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Women's Leadership Public Sector Digital Transformation: Roles, Barriers, And Success Factors

[1]Lathifah Aulia Rahmah, [2]Weni Rosdiana, [3]Firre An Suprapto
[123]Master of Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Science, State University of Surabaya

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ABSTRACT
Digital transformation will facilitate access in every field. One such area is women's leadership, which remains fragmented. This study aims to identify the roles, barriers, and success factors of women leaders in the digital era within the public sector. The method used in this study is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following the PRISMA guidelines. The data used were drawn from scientific articles published between 2021 and 2026, collected from Google Scholar, Scopus, and DOAJ. The results of the study indicate that women leaders are capable of defining clear visions and missions, building trust, and fostering collaboration in the digital age. The main barriers include patriarchal norms, the digital access gap, and the burden of dual roles in both the workplace and the household. Success factors stem from moral and emotional intelligence, adaptability, and the ability to lead an organization collaboratively.

ABSTRACT
Transformasi digital akan mempermudah akses dalam setiap bidang. Salah satunya yaitu mengenai Kepemimpinan perempuan masih terfragmentasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi peran, hambatan dan faktor keberhasilan pemimpin perempuan di Era Digital dalam sektor publik. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah SLR (Systematic Literature Review) dengan pedomen PRISMA. Data yang digunakan berasal dari artikel ilmiah yang terbit pada tahun 2021-2026 yang dikumpulan dari Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pemimpin perempuan dapat menentukan visi dan misi yang jelas, membangun kepercayaan, serta kolaboratif di era digital ini. Hambatan utama yaitu karena adanya norma patriarki, kesenjangan akses digital dan beban peran ganda dalam bidang pekerjaan dan rumah tangga. Faktor keberhasilan muncul karena adanya kecerdasan moral dan emosional, kemampuan beradaptasi serta kolaboratif dalam memimpin suatu organisasi.

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has made digital transformation an undeniable priority. Digital transformation can generally be defined as a radical process occurring within an organization that involves the utilization of technology, human resources, and business processes, resulting in a drastic change in the organization's business performance (Hadiono & Santi, 2020). This transformation has brought about significant changes in the way we interact with one another and with the world around us (Dwi Oktareza, Andreyan Noor, Erliyando Saputra, & Aulia Vivi Yulianingrum, 2024).

Digital transformation is also taking place in the public sector. In Indonesia, the government has provided a framework for the development of an Electronic-Based Government System through Presidential Regulation No. 95 of 2018, which emphasizes the realization of clean, effective, and accountable governance, as well as high-quality services, through the use of electronic-based government. Digital transformation in the public sector involves new ways of collaborating with stakeholders, establishing new frameworks for service delivery, and fostering new forms of relationships (Mergel, Edelmann, & Haug, 2019). Therefore, digitization will contribute to improving service quality and accessibility while strengthening the relationship

*Corresponding Author
e-mail: lathifah.23006@mhs.unesa.ac.id

between the government and its citizens. Changes in service delivery have been analyzed primarily under the term "e-government" (Mergel et al., 2019,).

Running e-government requires a leader to manage and carry out tasks. Leadership is essential in determining the direction and shaping the culture of an organization (Tamba, 2025). Studies in the public sector show that leadership, organizational culture, and change management are critical to the adoption or abandonment of digital initiatives (Mergel et al., 2019). Therefore, the vision and mission of an organization and the public sector can be clear. The question of who leads and how they lead is key to understanding why one organization is more successful than another.

Gender is an issue that has not yet received systematic attention. Gender gaps remain a serious concern in terms of access to digital resources and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy (Shava & Muringa, 2025). In principle, gender differences would not be a problem if there were no unfair treatment. The realities of inequality experienced by women seem to have become a culture and tradition that has permeated various aspects of society, including the workplace—such as in the economic, social, political, and educational spheres (Malihah, Zabidi, Atkia, Apifah, & Haryanti, 2024). The patriarchal culture that remains ingrained in society is often cited as a factor that limits women and undermines gender equality, particularly in leadership roles (Malihah et al., 2024). Women—particularly those in public sector roles—continue to be marginalized in both the implementation of policies and the distribution of benefits (Shava & Muringa, 2025).

