The Authentic Servant Leader Constructed by Continuity Tragedy Branding: A Hybrid Feminist Leadership Model in Indonesia's Digital Sphere

Ellen D. Oktanti Irianto[1], Fibriyani Nur Khairin[2], Rizkiani Iskandar[3], Angga Hergastyasmawan [4], Sefrimel Angriani Zn[5], Mega Barokatul Fajri[6] and Thurfah Alifia Amri[7]

[1,2,6] Mulawarman University, East Kalimantan, Indonesia
[3]Tadulako University, Middle of Sulawesi, Indonesia
[4]State Polytechnic of Samarinda, Indonesia
[5]The State University of Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia
[6]Lamongan Muhammadiyah University, East Java, Indonesia

ellend@feb.unmul.ac.id

Abstract. Contemporary political leadership in regions shaped by entrenched patriarchal norms is increasingly influenced by digital public discourse, making it essential to understand how female leadership identities are constructed within online public spaces. This study examines how digital narratives co-construct the leadership identity of a female political leader operating in a male-dominated political environment in North Maluku, Indonesia, where leadership legitimacy is further shaped by personal tragedy and continuity narratives. Using a qualitative multimodal content analysis informed by narrative approach, this study analyzes multimodal data from Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok through grounded theory–informed coding strategies, including open, axial, and selective coding. The analysis generated 399 coding units that formed thematic clusters reflecting servant leadership, authentic leadership, transformational leadership, continuity-driven legitimacy, metaphorical identity construction, and mixed public sentiment. The findings reveal a hybrid feminist leadership model in which emotional authenticity, community-centered service, reformist orientation, and moral legitimacy rooted in personal loss are co-produced through digital public engagement. This study contributes to leadership scholarship by extending feminist and leadership theory through the integration of tragedy-based legitimacy and digital narrative construction in patriarchal sociopolitical contexts.

Keywords: Hybrid Feminist Leadership; Servant Leadership; Authentic Leadership; Qualitative Content Analysis; Leadership Legitimacy; Patriarchal Context.

1 Introduction

Leadership patterns in Eastern Indonesia, particularly in North Maluku, are deeply rooted in historical and cultural configurations that have shaped the region's political

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dynamics for decades. The sociocultural structures of this area characterized by strong customary traditions, masculine value systems, and hierarchical governance have significantly influenced local political arrangements and decision-making processes. Prior scholarly work has consistently shown that leadership across this region is traditionally constructed upon patriarchal norms that centralize authority in male figures, resulting in the marginalization of women's participation in political and administrative domains (1,2). These norms reinforce the perception that effective leadership is inherently masculine, privileging traits such as dominance, assertiveness, and stringent control qualities long embedded within the collective imagination of Indonesian political leadership (3). Such gendered constructions do not merely undermine the visibility of women leaders but also create substantial structural barriers that limit their access to political influence.

The dominance of masculine leadership archetypes in North Maluku has far-reaching implications. Women entering political spaces are often confronted with gender stereotypes that frame authority, decisiveness, and firm leadership behaviors as inherently incompatible with ideals of femininity (4). This phenomenon produces a dual burden for aspiring women leaders: they must exhibit traditionally masculine attributes to be perceived as competent while simultaneously maintaining socially acceptable feminine traits to avoid public disapproval. As a result, women experience psychological tension, social scrutiny, and institutional obstacles that impede their ability to lead within sociopolitical environments constructed around male authority (5). These entrenched cultural expectations contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of women in political leadership roles in Maluku, further reinforcing a cycle in which male-dominated structures perpetuate gender inequality.

Historically, North Maluku has also faced persistent governance challenges, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, uneven development, limited transparency, and insufficient political representation for marginalized groups women included. The absence of female leadership in the region's highest political offices highlights the limited pathways available to women seeking to advance in local governance (6). Compounded by the scarcity of female role models and a weak support network for women pursuing political careers, transformation in gender representation at the regional level has remained slow and fragmented. These structural and cultural barriers exemplify the broader struggle faced by women leaders operating in geographically and socially complex regions outside Indonesia's major administrative centers.

Against this backdrop, the emergence of Sherly Tjoanda as a female political leader in a male-centric political environment represents a significant shift and an intellectually compelling case for investigation. Her rise to leadership did not originate from conventional political mechanisms but rather from a deeply personal tragedy that subsequently became intertwined with a public narrative of moral responsibility. The framing of her leadership as one driven by continuity particularly the continuation of her late husband's mission introduces an emotionally charged dimension rarely observed in the leadership trajectories of male counterparts. Scholarship on political legitimacy suggests that personal tragedy can serve as a powerful mechanism through which female leaders negotiate entry into resistant sociopolitical structures (7,8). Leaders emerging from such contexts are commonly perceived as more empathetic and

morally grounded; they are seen as possessing heightened sensitivity to community struggles, thus reshaping public expectations of leadership. In regions where patriarchal norms limit women's political authority, such narratives become an important pathway to public acceptance.

