

The role of female leadership competencies in enhancing performance in creative Indonesian SMEs: A motivation and job satisfaction approach

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Abstract This study aims to analyze the effect of female leadership competence on MSME performance, with motivation and job satisfaction mediating this effect. The research was conducted on female owners in creative sector MSMEs in East Java, Indonesia. The sample included 335 respondents. For data processing, quantitative data analysis techniques were applied via structural equation modeling (SEM) based on partial least squares (SEM-PLS). The data analysis process consisted of several stages, including the outer model, inner model, and model goodness tests. The results showed that work motivation and job satisfaction could mediate the relationship between female leadership competence and MSME performance. The practical implication of this research is that female leaders in the creative MSME sector are advised to continue developing their competencies, especially in terms of communication, empathy, and employee empowerment, to increase motivation and job satisfaction. Managing a supportive work environment, which prioritizes providing recognition and opportunities for employees to develop, can encourage greater productivity and performance. MSMEs in the creative sector should pay more attention to leadership factors to achieve long-term success.

Keywords: female leadership competencies, MSME performance, work motivation, job satisfaction

1. Introduction

In recent years, the issue of female leadership has become an increasingly relevant topic in various sectors, including in the world of micro, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) (Rahmayanty et al., 2023). Women leaders demonstrate unique leadership abilities, such as empathy, effective communication, and the ability to build strong relationships with teams (Aisyah et al., 2023; Dewi et al., 2023). The role of women's leadership in improving the performance and sustainability of MSMEs in East Java's creative sector is a significant topic in the context of regional economic development. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) from 2023 show that 64.5% of the total MSMEs in Indonesia are managed by women. Women's leadership in creative sector MSMEs in East Java has the potential to contribute greatly to regional economic growth. Women's leadership is often associated with characteristics such as diligence, thoroughness, patience, and high responsibility, which can improve organizational performance (Indiwo, 2016). Competence plays an important role in improving organizational performance, especially in MSMEs that have high flexibility characteristics (Yasin, 2023; Widjaja et al., 2018). However, there are still many challenges faced in optimizing women's leadership roles in this sector, such as gender stereotypes and a lack of adequate support. Therefore, it is important to explore how women's leadership competence can influence SME performance in a broader context, including the factors that mediate this relationship. The role of women's leadership in SME performance is significant (Collazos et al., 2024), especially when motivation and job satisfaction are considered mediating factors. Research shows that women leaders can improve organizational performance through their unique competencies and leadership styles (Prajawati et al., 2023), which positively influence employee motivation and satisfaction (Khan et al., 2024).

In this research, work motivation and job satisfaction are two crucial mediating variables for understanding the effect of women's leadership competence on MSME performance. Leaders who can motivate their teams effectively create a conducive work environment, which in turn increases productivity and organizational performance (Mpuangnan et al., 2024). In addition, high job satisfaction plays an important role in maintaining loyalty and organizational performance (Setiawan et al., 2021). Research on this relationship is highly relevant to ensure that women's leadership not only contributes to the achievement of short-term goals but is also able to create a sustainable impact in the long term.

Transformational leadership emphasizes visionary thinking, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Northouse, 2021). Integrating transformational leadership with motivation and job satisfaction as mediating factors underscores its profound impact on the performance of MSMEs in East Java's creative sector. By understanding these dynamics, organizations can better leverage women's leadership competencies to drive sustainable



growth and competitiveness amid the challenges posed by gender stereotypes and lack of support (Collazos et al., 2024). Competencies such as strategic vision and relationship building demonstrated by women leaders contribute positively to SME performance from a consumer perspective (Setiani et al., 2023). Work motivation and job satisfaction serve as mediators between leadership style and employee performance. In turn, job satisfaction influences organizational citizenship behavior, which is important for the overall performance of SMEs (Arijanto et al., 2023). Research by Islam et al. (2024) showed a positive and significant relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and job performance. Astuti et al. (2024) stated that individual entrepreneurial orientation affects SME performance through innovation, with no significant difference between genders.

However, despite their positive impact, women leaders play dual roles as workers and housewives (Djarmika et al., 2021; Farhan, 2022). This is one of the factors for the rise and fall of motivation to work stress, which can hinder performance (Nawungkrida et al., 2024). Addressing these challenges is critical to maximizing the benefits of women's leadership in SMEs. Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze the effect of female leadership competence on MSME performance, with motivation and job satisfaction as mediators, especially in creative sector MSMEs. This research is novel in that it focuses on the mediating role of motivation and job satisfaction in the relationship between female leadership competence and MSME performance. Most previous studies have tended to examine the direct influence of women's leadership on organizational performance without considering mediation aspects that can strengthen or weaken the relationship. Therefore, this research is expected to provide a deeper academic contribution to understanding the mechanisms underlying the effectiveness of women's leadership, as well as practical recommendations for the development of leadership strategies in the MSME sector.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Grand theory

Transformational leadership theory includes aspects of leadership, motivation, and performance that are at the core of the research. Transformational leadership theory was developed by Burns (1978) and Bass et al. (1987) and became one of the most relevant leadership theories in the context of women's leadership. Transformational leadership theory states that transformational leaders can inspire and motivate teams by creating a clear shared vision, empowering team members to achieve goals, and encouraging positive changes in performance and attitudes. These leaders focus on individual development, building trust, and creating a work environment that supports growth so that teams are more motivated to work beyond expectations. In the context of this research, women's leadership competencies can be considered a unique internal resource for MSMEs. Women leaders who can increase employee motivation and job satisfaction can optimize the use of human resources within the organization, ultimately improving the performance and competitiveness of MSMEs.

