

**Women, Economy and Labour Relations**



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**Gender and Freelancing in the  
Communication Industries**  
Experiences, Practices, Discourses

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Edited by

**Anca Anton and Raluca Moise**

# **Gender and Freelancing in the Communication Industries**

# WOMEN, ECONOMY AND LABOUR RELATIONS

**Series Editor:** Martina Topić-Rutherford

The University of Alabama, USA

This series aims to publish monographs and edited collections that tackle the position of women in the economy as well as explore labour relations. By labour relations, it means studying human relations in work in its broadest sense and analysing how labour relations affect social inequality with particular reference to women. In terms of social inequality, this series particularly welcomes analyses of women and class and broader analyses of labour relations. The series will publish perspectives from around the world and thus the series fits into the understanding of labour relations through both work relations in a Western sense and non-Western forms of labour. The series is also interested in studies of the position of women in worker's unions, the stance on women's affairs within workers' unions, and the position of women and women's affairs in labour movements. Both historical and contemporary perspectives are welcome. Studies in industrial and economic sociology are particularly welcome.

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# **Gender and Freelancing in the Communication Industries: Experiences, Practices, Discourses**

EDITED BY

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# Foreword

**Professor Ralph Tench, Leeds Business School, Leeds Beckett University, UK**

Academia should never exist in isolation; it is deeply connected to the dynamic societies in which we live and work. For example, as a context to this new book on gender and freelancing working we can observe societal ebbs and flows of how different groups in society are perceived and treated. The *Rebel Girls* book series was first published nearly 10 years ago and was groundbreaking in showcasing and celebrating remarkable women throughout history. It was written by Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo in the United States and includes 100 stories of extraordinary women who defied expectations, broke barriers, and made an impact across various fields and cultures. The main goal of the book was to challenge traditional gender stereotypes with the aim of inspiring and empowering young girls (Favilli & Cavallo, 2016).

Since the publication of *Rebel Girls*, we have entered an era characterised by increasing unpredictability, with this volatility accelerating significantly by 2025. The world has often been described using the framework of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA, Barber, 1992). However, this model is increasingly seen as inadequate for capturing the fragility and unpredictability of contemporary society. In response, the BANI framework (Cascio, 2020) has emerged as a more fitting descriptor – Brittle (systems), Anxious (people), Non-Linear (outcomes), and Incomprehensible (complexity). This shift in conceptualising the world is evident across social, economic, political, and community landscapes, and unfortunately, it has begun to affect the hard-won progress made by those advocating for greater balance and equality within society.

Women, in particular, have made significant strides across various domains, from social and political arenas to business and sports, where their roles have been highlighted, debated, and in some instances, achieved measurable progress. However, there is a growing sense that this progress has stagnated, with the advancement of women's rights and societal position increasingly contested by rising international economic, social, and political forces. Disconcertingly, the critical work of equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is now being questioned in some quarters, particularly in the influential context of North America. Businesses, government departments, and certain organisations appear to be retreating – whether voluntarily or under external pressure – on their commitments to EDI, questioning the necessity of these policies, practices, and broader goals.

In this context, the release of a new edition of *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* in March 2025 is particularly timely. This edition highlights both iconic historical figures, such as Cleopatra, Amelia Earhart, Rosa Parks, and Frida Kahlo, alongside contemporary role models like Michelle Yeoh (actor), Taylor Swift (musician), and Greta Thunberg (environmental activist), providing a much-needed reminder of the continued relevance and importance of celebrating the achievements of women throughout history and in the present day.

So, this is the context in which I am delighted to welcome this new collection of important works for the field of public relations and strategic communication. *Gender and Freelancing in the Communication Industries: Experiences, Practices, Discourses* is edited by two significant colleagues from the EUPRERA community in Europe, Anca Anton and Raluca Moise, who have been studying freelancing in the communication industries since 2021. I am pleased to read and endorse their work as it is 25 years since I first studied freelancing and focussed on the gendered nature of this work in the early 2000s with three externally funded research studies over a five-year time frame (Tench et al., 2000, 2001, 2005). Within this new book, the editors have attracted an impressive collection of writing and studies from across the EUPRERA community and beyond to build on this body of knowledge with originality and depth.

This book critically examines the gendered experiences of freelancers in the communication industries, focussing on how gendered discourses, practices, and structural barriers influence their professional trajectories. It is divided into three sections, each exploring different aspects of freelancing and its intersection with gender.

