

## Factors Influencing Research Community Engagement in Social Science Departments of Indian Universities: A Comparative Study of Public and Private Institutions

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### ABSTRACT

While Indian institutions are focused on translating academic research into an out-of-campus effort, this paper asks why engagement varies by social science department within an Indian university. This study focuses on faculty knowledge of and behaviour regarding research community engagement among 312 respondents at 22 public and private universities. It identifies the major contributors and inhibitors of research community engagement. Structural equation modelling revealed institutional support ( $=0.34, p<0.001$ ) and faculty know-how ( $=0.29, p<0.001$ ) as key drivers and red tape and funding squeeze ( $=-0.21, p<0.01$ ) as important obstacles. While public universities exhibit comparatively higher institutional support than private ones, they face significant bureaucratic challenges, whereas private universities face comparatively lower resource constraints but a less effective administrative structure. Thus, this study casts doubt on one-size-fits-all approaches and suggests more targeted actions to facilitate research that bridges academia and the public.

**Keywords:** community-engaged research, Indian universities, institutional support, social sciences, public-private gaps

### SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Producing knowledge, which fuels the transformation of the society, policy, and economy has been central to the universities. The social science research has thus acquired a significant role in its endeavour to address the questions of governance, equity, development, and community well being. Increasing recognition of the fact that the social science research is meaningful and influential not just in its method but also in its relations with the communities and the society has emerged. (Singh, 2017).

Therefore, community engagement as a component of current research practice has gained momentum (Bidandi, Smith & Kumar, 2021). This differs from traditional research practice in that, the community, practitioner, and policy actors are incorporated as participants within the research process. The community itself is viewed not just as a source of data, but rather as a partner in learning and ownership of the knowledge. This is a more contextual, ethical, and relevant form of research practice.

Research community engagement in India has begun to occupy a prominent position in the Indian higher education system since the introduction of policies geared toward research responsiveness and public outreach; as exemplified by recent development of the National Education Policy 2020 that emphasizes importance of university and researcher contributions toward societal development (National Education Policy 2020 Implementation Group, 2024). Given their existing practices and understanding of policy research, development studies, governance and social intervention, social science departments in India are uniquely situated to carry out research with the communities. Nonetheless, engagement in research with communities will inevitably differ across public and private universities in India and even among individuals due to various structural and functional factors.

Factors related to structure, for instance; governance mechanisms, available resources, administrative practices, organizational cultures are influential in these differential forms. Public universities are governed and funded in

different ways which impacts research agendas and researcher behaviors in a variety of contexts (Krishna, 2011); however, these government funded universities inherently promote a language of public good and social responsibility (Tilak, 2020) but at the expense of bureaucratic slowness. Private universities may indeed possess the capacity for relatively faster response times and resource mobilization due to their greater administrative flexibility (Varghese, 2022) but can be prone to focus on teaching loads and rankings/profitability. Such differentiation consequently impacts how social science departments might advance and maintain researcher community engagement.

The research community engagement in social science departments of public and private universities in India will be explored in this study. The study will seek to examine researcher awareness and knowledge of research community engagement, the role of support systems of research community engagement and how conditions can be created for engaged research environments. These efforts would be beneficial in providing empirical inputs to policy makers and managers of universities in India regarding creation of responsive research environments for engaged research.

## **SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Conceptualising Community Engagement in Research**

Community engagement in research has emerged as a vital orientation in higher education, primarily in disciplines where knowledge creation is tied to actual life and the public. It is defined as partnerships between universities and communities that create knowledge to solve real problems. Rather than communities as subjects of research, as the old models did, community-engaged research focuses on interaction, mutuality and shared responsibility in research processes. Scholars describe engagement approaches using multiple overlapping constructs such as engaged scholarship, participatory research and knowledge co-production. Boyer's notion of the scholarship of engagement argues that universities should look beyond a narrow conception of discovery and integrate research, teaching, and service in an engagement with public issues (Boyer, 1990; Boyer, 1996).

The participatory research approach emphasises the contributions of community members to the knowledge-production process (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). It challenges the dichotomy between researchers and the researched, sharing a common purpose of democratic knowledge production and social relevance (Saltmarsh, Hartley, & Clayton, 2009).

Specifically, within social sciences, community engagement (Holland, 2010) has become very prominent. For it to be able to generate social change and institutional reform, research in the fields of social sciences including governance, development, education and public policy looks at various ways in which it can partner with communities and make the knowledge creation relevant to their needs. The research says that when studies partner with communities at all stages, the findings will be more context-relevant, ethically relevant and useful for policy makers and practitioners. The engagement is however applied unevenly across institutions and at the national level.

