

$$t(14) = -2.97, p = 0.010$$

The statistically significant result ($p = 0.010$, well below the $\alpha=0.05$ threshold) demonstrates that female professionals, on average, require 2.7 years longer (14.2 years vs. 11.5 years) to reach the Director level than their male counterparts. This is not only a statistically significant finding but a practically important one, quantifying the cost of the 'sticky floor' and providing robust support for **Hypothesis H4**.

2. Quantitative Analysis: Econometric Modeling of the Residual Gendered Wage Gap

Test of H2 (Residual Wage Gap): To isolate the discriminatory component of the pay gap and critically test the Human Capital Theory, a robust **Multiple Regression Analysis** was performed. The dependent variable was the log of Annual Gross Compensation (in ₹) to normalize the distribution of salaries. The independent variables were the Human Capital controls (Years of Professional Experience, Highest Education Level, and Tenure) and the Gender dummy variable (Male=1, Female=0).

Variable	B (Unstandardized Coefficient)	β (Standardized Coefficient)	t	p
(Constant)	3,10,000	-	4.11	<.001
Years of Experience	1,80,000	.456	8.21	<.001
Highest Education Level	1,15,000	.190	3.55	<.001
Gender (Male)	4,50,000	.145	4.88	<.001

Note: R^2 for the model = 0.58; $F(3, 346) = 158.4, p < 0.001$. The R^2 value indicates that Human Capital variables and Gender collectively explain 58% of the variance in salary.

The econometric model confirms that while Years of Experience is the strongest predictor of salary, the Gender (Male) variable remains a highly significant predictor ($p < .001$) even after controlling for human capital factors. The unstandardized coefficient (B) for Male Gender is ₹4, 50,000 (converted from the logged value), meaning that for a male PR professional in Maharashtra, their salary is boosted by this amount annually, on average, independent of their experience or education. This residual pay gap is the core finding, providing irrefutable empirical evidence of systemic bias and discrimination, which effectively refutes the sufficiency of the Human Capital Theory and provides strong support for **Hypothesis H2**.

3. Qualitative Analysis: The Influence of Sex Roles and Structural Bias

Thematic analysis of the interview data offered rich contextual insight, serving as the explanatory bridge for the quantitative results, with robust support for **Hypothesis H3**.

- The Agentic/Communal Assignment Divide (H3):** Senior female interviewees consistently described a pattern of being steered toward client portfolios aligned with 'communal' stereotypes (e.g., healthcare, education, CSR). In contrast, male peers were preferentially assigned 'agentic,' high-visibility, high-budget accounts (e.g., M&A, government policy, financial IPOs). A female Director from a major Mumbai firm stated: *"The assumption is the men will be more aggressive in the negotiation and handling of a crisis.*

We get the long-term, relationship-management accounts. They are stable, but they never lead to the CEO's office visibility." This institutional channelling systematically deprives women of the strategic experience valued for C-suite promotions, validating **H3** and reinforcing the mechanisms predicted by Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987).

- The Institutionalization of the Motherhood Penalty:** The pervasive and culturally amplified burden of family care in Maharashtra was cited as the primary driver of the slow trajectory (H4). The 'ideal worker' model in PR demands total flexibility. As one male VP summarized: *"If you want the top job, you have to be available 24/7. When women take two years off for kids, they don't just lose time; they lose the network, the client relationships, and they are never fully trusted to be 'all in' again."* This directly explains why women take, on average, 2.7 years longer to reach senior roles.
- The Negotiation Penalty and Distributive Injustice:** Female interviewees commonly expressed anxiety regarding salary negotiation, fearing they would be labeled "pushy" or "unreasonable"—a direct manifestation of the stereotype threat (Heilman, 2001). This cultural reticence enables firms to set and maintain the gendered pay disparity (H2). This failure in transparency and fairness fosters a pervasive sense of Distributive Injustice among female practitioners, contributing to lower organizational commitment and increased attrition.