The first part, “Discourses, Narratives, and Identities”, explores how gendered discourses shape freelancers’ professional identities, career perceptions, and resilience. Key themes include the challenges faced by women, such as underpayment and job instability, the tension between freelancing as an empowering feminist choice versus structural inequalities, and the influence of gendered expectations on academic freelance work. The chapters highlight that digital platforms, while offering empowerment, often reinforce gendered inequalities.

The second part, “Practices, Constraints, and Opportunities”, investigates how freelancers navigate gendered career paths, networks, and work–life balance across different national contexts through four chapters. It highlights that while networking is essential for career progression, it often reinforces gendered power imbalances. Women in various countries face unique challenges, including exclusion from professional networks, restricted career mobility, and financial insecurity, despite opportunities for self-branding and networking.

The final part, “Inequalities, Career Dynamics, and Structural Barriers”, has three chapters that examine how structural inequalities impact career progression, financial stability, and visibility in freelancing. It explores generational differences in attitudes towards freelancing, the precarious nature of freelancing, and the perpetuation of gender inequalities, particularly in the public relations sector.

The contributors to the book have used diverse methodologies, including qualitative and quantitative approaches, to explore how gender affects the experience

of freelancing. Its intersectional approach contributes to the ongoing conversation about labour rights, professional identity, and equity in the gig economy, providing critical insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by female communication professionals in the evolving freelance landscape.

I celebrate this volume and see it adding significantly to this important spine of theory and practice in the understanding of the working world and lived experience of communication practitioners.

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# Preface

Freelancing has become an increasingly dominant mode of work in the communication industries, offering professionals flexibility and autonomy while simultaneously exposing them to precarity and systemic inequalities. This book, *Gender and Freelancing in the Communication Industries: Experiences, Practices, Discourses*, provides a much-needed exploration of the intersection of gender and freelance work in public relations (PR), marketing, digital media, and corporate communication. It builds on the research Anton and Moise (2021) and Moise and Anton (2022) have conducted on freelancing, while also reflecting the research conducted within the *EUPRERA Women in PR Network* on well-being in the communication industries.

The book examines how gender shapes freelance careers, revealing a persistent contradiction: while freelancing is often framed as an empowering choice, offering autonomy, self-determination, and work–life balance, it is also associated with financial precarity, job insecurity, and gendered constraints. As prior research suggests (Fielden et al., 2003; Tench et al., 2002, 2017, 2020), women freelancers often navigate additional burdens, including unequal pay, limited access to professional networks, and the pressure to balance caregiving responsibilities with professional aspirations.

This volume brings together 10 chapters authored by scholars from Croatia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Turkey, the UK, and the USA, who explore these tensions through national and comparative case studies. The book is structured into three thematic sections.

**Discourses, Narratives, and Identities** – The first part examines how gendered discourses influence freelancers’ experiences, shaping their professional identities and perceptions of stability, success, and resilience. Anton and Moise (Chapter 1) investigate the ways gendered discussions around precarity, empowerment, resilience, and well-being unfold in professional virtual communities of freelance communication professionals. Their analysis of social media interactions highlights how women freelancers actively negotiate self-worth and career sustainability while contending with systemic barriers such as underpayment and job instability. Moise and Anton (Chapter 2) shift the focus to media narratives surrounding female freelancers, identifying a paradox in online discourses: on the one hand, freelancing is presented as an empowering feminist choice that allows for work–life balance and independence; on the other, these narratives obscure structural inequalities, such as the reliance on unpaid domestic labour and the economic

instability many freelancers face. Doh (Chapter 3) provides an autoethnographic reflection on feminist PR research as a mobile freelancer, offering a deeply personal perspective on how gendered expectations shape freelance academic work. Through her experiences, she highlights how mobility, digital tools, and professional isolation intersect to create a unique set of challenges and opportunities for freelance scholars. Together, these chapters reveal how freelancing is simultaneously framed as liberating and precarious, with digital platforms serving both as sites of empowerment and spaces where gendered inequalities are sometimes reinforced.

