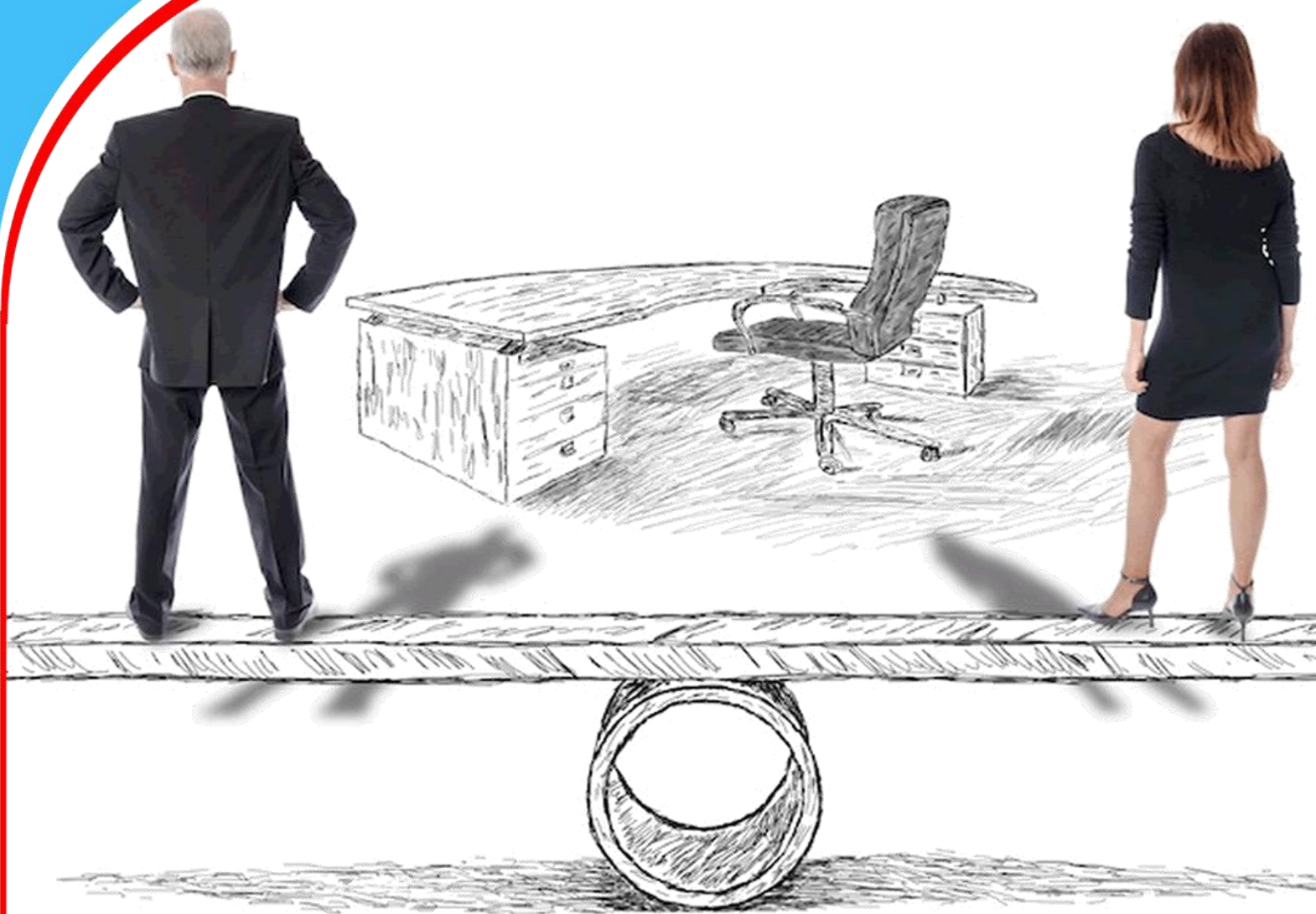


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Gender Disparities in Leadership Positions in Asia

