

How Gender inequality factors impact the growth of business organizations? A case study of UK Fashion industry

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ABSTRACT

Background: In the current period; gender inequality is regarded to be a major cause of concern since there is a substantial amount of disparity observed in the workplace. There is a lack of understanding and appreciation of female workforce and this leads to critical resource gap in the business environment.

Aims: The current study aims at discussing the impact that gender inequality has on the business organisation and has selected the UK fashion industry as a case study.

Method: A quantitative research design has been selected and SMARTPLS has been selected as the data analysis technique. The sample size is 400 participants.

Results: The results observed that there is a positive and moderate association shared between the variables i.e. there is a substantial impact on the business organisation's growth due to gender inequality.

Keywords: *Gender inequality, business growth, representation, biasedness*

INTRODUCTION

In the modern era; gender inequality is recognised to be a complex phenomenon that is observed within the business' structures and also its processes. This is particularly distressing for female workforce as acute gender inequality is harming their prospects for pursuing a better professional career (Turker and Altuntas, 2014). The issues are mainly evident in the organisation's attitude towards female workforce such as hiring policies, increments, and so on. The issue has also been identified in the UK fashion industry as there are repeated calls for including diversity and inclusion for female representation in the business.

The lack of corporate representation by females is a recurring issue identified for the UK fashion industry as it is failing to address societal expectations attested with it. There is also a perception that the UK fashion industry is one of the few industries that has an equal proportion of female workforce (Welsh et al., 2017). However, according to the British Fashion Council (2016); only 39% of females are represented in the UK fashion industry while the remaining is occupied by male counterparts. Such a disparity is also touted to be a reason for a decline in quality in their services as a lack of female representation is linked with lack of creativity and innovative ideas that are prerequisite for the UK fashion industry (British Fashion Council, 2016). Moreover, female workforce are also aware of the situation and its direness since according to European Institute for Gender Inequality (2017); the UK failed to improve its gender inequality score and reported an increase of only 0.3 points.

The UK's fashion industry particularly faced the major issue in this regard because of the similar position it has been in concerning the gender inequality. This is largely because the organisation's structure has largely remained the same and there has been no considerations to accommodate the female workforce in the fashion industry. Considering the contextual background; following are the research objectives:

- To assess the extent of gender inequality in the UK fashion industry
- To critically review literature regarding the prevalence of gender inequality in the UK fashion industry
- To evaluate the impact that gender inequality has on the workforce's morale and retention in the UK fashion industry
- To provide suitable recommendations in improving UK gender inequality within the UK fashion industry

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current disparities experienced within the UK fashion industry is based on a preconceived notion that the UK fashion industry requires creativity and innovation and it is best handled with a male workforce. The female workforce as a result are usually side lined and are relegated to second tier of employment (Linden, 2016). The female workforce are not facilitated with any

leadership based duties and their assignments are usually relegated to administration level work. This is described as Hostile Sexism that refers to the level of antipathy attested with female workforce (Stamarski and Son Hing, 2015). The concept of hostile sexism is against female workforce's ascent to leadership roles and does not hold a positive view regarding their capabilities. This view is predominant within the UK fashion industry and has been observing gender discrimination present in its HR practices (Todeschini et al., 2017). Following on, the use of hostile sexism has been a basis for increasing disparities in female employment and their engagement levels are also compromised in the business. Furthermore, there is a considerable amount of discrimination observed in HR practices and their decisions are influenced with the prevalent perceptions regarding female roles in the UK fashion industry (Alam et al., 2017).

The business structure is observed not to accommodate female workforce acquire any leadership position and a complicated scrutiny process is implemented for female workforce. In addition, the UK fashion industry is also unable to differentiate the importance of diversity and inclusion and the benefits that the industry can achieve through its implementation (O'Brien and Oakley, 2015). This is evidenced with the marginal role that the female workforce is currently being employed without any oversight to reduce inequality in the industry. In addition, the UK fashion industry is also considered to be a victim of institutionalised perception against female workforce and is failing to inculcate a feasible working environment for its female employees (Jung and Jin, 2014). The main drivers of change are women themselves that can make a case for themselves and carve a place for its employment in the UK fashion industry. Some of the changes that the business can implement within its workforce includes implementing change in the organisation and also changing the mind-set attested with female workforce's productivity (Chan et al., 2017).