**Practices, Constraints, and Opportunities** – The second part shifts from discourse to practice, exploring how freelancers navigate gendered career trajectories, professional networks, and work–life balance in different national contexts. Topić and Chmiel (Chapter 4) examine the role of networking in freelancers’ career satisfaction in the UK mass communication industries, highlighting that while men perceive networking as an opportunity, many women find networking practices exclusionary and even detrimental to their well-being. Cunha, Cruz, and Belim (Chapter 5) analyse freelancing in the Portuguese communication industry, where gendered professional interactions and work–life balance challenges shape freelancers’ experiences. Their study underscores how younger professionals place higher value on networking, while women often struggle with a perceived “glass wall” preventing upward career mobility. Alikılıç and Gökaliiler (Chapter 6) offer a comparative analysis of freelancers in Turkey, revealing surprising findings about gender-based preferences in hiring. While female freelancers tend to secure projects more easily than their male counterparts, they still grapple with financial insecurity and a lack of formal protections. Anton, Jupowicz-Ginalska, and Kaczmarek-Sliwiska (Chapter 7) compare the gendered dynamics of freelancing in Romania and Poland, showing how national labour policies and cultural expectations shape work–life balance and professional opportunities. Romanian freelancers tend to rely more on informal, collective networks, whereas Polish freelancers operate within a more structured but less community-driven ecosystem. Across these studies, a key theme emerges: freelancers must constantly engage in self-branding and networking to sustain their careers, yet these practices are deeply gendered, often reinforcing existing power imbalances rather than overcoming them.

**Inequalities, Career Dynamics, and Structural Barriers** – The final part investigates how structural inequalities influence career progression, financial stability, and professional visibility in freelancing. Bowman, Yaxley, and Bridgen (Chapter 8) provide a generational comparison of women’s freelance careers in UK PR, analysing how gendered career expectations have shifted over time. They highlight how generational differences affect attitudes towards freelancing, with older professionals often viewing it as a last resort, while younger women are more likely to see it as a strategic career choice. Holy, Miletić, and Zeman (Chapter 9) explore how female communication students in Croatia perceive freelancing, considering its potential as a career path within a highly feminised yet still structurally

unequal industry. Their findings suggest that while freelancing is seen as an alternative to traditional employment, many young women recognise its precarious nature early in their careers. Williams (Chapter 10) critically assesses the lived experiences of female PR freelancers in the UK, using Bourdieu's concept of habitus to examine how gender imbalances manifest in freelance careers. The chapter highlights how freelancing does not inherently challenge existing inequalities but often reinforces them through the necessity of self-promotion, client negotiations, and lack of job security. At the core of this book is a commitment to understanding freelancing as both an opportunity and a challenge for communication professionals. By critically examining the ways gender shapes freelance careers, this volume contributes to ongoing discussions about labour rights, professional identity, and equity in the gig economy.

This volume also showcases a diverse range of methodological approaches, reflecting the complexity of researching freelancing and gendered labour experiences across different national and professional contexts. Several chapters use qualitative methods, such as autoethnography (Doh, Chapter 3) to explore reflexivity in feminist PR research, and thematic analysis of media narratives (Moise and Anton, Chapter 2) to examine how freelancing is framed in public discourse. In-depth interviews (Alikılıç & Gökaliçler, Chapter 6; Cunha, Cruz, & Belim, Chapter 5) and conversational approaches (Williams, Chapter 10) provide first-hand accounts of freelancers' lived experiences, including financial precarity, self-branding, and career autonomy. Other chapters adopt quantitative and survey-based methodologies, such as the studies on networking, job satisfaction, and career dynamics (Topić-Rutherford & Chmiel, Chapter 4; Anton, Jupowicz-Ginalska, & Kaczmarek-Sliwinska, Chapter 7), which compare how gender shapes freelancers' access to professional opportunities in different labour markets. Additionally, Holy, Miletić, and Zeman (Chapter 9) explore young women's career perceptions using an online survey, while Bowman, Yaxley, and Bridgen (Chapter 8) employ a generational analysis combining structured conversations and Delphi methods to examine long-term career trajectories in freelancing. This diversity of methodologies, spanning feminist reflexivity, qualitative interviewing, survey-based statistical analysis, and mixed-method designs, allows for a comprehensive and intersectional exploration of the gendered dimensions of freelancing in communication industries.

At the core of this book is a commitment to understanding freelancing as both an opportunity and a challenge for communication professionals. By critically examining the ways gender shapes freelance careers, this volume contributes to ongoing discussions about labour rights, professional identity, and equity in the gig economy as it relates to the communication industries.