Although relevant, evidence of women's leadership in the digital transformation of the public sector remains fragmented. Existing reviews have only addressed digital transformation from a gender-neutral perspective or women's leadership within the context of digital transformation. To the best of our knowledge that explains both of these perspectives within public administration.

Taken together, these studies examining leadership in the context of the "glass ceiling" phenomenon among senior leadership positions in Kendari City (Yusuf & Rintaka, 2025) and a study on gender mainstreaming in the recruitment and promotion of structural positions (Jannah, Putri Marzaniar, & Muazzinah, 2025)indicate that women's access to the bureaucracy remains an issue. Reviews of leadership in digital transformation in the public sector have generally mapped out roles, factors, successes, and barriers, but without a gender lens (Harsya, Firmansyah, Napitupulu, & Hutagaol, 2026). From a digital perspective, Susarianto (2024) examines the role of digital leadership in the digital transformation of the public sector, while (Putri & Rony, 2026) discuss the impact of recruitment on employee performance using artificial intelligence in the public sector. A systematic review of the literature reveals that these studies address gender and digitalization separately.

This article aims to fill that gap. Theoretically, this article synthesizes findings scattered across several frameworks regarding roles, barriers, and success factors. Practically, this article will provide guidance for human resource policies in the public sector regarding leadership programs that support women in digital transformation. This review is guided by several research questions:

RQ 1. What is the role of women leaders in digital transformation?

RQ 2. What barriers do women leaders face in digital transformation?

RQ 3. What factors contribute to the success of women leaders in digital transformation?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to conduct a systematic and comprehensive synthesis of the literature, ensuring predictability and freedom from subjective selection bias. This literature review is used to synthesize existing evidence on digital leadership in the digital transformation of the public sector.

The document selection process followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and reproducibility. The selection process was divided into several stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion(Ardana, Akbar, & Martadireja, 2025).

Data sources and search strategies for primary data—specifically scientific articles—were conducted systematically via the Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ database on November 2, 2026. This platform was selected due to its coverage of public administration journals under the publish or perish software, using the keywords "women's leadership," "digital transformation," and "public sector" for the years 2021–2026.

The selection criteria used for data collection are as follows:

1. Peer-reviewed journal articles.
2. Published between 2021 and 2026.
3. They discuss women's leadership, digital transformation, or digital leadership, within the context of the public sector or government.
4. They are available in Indonesian and English.
5. Articles are excluded if they are news stories, opinion pieces, non-academic publications, or duplicates.

A step-by-step breakdown of the research process in the following section

1. Identified a relevant database (Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ) using a combination of keywords and retrieved 129 articles.
2. Removed duplicates using a reference management application (Mendeley or Zotero), resulting in 80 articles.
3. Screened titles and abstracts based on the criteria (33 articles).
4. The remaining full-text articles were assessed for suitability.
5. The final studies were included in the synthesis (12 articles).

Data analysis for each article was conducted by recording the authors and year, research context, methods, and key findings. The findings were synthesized thematically and coded into three themes in accordance with the research questions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 maps the twelve studies synthesized in this section by context and by how directly their evidence addresses the research questions.

Table 1. Studies Synthesized, their context, and the directness of their evidence

No	Study	Context and design	Directness of evidence	RQ
1	Purnamasari (2019)	Conceptual Study of women's leadership in Indonesia form Feminist perspective	Indirect (gender, conceptual, predates the search window)	RQ3
2	Kahanna (2021)	The Effectiveness of Women's Leadership in the Digital Era	Direct (gender and digital)	RQ1, RQ3

3	Da Meisa & Anzari (2021)	A Feminist Perspective on Women's Leadership in Indonesia	Indirect (gender, conceptual)	RQ2
4	Kurniasih (2023)	Women's Empowerment in the Digital Age: Smart and Digitally Literate Mothers	Direct (gender an digital, small, not an empirical study of leaders)	RQ2
5	Safhira et al. (2025)	Study the challenges and opportunities of women's leadership from the perspective of islamic low	Indirect (gender, normative)	RQ 1 RQ 2
6	Retno Wulandari & Ahmad (2025)	Normative legal research on women's leadership policy indigital age, with a comparison to Malaysia	Direct (gender an digital, small, not an empirical study leaders)	RQ2
7	Rohmah et al. (2025)	Case study of a female village head's transformational leadership in Kauman Village, Bojonegoro	Indirect (gender, no digital focus)	RQ1
8	Saputri (2025)	Library research on female leadership in Islam and its relevance to modern economic context	Indirect (gender, normative)	RQ1
9	Sava & Muringa (2025)	Systematic literature review on women's digital empowerment in the South Africa Public Sector	Direct (gender, digital and public sector)	RQ2
10	Anggraeni (2025)	Qualitative evaluation of Mayor Airin Rachmi Diany's leadership (2016-2021) an employee performance in South Tangerang	Indirect (gender case, no digital focus)	RQ3
11	Makbul (2025)	Best Practice of regional head leadership in the digital era	Indirect (digital, gender nor analyzed)	RQ1
12	Ayu & Anjani (2026)	Women's political participation an parliamentary representation in Indonesia	Indirect (gender, political rather than administrative)	RQ3