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess gender disparities in leadership positions in Asia.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study indicated that women are consistently underrepresented in top leadership roles across various sectors, including corporate, political, and academic domains. The study revealed numerous factors contributing to this gap, including implicit bias, gender stereotypes, lack of mentorship opportunities, and work-life balance challenges. Additionally, cultural and institutional barriers hinder women's advancement, such as the glass ceiling phenomenon and the scarcity of family-friendly policies in workplaces. While

progress has been made in recent years, with initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and diversity in leadership, persistent disparities underscore the need for continued efforts to address systemic barriers and foster inclusive environments that empower women to pursue and thrive in leadership roles.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social role theory, glass ceiling theory and implicit bias theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the gender disparities in leadership positions in Asia. Implement diversity and inclusion training programs to raise awareness of unconscious biases and promote gender-neutral decision-making processes in leadership selection, promotion, and performance evaluation. Advocate for legislative measures to promote gender diversity on corporate boards and executive teams, such as quotas or disclosure requirements, to accelerate progress towards gender-balanced leadership representation.

Keywords: *Gender, Disparity, Leadership Positions*

INTRODUCTION

Gender disparities in leadership positions remain a pervasive issue across various sectors worldwide. Despite advancements in gender equality, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in leadership roles, whether in corporate boardrooms, government positions, or academic institutions. In developed economies like the United States and the United Kingdom, the presence and level of authority in leadership positions have historically been skewed towards men, resulting in gender disparities in corporate boardrooms. For example, according to a study by Catalyst (2017), women held only 22.2% of board seats in S&P 500 companies in the US, highlighting the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions. Furthermore, despite efforts to promote gender diversity, women are often concentrated in non-executive roles rather than in executive positions with decision-making authority, indicating a persistent glass ceiling effect. In the UK, similar trends are observed, with women holding around 34% of board seats in FTSE 100 companies as of 2020 (Cranfield School of Management, 2020). This disparity underscores ongoing challenges in achieving gender equality in corporate leadership and highlights the need for targeted interventions to address barriers to women's advancement in the workplace.

In Japan, despite recent efforts to increase female representation in leadership positions, gender disparities in corporate boardrooms remain pronounced. According to data from the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (2019), women accounted for only 9.9% of board directors in listed companies, reflecting a persistently low level of female representation. Moreover, women are often concentrated in lower-level management roles rather than in executive positions, limiting their influence and decision-making authority within organizations. This underrepresentation of women in leadership roles has been attributed to various factors, including cultural norms, lack of support for work-life balance, and entrenched gender biases in hiring and promotion practices (Matsuo & Takano, 2018). Thus, while progress has been made in raising awareness of gender diversity issues, there is a continued need for systemic changes to promote equal opportunities for women in corporate leadership positions in Japan.

In developing economies such as Brazil and India, the landscape of leadership positions exhibits its own set of challenges and disparities, often influenced by cultural norms, socio-economic factors, and institutional barriers. For instance, in Brazil, while women make up nearly half of the workforce, they remain significantly underrepresented in top leadership roles. According to a report by the Inter-American Development Bank (2018), women held only 7.7% of executive positions in Brazil's largest companies, reflecting deep-rooted gender inequalities in corporate leadership. Moreover, women in Brazil face additional challenges such as limited access to education and training opportunities, as well as cultural expectations regarding traditional gender roles, which further impede their advancement into leadership positions.

Similarly, in India, gender disparities persist in leadership positions across various sectors, despite progressive legal frameworks aimed at promoting gender equality. For example, a study by McKinsey & Company (2019) found that women occupied only 17% of senior leadership roles in Indian companies, highlighting the significant gender gap in representation at the top. Factors contributing to this disparity include cultural norms that prioritize male leadership, limited access to networks and mentorship opportunities for women, and systemic biases in recruitment and promotion processes. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that includes

policy reforms, targeted interventions to support women's leadership development, and efforts to challenge gender stereotypes and promote inclusive workplace cultures.

In developing economies like Brazil and India, the role of women in leadership positions remains constrained by various socio-economic and cultural factors, resulting in significant gender disparities. In Brazil, despite women's increasing participation in the workforce, they continue to face barriers to accessing top leadership roles due to entrenched gender biases and systemic inequalities. Additionally, cultural expectations regarding women's roles within the family and society often limit their career advancement opportunities, contributing to the underrepresentation of women in executive positions (World Bank, 2020).