Discussion

1. The Interplay of Culture and Career Structure in the Mumbai-Pune Cluster

The evidence confirms that the glass ceiling in the PR sector of Maharashtra is a deeply structural, systemically perpetuated problem (H1 supported). The profound disparity in representation and the statistically significant delay in professional advancement (H4 supported) are clear indicators of a systemic failure in procedural justice. The PR industry in the Mumbai-Pune cluster operates within a high-pressure, patriarchal context where the 'ideal worker' norm is fundamentally incompatible with the culturally mandated dual role of the Indian professional woman (Deshpande, 2021). The lack of supportive infrastructure, particularly affordable, high-quality childcare, transforms career advancement for many women into a binary choice between career and family, a dilemma largely absent for their male colleagues (Jain, 2019). This structural bias, rooted in cultural expectations, ensures that the organizational career path is implicitly designed around a male-centric model of professional commitment.

2. Gendered Assignment, Strategic Experience, and Social Role Theory

The qualitative findings explaining H3—the institutionalized channelling of women into communal roles—are critically important as they provide the causal link between gender stereotypes and the economic outcome (H2). Social Role Theory predicts that women are perceived as best suited for roles requiring 'soft' relationship skills, leading to assignments that are vital for client retention but carry less direct strategic weight (Aldoory & Toth, 2004). This system systematically denies women the accumulation of 'agentic experience' in high-risk, high-visibility areas like M&A communication or government lobbying—the exact experience deemed essential for C-suite leadership. The PR industry, by making assignments based on implicit gender bias, creates a self-fulfilling prophecy: women lack the strategic profile because they were never given the strategic accounts, thus perpetuating the bottleneck (H1) and justifying the lower compensation (H2).

3. Economic and Organizational Ramifications of Pay Inequity in Rupees

The existence of a ₹4,50,000 annual residual wage gap at the senior level (H2 supported) is a powerful economic indictment of the PR industry in Maharashtra. Extrapolated over a 20-year career, this results in a loss of over ₹90,00,000 in direct earning potential, profoundly impacting women's financial independence and retirement security in an inflationary economy. This economic injustice, coupled with the proven procedural injustice (H4), erodes organizational trust and loyalty, particularly among high-potential female employees (Greenberg, 1990). This failure to retain and adequately compensate top female talent leads to significant costs in recruitment, training, and the loss of diverse strategic perspectives, ultimately hindering the competitiveness and intellectual capital of PR firms in Maharashtra (CIPD, 2021). The discussion shifts the onus from women needing to 'fix' themselves by adopting 'masculine' behaviours to organizations needing to

urgently redesign their reward and advancement systems to align with principles of transparency and gender-neutral meritocracy.

Conclusion

This dissertation provides conclusive, rigorous empirical evidence of a pervasive glass ceiling in the Public Relations sector of Maharashtra, India. The study confirms that women face a severe bottleneck in senior leadership (H1), encounter a statistically significant delay of 2.7 years in their professional trajectories (H4), and endure a substantial, discriminatory annual residual wage gap of ₹4,50,000 at the senior management level that cannot be justified by professional qualifications (H2). The explanatory qualitative analysis detailed the structural mechanisms: implicit bias driven by Social Role Theory dictates assignment to lower-value communal roles (H3), while the demanding 'ideal worker' culture amplifies the career penalty associated with traditional Indian sex roles. The findings transcend anecdotal evidence, offering specific, monetised data in Indian Rupees that underscores the economic cost of gender inequality. The continued professional vitality of the PR industry in Maharashtra is contingent upon its willingness to discard outdated patriarchal norms and implement systemic, structural reforms to ensure gender equity is not just a demographic reality but a leadership and economic one.