Four studies address women's leadership and digitalization together, and only one of them concerns the public sector (Shava & Muringa, 2025). Seven address women's leadership without a digital focus, and one address leadership in the digital era without gender analysis. Because of this imbalance, the findings below are labelled by the directness of their evidence, and claims about digital transformation are made cautiously.

The Role of Woman Leaders in the Digital Age

Women leaders can establish a clear vision and mission to guide an organization. A review of the existing literature—specifically in Kauman Village, Bojonegoro Subdistrict, Bojonegoro Regency—shows that the village leader, by setting a good example, built trust among villagers, which led to increased community participation in various village programs (Rohmah, Huda, & Lukito, 2025). Other findings also indicate that women's leadership is positively correlated with better oversight and social responsiveness in economic decision-making, thereby improving the quality of governance and socioeconomic well-being (Saputri, 2025). Women's leadership, which tends to be participatory and collaborative, has the potential to make a significant contribution

to managerial innovation, social balance, and the quality of sustainable economic policies (Shafira, Maryam, & Kurniati, 2024). Based on these studies, women leaders can serve as positive role models in building organizational trust, particularly in the public sector. Women leaders can provide effective responses and make informed decisions regarding governance within the socioeconomic sphere.

Furthermore, leaders need to possess a transformational leadership style. Transformational leadership is capable of fostering the creation of creative and innovative ideas and motivating every individual within the organization (Makbul, 2025). Thus, transformational leadership is closely tied to a leader's capacity for innovation. Innovation can serve as a driving force for an organization, enabling it to continuously renew, improve, and develop for the better. Additionally, a good leader is one who is capable of adopting a collaborative approach by fostering regular collaboration to create sustainable conditions (Kahanna, 2021).

Leadership in the digital age empowers transformational leaders in decision-making. Kahanna states that the essential skill is the ability to explore and navigate all technology-based situations (Kahanna, 2021). Additionally, a leader must have a strong command of technology so they can serve as a role model for their team and effectively address all organizational considerations. Digital advancements make it easier for leaders to communicate effectively through platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom meetings, and others. This fosters active and open communication.

Digitalization has also driven innovation in government operations, as detailed in the journal Best Practices in Local Leadership in the Digital Age, which explains that Surabaya's leader, Tri Rismaharini, pioneered the Government Resources Management System (GRMS) and a mobile smart application—the first of their kind in Indonesia (Makbul, 2025). These innovations have positioned the city of Surabaya as a leader in digitalization and e-government. This demonstrates that female leaders can drive change and development in the public sector.

Barriers

Although there has been progress in challenging the stereotype that women are only suited for domestic roles, many people still believe that a woman's primary role is that of a homemaker, thereby hindering their participation in the workforce and in leadership positions. A social construct in society that still assigns women a dual role—that of a worker and that of a homemaker—means that society's focus on a woman's dual role gives rise to serious assumptions regarding her status within the family (Da Meisa & Anzari, 2021). Another study explains that women find it difficult to maintain a balance between work and life due to the demands of both their professional responsibilities and household duties. Furthermore, women in leadership roles are expected to focus on professional matters without neglecting their traditional household obligations. This imbalance can lead to negative consequences such as increased stress, exhaustion, and even the decision to leave the workforce early (Retno Wulandari & Ahmad, 2025).