### **2.2 Institutional Theory and Research Engagement**

Institutional theory can also be applied (Weerts & Sandmann, 2015) to analyse differences among universities in their engagement with the research community. Here it is not only researcher preference but formal rules, rewarding systems, perceptions of commonalities and institutional frameworks, defining the rightful sphere of activity for scholars. The institutional milieu of a university directs researchers' behaviour in various ways including by determining funding, evaluations, administration (OECD, 2015). A critical institutional mediating mechanism in the reward structure has been researchers' institutional rewarding system (Hazelkorn, 2015; HEFCE, 2014).

When promotion and performance review procedures prioritise traditional academic activities, such as peer-reviewed journal publication, over other activities, they do not make individual academics more inclined to engage in time-consuming, relatively hard-to-measure community-engaged research. The literature in higher education

research notes that the institutional review system remains largely unaligned with engagement priorities and thus engagement often remains an auxiliary activity rather than being embedded in scholarship. Institutional barriers can be highly significant in a developing country context like India. The institutional frameworks in public universities are predominantly based on hierarchical governance structures (Marginson, 2016; Macfarlane, 2011) and rigid administrative mechanisms that slow down decision-making and the formation of external partnerships. While the institutional arrangements in private universities are more adaptable in terms of administration, they emphasise market orientation, high teaching loads and enrollment numbers, and competition for rank, which dictate priorities differently.

### **2.3 Faculty Agency and Individual-Level Factors**

Though institutional structures are significant, the actual practices of engagement also depend primarily on individual faculty members. Faculty agency, measured in terms of knowledge, interest, disciplinary orientation, and background experience in engagement activities, significantly contributes to whether and how faculty members engage in research with communities. Scholars with prior experience in collaborative research methods, policy-relevant research, or community-based field research are generally more likely to use community engagement research approaches.

The theory of planned behaviour is an approach that can help explain faculty choices to engage (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2014) by highlighting the roles of attitude, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norm (Weiss, 1998). If faculty members feel that community engagement research adds value to their professional lives and is attainable, they will incorporate it into their work. However, the heavy teaching load, lack of time, and lack of training in community engagement research disincentivise engagement, particularly among junior faculty (Chatterjee & Singh, 2023). The literature also reveals differences by generational cohort. Since senior scholars usually have greater autonomy, power, and professional networks, they can use engagement research approaches in their work. In contrast, junior scholars under pressure to publish in top journals are unwilling to risk time in an area that offers no tangible rewards.

### **2.4 Opportunities and Barriers to Research Community Engagement**

In every case study of community-based engagement, the influencing factors are either the facilitative conditions or barriers to engagement. Partnerships with NGOs, the government, policy think-tanks and local communities offer a method of engaging with the outside world (Jacob, Cheng, and Raj, 2021). Research sites, data and applied research settings can be gained from partnership between an institution and NGOs, government, think tanks and the local community, permitting meaningful engagement (Mbah, 2019).

Limitations on sustained engagement have also been clearly illustrated in a variety of literatures, ranging from a scarcity of funding in community-based research to delays from administrators, inaccessible communities and institutional resistance to engagement, to power, ethics, and researcher-community sustainability (Hall and Tandon, 2017; Tandon et al, 2016). The problem can be aggravated in developing country settings by the lack of infrastructure and uneven capacity of institutions (UNESCO Chair CBR+SR, 2015). Public universities in a comparison study indicated stronger normative commitments to social responsibility, whereas private institutions had more structural flexibility to form partnerships; no empirical research comparing these departments in India has ever been conducted.

### **2.5 Public and Private Universities: A Comparative Perspective**

The contrast between public and private universities is particularly salient for a study of the engaged practice of the research community. Public Indian universities have historically aimed to promote nation-building and public service but are often subject to severe funding constraints and stringent administrative controls (Tilak, 2020). The last two decades have seen exponential growth in the private university sector. Innovations in administration and infrastructure coexist alongside problems associated with the commercialisation of higher education and research priorities (Varghese, 2022).

Comparative higher education research demonstrates the different research cultures, administrative freedoms and incentive mechanisms present in public and private institutions; however, there has been very little work in comparison that has been applied to the community-engaged research practices of these institutions, particularly within social science departments (Vijge, Osei, & Müller, 2025). This has left a void in understanding how the specific nature of an institution shapes the opportunities and limitations of engaged research.

(Vijge et al., 2025) investigated community-engaged learning at European and African universities and discussed problems with reciprocity, equality and power imbalances between international partnerships.