It is also stated that the increased awareness amongst the female workforce can be a catalyst for change in the industry's structural mechanisms and can lead to better changes such as reducing inequality (Conor et al., 2015). This is only possible through a strong and positive role for the female workforce and a comparison with industries in a different region. The productivity and the amount of change that can be observed through female workforce's inclusion can crystallise an argument regarding their role's importance within a competitive industry.

Hypotheses in this case includes:

H1: There is a positive scope for female workforce's participation in the UK fashion industry

H2: There is no significant relationship between gender inequality and UK fashion industry's growth

H3: There is no significant relationship between gender pay gap and the UK fashion industry's growth

Continuing further, the representation aspect is important and crucial for the organisation because it refers to the use of the current business environment's dynamics that register a crucial role in this regard. The female workforce's role in the UK fashion can be comprehensively discussed to increase its participation and to be certain that there is a marked reduction in gender inequality (Caro et al., 2015). The gender inequality in the UK fashion industry is regarded to be intertwined with cultural inferences as well where there are cultural norms and procedures that pose substantial barriers to female participation.

Furthermore, linking the culture inference, it is observed that the gender inequality present in the UK fashion industry is attributed towards the culture inference that suggests female workforce to be less resilient than its gender counterparts (O'brien and Oakley, 2017). This is also considered to be an effective method for assessing the gender roles in the organisation and also gather inputs regarding finding the application of female workforce in the UK fashion industry. Moreover, the concept of inequality is considered to be a consequence of a series of stratification and is structured within the business environment that is not able to pay any significant attention to the business (Boström and Micheletti, 2016). In addition, the communities as well are engaged with creating and validating the perception that the female workforce are not competent enough to acquire leadership roles in any industry.

Particularly within the UK fashion industry; there is a semblance of such a perception oversight where social class and the differences in income levels have led to an increase in awareness about female participation (Piasna and Drahokoupil, 2017). The role of technology in the UK fashion industry is regarded to be a major factor in discussion regarding the female workforce's role and position within the industry (Blázquez, 2014). Limited awareness and the issue regarding income disparity is one of the major concerns that the current female workforce face within the fashion industry. The reluctance to provide female workforce the opportunity to groom themselves for a leadership position is missing and is deemed inadequate for the female workforce.

Besides the cultural nuances; the UK fashion industry itself is reluctant to provide any benefit to its female workforce because of the prevalent competitiveness in the industry. At this point, the promotion of female workforce is regarded to be a major concern amongst the UK fashion industry and does not provide any impetus to support female workforce in the industry (Dy et al., 2017).

Theoretical framework

Women empowerment theory explains that the female workforce are required to make such choices and decisions that can be used to address societal issues and the necessity to redefine gender based roles are a necessity (Ely et al., 2000). In addition, the female workforce are required to embark on a similar journey of perseverance to ensure that their roles are protected with relative ease (Ely and Padavic, 2007). The main basis of increasing this role is to pursue their objectives and goal in the UK fashion industry.

The theory is also of the opinion that the female workforce must be in a position to advocate a role for themselves and to be certain that there is adequate accolades granted to them in a business setting (Britton and Logan, 2008). This can be viewed from the fashion industry's perspective where better opportunities can be gauged through substantial awareness created regarding them. Following on, the theory also ensures that there is adequate discussion conducted regarding female participation particularly in competition driven industries such as fashion and to create more meaningful roles for females.

Furthermore, the theory also states that the female workforce must be autonomous enough to take their decisions and to enjoy the same benefits as provided to women. This is also regarded to be an effective method to re-engage in debates concerning women empowerment within the leadership context and to promote female workforce in the fashion industry (Calás et al., 2013). Potential barriers and concerns have led to a negative perception regarding this phenomenon that has led to a decreased participation and thus gender inequality is also implemented within the UK fashion industry.