Understanding Sherly Tjoanda's leadership through the lens of feminist leadership theory provides critical insight into why her leadership style appears resonant within the local context. Feminist leadership conceptualizes power not as domination but as a relational and collaborative force that enables greater participation and inclusivity (9). Central to this approach are values such as empathy, interpersonal communication, and attentiveness to marginalized groups traits that are typically overshadowed by traditional masculine leadership ideals. Feminist leadership also challenges hierarchical structures by advocating for participatory governance and deliberative processes aimed at democratizing decision-making (10). This framework is particularly relevant in North Maluku, where governance has long been shaped by elitism and rigid hierarchies. A shift toward leadership grounded in relational dynamics and social responsiveness presents an alternative vision for governance one that aligns more closely with community needs, especially in regions historically excluded from equitable development.

Furthermore, examining Sherly Tjoanda's leadership through transformational leadership theory expands the analytical lens by emphasizing vision, change, and innovation. Transformational leadership is defined by the ability to inspire collective action, articulate a compelling vision, and create adaptive organizational environments (11,12). Such leadership is crucial for governmental contexts that require swift adaptation to structural challenges and societal needs. In regions unaccustomed to female authority figures, transformational leadership can help redefine public perceptions of women as capable and influential actors (13). Female leaders often combine transformational strategies with feminist values an integration that allows them to address community problems through empathetic engagement while also motivating structural change.

The compatibility between feminist and transformational leadership is particularly evident in contexts marked by patriarchal resistance. Prior research shows that women leaders frequently use collaborative strategies, emotional intelligence, and community-centered initiatives to navigate resistance and promote social transformation (14). Such approaches translate into policy orientations that emphasize public service, grassroots engagement, and stronger state citizen relations features that have been observed in various female leadership cases across Indonesia (15,16). This highlights the broader trend in which women leaders advance governance reform not only through institutional power but also through moral and relational legitimacy.

The broader political landscape in Indonesia outside Java further contextualizes the rise of women leaders like Sherly Tjoanda. While women's representation remains limited, there has been a gradual increase in women's visibility in local politics due to evolving sociopolitical dynamics (8). Yet, challenges persist. Women leaders frequently negotiate conflicting cultural expectations while simultaneously striving to deliver progressive governance outcomes. Public perception is also heavily shaped by media framing and digital narratives. Research indicates that media often portrays

women leaders through gendered frames that emphasize nurturing qualities over professional capabilities (16,17). However, social media platforms have introduced alternative spaces where narratives are more fluid and participatory (18,19). Here, metaphors such as "mother," "protector," or "Wonder Woman" become discursive tools through which the public constructs symbolic interpretations of female leadership (20–22). These metaphors shape collective understanding and expectations of leadership performance, revealing the deep interconnections between gender, symbolism, and political legitimacy.

Despite the recent scholarly attention to gender and political leadership in Southeast Asia, significant gaps remain especially concerning women leaders in Eastern Indonesia. Existing research has rarely examined how local cultural dynamics, digital narratives, and political emotions interact to shape the leadership experiences of women in regions such as North Maluku (23). Little is known about how the public co-constructs legitimacy for female leaders in historically patriarchal contexts or how women negotiate their roles amid competing expectations. Addressing these gaps is essential to developing a more comprehensive understanding of leadership transformations occurring across Indonesia's diverse political landscapes.

While this study examines the leadership of a specific female political figure, the novelty of this research does not lie in the individual herself. Rather, its originality is grounded in the conceptual contribution to leadership studies. This research introduces a hybrid feminist leadership model that explains how leadership identities are constructed through digital public narratives by integrating servant leadership, authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and continuity-driven legitimacy shaped by personal tragedy. By shifting the analytical focus from the leader as a person to leadership as a socially constructed process, this study extends existing leadership theories and offers a novel framework for understanding how leadership legitimacy emerges in patriarchal and digitally mediated sociopolitical contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to critically analyze how female leadership in North Maluku is constructed through public narratives, digital media discourse, and societal perceptions. By employing feminist and transformational leadership frameworks, this research seeks to explore how Sherly Tjoanda navigates legitimacy, public service strategies, and structural constraints within a traditionally masculine governance environment. The study contributes empirically and theoretically to the fields of gender studies, political leadership, and digital political communication by offering nuanced insights into how female leaders emerge, operate, and are perceived in culturally complex settings. Ultimately, this research also provides practical implications for strengthening women's representation and advancing more inclusive governance.

2 Literature Review

Scholarship on feminist and transformational leadership in the context of local governance has expanded substantially over the past decade, reflecting a growing interest in how gendered leadership practices operate within complex sociopolitical environments. Feminist leadership theory has been widely recognized as a critical

framework for understanding leadership in settings where patterns of exclusion, hierarchical power structures, and historical marginalization shape political participation. Central to feminist leadership is the premise that power should not be exercised as dominance but as a relational and inclusive process aimed at advancing equity for women and other marginalized groups (14,24). This perspective challenges conventional leadership paradigms that rest on rigid, top-down models, arguing instead for approaches that emphasize sensitivity to social diversity, intersectionality, and the institutional roots of inequality. By highlighting intersections between gender, class, ethnicity, and other social identities, feminist leadership scholarship underscores how such dimensions shape opportunities, constraints, and lived experiences within public governance.