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Part I

**Discourses, Narratives, and Identities**

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## Chapter 1

# Gendered Discourses on Precarity, Empowerment, Resilience, and Well-being Within Freelance Professional Virtual Communities in the Communication Industries

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### Abstract

This study examines gendered discourses within a professional virtual community (PVC) for freelance public relations professionals, focussing on precarity, empowerment, resilience, and well-being. Using thematic analysis of 1,293 posts from a UK-based Facebook group, the research highlights how gender shapes freelancers' experiences and interactions within the PVC. While men and women encounter overlapping challenges, the frequency, intensity, and framing of these issues are often distinctly gendered. Precarity emerges as a dominant theme, with women disproportionately affected by financial instability and unreliable contracts due to systemic inequities and caregiving responsibilities. PVCs serve as empowering spaces, enabling freelancers to share resources, build autonomy, and collectively address challenges such as client biases and undervaluation, with gender-specific strategies often surfacing. Resilience is critically examined as both an individual asset and a mechanism that normalises structural inequities. Discussions on well-being reveal unique gendered pressures, particularly in balancing professional and domestic roles. This study underscores PVCs'

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pivotal role in supporting gender-sensitive professional growth and sustainability in the communication industries.

*Keywords:* Freelancing; freelancers; professional virtual community; gendered discourse; communication industries; public relations; precarity; empowerment; resilience; well-being

## Introduction

Freelance work has become a staple of working arrangements in the communication industries: a pre-pandemic European survey on freelancers carried out in 2018, the first of its kind (Malt & EFIP, 2021), pointed to an overwhelming 30.9% as communication freelancers and to freelancing in general as the fastest growing segment in the EU labour market. However, a later study (Spanjaart, 2021) that also included annual Eurostat data showed a different reality: while in some countries the number of freelancers increased, in others the number was stagnant or it even went down because of unsupportive legislation and lack of income predictability, with an overall decrease of 2 million over a decade in the total number of freelancers active on the European labour market. In contrast, when the 2018 study was repeated in 2022, its findings suggested that “freelancing is emerging as an increasingly attractive career choice given the benefits it offers in terms of autonomy, flexibility and work-life balance”, pointing to an increase in freelance job postings and sign-ups (Malt, 2022).

The difference between the macro and market perspective showed through Eurostat data and the micro and individual perspective showed through surveys answered by freelancers supports the precarity – empowerment contradicting discourses associated with freelance work (Moise & Anton, 2022). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic brought nuance to discourses surrounding flexible work arrangements, putting an emphasis on the role of resilience (Ziegele & Zerfass, 2021) and well-being (van der Zwan et al., 2020) in the communication industries and among freelancers, although it is debatable whether resilience is conducive to well-being (Lacomba et al., 2022). Research carried out during the pandemic also points to the gendered nature of (online) freelance work (Anton & Moise, 2021; Dunn et al., 2021) and to the increased gender inequality reflected in working hours faced by women in general and mothers in particular in the online labour force (Collins et al., 2021).

This study investigates the discussions surrounding precarity, empowerment, resilience, and well-being in a PVC dedicated to public relations freelance professionals. They “bring together geographically dispersed, like-minded people to form a network of knowledge exchange” (Chen & Hung, 2010, p. 226), while also creating communities of interest who interact extensively about specific topics (Armstrong & Hagel, 1996). We used thematic analysis to identify (1) salient themes in the discourses surrounding these four concepts, (2) whether there are gendered perspectives and nuances in the discourses associated with the themes, and (3) the role of the PVC in navigating the gendered experiences of the freelancers.

The study focusses on a UK-based Facebook group acting as PVC, identified as freelance community with a narrower focus on communication and public relations. It addresses a knowledge gap situated at the intersection of gendered discourse, the communication industries, freelancing, and PVCs.

## **Feminisation of Communication Industries**

A substantial literature and scholarship have been dedicated to the study of feminisation in the public relations industry, with scholars addressing the numerical increase and importance of women in the labour sector over the last 50 years. Starting with the Velvet Ghetto study in 1986 (Cline et al., 1986), the research in public relations has then continued to include topics such as the glass ceiling, pay gap, lack of mentorship opportunities, and stereotyped expectations of leadership style, where leadership is usually seen as a masculine trait (Tench & Topić, 2017; Topić et al., 2020). Partially associated with the second-wave of feminism and the increasing numbers of women entering the profession, the process of feminisation has been shown to have major implications for both the industry's professional status and workplace cultures (Fitch & Third, 2010), such as dominant perceptions of lowering the professional reputation, declining both salaries and status, and excluding public relations from primary decision-making in organisations (Aldoory, 2005; Grunig et al., 2000; Papinchak, 2005). The feminisation of public relations industry, as it was captured by scholars in the USA, Australia or UK, has been echoed by similar studies conducted on other European countries, with the European Communication Monitor establishing that when one issue gets resolved (i.e., glass ceiling), new issues tend to emerge (Tench & Topić, 2017; Topić et al., 2020).