Another theory that explains gender inequality is the glass ceiling theory and it is largely considered to address the barriers created specifically for women participation and restricts any attempt to include the female workforce (Powell and Butterfield, 2015). The barriers are required to be transcended through awareness and to ensure that this forms a basis for crystallising

arguments regarding female workforce's inequality and their position in the industry. Following on, it is also stated that the prevailing inequalities in the workplace is a recurring issue in the fashion industry and limited steps are taken to address these issues.

Conceptual framework

Independent variables: Gender pay gap, lack of representation, gender bias,

Dependent variable: Fashion industry growth

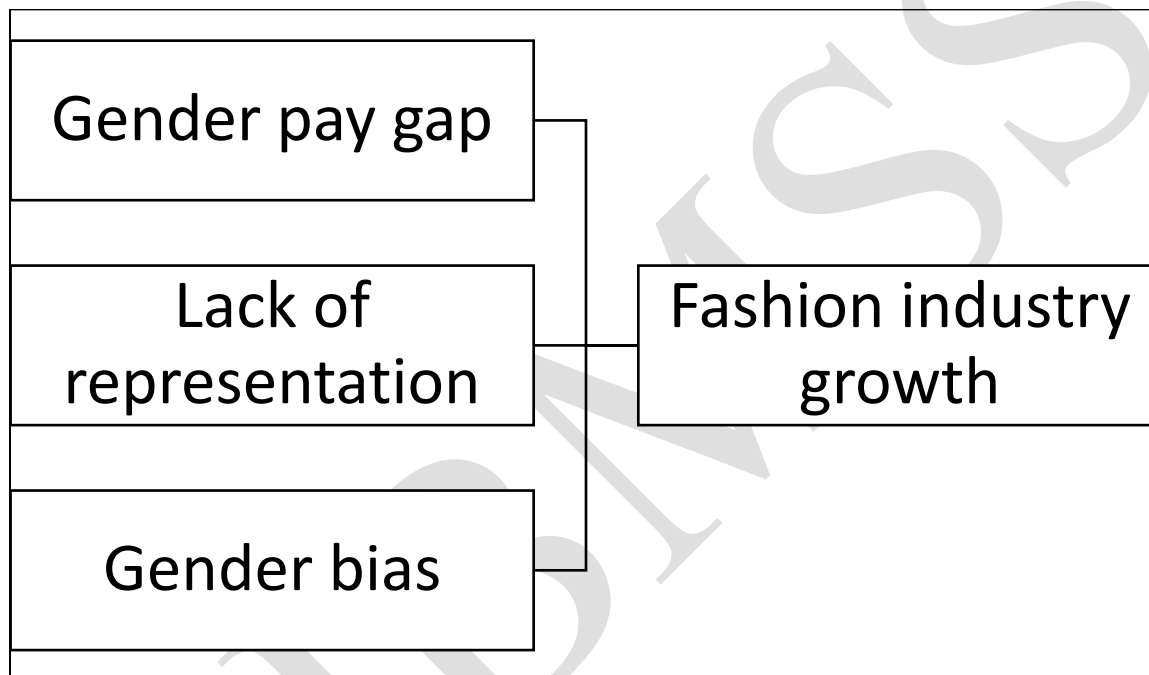


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Author

METHODOLOGY

The methodology chosen for the research is a quantitative research design and is regarded to be an effective choice for the study since it intends to provide objective results regarding the topic. Moreover, the quantitative research design is also important for assessing the study's variables' relationship with each other and to subject them into a critical discussion (McCusker and Gunaydin, 2015). This is only possible through a quantitative research design since its counterpart only derives subjective inferences that is not required for addressing the study's objective. In

addition, the philosophical assumption in this regard is positivism where the study's main focus is to observe the numerical data that is being provided (Ryan, 2015). This is considered to be quite effective for the study's purpose since it helps in triangulating results and address the objectives with relative ease.

The use of any other philosophy is discarded in the study because of its lack of objectivity and also the lack of concern showed towards the objectives. The results derived therefore cannot be discussed and implemented with the required criticality as per the topic's main objectives and questions (Ostrom, 2014). This is observed to be a major reason for assessing the study's decision to opt for a positivism philosophy. Furthermore, the data collection in this study is obtained from primary sources such as conducting survey questionnaire since the key requirement is for a numeric data for the analysis. The survey questionnaire is a relevant option for the current research since it helps in obtaining crucial and adequate information regarding the topic and to be used for addressing the study's objectives.