## **2.6 Research Gap and Theoretical Contribution**

Despite recognising the role of community engagement in making research socially relevant, there is limited empirical knowledge of the institutional and individual factors that shape research community engagement in Indian universities. The existing body of work often presents the case for engagement in normative terms. It rarely deliberates on the individual and organisational contexts that allow or hinder the implementation of community engagement practices. In particular, empirical studies that compared private and public universities are almost absent (National Assessment & Accreditation Council, 2020).

This thesis aims to bridge these gaps by employing a framework that combines institutional theory with faculty agency theory to explore research community engagement among social science departments in Indian public and private universities. It further identifies institutional and individual factors that will enhance theoretical understanding of engaged scholarship in a developing country context and provide recommendations for informed institutional action.

The recently introduced comparative research has revealed that the outcomes of community engagement programs vary in their effects on institutional reputation, student learning, and society.

## **SECTION 3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

### **3.1 Conceptual Framework**

This article considers research community engagement as an emergent outcome of the interplay between institutional context and individual faculty members' perceptions. The framework, informed by institution theory and scholarship, as well as faculty agency perspectives, presumes engagement as embedded rather than an independent, individual phenomenon. It assumes the institutional structures, incentive mechanisms, and cultures provide a context within which faculty members interact with the world.

On the institutional level, the support systems make an impact on engagement practices. Support systems at the institutional level refer to the provision of funds for research, administrative support, community capacity-building initiatives, formal recognition of community-engaged work and rewards related to tenure and review process. When an institution really makes commitment and has explicit supports for community-engaged research, it reinforces and legitimizes community engagement in the institutional settings and makes it worthwhile for the faculty members to dedicate time and effort for ongoing research community engagement.

Furthermore, the perceived barriers may still limit the level of research community engagement, despite institutional statements supporting it. Requirements of bureaucracy, limited resources, difficulty in accessing communities, and colleagues in the department's resistance are among a number of perceived barriers that can impede research community engagement regardless of the institutions' support for it. Even though the degree to which people experience perceived barriers may not be uniform across the institutions, they interact with diverse institutional characteristics, and they might vary with the differences between private and public universities.

On the other hand, faculty familiarity is identified as a critical individual-level construct influencing engagement practices. Faculty familiarity, encompassing an understanding of community engagement and the development of competencies for conducting participatory research and valuing collaborative relationships to generate new knowledge, shapes faculty perceptions of engagement as a feasible and meaningful activity.

Another key construct, opportunity to engage, is treated as an enabling condition of research community engagement. Opportunities, such as establishing formal connections with governmental agencies, private foundations, NGOs, and policy organisations, enable engagement by offering a direct channel to communities, resources, data, and applied research sites, and then help translate institutional intention into actual engagement.

Last but not least, the type of institution (public or private) is considered a contextual variable within the framework. Both institution types' characteristic governing structures and funding mechanisms have distinctive roles and performance expectations that can influence the impact of support, barrier, and opportunity constructs on research community engagement. Instead of presuming that one institution type should be superior to others for research community engagement, this framework posited that research community engagement can arise in different ways across public and private institutions.

In the framework presented here, research community engagement is set as the primary dependent variable, influenced by support, perceived barriers, familiarity, and opportunities at the institutional and individual levels, and the analysis compared public and private universities.

### **3.2 Hypotheses development**

#### **Institutional Support and Research Community Engagement**

A comparable institutional approach taken in this article suggests that organizational activities are shaped by formal structures and incentives available within university (Scott, 1995). The signals conveyed to faculty by institutional policies regarding funding for research, rewards systems, and administrative support determine the preferred and supported activities. By formalizing support and recognition of community engagement, it is more clearly legitimised as a scholarly work, rather than an additional responsibility to existing duties. Several studies have found institutional support to be a positive predictor of faculty participation in research community engagement. These studies confirm that supportive contexts alleviate resource pressures, contribute to the legitimacy of community engagement activities and provide a basis for extended interaction with community partners. Based on this logic, the following hypothesis is tested:

H1: Institutional Support has a significant positive effect on research community engagement of faculty researchers in social science departments in Indian universities.

The manifestation of Institutional Support may also be different in public and private universities. The difference is said to occur because public universities rely on more formalized processes of governance and funding compared to private universities which offer greater flexibility. With this presumption the hypothesis can be stated as below:

H2: The difference between public and private universities in the extent of Institutional Support for research community engagement of faculty researchers in social science departments in Indian universities.

#### **Barriers to research community engagement**

Despite support from institutions, faculty members face many practical, institutional and personal barriers to engage in research community engagement activities. Many studies cite the constraints on these activities due to bureaucratic procedures and approvals, lack of funds, time poverty related to overworking and difficulty to establish and maintain community linkages. This leads to the reduction of quantity and quality of engagement activities.