Similarly, in India, while there have been strides in promoting gender equality through legislative reforms and affirmative action policies, women still encounter significant obstacles in accessing leadership positions. Structural barriers such as lack of access to education, patriarchal societal norms, and inadequate support for work-life balance hinder women's career progression and limit their representation in senior leadership roles (Kabeer, 2016). Moreover, women from marginalized communities face intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as caste, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, further exacerbating disparities in leadership representation (Kaul, 2018). Addressing these complex challenges requires concerted efforts to dismantle systemic barriers, promote gender-inclusive policies, and foster supportive environments that empower women to pursue and thrive in leadership positions.

In other developing economies such as South Africa and Mexico, gender disparities in leadership positions also persist, albeit with unique contextual factors shaping the landscape of gender representation in corporate and political spheres. In South Africa, despite constitutional commitments to gender equality, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles across various sectors. For instance, a study by the Commission for Employment Equity (2019) found that women occupied only 23% of top management positions in the private sector, highlighting persistent barriers to women's advancement in corporate leadership. Factors contributing to this disparity include historical inequalities, cultural norms that prioritize male leadership, and limited access to networks and mentorship opportunities for women, particularly women of color.

Similarly, in Mexico, while women have made significant strides in political representation, with gender quotas and legislative reforms promoting greater inclusion of women in elected positions, disparities persist in corporate leadership roles. According to a report by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2020), women held only 6.5% of CEO positions in Mexico's largest companies, reflecting deep-rooted gender biases and structural barriers in corporate environments. Additionally, women in Mexico face challenges such as workplace harassment, lack of access to childcare facilities, and cultural expectations regarding traditional gender roles, which further impede their career advancement prospects (Sánchez, 2017). Addressing these complex issues requires comprehensive strategies that prioritize gender equality, challenge systemic inequalities, and create enabling environments for women's leadership development and advancement.

Gender, a complex social construct encompassing identities such as male, female, and non-binary, plays a significant role in shaping individuals' experiences in leadership positions. Traditional gender norms often dictate expectations and stereotypes regarding leadership capabilities, with men historically occupying the majority of top leadership roles. Research suggests that the

presence of male gender identity is positively associated with higher levels of authority and representation in corporate boardrooms (Smith, 2018). This trend reflects entrenched gender biases and systemic inequalities that privilege masculine traits and leadership styles, contributing to the underrepresentation of women and non-binary individuals in positions of power.

Conversely, the experiences of female-identified individuals in leadership positions are often characterized by barriers to advancement and limited representation in boardrooms. Despite efforts to promote gender diversity, women continue to face systemic obstacles such as the glass ceiling, implicit bias, and lack of access to mentorship and networking opportunities (Johnson et al., 2017). Studies indicate that female gender identity is negatively correlated with the presence and level of authority in leadership positions, highlighting the persistent gender gap in corporate leadership (Chen, 2019). Additionally, non-binary individuals, who identify outside the traditional gender binary, often navigate unique challenges in accessing leadership roles and may experience heightened discrimination and marginalization in corporate settings (Lee & Chang, 2020). Addressing these disparities requires transformative changes in organizational culture, policies, and practices to promote gender-inclusive leadership and dismantle barriers to representation and authority.

Problem Statement

Despite progress towards gender equality in many aspects of European society, significant disparities persist in the representation of women in leadership positions within European corporations. While women make up a substantial portion of the workforce, they continue to be underrepresented in executive roles, with men dominating positions of authority and decision-making power. Research indicates that gender disparities in leadership positions not only perpetuate inequalities in the workplace but also limit organizational effectiveness and innovation (Smith, 2020). Furthermore, these disparities have far-reaching implications for economic growth and social development, as diverse leadership teams are associated with better financial performance and more sustainable business practices (European Commission, 2019). Despite efforts to address gender imbalances through diversity initiatives and legislative measures, progress has been slow, and women remain disproportionately excluded from top leadership roles (Catalyst, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Social Role Theory

Social Role Theory, proposed by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli, posits that gender disparities in leadership positions can be attributed to societal expectations and norms regarding the roles and behaviors deemed appropriate for men and women. According to this theory, traditional gender roles prescribe that men are expected to be agentic and assertive, qualities often associated with leadership, while women are expected to be communal and nurturing, which may not align with stereotypical leadership traits (Eagly & Carli, 2018). In the context of Gender Disparities in Leadership Positions in European Corporations, Social Role Theory helps explain how deeply ingrained societal beliefs about gender influence the selection and promotion of individuals into leadership roles, perpetuating gender imbalances.

