

Motivation of Women Leaders in Digital Economy

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of the digital economy has created new opportunities for women to participate in entrepreneurship, innovation, and leadership. However, women's participation in digital environments remains influenced by motivational, technological, organizational, and socio-cultural factors. This study aims to systematically review the factors that motivate women to participate in leadership and economic activities within the digital economy, while identifying contextual influences and research gaps. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted using Scopus, PubMed, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Following the PRISMA-based selection process, 15 studies were included for thematic analysis. The findings indicate that women's motivation is multidimensional, involving intrinsic factors such as autonomy and self-development, extrinsic factors such as income and career opportunities, and social-contextual factors including organizational support, digital access, and social networks. Digital competence and technological access further influence women's ability to translate motivation into sustained participation and leadership. The study highlights the importance of an integrated digital leadership ecosystem that supports women through digital skills development, inclusive organizational practices, mentoring, and improved access to technological and economic opportunities.

Keywords: *Motivation, Leadership Behaviour, Systematic Literature Review (SLR), Women Leadership*

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1. | INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving digital economy, technological change is reshaping how organizations create value, coordinate work, and exercise leadership. Digital transformation requires leaders to combine strategic vision, innovation, adaptability, networking, and employee support because organizational change increasingly occurs through technology-enabled and flexible work environments (Weber et al., 2022). From a gender perspective, the digital economy creates new opportunities for women to participate in entrepreneurship, innovation, and leadership, but digitalization does not automatically remove structural and cultural inequalities (Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell, 2021; Franzke et al., 2022).

Women's motivation to enter and sustain leadership roles is multidimensional. Previous research distinguishes between necessity- and opportunity-based motives, with autonomy, self-fulfilment, financial aspirations, recognition, and the desire to address social problems appearing as important drivers of women's entrepreneurial activity (Rosca et al., 2020; Lingappa & Rodrigues, 2023). Research in Indonesia likewise indicates that psychological factors and the distinction between necessity- and growth-oriented motives are relevant to women's entrepreneurial development (Riantoputra & Muis, 2020). In the digital context, motivation is also connected with access to technology, digital skills, and the ability to use online platforms to create business opportunities. Studies show that ICT skills can support entrepreneurial intentions (Shukla et al., 2021), while participation in digital platforms can expand women's technological engagement, although gender gaps remain in activities requiring advanced technical capabilities (Kang, 2022).

The digital environment may therefore strengthen women's agency while simultaneously exposing persistent barriers. Women entrepreneurs use digital technologies to create social and economic opportunities, but their experiences remain shaped by individual, social, and structural conditions (Suseno, 2021). Digital technologies and internet use can also support women's economic participation and generate wider benefits for households and communities (Kusumawardhani et al., 2022). In addition, research on Asian women entrepreneurs shows that cultural values, resource constraints, family responsibilities, and institutional conditions influence entrepreneurial intentions and leadership practices (Franzke et al., 2022). These findings suggest that women's motivation cannot be understood solely as an individual psychological characteristic; it needs to be examined in relation to technological, organizational, and socio-cultural contexts.

Recent empirical evidence further links women's participation in leadership with digital transformation and innovation. Female executives have been found to be positively associated with corporate digital transformation, partly through greater research and development intensity (Qian, 2024), while women operating online businesses may respond differently to push and pull motivations in relation to financial and non-financial performance (Li & Sanusi, 2023). Similarly, women entrepreneurs in

Bandung identify autonomy, income, and market opportunities as important motivations, while digital and marketing skills remain major challenges (Putri & Shodiq, 2024). At the organizational level, leadership behavior can influence intrinsic motivation and creativity, indicating the importance of supportive leadership environments for innovative work (Zhang & Liu, 2022).

Although existing studies provide valuable evidence on women's entrepreneurship, digital participation, and leadership, the literature remains fragmented across psychological motivation, digital capability, organizational support, and social context. Systematic research on the digital economy also indicates the need to integrate gender, technology, motivation, and institutional perspectives when examining women's participation in digital environments (Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell, 2021; Ristanović et al., 2024). Therefore, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine the factors motivating women to become and remain leaders in the digital economy. Specifically, it identifies intrinsic, extrinsic, and social motivations; examines how technological, organizational, and cultural contexts shape these motivations; and identifies gaps for future research. By integrating these dimensions, the study aims to provide a more coherent understanding of women's digital leadership motivation and its implications for inclusive and sustainable participation in the digital economy.

2. | LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation

Motivation refers to the internal and external forces that initiate, direct, and sustain individual behavior toward particular goals. In the context of women's entrepreneurship and leadership, motivation is multidimensional because individual aspirations interact with economic, organizational, technological, and socio-cultural conditions. Recent research distinguishes between necessity-based (push) and opportunity-based (pull) motivation. Necessity motivation is associated with financial needs, limited employment alternatives, family circumstances, or other pressures, whereas opportunity motivation includes autonomy, achievement, income aspirations, market opportunities, and self-development (Lingappa & Rodrigues, 2023). This distinction is particularly relevant in developing economies, where motivational patterns can differ according to institutional and socio-cultural conditions.

Digitalization adds another dimension to women's motivation. Access to digital technologies and online platforms can expand opportunities for entrepreneurship, market participation, and independent economic activity. Shukla et al. (2021) highlight the role of ICT in supporting digital entrepreneurship among women, while Suseno (2021) shows that digital technologies can facilitate women's social innovation and entrepreneurial activities. In Indonesia, Putri and Shodiq (2024) found that autonomy, higher income, and broader market opportunities were important motivations for women entrepreneurs, while digital and marketing skills remained significant challenges.

Thus, motivation in the digital economy can be understood as the interaction of intrinsic factors such as autonomy and self-development, extrinsic factors such as income and career opportunities, and contextual factors such as technology access, social support, and market conditions. This multidimensional perspective provides a foundation for examining why women pursue leadership and entrepreneurial roles in increasingly digital environments.

Women's Digital Leadership

Women's digital leadership refers to women's capacity to lead organizations, businesses, communities, and digital initiatives through the effective use of technology, strategic decision-making, innovation, networking, and adaptive capabilities. Digital leadership should therefore not be understood solely in terms of formal managerial positions, but also in relation to women's ability to participate in and influence technology-enabled economic and organizational activities.

The digital economy provides new opportunities for women's participation while also reproducing some existing gender inequalities. A systematic review by Grau-Sarabia and Fuster-Morell (2021) demonstrates that gender remains an important analytical dimension in digital-economy research, particularly regarding participation, work arrangements, access, and inequalities. Digital platforms can expand women's opportunities to develop businesses and reach wider markets, although differences in digital capabilities and access to resources may constrain participation (Shukla et al., 2021; Suseno, 2021).

Women's leadership is also relevant to organizational digital transformation. Qian (2024), using evidence from Chinese companies, found that a higher proportion of female executives was associated with greater corporate digitalization, with research and development intensity serving as an important mechanism. Similarly, research on women's digital entrepreneurship indicates that technological engagement and entrepreneurial capabilities can influence women's ability to create and sustain economic activities in digital environments (Kang, 2022; Li & Sanusi, 2023). Accordingly, women's digital leadership can be conceptualized as an intersection of leadership capability, digital competence, motivation, innovation, and access to organizational and technological resources. This perspective connects women's individual motivations with the broader structural conditions that shape their participation in the digital economy.

3. | RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine the motivation of women leaders in the digital economy. Three research questions guide the review: (1) What motivates women to become leaders in the digital economy? (2) How do technological, organizational, and cultural factors influence their motivation? and (3) What research areas require further development? the literature search was conducted using indexed databases, including Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Embase, with

a five-year publication period to ensure relevance and recency. The search used combinations of keywords such as “Women Leadership,” “Digital Economy,” “Motivation,” “Female Leader Technology,” and “Gender Inclusivity Digital Leadership,” using Boolean operators (AND/OR) as appropriate for each database. Retrieved studies underwent title and abstract screening, followed by full-text assessment based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Studies were included when they focused on women leaders in digital economy or technology-based contexts, examined intrinsic, extrinsic, or social motivation, were published in English and peer-reviewed journals, and fell within the defined publication period. Editorials, commentaries, grey literature, studies unrelated to women’s digital leadership, and studies outside the specified period were excluded. The selection process followed PRISMA principles, with data extracted on authors, year, context, motivation type, methods, and key findings. Thematic analysis was then conducted to identify major motivational dimensions and research gaps.