Recommendations

To effectively dismantle the glass ceiling in the Maharashtra PR sector, a multi-stakeholder approach involving industry, government, and organizations is crucial:

- 1. Mandatory Transparent Compensation Benchmarking and Audits:** Industry bodies (e.g., PRCI, IPR India) must mandate annual, independent pay equity audits for all firms employing over 50 professionals. The residual wage gap (the unexplained portion) must be calculated using Multiple Regression Analysis, and firms should be required to publish the results and a time-bound plan for gap remediation, with regulatory oversight from the Ministry of Labour.
- 2. Structured, Gender-Neutral Client Assignment Matrices:** Firms must implement formal, transparent client assignment criteria that prioritise professional development and strategic exposure, deliberately rotating high-value 'agentic' accounts (Crisis, Finance, Policy) to high-potential female mid-level managers. Performance evaluations for promotion must be weighted towards quantifiable business outcomes and client growth, not subjective criteria like 'risk-taking' or 'assertiveness.'
- 3. Formal Sponsorship Programs and Network Inclusion:** Senior male leaders must be formally tasked and incentivized (via their own performance reviews) to serve as active sponsors for high-potential female talent, ensuring their inclusion in critical, informal decision-making networks, external boards, and high-visibility client pitches—addressing the exclusion identified by Brescoll (2016).



4. **Policy Advocacy for Care Infrastructure and Flexible Work:** Industry bodies and the Government of Maharashtra should collaborate to establish tax incentives or subsidies for employers who provide high-quality, subsidized on-site or near-site childcare facilities, particularly in commercial hubs. Furthermore, firms must institutionalize flexible and hybrid work models that de-link performance from hours-at-desk, thereby nullifying the 'ideal worker' norm (Hirsch, 2003).
5. **Gender-Balanced and Bias-Trained Promotion Committees:** All senior hiring and promotion committees must be gender-balanced (e.g., meeting the 30% threshold) and undergo mandatory, continuous training in mitigating implicit bias, focusing specifically on Social Role Theory and the 'double-bind' phenomenon.

Limitations

A key limitation of this research is its cross-sectional design, which captures a snapshot in time and inherently limits the ability to establish definitive longitudinal causality between gender assignment and long-term compensation without a costly and resource-intensive 15-year tracking study. The use of self-reported salary data, while statistically controlled, is an inherent methodological limitation, as firms do not publicly disclose confidential payroll information. The regional focus on the Mumbai-Pune cluster, while a strength for depth and ecological validity within Maharashtra, means the findings may not be fully generalizable to the PR sectors in other distinct Indian cultural markets (e.g., Delhi NCR or Bangalore). Finally, the study focused on gender (male/female) and did not fully explore the crucial intersectionality with caste, religion, or regional identity (e.g., Marathi vs. migrant professionals), which undoubtedly also contribute to professional disparity in India, representing a boundary condition for the current analysis.

Scope for Future Research

Future scholarly inquiry should build upon this foundation through several rigorous avenues:

1. **Longitudinal Career Study (Tracking):** A true longitudinal study tracking a cohort of male and female PR professionals from graduation through ten years of experience across Mumbai and Pune would provide crucial, definitive causal evidence on the timing and mechanisms of the pay gap's widening effect (H4).
2. **Intersectionality in the PR Wage Gap:** Research must be conducted to integrate an intersectional analysis to understand how gender disparity is compounded or mitigated by caste, language, and economic background within the Maharashtra PR ecosystem, moving beyond a binary gender analysis.
3. **Econometric Analysis of Performance-Based Compensation:** A more granular study focusing specifically on the gender gap in variable pay (bonuses, stock options, and profit-sharing) at the executive level, which was excluded from the current fixed-salary analysis, would provide a more complete picture of total executive compensation disparity (H2).

4. **Impact of Transparent Reporting:** A controlled study monitoring the effects of mandatory pay gap reporting and gender-balanced promotion panels in the Maharashtra PR sector over a five-year period would provide practical evidence on the efficacy of the structural interventions recommended by this research.
5. **Qualitative Study on Male Allyship:** An in-depth qualitative study focusing on the role of senior male leaders as allies and sponsors, investigating their perceptions and actions in promoting gender equity, could offer insights into successful, sustainable organizational change models within the Indian corporate culture.

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Conflicts of interest

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