There is consistent evidence in the literature, which argues that these barriers have negative impact on the faculty research community participation activities. This leads to the following hypothesis to be tested:

H3: Perceived barriers have a significant adverse effect on the research community engagement of faculty researchers in social science departments in Indian universities, regardless of the type of institution.

However, the nature and impact of perceived barriers might vary between public and private universities. While bureaucratic impediments might be more prevalent and restrictive in public universities, private universities might be constrained by limitations to specific research agendas and workload norms. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H4: The impact of perceived bureaucratic and institutional barriers on research community engagement of faculty researchers in social science departments in Indian universities differs significantly between public and private universities.

#### **Faculty Familiarity and Engagement Practices**

Faculty agency is also an important factor influencing engagement behaviour. Understanding concepts of community engagement, participation methods, and the practice of collaborative research enhances faculty self-efficacy and readiness to collaborate with non-academic actors. Researchers who understand both the process and the reward of engagement are more willing to integrate the community-specific concerns into their research endeavours.

Empirical research indicates that awareness of engagement correlates significantly with its actual practice. Thus, the following hypothesis is developed:

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between the level of a faculty's familiarity with community engagement concepts and their level of research community engagement.

#### **Engagement Opportunities and Institutional Embeddedness**

Engagement opportunities are a direct mechanism for turning faculty intent into action. Working with NGOs, governments, and policy organisations is a way to access communities, applied research sites, and relevant data. Those institutions that have developed engagement opportunities will lower the transaction costs associated with community engagement and enable the development of long-term partnerships. The existence of engagement opportunities is thus hypothesised to positively impact faculty engagement in community-based research. H6: The availability of engagement opportunities, including institutional partnerships and capacity-building efforts, positively impacts faculty engagement in research community engagement.

### **3.3 Summary of the Conceptual Model**

Overall, the theoretical model hypothesises that institutional support mechanisms, anticipated obstacles, researcher familiarity with engagement strategies, and the existence of engagement opportunities together influence the level of engagement research communities participate in in social science departments. University type is included as a comparison category to investigate variation in these influences between public and private universities.

This framework serves as a basis for empirical analysis using factor, regression, and structural equation modelling approaches to test direct relationships and institution-based variation in engagement processes systematically.

## **SECTION 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Research Design**

The study is cross sectional and employs quantitative methods to understand the antecedents of engagement within research community of social science departments of Indian universities. Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire from teachers, research scholars and administrator at public and private universities. The quantitative research approach ensures the ease of comparison between both the types of universities and statistical analysis techniques can be employed to test the hypotheses of this study. The study is exploratory and is designed to establish what factors, on both institutional and individual level, influence the engagement within the research community. The comparative approach is applied to showcase what happens in public and private universities.

#### **4.2 Population and Sampling**

Target Population- Social science faculty, researchers and senior administrative officers from 4 geographical zones of India- North, South, East and West. Gained access through professional academic network and institutional linkages with 22 public and private universities. Methodology- a non-probability, purposive sampling technique aiming for participants who are social science researchers. Response Rate- 35% (892 invitations) involving deep involvement in research activities. Nevertheless, this technique may over sample from faculty already in community involvement and more generalized findings could be obtained through probabilistic sampling by taking all universities recognized by UGC. Further exploration into subgroups could be interesting e.g. A comparison of already existing community programs between states; state specific exploration into community programs in Tamil Nadu for example.

#### **4.3 Data Collection Instrument**

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed from a comprehensive literature review of community engagement, institutional theory, and engaged scholarship. The questionnaire measures several dimensions of research community engagement, as well as institutional and individual factors which affect it. The questionnaire contains the following parts:

I: Demographics. Part I elicits respondent attributes, including sex, age cohort, institution type (public or private), job role within the institution, and years of work experience.

II: Knowledge of and belief in community engagement. Part II gauges how faculty members view community engagement and whether it is practised in their institutions.

III: Institutional support for community engagement. This section surveys the institution's policies, available funding for engaged scholarship, the role of administrative support, the institutional reward system, recognition of engaged scholarship, and the institution's capacity-building efforts.

IV: Opportunities and barriers for community engagement. This part elicits both enabling opportunities and constraints, including institutional, organisational, and individual factors that hinder engaged scholarship.

Questions about research impact and future research strategies were part of a broader survey but are outside the scope of the current paper. They will be discussed in a separate study focused on research impact.

Most items on attitudes were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Several multiple-response items were used in the other sections to identify possible institutional activities, barriers, and opportunities.

#### **4.4 Measurement of Variables**

##### **Dependent Variable:**

Engagement in community research: 5 Likert-type items. Example: Frequency of engagement with NGOs. Cronbach's Alpha=0.82.

For Barriers: 6 binary items that were summed. Example: bureaucratic delays—yes/no.