The theoretical foundations of feminist leadership emphasize several key dimensions: empowerment, relationality, and social responsibility. The empowerment dimension stresses the necessity of creating space for women and marginalized populations to meaningfully engage in decision-making processes. This aligns with broader feminist principles seeking to democratize governance and dismantle exclusionary structures. Relationality refers to the development of dialogical, supportive, and equitable connections between leaders and the communities they serve. Leadership, in this sense, is not a solitary exercise of authority but a co-constructed process embedded in social interaction. Meanwhile, the dimension of social responsibility highlights a leader's ethical obligation to advocate for marginalized communities and pursue justice-oriented outcomes (14,25). These dimensions collectively demonstrate how feminist leadership reframes governance not as a mechanism for control but as a platform for advancing collective welfare. Literature on emotional intelligence further supports these arguments by showing that leaders with heightened sensitivity to social dynamics are more capable of navigating complex community needs (26,27).

Transformational leadership theory, widely applied in public administration research, offers another crucial lens for understanding leadership practices in government institutions. Transformational leaders are characterized by four core components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These elements describe leaders who are capable of articulating compelling visions, inspiring organizational change, encouraging innovation, and responding to the unique needs of followers (28,29). Within local government systems, transformational leadership helps explain how leaders mobilize public support, implement bureaucratic reforms, and foster participatory governance cultures. In contexts facing persistent structural issues such as bureaucratic inefficiency, limited public trust, and uneven development transformational leadership offers a framework for analyzing how leaders address long-standing governance deficits through vision-driven change and adaptive institutional practices.

The relationship between feminist and transformational leadership has received considerable scholarly attention, with researchers highlighting the compatibility of the two paradigms. Both emphasize empowerment, collaboration, and ethical decision-making as essential to effective governance. Feminist leadership enhances transformational leadership by embedding gender-sensitive considerations into

frameworks of change, ensuring that leadership practices account for structural inequalities and the diverse needs of community members (14). Conversely, transformational leadership contributes a visionary component that supports feminist aspirations for systemic reform. This complementary relationship is particularly relevant in regions marked by social stratification, where leadership must balance empathy-driven approaches with strategic interventions designed to challenge entrenched norms (29). As such, the integration of feminist and transformational leadership perspectives contributes to a more holistic understanding of leadership in public governance.

Servant leadership, while distinct, further complements both feminist and transformational frameworks. Rooted in the ethos of serving others, servant leadership emphasizes empathy, humility, and a commitment to fostering the growth and empowerment of followers. Scholars argue that servant leadership can transform organizational cultures by prioritizing trust, collaboration, and shared responsibility (25,30). When aligned with feminist leadership, servant leadership underscores ethical and relational aspects of governance, reinforcing the importance of attentiveness to community well-being. Its alignment with transformational leadership is reflected in its ability to cultivate moral vision and promote continuous improvement within institutions. The convergence of these three frameworks offers a multifaceted lens through which political leadership can be examined and is particularly valuable in analyzing leaders operating under conditions of social inequality and cultural resistance.

In addition to these core theoretical models, literature on tragedy-driven leadership provides unique insights into how personal narratives shape political legitimacy. Scholars such as (8) highlight that leaders who publicly navigate personal tragedy often evoke strong emotional responses from constituents. Such narratives may enhance public perceptions of a leader's empathy, resilience, and authenticity. When personal loss is articulated as a shared or collective experience, it can strengthen moral legitimacy and justify leadership roles in politically challenging contexts (31). This phenomenon reflects broader trends in political communication where storytelling and emotional resonance significantly shape public evaluations of leadership. In many cultural contexts, particularly those with strong communal values, leaders who embody narratives of perseverance are perceived as more relatable and morally grounded (32). These dynamics help explain why tragedy-driven leadership narratives are effective for women leaders who must negotiate gendered expectations while seeking legitimacy in patriarchal environments.

Another critical strand of scholarship concerns media framing of women leaders in the Global South. Studies have shown that traditional media often perpetuates gender biases by framing women leaders through domestic or emotional tropes rather than professional competence (8). Such portrayals reinforce stereotypes that associate women with nurturing roles and men with authority, thereby constraining public perceptions of women's leadership capabilities. However, research also shows that favorable framings such as highlighting professional achievements or governance successes can significantly enhance women's legitimacy and credibility (31). These

findings underscore the media's dual role as both a barrier and a facilitator of gender-equitable political representation.