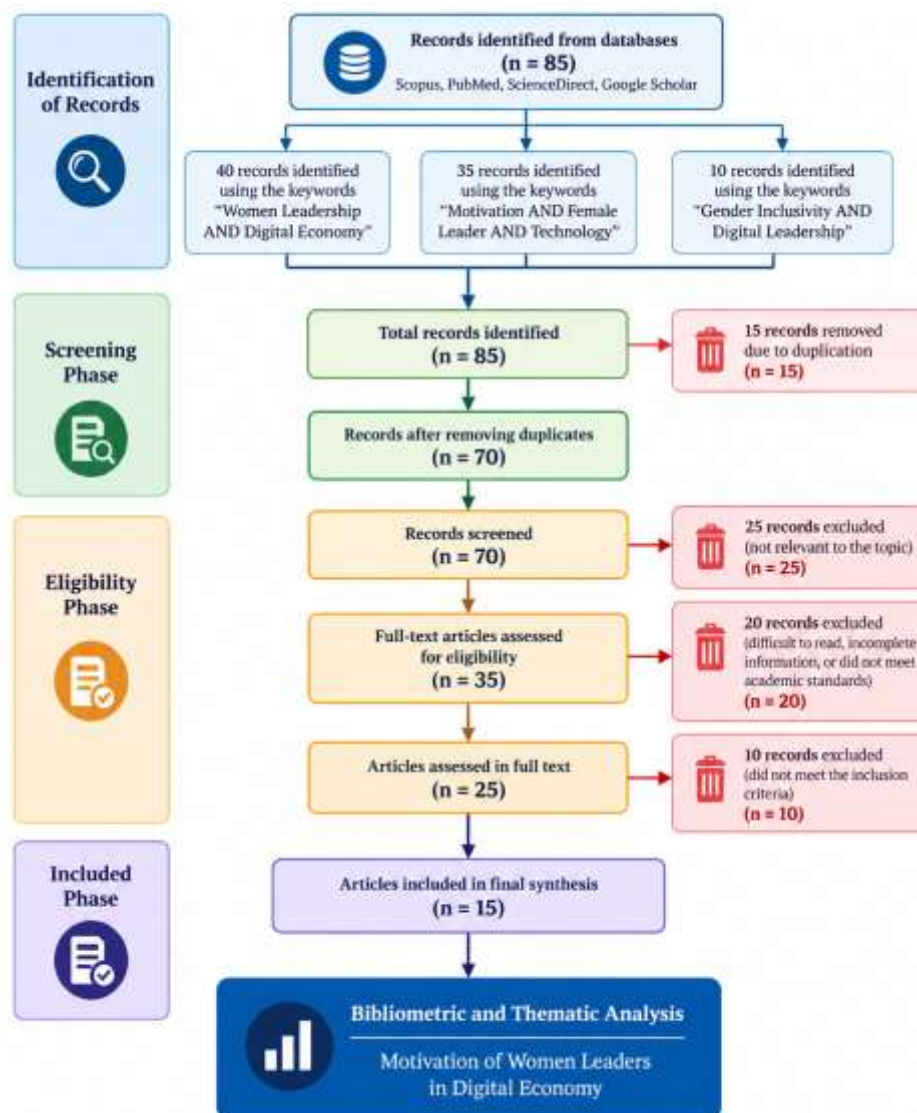


Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram

The article selection process followed a PRISMA-based procedure. A total of 85 articles were initially identified from four databases: Scopus, PubMed, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. Three groups of keywords were used: “Women Leadership AND Digital Economy,” “Motivation AND Female Leader AND Technology,” and “Gender Inclusivity AND Digital Leadership.” After removing 15 duplicate records, 70 articles remained for the screening and eligibility assessment. Subsequently, 25 articles were excluded because they were not sufficiently relevant to the research topic, while 20 were removed because they had inadequate readability, incomplete information, or did not meet the required academic standards. The remaining 25 articles underwent full-text assessment, resulting in the exclusion of 10 additional articles that did not fully satisfy the predefined inclusion criteria, particularly regarding women’s motivation and leadership within digital economy or technology-related contexts.