Socioeconomic factors also pose challenges to women's digital access. Female digital users account for 48.81%, while male internet users account for 51.19% (Kurniasih, 2023). These figures reveal a digital user gap that prevents some women from fully maximizing their leadership potential. Women's empowerment in the digital age is not only about how women can capitalize on business opportunities in the digital space, but also about how they can optimize their potential to make the best decisions in their lives, how they can establish a strong bargaining position, and how they can contribute positive energy to building themselves, their families, their immediate communities, and society at large by leveraging information and communication technology (Kurniasih, 2023). Thus, it is evident that women have not yet fully achieved digital literacy.

In addition, the obstacles and challenges faced by women in leadership roles in the digital age include double standards, physical violence, and cyber violence. Violence against women in the digital world is not limited to Indonesia; it also occurs in other countries. As explained in the journal *Women's Empowerment in the Digital Age: Smart and Digitally Literate Mothers*, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW-67) emphasized the importance of digital participation in women's and children's leadership as a form of innovation, connectivity, and digital literacy for women, and condemned the prevalence of online and offline harassment, and discrimination against children and girls (Kurniasih, 2023)

Factor of Success

The advancement of women's leadership must certainly continue to be championed by fostering a commitment to women's empowerment and personal development so that they can play an active role across all social strata—an issue that must be consistently addressed. Studies show that leaders require emotional intelligence—a combination of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management skills—which is considered essential for supporting an individual's success(Purnamasari, 2016). Additionally, moral intelligence is a key factor for leaders in achieving success. Moral intelligence is the ability to distinguish between right and wrong as defined by universal principles (Purnamasari, 2016)The journal article *The Effectiveness of Women's Leadership in the Digital Era* demonstrates that women have proven effective leaders by demonstrating responsibility and adaptability in facing various challenges without neglecting their social role(Kahanna, 2021).

Compared to men, women tend to be more patient, gentle, empathetic, and able to handle multiple tasks at once; women possess the ability to multitask while maintaining the same level of concentration, unlike men, who tend to tackle complex problems and resolve them one at a time (Shafira et al., 2024). A literature review by Mutia Kahanna notes that women possess skills related to professionalism and work ethic; these abilities enable them to build networks and collaborate effectively—both verbally and in writing—and to think critically about all matters (Kahanna, 2021). A study conducted by Anisa Anggraeni and Dewi Erowati in the journal Evaluation of Airin Rachmi Diany's Leadership (2016–2021) on Employee Performance Effectiveness at the South Tangerang Mayor's Office indicates that the leadership of Airin Rachmi Diany—who has served for 10 years—has demonstrated success in the human development index, economic growth, life expectancy, income, and average years of education. Her transformational leadership style involves motivating employees, fostering open communication and coordination, and instilling work discipline among staff. In this way, Airin Rachmi Diany demonstrates the necessity of transformational leadership in addressing complex challenges within public sector organizations. As a leader, she actively exercises oversight and ensures that all work units collaborate effectively to achieve their targets.

In this digital age, women's leadership is also shaped by the role of social media. Through platforms such as Instagram, X (Twitter), and TikTok, women can now build their political image, expand their support networks, and raise awareness of gender equality issues on a broader scale (Ayu & Anjani, 2026) . Through these digital media, leaders can provide information directly to the public without the need for convoluted bureaucratic processes. The use of social media provides open access to the public. Furthermore, women leaders can expand access and flexibility by cutting through bureaucracy, as well as expanding and managing their networks.

CONCLUSION

The literature review conducted shows that women leaders play a crucial role in digital transformation. Women leaders can establish a clear vision and mission by building trust and

fostering collaborative participation. They can also drive technology-based innovation in governance, among other areas.

Barriers to women's leadership include the prevalence of patriarchal norms and the double burden of work and household responsibilities. Gender gaps arise from unequal access to digital resources, as well as from the prevalence of cyberviolence against women in the digital age.

The success of women's leadership depends on both personal abilities and the environment. This includes emotional and moral intelligence, adaptability, professionalism, and networking skills. A transformational leadership style is key to success, as it allows leaders to adapt to changing conditions and environments. Social media serves as a catalyst that enables women leaders to reach out to the public.

RECOMMENDATION

One recommendation is to expand leadership programs for women that cover digital leadership and the use of technology in public communication. This would allow for the integration of a gender perspective into recruitment, promotion, and planning. In addition, it is necessary to provide work arrangements that support flexibility for women in order to reduce their double burden. Another recommendation is the need for mechanisms to protect women from cyber threats and harassment in the digital age.

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