Beyond traditional media, digital platforms such as Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok have become central arenas for political narrative construction. Social media provides expansive opportunities for leaders and citizens to interact, renegotiate identities, and articulate alternative political narratives (8,18). (33) demonstrates that digital platforms enable rapid, iterative narrative-building processes shaped by real-time public engagement. For women leaders, these spaces allow the creation of more authentic self-representations that challenge rigid stereotypes commonly perpetuated by mainstream media. Visual-based platforms such as Instagram and TikTok are especially influential in enabling women leaders to humanize their political personas and connect with younger demographics through relatable content (34). This shift illustrates how digital political communication can democratize narrative construction and expand opportunities for women to gain legitimacy.

The role of metaphors within political communication further enriches the understanding of how leadership identities are shaped. Metaphors simplify complex political realities and evoke emotional resonance, often serving as cognitive shortcuts that influence public evaluation of leaders (20,21,35). (34) shows that metaphors such as "journey" or "struggle" are frequently employed to describe political processes, highlighting endurance and perseverance. For women leaders, metaphors often blend images of nurturing and strength, creating hybrid representations that simultaneously invoke warmth and resilience. While such metaphors can enhance public acceptance, they also risk reinforcing gender stereotypes that constrain women's authority. The dual nature of metaphoric representation underscores the need to critically analyze how symbolic language shapes leadership perceptions in specific cultural contexts.

Despite the richness of existing scholarship, significant gaps remain particularly concerning women's leadership in subnational Indonesian governance. Adekoya and (36) emphasize the scarcity of studies examining female leaders in provincial or district-level settings, especially in regions influenced by strong patriarchal norms. (37) further notes that previous research has tended to focus largely on national-level figures, overlooking the distinct challenges and opportunities faced by women in local governance spaces. These gaps highlight the need for more context-sensitive investigations that explore how women navigate cultural barriers, negotiate moral legitimacy, and enact transformational change in their communities.

This literature review demonstrates that understanding women's leadership in patriarchal sociopolitical environments requires a multidimensional analytical approach integrating feminist, transformational, and servant leadership theories with analyses of tragedy-driven narratives, media framing, and digital discourse. While this study empirically focuses on North Maluku, the leadership dynamics discussed in this review are not confined to a single geographical setting. Similar patterns of gendered leadership negotiation, moral legitimacy construction, and narrative-based authority have been documented across various sociocultural contexts, including regions in South and Southeast Asia. Accordingly, North Maluku should be understood as a representative context through which broader dynamics of women's leadership in

patriarchal and digitally mediated environments can be examined, rather than as an isolated or exceptional case.

3 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design informed by narrative analysis to investigate how female political leadership is constructed within digital public discourse. A qualitative approach is particularly suited to this research because contemporary political leadership especially female leadership in localized, patriarchal contexts is not shaped solely by formal institutional processes but is profoundly influenced by the narratives, symbols, and sociocultural meanings produced in online environments. Prior scholarship on digital political communication confirms that narrative-based methods are among the most effective tools for unpacking the complexities embedded in public interpretations of political actors, especially when such interpretations are distributed through multimodal platforms like Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok (38,39). These platforms facilitate rapid and continuous narrative formation, making them essential arenas for understanding how citizens construct, endorse, or challenge leadership identities.

While this study is empirically grounded in the context of North Maluku, the methodological approach adopted here is not confined to a single geographical or cultural setting. Female leadership in localized patriarchal contexts across different regions, including other parts of Indonesia such as East Java, is similarly shaped by gendered narratives, symbolic representations, and sociocultural meanings circulating in digital spaces. These leadership dynamics extend beyond formal institutional processes and are increasingly mediated through online public discourse. Accordingly, the qualitative narrative and multimodal analytical strategy employed in this study is designed to capture leadership construction processes that are analytically relevant across diverse regional contexts where digital media plays a central role in shaping public perceptions of women leaders.

Narrative content analysis serves as the principal analytical framework of this study due to its capacity to capture the deep structures and thematic patterns of political narratives circulating in digital spaces. (38) argues that narrative analysis is valuable for examining how political leaders craft identities, appeal to public emotions, and develop relational bonds with constituents through storytelling. In the context of female leadership, digital narratives frequently embody broader discourses surrounding gender, authority, and legitimacy. Employing narrative analysis allows this study to trace how the public frames female leadership through recurring stories, metaphors, and affective expressions. The method is used not only to examine public reactions but also to identify how gendered power dynamics are reproduced or contested within digital conversations. In this study, content analysis provides the systematic analytical structure, while narrative analysis functions as an interpretive lens to examine meaning-making processes within leadership-related digital content.

The data for this study were drawn from three major social media platforms: Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok. These platforms were selected because each contributes distinct communicative features that shape narrative construction. Twitter provides text-based, spontaneous commentary, making it an ideal site for capturing immediate public sentiment and political discussion. Instagram offers a visually oriented environment where images and captions co-construct leadership personas. TikTok, by contrast, foregrounds short-form audiovisual content, creating highly performative spaces where gestures, expressions, editing choices, and audio cues significantly influence public interpretation. Collectively, these platforms provide a rich archive of multimodal discourse that reflects the complexity of contemporary political communication surrounding female leaders.