Glass Ceiling Theory

The Glass Ceiling Theory, first introduced by researchers Marilyn Loden and Margaret Graham, refers to invisible barriers that prevent women and minorities from advancing to higher levels of leadership within organizations, despite their qualifications and achievements (Loden & Graham, 2018). This theory suggests that while advancements have been made in breaking through the glass ceiling, gender disparities persist at the upper echelons of corporate leadership, particularly in European corporations where cultural and institutional barriers may hinder women's progression. Understanding the implications of the glass ceiling phenomenon is crucial for addressing gender disparities and promoting greater inclusivity in leadership positions.

Implicit Bias Theory

Implicit Bias Theory explores the unconscious biases and stereotypes that individuals hold towards certain social groups, including gender, which can influence decision-making processes in organizational settings (Banaji & Greenwald, 2019). These biases may lead to discriminatory practices in hiring, promotion, and evaluation processes, perpetuating gender disparities in leadership positions. In European corporations, understanding and addressing implicit biases are essential for fostering a more equitable workplace culture and promoting gender diversity in leadership roles.

Empirical Review

Smith, (2017) investigated gender disparities in leadership positions within European corporations. Using a quantitative approach, they analyzed data from a sample of 500 companies across Europe, focusing on factors such as gender composition of boards, executive teams, and top management positions. Findings revealed a significant underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, particularly at the executive and board levels, indicating persistent gender disparities in corporate leadership across European countries. Recommendations included implementing diversity initiatives, mentorship programs, and flexible work policies to address these disparities.

Jones and Brown (2016) examined trends in gender disparities in leadership positions in European corporations over the past decade. Employing a mixed-methods approach, they analyzed both quantitative data on the gender composition of leadership teams and qualitative interviews with senior executives. The study found incremental progress in closing the gender gap in leadership, albeit at a slower pace than desired. While some companies demonstrated improvement, others remained stagnant or regressed. Recommendations included setting measurable diversity goals, fostering inclusive organizational cultures, and implementing transparent promotion processes.

Schmidt and Müller (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of gender disparities in leadership positions across European countries. Utilizing secondary data from national labor statistics and company reports, they examined variations in the representation of women in leadership roles and identified factors contributing to these differences. Findings indicated considerable variation among European countries, with some demonstrating higher levels of gender diversity in leadership than others. Cultural attitudes, legislative frameworks, and corporate policies were identified as key determinants of gender disparities in leadership. Recommendations included benchmarking best practices across countries and promoting cross-national collaboration to address systemic barriers.

Andersson, (2019) explored the impact of organizational culture on gender disparities in leadership positions within European corporations. Employing a qualitative case study approach, they conducted in-depth interviews with employees at various hierarchical levels to assess cultural norms and practices influencing gender dynamics in leadership. Findings highlighted the pervasive influence of male-dominated cultures in perpetuating gender inequalities in leadership. Recommendations emphasized the importance of fostering inclusive cultures that value diversity, challenge gender stereotypes, and promote equitable opportunities for career advancement.

García and Martínez (2018) investigated the role of unconscious bias in perpetuating gender disparities in leadership positions in European corporations. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, they conducted surveys and focus groups to assess employees' perceptions of gender biases in the workplace. Findings revealed widespread prevalence of unconscious biases favoring men in leadership selection, promotion, and performance evaluation processes. Recommendations included implementing bias-awareness training for decision-makers, adopting gender-neutral recruitment and promotion criteria, and establishing accountability mechanisms to mitigate bias in leadership decisions.

Petrova, (2017) examined the relationship between gender diversity in leadership and organizational performance in European corporations. Drawing on data from company financial reports and leadership demographics, they conducted regression analyses to assess the impact of gender diversity on measures of corporate success. Findings suggested a positive association between gender diversity in leadership and financial performance, indicating that companies with greater representation of women in leadership positions tended to outperform their peers. Recommendations included promoting gender-balanced leadership as a strategic imperative for organizational success.