Consequently, 15 articles were selected for the final synthesis and thematic analysis because they were considered the most relevant and representative of the research focus. The number of selected studies was considered appropriate for the literature mapping and content analysis conducted in this study, where relevance and quality were prioritized over the quantity of publications. A formal risk-of-bias assessment was not conducted because the study focused on literature mapping and thematic synthesis rather than empirical testing or meta-analysis. Potential bias was addressed through duplicate removal and the exclusion of irrelevant or low-quality studies.

4. | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature selection process identified 15 studies that met the predefined inclusion criteria and were considered relevant to the motivation and leadership of women in the digital economy. The selected studies covered different contexts, including women entrepreneurship, online businesses, digital platforms, organizational leadership, and corporate digital transformation. The synthesis indicates that women’s motivation in digital environments is multidimensional and can be broadly grouped into intrinsic, extrinsic, and social-contextual factors. These dimensions are interconnected rather than mutually exclusive, with their relative importance depending on technological access, organizational conditions, market opportunities, and socio-cultural environments.

Table 1. Literature Review

No	Study	Main focus	Method/context	Main finding relevant to this SLR
1	Riantoputra & Muis (2020)	Women entrepreneurs	Indonesia	Psychological and contextual factors
2	Rosca et al. (2020)	Women entrepreneurs/social entrepreneurship	Emerging markets	Women as agents of economic/social change

No	Study	Main focus	Method/context	Main finding relevant to this SLR
3	Grau-Sarabia & Fuster-Morell (2021)	Gender & digital economy	SLR	Gender remains important in digital economy
4	Suseno (2021)	Digital innovation social	Women entrepreneurs	Technology creates opportunities while structural barriers remain
5	Shukla et al. (2021)	ICT & women entrepreneurship	Digital entrepreneurship	ICT supports women's digital entrepreneurship
6	Franzke et al. (2022)	Female entrepreneurship	Asia	Context, culture and institutional factors matter
7	Kang (2022)	Women & digital platforms	Online platform	Technology enables participation but capability gaps remain
8	Kusumawardhani et al. (2022)	Women-led MSMEs & internet	Indonesia	Internet access supports women-led economic activity
9	Zhang & Liu (2022)	Motivation & leadership behavior	Organizational study	Leadership behavior affects intrinsic motivation/creativity
10	Li & Sanusi (2023)	Women's entrepreneurial motivation	Online microbusiness	Push/pull motivation relates to performance
11	Lingappa & Rodrigues (2023)	Women entrepreneurial motivation	SLR	Necessity and opportunity motivations
12	Putri & Shodiq (2024)	Women entrepreneurs	Bandung	Autonomy, income and market opportunities
13	Qian (2024)	Female executives & digitalization	Chinese companies	Female executives associated with digital transformation
14	Ristanović et al. (2024)	Women in digital economy	Developed economies	Recognition and persistent structural barriers
15	Alhajri & Aloud (2023)	Female digital entrepreneurship	Structured SLR	Fragmented literature and importance of social/institutional context

The first major finding concerns intrinsic motivation. Several studies indicate that autonomy, self-development, personal achievement, and the desire to exercise greater control over economic activities are important motivations for women's participation in digital entrepreneurship and leadership. The systematic review by Lingappa and Rodrigues (2023) demonstrates that women's entrepreneurial motivation includes both necessity and opportunity factors, with autonomy, achievement, independence, and personal development forming important opportunity-oriented motivations. Putri and Shodiq (2024) similarly identified autonomy, income aspirations, and market opportunities as important motivations among women entrepreneurs in Bandung. These findings indicate that women may enter digital economic activities not only because of external economic pressures but also because digital environments provide opportunities for independence and self-development.