Given this multimodality, the analysis required an expanded coding framework capable of capturing textual, visual, and audio-visual dimensions simultaneously. Following best practices suggested by (40,41), this study implemented a multimodal coding approach that addressed: (1) textual content such as captions, comments, and hashtags; (2) visual elements including facial expressions, clothing, gestures, and symbolic imagery; and (3) audio-visual features such as voice tone, background music, and editing pace. Coding these elements in parallel allowed the analysis to account for how different modalities shape and reinforce meaning, thereby offering a holistic view of leadership constructions. Analytical integration across these modalities was further strengthened by employing NVivo as a qualitative data management tool, which enabled systematic organization and thematic cross-referencing of diverse data formats.

The analytical process followed a grounded theory informed coding scheme as outlined by (42), consisting of three interconnected phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During open coding, the data were broken down into discrete units such as phrases, images, gestures, and audio cues that reflected public interpretations of leadership, gender, emotional expression, and political performance. These codes captured recurring sentiments, symbolic references, and evaluative judgments embedded in the digital content. Axial coding then connected these initial codes into broader thematic categories by examining their relationships and co-occurrences. Themes such as leadership metaphors, public sentiment (supportive and critical), gendered evaluations, and narratives of public service and empathy emerged from this stage of analysis. Finally, selective coding identified a central unifying storyline that synthesized these themes into a coherent framework explaining how digital publics construct female leadership in North Maluku. This systematic progression from granular coding to thematic integration ensured that interpretations remained grounded in the data while allowing for theoretical development.

The use of grounded theory informed coding strategies in this study is deliberate and methodological rather than exploratory. Grounded theory is employed not to generate a formal substantive theory, but as an analytical framework to structure systematic coding and category development from complex qualitative data. The open, axial, and selective coding stages enable the analysis to move progressively from fragmented narrative elements to integrated leadership themes grounded in empirical digital discourse. This strategy is particularly suitable for examining leadership construction in digital environments, where meanings emerge inductively through repeated patterns

of public narratives, symbols, and emotional expressions. By adopting grounded theory as a coding strategy rather than a full theory-building approach, this study maintains analytical rigor while remaining aligned with its narrative and interpretive research design.

Data triangulation was implemented to enhance the credibility and robustness of the findings. Triangulation involved comparing narratives across the three digital platforms, cross-referencing public discourse with media portrayals, and aligning emergent themes with existing scholarly literature on gendered political leadership (43,44). This comparative process enabled the identification of narrative consistencies such as empathetic portrayals of female leadership as well as platform-specific variations, such as the heightened visual emotionality present in TikTok videos. Triangulation mitigated the risk of platform-dependent bias and contributed to a more reliable understanding of leadership construction within the broader digital ecosystem.

The study also adhered to established standards of validity and reliability within qualitative digital research. Peer review, as recommended by (45), was incorporated to identify analytic blind spots and ensure methodological rigor. Detailed descriptions of data sources, coding procedures, and analytic decisions were documented to promote transparency and replicability. Although traditional member checking was not feasible due to the nature of publicly available digital data, interpretive reliability was maintained by comparing emergent themes with established theories and empirical findings. This approach aligns with principles of interpretive validity in narrative and digital ethnographic research.

Ethical considerations were integral to the research design, particularly given the sensitivity of analyzing publicly posted content. While data from social media platforms are publicly accessible, scholars emphasize the need for careful treatment of user-generated content to avoid unintended privacy violations (40,46). Accordingly, this study anonymized all user identifiers and refrained from reproducing verbatim comments that could compromise privacy. The research also complied with platform-specific terms of service and adhered to norms of responsible digital scholarship by maintaining transparency regarding the study's purpose and analytical procedures.

By integrating multimodal narrative analysis, grounded theory coding strategies, triangulation, and ethical safeguards, this methodology provides a comprehensive approach to understanding how female political leadership is constructed in digital public spaces. The methodological rigor applied here ensures that the study's interpretations are systematic, credible, and theoretically informed, offering nuanced insights into the narrative processes that shape leadership perceptions in a region where gender, culture, and political identity intersect in complex ways.

4 Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis conducted in this study reveals a complex and multi-layered narrative construction of Sherly Tjoanda's leadership within the digital public sphere. Across social media platforms and online news coverage, public narratives converge to

produce a hybridized leadership identity that blends elements of servant leadership, authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and a distinct form of continuity-driven leadership shaped by personal tragedy. These thematic strands do not operate in isolation; rather, they intertwine to form a coherent leadership narrative that resonates strongly within the socio-cultural context of North Maluku. The results demonstrate how public discourse simultaneously reflects and reshapes gendered expectations of political leadership, particularly in regions historically structured by patriarchal norms.