Questionnaire were circulated to 400 participants that are associated with the fashion industry and to provide them with questions designed specifically regarding gender inequality and its impact on the business organisation within the UK fashion industry. In addition, the sample size is important to determine before conducting an analysis since it is able to provide relevant and reliable results. Furthermore, regarding the data analysis technique; the study intends to implement SMARTPLS software. The statistical software is used to discern the relationship between the variables and to assess its association shared with each other.

The use of such an analysis technique is used to address the study's objectives and highlight key information regarding the gender inequality's impact on the UK fashion industry. The report is understood to use discriminant validity, regression, and the descriptive statistics to conduct its result and to observe whether the study's hypotheses are either accepted or rejected. The questionnaire for the report is attached in appendix 1.

Analysis

Table 1 Outer loading

<i>Parameter estimates</i>	<i>Standard errors</i>	<i>T values</i>	<i>P values</i>
LR1 <- Lack of Representation	1.000	n/a	n/a
FIG2 <- Fashion Industry Growth	0.855	0.168	5.081
		0.000	

FIG1 <- Fashion Industry Growth	0.688		0.162	4.261	0.000
GB2 <- Gender Bias	1.000	n/a		n/a	n/a
LR3 <- Lack of Representation	0.782		0.143	5.469	0.000
GP2 <- Gender Pay Gap	0.679		0.132	5.135	0.000
LR2 <- Lack of Representation	1.000	n/a		n/a	n/a
GP3 <- Gender Pay Gap	1.390		0.294	4.733	0.000
GB1 <- Gender Bias	0.940		0.246	3.814	0.000
FIG3 <- Fashion Industry Growth	1.000	n/a		n/a	n/a
GB3 <- Gender Bias	1.221		0.231	5.291	0.000
GP1 <- Gender Pay Gap	1.196		0.236	5.065	0.000

From table 1, it is observed that the independent variables i.e. Gender bias, lack of representation and the gender pay gap has a positive and a significant effect on the UK fashion industry. However, not all statements regarding dependent variable is statistically significant such as the gender pay gap's third statement that does not share a strong and significant result.

Table 2 Latent variable

	<i>Parameter estimates</i>	<i>Standard errors</i>	<i>T values</i>	<i>P values</i>
Fashion Industry Growth	0.285	0.098	2.926	0.004
Gender Bias	0.390	0.109	3.589	0.000
Gender Pay Gap	0.204	0.075	2.711	0.007
Lack of Representation	0.223	0.075	2.963	0.003
Gender Bias <-> Fashion Industry Growth	0.437	0.078	5.632	0.000
Gender Pay Gap <-> Fashion Industry Growth	0.260	0.062	4.187	0.000
Gender Pay Gap <-> Gender Bias	0.267	0.065	4.083	0.000
Lack of Representation <-> Fashion Industry Growth	0.292	0.061	4.802	0.000
Lack of Representation <-> Gender Bias	0.360	0.071	5.047	0.000
Lack of Representation <-> Gender Pay Gap	0.241	0.057	4.258	0.000

The table 2 indicates that there is a significant result shared between Gender bias and Lack of representation besides the gender pay. The gender pay and fashion industry growth shows an

insignificant relationship with its p-value is 0.26; higher than the benchmark significant value. In addition; the fashion industry growth and lack of representation shares a positive and significant results i.e. p value is 0.024 similarly with the corresponding variables. Following on; it is also observed from these results is that the relationship is comprehensively both significant and positive between each other.