The second finding concerns extrinsic and economic motivation. Financial needs, income generation, market expansion, career opportunities, and access to customers are consistently associated with women's participation in digital economic activities. Li and Sanusi (2023) found that different entrepreneurial motivations among female online microbusiness owners were associated with different dimensions of business performance. Their findings suggest that motivation based on economic necessity and opportunity can influence the outcomes pursued by women operating online businesses. Digital platforms can also reduce some traditional barriers to market participation by enabling women to access customers and conduct business activities beyond their immediate geographical environments (Shukla et al., 2021; Kang, 2022). Thus, digitalization can strengthen the economic attractiveness of entrepreneurship by increasing market access and reducing some operational constraints.

The third finding relates to digital capability and technological access. Digital skills are not simply technical resources but also contribute to women's confidence and ability to participate in technology-enabled economic activities. Shukla et al. (2021) emphasize the role of ICT in supporting women's digital entrepreneurship, while Suseno (2021) demonstrates that digital technology can help women entrepreneurs overcome individual, social, and structural constraints and develop social innovation. Research on women's engagement with online platforms further shows that technological participation can create new opportunities while differences in advanced digital capabilities may continue to shape participation (Kang, 2022). These findings indicate that motivation and digital capability reinforce each other: opportunities created by technology may stimulate participation, while stronger digital competence can increase women's capacity to exploit those opportunities.

The fourth finding concerns the social and organizational context of women's leadership motivation. Women's participation in the digital economy is influenced not only by individual motivation but also by social networks, institutional support, gender norms, and organizational environments. Grau-Sarabia and Fuster-Morell (2021) show that gender remains an important dimension in research on the digital economy,

particularly regarding participation, working conditions, and inequalities. Franzke et al. (2022) likewise emphasize the importance of contextual conditions in understanding female entrepreneurship in Asia. These findings suggest that motivation should be interpreted within the broader social and institutional environment rather than as an isolated individual characteristic.

The fifth finding concerns the relationship between women's leadership and organizational digital transformation. Evidence from Qian (2024) indicates that a higher proportion of female executives is associated with greater corporate digitalization, with R&D intensity identified as an important mechanism. This finding connects women's leadership participation with organizational technological development. In addition, Zhang and Liu (2022) demonstrate that leadership behavior can influence employees' intrinsic motivation and creative performance, highlighting the importance of leadership environments that encourage participation and creativity. Therefore, women's digital leadership should be understood not only as an outcome of individual motivation but also as a potential contributor to organizational innovation and transformation.

Overall, the synthesis shows that women's motivation in the digital economy results from the interaction of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, digital capability, and social-organizational support. The literature also indicates that digitalization creates opportunities for women while not automatically eliminating gender-based structural barriers. A structured review of female digital entrepreneurship similarly identifies the literature as fragmented and emphasizes the importance of institutional and social context in understanding the field. Consequently, the findings support an integrated perspective in which motivation, digital competence, leadership opportunities, and contextual conditions jointly shape women's participation and leadership in the digital economy.



Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Motivational Factors

Figure 2 summarizes the relationships among the principal motivational factors identified through the literature synthesis.

5. | DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic literature review indicate that women's motivation in the digital economy is multidimensional and results from the interaction of intrinsic, extrinsic, technological, and social-contextual factors. Rather than operating independently, these dimensions reinforce one another and influence women's willingness and capacity to participate in leadership and digital economic activities. This interpretation is consistent with Lingappa and Rodrigues (2023), who distinguish necessity- and opportunity-based motivations as two broad categories of women's entrepreneurial motivation. Within the digital economy, these motivations are further shaped by access to technology, digital capabilities, market opportunities, and social support.

Intrinsic motivation is reflected in women's aspirations for autonomy, self-development, achievement, independence, and greater control over their economic activities. Putri and Shodiq (2024) identified autonomy, income aspirations, and market opportunities as important motivations among women entrepreneurs in Bandung. Similarly, Suseno (2021) demonstrated that digital technologies can provide women entrepreneurs with opportunities to respond creatively to individual, social, and structural constraints. These findings suggest that digital participation may strengthen women's sense of independence while simultaneously creating opportunities to develop leadership, entrepreneurial, and decision-making capabilities.