To contextualize the findings, the distribution of coding categories is presented through a descriptive overview. The analysis generated a total of 399 coding units that were classified into six dominant thematic clusters. These include servant leadership (28 percent), authentic leadership (17 percent), transformational leadership (13 percent), continuity-driven tragedy branding (19 percent), public metaphors (14 percent), and overall sentiment (9 percent). The following table summarizes these distributions:

Table 1. Distribution of Major Coding Themes

Main Theme	Subthemes	Number of Codes	Percentage
Servant Leadership	Grassroots service, empathy, direct presence	112	28%
Authentic Leadership	Transparency, sincerity, morality	68	17%
Transformational Leadership	Bureaucratic reform, change vision	52	13%
Continuity - Tragedy Branding	Moral mandate, grief-based legitimacy	74	19%
Public Metaphors	Maternal, heroic, stigma-breaking imagery	56	14%
Public Sentiment	Praise and criticism	37	9%
Total		**399**	**100%**

This distribution indicates that public narration is most strongly anchored in themes of service and empathy, confirming that Sherly's leadership is largely understood through the lens of her engagement with local communities. Public discourse frequently highlights her physical presence among citizens, her willingness to listen, and her efforts to address issues without distancing herself behind bureaucratic layers. These representations align with theoretical discussions that emphasize the effectiveness of servant leadership in public governance contexts, particularly in building trust and fostering community-oriented legitimacy (47,48). The prevalence of this theme

suggests that in contexts where political disillusionment is high, the performance of accessibility and direct service becomes a crucial marker of legitimacy.

Authentic leadership emerges as the second major theme, reflecting how public audiences perceive Sherly's sincerity, emotional expression, and moral character. Her authenticity is repeatedly emphasized in online discussions, with users noting her transparent communication style and apparent genuine concern for the community. This emphasis resonates strongly in collectivist cultural settings where emotional openness and moral clarity are deeply valued (49). However, the literature also notes that female leaders in patriarchal societies often encounter skepticism when they exhibit assertiveness or authority (50). The positive reception of Sherly's authentic leadership thus indicates a possible shift in gendered expectations within North Maluku, suggesting that traits like empathy and sincerity may help mitigate bias and broaden public acceptance of female authority.

The analysis further demonstrates that elements of transformational leadership are woven into public narratives surrounding Sherly. Although not as dominant as servant or authentic leadership, references to bureaucratic reform, strategic decision-making, and forward-looking vision appear with notable frequency. The public often associates her decisions with efforts to streamline governance, reduce administrative burdens, and address long-standing infrastructural issues. These descriptions align with the four components of transformational leadership idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (28,29). They reveal a perception of Sherly not merely as a compassionate leader but as a pragmatic reformer capable of initiating structural change. The combination of emotional engagement and strategic transformation produces a compelling image of leadership that responds simultaneously to the community's affective and administrative needs.

One of the most compelling findings concerns the emergence of continuity-driven leadership, a narrative uniquely shaped by Sherly's personal tragedy. Many comments and media portrayals emphasize her role in continuing the legacy of her late husband, framing her leadership as a moral duty rather than a conventional political ascension. The thematic cluster representing this narrative accounts for 19 percent of the coded data, signifying its substantial influence on public interpretation. Research has shown that personal tragedy when communicated effectively can enhance emotional resonance between leaders and constituents, thereby reinforcing perceptions of moral legitimacy (51,52). Emotional narratives are particularly potent in sociocultural contexts such as North Maluku, where shared suffering and collective experiences form the basis of community identity.

In this case, tragedy operates as a symbolic asset that bridges the personal and political. Public discourse positions Sherly as a custodian of unfinished work, a leader morally guided by a commitment to honor the legacy of her husband. This continuity-driven narrative reinforces public empathy and produces a unique moral framing of her leadership, distinguishing her from predecessors whose legitimacy was rooted in traditional patriarchal authority. Literature on continuity in political leadership underscores the power of lineage and emotional legacy in legitimizing leadership roles, especially in cultures shaped by tradition and familial respect (53). Sherly's narrative

exemplifies how personal history can be woven into political identity and transformed into a powerful narrative of resilience and moral rightfulness.

Another layer of narrative construction emerges from the metaphors used by the public to describe Sherly. Metaphors such as “Mother of Maluku,” “Wonder Woman,” and “a new Kartini” circulate widely in digital spaces. These metaphors reveal how symbolic language is employed to articulate complex leadership qualities and gendered expectations. Cognitive linguistic studies demonstrate that metaphors facilitate emotional connection by translating abstract qualities into familiar cultural and social imagery (20,21,35). The metaphors used to describe Sherly tend to blend traditionally feminine attributes of care and warmth with masculine-associated traits of bravery and decisiveness. This hybrid imagery reflects an attempt to reconcile gendered expectations within a society where leadership has long been coded as masculine.

The maternal metaphors often emphasize protection, nurturance, and moral virtue, aligning with longstanding cultural ideals of womanhood. Conversely, the heroic metaphors invoke images of strength, resilience, and extraordinary capability. The coexistence of these metaphorical frames indicates an evolving public narrative that recognizes the multidimensionality of female leadership. These findings echo insights from (51) meta-analysis, which suggests that hybrid metaphors may help expand public acceptance of women in leadership roles by framing them as simultaneously competent and caring.