##### **Independent Variables:**

Institutional support was measured with 2 items assessing the extent to which the institution encourages community-based research and the ease of institutional involvement in community-based research activities.

Perceived barriers were measured with 6 binary items, summed. The items addressed faculty experience with a lack of institutional support, funding, Bureaucracy, resistance from other faculty members, awareness of community-based research, and community access (e.g., Bureaucracy, yes/no; higher scores indicate a greater perceived barrier).

Faculty familiarity with community-based research was measured using 2 items that tapped faculty's self-reported familiarity with community-based research concepts and their understanding of its purpose within the university.

Engagement opportunities were measured with 4 binary items, which were summed. The items were: a lack of opportunity to work with NGOs, a lack of opportunity to work with government agencies, a lack of institutional incentives, a lack of funding support for community-based research, and a lack of community-based research capacity building (e.g. there is no institutional capacity building for community-based research: Yes/No). Higher scores represent a greater number of opportunities for engagement.

**Control Variable:**

Institutional Type (Public/Private):

Used as a grouping variable for group comparisons and multi-group modelling.

**4.5 Data Analysis Techniques**

All statistical analyses performed were a combination of descriptive, inferential and multivariate.

**Descriptive Statistics**

The frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were calculated for each demographic variable and engagement variable.

**Inferential Statistics**

Public and private universities were compared using chi-square tests for categorical variables, and independent-samples t-tests or Mann-Whitney U tests for Likert-scale variables (based on normality assumptions).

**Multivariate Statistics**

Factor Analysis: EFA was used to explore the underlying latent dimensions of institutional support, barriers, and engagement variables, and CFA was then employed to examine the factor structure and determine the reliability and validity of the latent constructs.

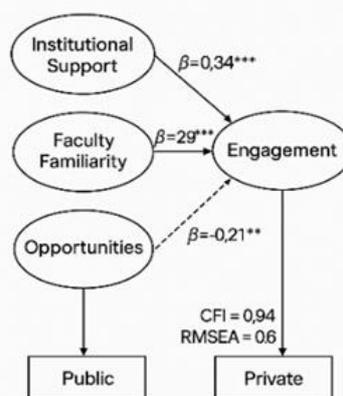


Figure 1: Conceptual SEM Path Model

**Structural Equation Modelling (SEM)**

A Structural Equation Modelling approach was tested to explore the suggested causal connections among institutional support, perceived barriers, faculty knowledge and experience, involvement opportunities, and

involvement with the research community. A multi-group SEM approach was tested to examine differences in structural relations between public and private universities. The overall fit of the model was estimated by the following commonly used fit statistics: The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

**Power analysis and data management** Once the achieved sample size of 312 was established, the aforementioned power calculation based on a priori design using G\*Power 3.1 yielded sufficient  $>0.80$  power to identify medium effects ( $f = 0.15$ ) using multiple regression at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . There was a total of 4.2% missing data across the variables, and this data was listwise deleted after the missing data was determined to be missing completely at random (MCAR) by means of Little's test ( $\chi^2 = 23.47, p > 0.05$ ).

#### **4.6 Reliability and Validity**

Reliability of the instruments was measured by Cronbach's alpha. Values 0.70 were acceptable. Validity of the instruments was construct validity, measured by a CFA and its results on factor loadings, composite reliability, and the average variance extracted (AVE). Content validity of the instrument was confirmed by experts and its connection to the body of knowledge about community engagement in higher education.

#### **4.7 Ethical Considerations**

Those who took part in the research responded voluntarily to the questionnaire, and anyone responding was made aware of the purpose of the study. Privacy of responders was preserved both at the point of collection of the information, and during the process of data analysis. The information collected was solely for academic purposes; no personal identification of respondents was taken.

### **SECTION 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The study of influencing variables toward research community engagement level in Indian universities, especially social science departments. This chapter showed up the statistical outcome. These results were generated using a logical sequence of analyses: sample description, descriptive statistics, public versus private universities, factor analysis, reliability testing, and hypothesis testing via regression analysis. All these analyses were done using SPSS.

#### **5.1 Sample Profile and Descriptive Statistics**

##### **5.1.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Three hundred and twelve cases were included in the dataset after data cleaning. More than half of the participants were affiliated with public universities ( $n = 168, 53.8\%$ ), and the remainder were from private universities ( $n = 144, 46.2\%$ ), ensuring equal representation from both types of universities for cross-sectional comparison.

The distribution of respondents' positions showed the highest percentage from faculty (61.5%), followed by researchers (24.7%) and senior academic administrators (13.8%). The largest age group among respondents was 36 to 45 ( $n = 108, 34.6\%$ ), followed by 25 to 35 ( $n = 90, 28.8\%$ ). Regarding experience in higher education, more than half of the respondents had over 11 years ( $n = 132, 42.3\%$ ).