Table 3 Model fit

	<i>FIG1</i>	<i>FIG2</i>	<i>FIG3</i>	<i>GB1</i>	<i>GB2</i>	<i>GB3</i>	<i>GP1</i>	<i>GP2</i>	<i>GP3</i>	<i>LRI</i>	<i>LR2</i>	<i>LR3</i>
<i>FIG1</i>	1.000	0.135	0.107	0.234	0.189	0.175	0.146	0.204	0.132	0.165	0.194	0.182
<i>FIG2</i>	0.135	1.000	0.092	0.203	0.163	0.151	0.126	0.176	0.114	0.142	0.168	0.158
<i>FIG3</i>	0.107	0.092	1.000	0.159	0.128	0.119	0.100	0.139	0.090	0.112	0.132	0.124
<i>GB1</i>	0.234	0.203	0.159	1.000	0.164	0.152	0.147	0.204	0.132	0.198	0.234	0.219
<i>GB2</i>	0.189	0.163	0.128	0.164	1.000	0.123	0.118	0.164	0.107	0.159	0.188	0.176
<i>GB3</i>	0.175	0.151	0.119	0.152	0.123	1.000	0.109	0.152	0.099	0.148	0.174	0.163
<i>GP1</i>	0.146	0.126	0.100	0.147	0.118	0.109	1.000	0.164	0.106	0.139	0.164	0.154
<i>GP2</i>	0.204	0.176	0.139	0.204	0.164	0.152	0.164	1.000	0.148	0.194	0.229	0.215
<i>GP3</i>	0.132	0.114	0.090	0.132	0.107	0.099	0.106	0.148	1.000	0.126	0.148	0.139
<i>LR1</i>	0.165	0.142	0.112	0.198	0.159	0.148	0.139	0.194	0.126	1.000	0.152	0.142
<i>LR2</i>	0.194	0.168	0.132	0.234	0.188	0.174	0.164	0.229	0.148	0.152	1.000	0.168
<i>LR3</i>	0.182	0.158	0.124	0.219	0.176	0.163	0.154	0.215	0.139	0.142	0.168	1.000

The model fit shows the correlation between the variables and it is observed that there is a positive and moderate strength relationship between fashion industry growth and gender bias. This shows that an increase in bias may possibly increase growth in the UK fashion industry's growth. In addition, the relationship between lack of representation and gender pay gap is observed weak and thus exerts a very minimal impact on the gender pay gap. Furthermore, it is also observed that a very positive and significant relationship is observed between representation and the fashion industry growth. This relationship indicates that an increase in female representation may lead to more positive and linear business growth in the fashion industry.

Table 4 Construct reliability and validity

<i>Cronbach's alpha</i> <i>(standardized)</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha</i> <i>(unstandardized)</i>	<i>Composite</i> <i>reliability (rho_c)</i>	<i>Average variance</i> <i>extracted (AVE)</i>

Fashion Industry Growth	0.269	0.268	0.276	0.115
Gender Bias	0.342	0.343	0.345	0.150
Gender Pay Gap	0.312	0.310	0.331	0.147
Lack of Representation	0.355	0.354	0.355	0.155

Regarding the construct reliability of the variables; it is observed that the Cronbach alpha is fairly low for all the variables such as 0.276, 0.3345, 0.331, and 0.355 respectively. The low Cronbach alpha indicates that the current sample size needs to be increased for a much better and accurate result. The low reliability and validity however, does not necessarily indicate that the study's results are negated but it affirms that a larger sample size can be used to increase the results' veracity. This explains the current correlation present between the variables can also improve its association and significance between the variables.

Table 5 Discriminant Validity

<i>Fashion Industry Growth</i>	<i>Fashion Industry Growth</i>	<i>Gender Bias</i>	<i>Gender Pay Gap</i>	<i>Lack of Representation</i>
<i>Fashion Industry Growth</i>	1.349			
Gender Bias	1.197	1.004		
Gender Pay Gap	1.164	1.204	1.154	
Lack of Representation				

As per the results; it is observed that there is a positive and significant association between fashion industry growth and gender bias since the relationship's p value is 1.35. Moreover, the relationship between the dependent variable and the gender pay gap is also significant and positive i.e. 1.13 however, there is a weaker correlation between the variables. this shows that gender bias has more variability than gender pay gap. Moving along; the fashion industry growth and the lack of representation indicates that there is a moderate strength association between fashion industry

growth and the low representation. The correlation between gender bias and lack of representation is positive along with being moderately significant in strength with a p value of 1.251.