Social media platforms play a significant role in amplifying and circulating these narratives. The multimodal nature of Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok shapes the distinct ways in which Sherly’s leadership identity is constructed. Twitter conversations often feature critical discussions, spontaneous reactions, and political commentary, reflecting the platform’s function as a textual forum for public deliberation. Instagram posts highlight visual portrayals of Sherly’s interactions with the community, emphasizing accessibility, composure, and emotional presence. Meanwhile, TikTok’s short-form video format encourages performative displays of leadership, with user-generated content contributing to viral representations of Sherly’s persona. These multimodal interactions illustrate the increasingly participatory nature of digital political communication, where identity is not simply presented by leaders but co-created through public engagement (54,55).

The emotional responses expressed through likes, comments, and shares further reinforce this dynamic. Visual and affective cues such as Sherly’s expressions of empathy during community visits frequently receive high engagement, underscoring the role of emotional resonance in shaping leadership perceptions. This aligns with (56), observations on the significance of visual emotionality in political communication and findings regarding the influence of emotive digital content on public evaluation of political actors. These multimodal responses illustrate how leadership identity becomes embedded not only in what political figures do, but also in how digital audiences feel about what they see.

Despite the dominance of positive narratives, the analysis also reveals a strand of critical discourse. Some users question the authenticity of Sherly’s service-oriented actions, interpreting them as political branding or temporary performance. Others express doubts regarding the sustainability of her transformative agenda. These

critiques correspond with broader research on women leaders in Southeast Asia, where public support is often accompanied by underlying skepticism rooted in gender bias (57). Several comments reflect overt gendered criticism, suggesting that perceptions of leadership success remain entangled with patriarchal assumptions about women's capabilities. Such findings are consistent with earlier work by (58,59) who argue that women leaders are frequently subjected to double standards, with their authority questioned irrespective of their performance.

Nonetheless, many critical comments focus on substantive governance concerns, such as demands for deeper bureaucratic reform or improved public services. This indicates that public expectations extend beyond emotional engagement to include measurable governance outcomes. The coexistence of affective support and pragmatic evaluation suggests that digital publics are capable of both personal and policy-oriented assessments. (60) highlight that while emotional narratives may initially bolster legitimacy, sustained public trust requires tangible performance an observation supported by this study's findings.

A notable dimension of Sherly's leadership narrative is the recurrent emphasis on soft power. Her leadership style is frequently described as firm yet non-authoritarian, decisive yet compassionate. This soft power approach appears to resonate strongly within the public sphere. Scholars note that women leaders often rely on relational influence and empathetic engagement to navigate male-dominated political environments (61,62). Sherly's visible engagement in community service, her calm demeanor during public appearances, and her non-confrontational decision-making style constitute instances of soft power that enhance her political legitimacy. The public's response to such gestures suggests that soft power may function as both a gendered expectation and a strategic advantage for women leaders in patriarchal contexts.

The findings collectively indicate strong alignment with existing theoretical frameworks on gendered leadership, hybrid leadership models, and digital political communication. The hybridized narrative combining servant, authentic, and transformational leadership traits reflects broader academic discussions on leadership models that emphasize adaptability, emotional intelligence, and reformist vision (47,53). Similarly, the prevalence of tragedy-based legitimacy aligns with theoretical explanations of how emotional narratives shape political identity and public trust. The use of gendered metaphors is consistent with cognitive linguistic theories, while the influence of social media in constructing leadership identity supports current scholarship on digital politics and participatory media ecosystems.

In summary, the qualitative findings show that Sherly Tjoanda's leadership is constructed through a rich interplay of service-oriented actions, emotional authenticity, transformative aspirations, and personal tragedy. These elements are reinforced by symbolic metaphors and multimodal digital interactions, creating a multifaceted leadership identity that resonates within a region marked by patriarchal traditions and governance challenges. Public perceptions reveal both admiration and skepticism, demonstrating that female leadership in North Maluku is evaluated through a nuanced prism that includes emotional, symbolic, and performance-based criteria. This study contributes to broader theoretical and empirical debates on gender and leadership by

showing how hybrid leadership identities can emerge organically through digital narratives and how such identities reflect deeper sociopolitical dynamics in culturally complex regions.

5 Conclusion

This study set out to examine how the leadership of Sherly Tjoanda, a female political figure in North Maluku, is constructed through digital public narratives and multimodal discourse across social media platforms. Through qualitative narrative analysis supported by grounded theory coding strategies, the research uncovered a multidimensional leadership identity shaped by the interplay of servant leadership, authentic leadership, transformational leadership, and continuity-driven leadership rooted in personal tragedy. These elements coalesce within a sociocultural environment historically dominated by patriarchal leadership norms, revealing how digital publics negotiate and reinterpret gender, authority, and legitimacy in real time.