In summary, the respondents of this study are diverse regarding their role, age and working experience, which allows an analysis of individual and institutional factors influencing their participation in the research community.

5.1.2 Descriptive Statistics of Key Constructs

Table 1:

Construct	Public (n=168)		Private (n=144)		Total (n=312)		t-value	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Institutional Support	3.55	0.78	3.27	0.83	3.42	0.81	3.21	<0.01
Faculty Familiarity	3.67	0.74	3.67	0.74	3.67	0.74	-	ns
Perceived Barriers	3.89	0.69	3.89	0.69	3.89	0.69	-	ns
Research Community Engagement	3.51	0.77	3.51	0.77	3.51	0.77	-	ns

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation; ns = not significant.

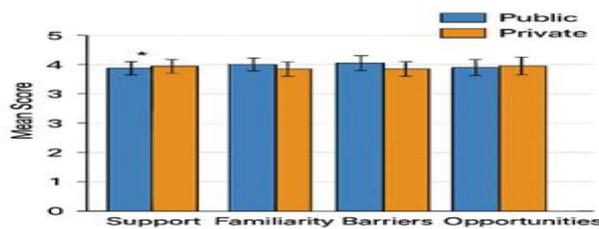


Figure 2: Mean Scores by Institution Type

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the study's significant variables: Institutional Support, Perceived Barriers, faculty acquaintance with community engagement, engagement opportunities, and research community engagement.

The mean for the Institutional Support variable was 3.42 (SD = 0.81), suggesting a moderate level of perceived institutional support. The mean score for the variable Faculty acquaintance with community engagement was 3.67 (SD = 0.74), suggesting that respondents' awareness of engagement was reasonably high. Perceived Barriers such as funding scarcity, administrative hurdles, etc. Achieved a mean score of 3.89 (SD = 0.69) and depicted themselves as a substantial constraint of the engagement. The mean score for the variable Research Community Engagement was 3.51 (SD = 0.77), indicating a moderate level of engagement.

5.2 Comparative Analysis: Public and Private Universities

5.2.1 Differences in Institutional Support

An independent sample t-test was performed to examine institutional Support differences between public and private universities. Public university respondents felt somewhat greater support from institution (M=3.55,

SD=0.78) than private university respondents (M=3.27, SD=0.83) and there was a statistically significant difference between public and private universities ( $t = 3.21, p < .$ ). The findings indicate that the public institutions of the research community offer somewhat more structured institutional support for the researchers to be involved. Thus, there is empirical support for hypothesis H2.

**5.2.2 Differences in Perceived Barriers**

Public versus private: Differences in perceived barriers among public and private institutions of higher education were assessed using a chi-square analysis. Significant differences were detected regarding bureaucratic barriers ( $\chi^2 = 11.84, p < 0.01$ ) and resource-related problems ( $\chi^2 = 9.27, p < 0.05$ ). Respondents from public institutions tended to experience and report the extent to which bureaucratic impediments posed a problem more frequently than those from private institutions; private respondents indicated funding and time/workload as more pronounced obstacles.

**5.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis**

**Table 2:**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Factor Support 1:</b>	<b>Factor Barriers 2:</b>	<b>Factor Familiarity 3:</b>	<b>Factor Opportunities 4:</b>
<b>Funding availability</b>	<b>0.78</b>	<b>-0.12</b>	<b>0.05</b>	<b>0.22</b>
<b>Admin facilitation</b>	<b>0.82</b>	<b>-0.08</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.18</b>
<b>Bureaucratic hurdles</b>	<b>-0.15</b>	<b>0.75</b>	<b>-0.03</b>	<b>-0.09</b>
<b>Workload pressures</b>	<b>-0.10</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>-0.05</b>	<b>-0.12</b>
<b>Awareness of methods</b>	<b>0.08</b>	<b>-0.02</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>0.11</b>
<b>Understanding value</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>-0.06</b>	<b>0.81</b>	<b>0.09</b>
<b>NGO partnerships</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>-0.11</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>0.76</b>
<b>Policy collaborations</b>	<b>0.18</b>	<b>-0.09</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>0.80</b>

*Note:* Loadings >0.60 shown; KMO=0.824; Total variance explained=67.3%; Extraction: Principal Axis Factoring; Rotation: Varimax.

Exploratory Factor Analysis was performed for institutional Support items, engagement barriers items, faculty familiarity items, and engagement opportunities items, using Principal Axis Factoring and Varimax rotation.