Extrinsic motivation is primarily associated with income generation, market access, career development, business opportunities, and economic necessity. Li and Sanusi

(2023) found that different entrepreneurial motivations among female online microbusiness owners were associated with different dimensions of business performance. Digital platforms can also expand women's access to customers, markets, information, and business networks, thereby reducing some geographical and operational barriers (Shukla et al., 2021; Kang, 2022). Consequently, digitalization may increase the economic attractiveness of entrepreneurship and provide additional pathways for women to establish businesses, expand economic activities, and assume leadership roles.

However, motivation alone does not guarantee sustained participation in the digital economy. Digital competence and technological access represent important enabling conditions. Although digital technologies can create new opportunities, unequal access to skills, infrastructure, financial resources, and digital networks may constrain women's ability to benefit from these opportunities. Suseno (2021) showed how women entrepreneurs use digital technologies to develop opportunities in response to structural and social challenges, while Grau-Sarabia and Fuster-Morell (2021) emphasized that gender remains an important dimension in research on the digital economy. Thus, women's motivation needs to be supported by adequate technological capabilities and an enabling environment that allows motivation to be translated into sustained digital participation and leadership.

The organizational and social environment also plays an important role in shaping women's motivation. Research on female entrepreneurship in Asia highlights the influence of cultural, institutional, and social conditions on women's entrepreneurial participation (Franzke et al., 2022). Similarly, research on female digital entrepreneurship emphasizes the importance of institutional and social contexts while identifying fragmentation and limited theoretical integration as continuing challenges in the field (Alhajri & Aloud, 2024). Organizational support, professional networks, mentoring, access to resources, and prevailing gender norms can therefore influence whether women are able to transform individual motivation into leadership participation. This perspective indicates that women's digital leadership should be examined not only at the individual level but also within a broader ecosystem of organizational, institutional, and social conditions.

The relationship may also operate in the opposite direction, as women's leadership participation can contribute to organizational digital transformation. Qian (2024) reported that a higher proportion of female executives was associated with greater corporate digitalization, particularly through increased R&D intensity. This finding suggests that women's participation in leadership is not merely an outcome of digital transformation but may also contribute to technological development and organizational innovation. Women leaders can therefore occupy both a responsive and an active role within digital transformation processes.

Overall, the findings support an integrated perspective in which motivation, digital competence, organizational support, and socio-cultural conditions jointly shape

women's participation in digital leadership. The interaction among these dimensions helps explain why women with strong entrepreneurial or leadership aspirations may experience different outcomes depending on their access to technology, resources, networks, and supportive institutional environments. The literature also indicates several research gaps, particularly the limited integration of motivational, technological, organizational, and socio-cultural dimensions within a single analytical framework. Future research should therefore examine these relationships across diverse national, organizational, and industry contexts and employ longitudinal approaches to better understand how women's motivation and leadership participation evolve alongside digital transformation.



Figure 3. Integrated Framework of Women's Digital Leadership Motivation

6. | CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review examined the factors that motivate women to participate in leadership and economic activities within the digital economy. Based on the synthesis of 15 selected studies, women's motivation is multidimensional and shaped by the interaction of intrinsic, extrinsic, technological, organizational, and socio-cultural factors. Intrinsic motivation includes autonomy, self-development, achievement, and the desire for greater control over professional or entrepreneurial activities. Extrinsic motivation is associated with income generation, career opportunities, market access, and economic needs. These motivational dimensions are strengthened or constrained by women's digital capabilities, access to technology,

organizational support, social networks, and prevailing gender norms. The findings further demonstrate that digitalization creates new opportunities for women to develop businesses, access wider markets, participate in innovation, and assume leadership roles. However, digital transformation does not automatically eliminate structural and gender-related barriers. Differences in digital skills, access to technological resources, institutional support, and socio-cultural conditions continue to influence women's ability to convert motivation into sustained participation and leadership.

The study contributes an integrated perspective in which women's digital leadership is understood as the outcome of interactions between individual motivation and the technological, organizational, and social environment. Practically, organizations and policymakers should strengthen digital skills, mentoring, inclusive organizational practices, access to technology, and opportunities for women's leadership development. Future research should employ longitudinal and comparative approaches and examine diverse groups of women across different geographical and digital contexts. Greater attention should also be given to emerging environments such as AI-enabled workplaces, digital platforms, remote work, and other technology-driven forms of leadership.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval and Originality Statement

Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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