From a leadership perspective, this multidimensional configuration should be understood as more than a combination of leadership styles. Leadership in this study is positioned as a socially constructed process through which authority and legitimacy are continuously negotiated within digital public spaces. Rather than being derived solely from formal political office, leadership emerges through relational engagement, emotional resonance, and symbolic meaning-making involving both the leader and digital publics. By conceptualizing leadership in this way, the study clarifies that leadership stands as a dynamic and interpretive process, shaped by interaction, narrative circulation, and public recognition, particularly within patriarchal and digitally mediated sociopolitical contexts.

The findings indicate that servant leadership forms the most prominent narrative in public discourse, reflecting widespread appreciation for Sherly's direct involvement in community life and her responsiveness to everyday concerns. This theme dovetails with perceptions of authentic leadership, where emotional sincerity, transparency, and moral clarity are recognized as central to her public persona. Together, these two frameworks provide an alternative model of leadership that contrasts sharply with the masculine, hierarchical political styles traditionally associated with North Maluku. The data show that Sherly's compassionate and relational approach resonates deeply with communities seeking accessible and empathetic governance.

Transformational leadership also emerges within the narrative constellation, albeit less frequently than the preceding themes. Public discussions referencing bureaucratic reform, visionary thinking, and structural improvements highlight perceptions of Sherly as a reform-minded leader capable of addressing longstanding governance challenges. This suggests that her leadership is not understood solely through emotional or moral dimensions but also through her strategic efforts to modernize local administration. The integration of servant, authentic, and transformational traits reveals a hybrid leadership model that aligns with emerging scholarly frameworks emphasizing adaptability, emotional intelligence, and reform-oriented action in complex political environments.

A distinctive dimension of Sherly's leadership identity and one that carries significant emotional weight in public discourse is continuity-driven leadership. Her trajectory into office following personal tragedy has become a central narrative lens through which constituents interpret her moral legitimacy. Public expressions of empathy, references to continuing her late husband's mission, and symbolic portrayals of resilience demonstrate how tragedy is transformed into political meaning. This narrative dynamic reinforces the notion that emotional resonance and shared hardship can strengthen leadership legitimacy, particularly in collectivist cultural settings.

Public metaphors further shape Sherly's leadership identity by blending maternal imagery with heroic symbolism. Descriptions such as "Mother of Maluku," "protector," or "Wonder Woman" communicate expectations that female leaders must embody both care and strength. These metaphorical constructions illuminate how gendered narratives persist even as they evolve, suggesting both opportunities and constraints for women in politics. While such metaphors may facilitate acceptance of female leadership, they also risk narrowing public expectations by framing women in essentialist ways.

Despite predominantly positive portrayals, the analysis also reveals critical voices expressed across platforms. Some individuals question the authenticity of Sherly's service-oriented actions, while others critique the pace of bureaucratic reform or raise concerns about her long-term strategic capacity. These responses underscore that public legitimacy is contingent and multifaceted. Emotional appeal may generate initial support, but sustained legitimacy requires consistent and demonstrable governance outcomes. Moreover, several criticisms exhibit gendered undertones, reflecting entrenched patriarchal attitudes that continue to shape perceptions of female leadership.

The study's findings contribute to broader discussions in gender studies, public administration, and digital political communication by demonstrating how leadership identities are co-produced through multimodal interactions between leaders and the public. They also show how female leaders navigate patriarchal structures by combining emotional connection, symbolic representation, and administrative reform. In this sense, Sherly Tjoanda's leadership illustrates how women can leverage hybrid leadership styles to build legitimacy within challenging sociocultural contexts.

However, the study is not without limitations. First, the analysis is restricted to publicly accessible digital content, which may disproportionately capture the voices of individuals with greater digital access or familiarity with social media platforms. As such, offline perspectives, especially from rural or digitally marginalized communities, are not fully represented. Second, narrative interpretations are constrained by the nature of multimodal data, where meaning is often context-dependent and influenced by platform-specific norms and algorithms. Third, the study focuses on a single political figure, limiting generalizability to other regions or leadership contexts within Indonesia. Future research would benefit from cross-case comparisons to determine whether similar narrative patterns emerge among other female leaders in Eastern Indonesia or across varying political environments.

Several recommendations arise from these limitations. Researchers should consider incorporating mixed method approaches that include interviews, focus groups, or ethnographic observation to triangulate digital narratives with offline perceptions.

Comparative studies across regions could illuminate how local cultures mediate narrative constructions of female leadership. Additionally, a longitudinal research design would capture how leadership narratives evolve over time, particularly in response to policy outcomes, political events, or shifts in public sentiment.

In conclusion, this research highlights the vital role of digital narratives in shaping contemporary political leadership, particularly for women navigating patriarchal cultural landscapes. Through its identification of hybrid leadership themes, tragedy-based legitimacy, symbolic metaphorical constructions, and the interplay of emotional and critical discourse, the study offers a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical forces that construct female leadership in North Maluku. The findings underscore the need for more nuanced, context-sensitive analyses of gender and politics, as well as the importance of promoting inclusive narratives that support women's continued participation and leadership in public governance.

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