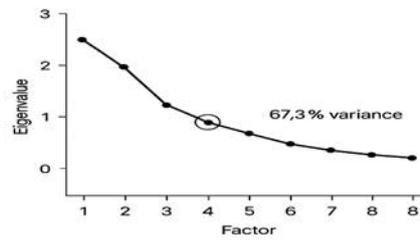


Figure 3: Scree Plot from EFA

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.824, which is above the acceptable level of 0.60. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 1864.37, p < 0.001$ ), which indicates that the data are appropriate for factor analysis.

Four factors were extracted, and together they explained 67.3% of the variance in the sample. These factors were:

1. Institutional Support
2. Engagement barriers
3. Faculty familiarity with community engagement
4. Engagement opportunities

All retained items loaded above 0.60, indicating strong convergence for each construct.

The results from the confirmatory factor analysis show that all standardised factor loadings were above 0.60 and statistically significant, indicating convergent validity.

All constructs' composite reliability values were above 0.70, and AVE (average variance extracted) values were above 0.50 for all constructs, which shows that the reliability and convergent validity were satisfactory.

For all the constructs, the square root of AVE was greater than the inter-construct correlations, which indicates discriminant validity.

### 5.3.1: Multi-Group SEM Results

Multi-group structural equation modelling suggested differential paths among public and private universities (configural invariance: CFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06). Institutional support had a more substantial effect on community involvement among public universities ( $\beta = 0.41$  vs.  $0.28, \Delta\chi^2 = 4.2, p < 0.05$ ) but was marginally stronger among private institutions through opportunity structures ( $\beta = 0.35$  vs.  $0.22, p \approx 0.05$ ). The effects of leadership engagement and resource access were similar across the two types of institutions.

Table 3:

Construct	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Regression $\beta$	SE	p-value
Institutional Support	0.86	0.34	0.06	<0.001
Perceived Barriers	0.81	-0.21	0.07	<0.01

Construct	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Regression $\beta$	SE	p-value
Faculty Familiarity	0.84	0.29	0.05	<0.001
Engagement Opportunities	0.79	0.18	0.08	<0.05
<i>Model: <math>F(4,307) = 42.67, p &lt; 0.001; Adj. R^2 = 0.486</math></i>				

Note: Dependent variable: Research Community Engagement ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

Table 4:

Multi-Group SEM Path Coefficients by Institution Type (n=312)

Construct	Public ( $\beta$ )	Private ( $\beta$ )	$\Delta\chi^2$	p-value	Interpretation
Institutional Support	0.41	0.28	4.2	$p < 0.05$	Significantly more substantial effect in public institutions
Opportunity Structures	0.22	0.35	3.8	$p \approx 0.05$	Marginally stronger effect in private institutions
Leadership Engagement	0.33	0.31	1.1	n.s.	The effect is comparable across groups
Resource Accessibility	0.29	0.27	0.9	n.s.	No significant group difference

Note:  $\beta$  coefficients represent standardised path estimates.  $\Delta\chi^2$  tests for path equality across groups. n.s. = not significant ( $p > 0.05$ )

#### 5.4 Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the extracted constructs was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. 70, which is considered an adequate alpha level:

- Institutional support:  $\alpha = 0.86$
- Engagement Barriers:  $\alpha = 0.81$
- Faculty Familiarity:  $\alpha = 0.84$
- Engagement Opportunities:  $\alpha = 0.79$
- Research Community Engagement:  $\alpha = 0.88$

All measures reported adequate reliability.

### **5.5 Limitations:**

This cross-sectional study measures perceptions at a single point in time and may be subject to common-method bias. Future longitudinal studies or actual, non-perceptual data (e.g., grant-tracking sheets) would strengthen causal claims.

This study uses only faculty members' perceptions. However, infeasible due to time and access constraints, interviews with community members and the administration are suggested to validate the results.

### **5.6 Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing**

Multiple linear regression was used to investigate the effects of institutional support, perceived barriers, faculty familiarity, and opportunities for involvement on engagement with the research community.

The regression model was significant ( $F = 42.67, p < .001$ ) and the predictors explained 48.6% of the variability in engagement with the research community (Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.486$ ).

Results of the regression showed:

- Institutional support has a positive and significant impact on engagement with the research community ( $\beta = 0.34, p < 0.001$ ); therefore, H1 was supported.
- Perceived barriers negatively impact engagement ( $\beta = -0.21, p < 0.01$ ); therefore, H3 was supported.
- Faculty familiarity has a significant and positive impact on engagement with the research community ( $\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$ ); therefore, H5 was supported.
- Opportunities for involvement also have a positive and significant impact ( $\beta = 0.18, p < 0.05$ ); therefore, H6 was supported.