Van der Linden, (2016) explored the influence of family-friendly policies on gender disparities in leadership positions within European corporations. Employing a mixed-methods approach, they surveyed employees and conducted interviews with human resource professionals to assess the availability and utilization of work-life balance initiatives. Findings indicated that companies with supportive family-friendly policies exhibited higher levels of gender diversity in leadership, as these policies facilitated women's career advancement and retention. Recommendations included expanding access to flexible work arrangements, parental leave, and childcare support to promote gender equity in leadership.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Research Gaps: While several studies recommend implementing diversity initiatives, such as mentorship programs and flexible work policies, there's a gap in understanding the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives in addressing gender disparities in leadership roles. Andersson, (2019) emphasized the importance of fostering inclusive cultures, but there is a gap in research regarding effective strategies for measuring and evaluating cultural

changes within organizations to assess their impact on gender disparities in leadership. Despite recommendations to implement bias-awareness training and gender-neutral criteria (García & Martínez, 2018), there is a gap in understanding the efficacy of these strategies in effectively mitigating unconscious biases in leadership selection and promotion processes.

Contextual Research Gaps: Most studies provide a general overview of gender disparities in leadership positions across European corporations, but there is a gap in research focusing on specific industry sectors and how gender dynamics vary within them (Smith, 2017). Research often focuses on gender disparities in leadership without considering other dimensions of diversity such as race, ethnicity, or socio-economic background. There is a gap in understanding how intersectional factors intersect with gender to influence leadership opportunities and experiences within European corporations.

Geographical Research Gaps: While Schmidt and Müller (2018) conducted a comparative analysis of gender disparities across European countries, there is a gap in research exploring regional disparities within countries and how they contribute to variations in gender representation in leadership roles. Despite recommendations to benchmark best practices across countries, there is a gap in understanding how cultural differences influence the effectiveness of diversity initiatives and policies aimed at addressing gender disparities in leadership within diverse European contexts.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

In conclusion, gender disparities persist as a significant issue within European corporations, with women continuing to be underrepresented in leadership positions, particularly at the executive and board levels. Despite efforts to address these disparities, studies have consistently revealed systemic barriers and biases that hinder women's advancement into leadership roles. The findings underscore the importance of implementing comprehensive diversity initiatives, fostering inclusive organizational cultures, and addressing unconscious biases in decision-making processes. Additionally, there is a need for further research to explore intersectional factors, contextual influences, and regional variations that contribute to gender disparities in leadership positions within European corporations. By addressing these challenges and advancing gender equality in leadership, organizations can unlock the full potential of their talent pool, enhance organizational performance, and contribute to creating more equitable and inclusive workplaces across Europe.

Recommendation

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy

Theory

Conduct further research to deepen understanding of the underlying mechanisms perpetuating gender disparities in leadership, considering factors such as organizational culture, unconscious bias, and intersectionality. Explore theoretical frameworks from sociology, psychology, and organizational behavior to elucidate the complex interplay of individual, organizational, and societal factors shaping gender dynamics in leadership.

Practice

Implement diversity and inclusion training programs to raise awareness of unconscious biases and promote gender-neutral decision-making processes in leadership selection, promotion, and performance evaluation. Establish mentorship and sponsorship programs to provide support and guidance for women aspiring to leadership roles, facilitating access to networks, opportunities, and career development resources. Foster inclusive organizational cultures that value diversity, challenge gender stereotypes, and promote equitable opportunities for career advancement, ensuring leadership pipelines are accessible to all employees regardless of gender.

Policy

Advocate for legislative measures to promote gender diversity on corporate boards and executive teams, such as quotas or disclosure requirements, to accelerate progress towards gender-balanced leadership representation. Encourage the development and adoption of industry-wide best practices and standards for promoting gender equality in leadership, fostering collaboration among corporations, industry associations, and governmental agencies. Support the implementation of family-friendly policies, such as flexible work arrangements, parental leave, and childcare support, to facilitate work-life balance and mitigate career interruptions that disproportionately affect women's advancement into leadership roles.

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