Topić et al. (2020) outline the most important stages of researching the feminisation in public relations: the 1980s, with two main subthemes being developed – work discrimination and bias against women, with the concept of *velvet ghetto* arising, albeit with little impact on company policy and offering little access to top management (Cline et al., 1986). This time also saw women having more technical roles, suffering bias towards their intentions to get married and have children, and discriminatory practices of promotion. The 1990s were a period whose main contributions are the (1) development of feminist theory of public relations (with subthemes of radical feminist perspective, women as symmetrical communicators and criticism of liberal feminism); (2) organisational theory in public relations (with subthemes of glass ceiling and the pay gap, work experiences and satisfaction and power). (Topić et al., 2020, p. 396)

The feminist theory of public relations has seen the rise of gendered professional behaviours, with women being seen as developing a “more cooperative, negotiation style of public relations than would men if women saw themselves in a managerial-rather than technical-role” (Grunig, 1991, pp. 85–86, 1999). Such views have then been applied on gendered conversations, where scholars such as Tannen (1990) have started to develop a type of analysis which combined discursive psychology and feminist conversation analysis; it was therefore found that “men speak the language of competitiveness, independence and status while

women speak the language that creates intimacy and builds relationships” (Topić et al., 2020, p. 397). Women’s distinctiveness has also been identified in relation to leadership skills, where the main traits were thus found that women tend to use “participative management, attempts to energise staff, and empathy” (Aldoory, 1998, p. 97).

The 2000–2009 period sees a continuation of theory development in relation to women’s large representation in the public relations industry, the main points of focus being professionalism (with subthemes of the position of women and the position of public relations and technical vs managerial positions) and feminist theory (with subthemes of criticism of liberal feminism, feminist values and PR excellence, power, women more inclined to conduct research and radical feminist perspective). (Topić et al., 2020, p. 398)

The research emphasises the wide representation of technical roles for women and the lower levels of power than their male manager counterparts. The final period identified by the authors is 2010–2019 and the main thematic directions that they identified were work discrimination (with subthemes of technical vs managerial positions, glass ceiling and the pay gap, masculine work culture and diversity) and bias against women (with subthemes of stereotypes about women’s organisational skills, power, stereotypes on communication skills and intersectionality and criticism of liberal feminism) (Topić et al., 2020, p. 399). The authors’ main contribution is to show that the stereotypes the professional field construes discursively about women PR professionals support institutional discriminatory practices, such as pay gap and glass ceiling issues. Stereotypes such as women being more inclined to have good communication skills and to be more dedicated to personal communication that builds relationships is a discursive, informal norm that can shape managers’ perceptions of women PR professionals and lead to biased hiring and promotion practices.

The relationship between gender and public relations has been investigated from multiple perspectives, as we have seen, mostly with a focus on work and professional discriminatory practices. Radical feminist studies have also explored the relationship between gender and power and how it manifests in the professional field habitus, through dominant discourses construed about women PR professionals, reproduction of institutional mechanisms of discrimination and field-specific practices that support this broader apparatus. A completely uncharted area is how such realities impact women freelance PR professionals. According to the latest data from the Chartered Institute for Public Relations (2024), around 60% of public relations practitioners in England and Wales are women; the 66% of practitioners below director are female; and 34% are male. The situation is reversed in senior roles, with 54% are male and 46% are female. Correlating these results with the age of PR professionals, PR is a young occupation, with 45% of practitioners aged between 16 and 34 years old. The main issue here is the industry’s capacity of retaining mid-level women practitioners and supporting them into progressing to leadership level. According to PR Week (Barrett, 2023), a significant trend is emerging where only a small percentage of women are opening new PR agencies, with data showing that a considerably low number of female entrepreneurs are taking the leap to establish their own PR firms.