Table 6 Path Coefficients

	<i>FIG</i>	<i>GB</i>	<i>GP</i>	<i>LR</i>
<i>FIG</i>	<hr/>			
GB	0.277			
GP	0.181	0.194		0.395
LR	0.179	0.352		

The table shows that lack of representation shares the highest correlation with gender bias with a coefficient value of 0.395 while the remaining variables also share a positive and strong correlation with the dependent variable.

	<i>VIF</i>
FIG1	1.029
FIG2	1.035
FIG3	1.013
GB1	1.043
GB2	1.049
GB3	1.031
GP1	1.034
GP2	1.061
GP3	1.028
LR1	1.046
LR2	1.046
LR3	1.039

There is a substantially low Collinearity shared between the variables that shows that the predictor variables share a substantial extent of independence and are in a position to explaining variation in fashion industry's growth.

S.No.	Hypotheses	Status
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1	There is no significant relationship between gender pay gap and the UK fashion industry's growth	Accepted
2	There is a positive scope for female workforce's participation in the UK fashion industry	Accepted
3	There is no significant relationship between gender inequality and UK fashion industry's growth	Rejected

As per the results observed; it is observed that both the objectives and the questions are seemingly addressed since a positive with a moderate association relationship is shared between fashion industry growth and the gender inequality factors. In addition, the study's findings are observed to concur with Woetzel et al. (2015) that also stated that the prevalence of gender inequality within the UK fashion industry is leading to increased competition. This leads to a lack of understanding regarding the organisation's resources and also understanding the issues concerning gender inequality and also fails to assess the issue in the fashion industry.

In addition, it is also stated that the findings' suggests the business growth is quite imperative with an increase in an inclusive environment in the fashion industry. Furthermore, it is also stated that an increase in gender participation is a crucial requirement for increasing business resilience and also improving its performance. This includes decreasing the competitiveness and increasing quality quotient within the fashion industry. This is also consistent with Kabeer (2016)'s study that also observed the lack of variety in the fashion industry is linked to lack of representation within the fashion industry. The findings also observed that there is a substantial amount of gender disparity present within the UK fashion industry however, it is also noted that the report used a smaller population size. The results however, provided substantial results and also indicated that the factors associated with gender inequality on the business growth in the UK fashion industry.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion; it is also observed that the report conducted a study concerning with the investigation regarding the role of gender inequality factors within the UK fashion industry. Moreover, the report observed a contextual background in this case and identified the key factors that lead to a lack of female representation within the industry such as a negative perception and also the issues attested within the industry itself. After providing the report's background; the

report then formulated its aim and also the objectives and also the questions to be addressed in the report. In addition, the report also included a literature review along with the theoretical framework that offered explanation regarding the role of gender inequality within the fashion industry. The methodology adopted in the study included a quantitative research design and used SMARTPLS as the data analysis technique. Through the findings, the study's hypotheses were addressed along with the objectives and questions. The discussion is observed with related studies that were in agreement with the study's results. Further discussion was carried out to validate the results obtained in the study.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey questionnaire

Demographics

Gender

- 1= Male
- 2= Female

Age

- 1 = 18-24 years
- 2 = 25-30 years
- 3 = 31-38 years
- 4 = 38 years and above

Sr.No	Variables	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	Gender pay gap (IV)	1	2	3	4	5
1	There is a significant pay gap in the industry	1	2	3	4	5
2	There is a reluctance in fashion industry to increase wages for females	1	2	3	4	5
3	There is a lack of growth options for females	1	2	3	4	5
	Lack of representation (IV)	1	2	3	4	5
1	Females are underrepresented in the fashion industry	1	2	3	4	5
2	The females are not preferred in leadership positions	1	2	3	4	5
3	We are not involved in the decision making process	1	2	3	4	5
	Gender Bias (IV)	1	2	3	4	5
1	Despite major role; women are not viewed competent in the	1	2	3	4	5
2	A complex hiring process is purposely implemented for females	1	2	3	4	5
3	The wage gap has increased in recent times	1	2	3	4	5

	Fashion industry growth (DV)	1	2	3	4	5
1	There is a lack of creativity in the industry due to gender inequality	1	2	3	4	5
2	The fashion industry is not able to increase its growth potential	1	2	3	4	5
3	The industry is not competitive enough due to non-inclusion of women	1	2	3	4	5