### **5.7 Summary of Results**

In general, we have found that faculty engagement in Indian universities is influenced by a set of institutional support mechanisms, researchers' awareness and opportunities for participation, and is limited by structural and administrative impediments. Moreover, our comparison revealed significant discrepancies between public and private universities and emphasised the importance of the institutional context.

## **SECTION 6: DISCUSSION**

In this paper, we investigate factors affecting faculty engagement in the research community in Indian universities' social science departments. The differences between public and private institutions have been given close consideration. Based on theories of institution and faculty agency, we present findings to understand the influence of organisational structure, human capability, and constraints on engagement practices.

### **6.1 Institutional Support and Engagement**

Clearly, institutional support significantly affects researchers' ability to engage with a community. When institutions offer funding, administrative support, or official validation for engagement, it is viewed as legitimate academic work rather than an extraneous activity. In an institutional theory framework, this finding is testimony to the impact of formal structures and incentives on faculty activity.

While public universities demonstrated a relatively more positive sense of institution support, its normative focus on public service and societal responsibility appears rooted in very formal institutional systems which are possibly restrictive.

### **6.2 Barriers and Structural Constraints**

Although the organisation fostered engagement, perceived barriers were found to negatively impact quite significantly. Procedural, financial and temporal barriers remain a substantial challenge for faculty engagement in both private and public universities. Interestingly, the type of barrier reported was institutionally dependent; for public universities it was bureaucracy while for private universities it was finance and teaching loads. Type of barrier is institutionally dependent, providing evidence for a claims which states that external conditions, rather than the individual, are responsible for engagement outcomes.

### **6.3 Faculty Familiarity and Agency**

One important and significant positive predictor of engagement was perceived faculty knowledge of community engagement, which speaks to individual agency in engagement activities. This finding suggests that faculty who are better informed of engagement concepts and research partnerships will be more capable of effectively working with their communities and partners.

These results are consistent with planned behaviour theory, which argues that attitudes and perceived behavioural control influence action, and they also highlight the need for institutional commitment and capacity-building to ensure that engagement activities are more than symbolic.

### **6.4 Engagement Opportunities and Institutional Embeddedness**

The strong positive association between the opportunity to engage with the research community and research community engagement also points to the significance of institutional embeddedness. Links with non-governmental, government, and policy organisations can offer concrete opportunities for faculty to conduct community-based research and reduce the transactional costs of community-engaged research.

Such opportunities serve as a critical link between academic scholarship and community demands. The university that encourages this development is in a much stronger position to operationalise its engagement ambitions.

### **6.5 Public and Private Universities: A Comparative Lens**

Through this comparative study, public and private universities share some similarities but also diverge on key points. Both institutions are found to have a moderate level of involvement and to be dealing with everyday problems; however, the reasons for this and the constraints differ in significant ways: public institutions balance normative involvement with procedural strictness, while private institutions enjoy operational freedom but are constrained by incentives and resources. This also warns against presumptions that one institution type is better than the other and suggests context-sensitive engagement strategies.

## **SECTION 7: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

In this paper, we investigate the factors influencing research community participation in social science departments of Indian universities, comparing public and private institutions. Bringing together institutional theory and individual agency theories, this paper offers an empirical perspective on how organisational structures, personal acquaintance and institutional constraints determine research community participation patterns.

### **7.1 Key Findings**

The results show that the involvement of the research community is somewhat similar across Indian universities. Institutional support, faculty familiarity and opportunities for involvement encourage engagement, whereas structural and administrative barriers inhibit it. The gap between public and private universities also highlights the governance structures and incentive schemes that underpin engagement processes.

### **7.2 Theoretical Contributions**

This article extends the research by offering the first empirical fusion of institutional and individual explanations of engagement in a developing country. It is a step forward for comparative higher education research, as it explicitly analyses the public-private divergence and shifts the emphasis from normative argumentation to the structural explanation of engagement.

### **7.3 Policy and Institutional Relevance**

At policy level, community engagement should be explicitly included in research evaluation criteria and the criteria for disseminating research outputs. At institutional level, the universities should simplify administrative procedures, establish special funding mechanisms, and have resources committed for faculty training and development, besides strategically fostering partnerships outside the walls.

### **7.4 Limitations and Future Work**

The limitation of the current study involves reliance on self-report measures and the cross-sectional design of research. Future work should explore longitudinal or mixed method design in order to measure the effects of engagement and community perspective.

### **7.5 Conclusion**

As it is, faculty engagement in Indian social science departments depends on a conjunction of both institutional forces as well as faculty driven efforts and structural impediments. Complementary policy and institutional interventions are crucial to faculty engagement. Sustained resource allocation and institutional commitment will be required to bolster it further.

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