## **Precarity, Empowerment, Resilience, and Well-being in the Communication Industries**

Research on precarious work and its far-reaching implications has expanded significantly over the past few decades. Defined by job insecurity, low wages, and limited benefits, precarious employment has been closely tied to the rise of neo-liberal policies and evolving business practices (Kallenberg, 2009; Quinlan, 2014). Scholars have explored how workers navigate these uncertainties, focussing on communicative strategies for managing work–life precarity (Golden & Jorgenson, 2022) and personal branding as a tool for career sustainability (Vallas & Christin, 2018). Creative industries, such as publishing and journalism, have emerged as hotspots for precarious work, where unstable employment is a defining characteristic (Anciaux et al., 2019; Bridges, 2018). In addition, research has addressed the mental health consequences of precarious employment, underscoring the importance of coping resources in mitigating its impact (Bosmans et al., 2016). Gender disparities remain a critical lens in examining precarious work, particularly in feminised fields like public relations, where women face compounded challenges of inequity and systemic bias (Topić et al., 2020). As precarious work continues to shape labour markets, its implications extend beyond individual workers, influencing organisational dynamics and societal structures (Kallenberg, 2009).

Recent research into resilience among public relations professionals emphasises its crucial role in managing work–life precarity and coping with workplace adversities. Golden and Jorgenson (2022) explored various forms of precarity in work–life relationships, analysing how resilience is enacted through communicative practices. In Latin America, resilience was found to correlate with factors like age, experience, and hierarchy among PR practitioners (Moreno et al., 2019). Qualitative studies have also highlighted resilience patterns among PR professionals, described as bouncing forward, up, back, and around to adapt to multi-level workplace adversities (Guo & Anderson, 2018). Additionally, stress resilience has been identified as a key competence for communication professionals, with agencies introducing programmes aimed at enhancing employees' resilience (Ziegele & Zerfass, 2021). Together, these findings underscore the centrality of resilience in navigating the high-pressure, dynamic environment of public relations.

Research on well-being in public relations and communication professions presents a nuanced understanding of the field. Freelance and independent professionals often report benefits such as reduced stress and improved work–life balance (Fielden et al., 2003; Syrett, 2016), while organisational support remains critical for enhancing the well-being of full-time employees (Eng et al., 2024). Generational differences are evident, with senior professionals facing greater struggles in achieving work–life balance compared to their entry-level counterparts (Candello & Mohammadpour, 2024). Women in PR report relatively higher happiness levels at work (Muñiz-Velázquez et al., 2022), yet they contend with distinct challenges, including networking-related stress and issues like sexual harassment (Anton, 2024) and valued recognition (Cunha et al., 2024). The feminisation of the industry and the dominance of small businesses call for tailored well-being strategies (Anton, 2024). In this context, precarious

employment remains a significant factor negatively affecting mental well-being, particularly when coping resources are insufficient (Bosmans et al., 2016). Although progress has been made, discriminatory work environments persist for women in PR (Topić et al., 2020).

## **Professional Virtual Communities**

PVCs emerged as significant platforms for knowledge sharing and professional growth among geographically dispersed practitioners (Bifulco & Santoro, 2005; Dudezert et al., 2006). By leveraging information and communication technologies, these communities enable collaboration, exchange of support, and the cultivation of a shared sense of community among members (Blanchard et al., 2011). Successful PVCs rely on factors that enhance their perceived value, such as facilitating expertise exchange and fostering community development (Katzy & Sung, 2002). As a result, PVCs serve as essential spaces for professionals to connect, share insights, and advance their respective fields without being limited by physical boundaries.

In the communication industries, PVCs have taken on particular significance, especially for freelancers who often lack traditional organisational support structures. These communities address critical challenges such as client management, pricing strategies, and professional isolation, enabling freelancers to collectively navigate the precarity of independent work. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of PVCs was amplified as members turned to these spaces for both emotional support and practical resources, including advice on pivoting to new business models or managing financial insecurity during lockdowns (Anton & Moise, 2021). Research has explored their internationalisation, sense of community, and impact on professional growth (Blanchard et al., 2011; de Vries & Kommers, 2004). Specific studies have examined communities for communication freelancers (Moise & Anton, 2022) and academics (Yu et al., 2009), highlighting their role in fostering connections and advancing professional goals. The integration of Web 2.0 technologies in virtual conferences has further promoted diverse perspectives and inclusive participation (Broadfoot et al., 2010). However, challenges such as cultural differences and economic disparities can influence activity levels within these communities (Yu et al., 2009). Despite these hurdles, online professional communities are widely recognised as valuable resources for ongoing professional development and knowledge exchange across various fields (de Vries & Kommers, 2004).

## **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine gendered discourses within a single PVC dedicated to communication and public relations freelancers. The research investigates how these communities mediate experiences of precarity, empowerment, resilience, and well-being, focussing specifically on the gendered dimensions of these themes. The study analysed all posts from a UK-based Facebook group acting as a PVC for communication professionals. The corpus