2.2. Female Leadership Competencies Toward Performance

Female leadership competencies, which include communication skills, empathy, and employee empowerment, have a positive effect on organizational performance. According to Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001), female leaders tend to use a more democratic and participatory leadership style, which can increase employee motivation and job satisfaction. Research conducted by Wang et al. (2011) also revealed that leaders with good interpersonal skills, as often found in female leaders, can create a positive work environment and improve team performance.

According to Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leaders can inspire and motivate employees, which ultimately has an impact on improving organizational performance. Women's leadership competencies included in the transformational leadership style can encourage innovation and increase MSME productivity through increased employee motivation and job satisfaction (Aristana et al., 2024 & Campos, 2021). In addition, research conducted by Haque et al. (2015) shows that female leaders are more likely to apply a relationship-oriented approach, which increases employee commitment and results in better performance. Susanti et al. (2020) emphasized that women's leadership competencies, which include the ability to collaborate and interact effectively, play a significant role in driving MSME performance. Thus, developing women's leadership competencies is an important strategy for improving the competitiveness and success of MSMEs. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

H1: Female leadership competencies have a significant effect on performance.

2.3. Female Leadership Competencies Toward Motivation

According to transformational leadership theory, leaders who can inspire and motivate employees through a clear vision and emotional support can increase team motivation and performance (Prati et al., 2003). In addition, Dewi et al. (2020), Gartzia and Van Engen (2012), and Bani (2024) reported that the feminine leadership style of female leaders has a positive effect on employee motivation. Feminine leadership that emphasizes empathy, communication, and a supportive approach can increase employee motivation and job satisfaction. Research by Lekniyanto et al. (2021) shows that motherhood has a positive effect on women's leadership, which in turn can increase employee motivation. In addition, feminine leadership styles that tend to be democratic and participatory can increase employee engagement and commitment in MSMEs. This approach

allows employees to feel valued and listened to, which contributes to increased work motivation. A study by Paais & Pattiruhu (2020) revealed that a feminine leadership style has a positive effect on work motivation and employee performance. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed for this research.

H2: Female leadership competencies have a significant effect on motivation.

2.4. Female Leadership Competencies toward Job Satisfaction

Female leadership can influence employee job satisfaction through various mechanisms (Valderrama et al., 2023). According to transformational leadership theory, leaders who demonstrate empathy, effective communication, and emotional support can increase job satisfaction. Research by Zenger & Folkman (2020) shows that women are often rated higher in 13 of 19 leadership competencies, including the development of others, integrity, and communication, all of which contribute positively to job satisfaction. Feminine leadership styles that tend to be democratic and participatory can increase employee engagement and commitment in MSMEs. This approach allows employees to feel valued and listened to, which contributes to increased job satisfaction. Pawirosumarto et al. (2017) reported that leadership style has a positive effect on job satisfaction and employee performance. On the basis of this explanation, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H3: Female leadership competence has a significant effect on job satisfaction.

2.5. Motivation toward Performance

Work motivation plays an important role in improving individual and organizational performance. Employees who have high motivation make maximum efforts to achieve targets and better work results (Suryadi et al., 2024). Moon et al. (2020) and Lee & Hidayat (2018) state that intrinsic motivation, such as rewards for achievement, responsibility, and self-development, strongly affects employee performance. Robbins & Judge (2014) added that motivation determines the level of effort, direction, and perseverance of employees in completing tasks, which ultimately has a direct effect on productivity and work quality. Empirical research supports the positive relationship between motivation and performance. Kuranchie & Amponsah (2016) reported that motivation acts as a major factor in increasing employee productivity in various industrial sectors. Moreover, a study by Dessler (2020) revealed that highly motivated employees are more proactive in completing tasks and better able to cope with job challenges than employees who have low motivation. Altassan (2024) and Appelbaum & Kamal (2000) also reported that providing motivation, both in the form of financial incentives and nonfinancial incentives, contributed positively to improving employee performance in SMEs. This finding confirms the importance of managing employee motivation to encourage the achievement of optimal performance. High motivation encourages MSME players to work harder, innovate, and improve the quality of their products or services. Research by Kyal et al. (2022), Hadi et al. (2022), and Purwanto et al. (2022) shows that there is a positive influence between motivation and MSME performance. Proposed hypothesis

H4: Motivation has a significant effect on performance.

2.6. Job satisfaction with performance

According to Brayfield and Crockett (1955), high job satisfaction can improve individual performance. They state that employees who are satisfied with their jobs tend to be more productive, more loyal, and more motivated to perform quality work. In addition, according to Westover et al. (2010), job satisfaction occurs when employee expectations are met, such as fair pay, a comfortable work environment, and good relationships with superiors and coworkers, which ultimately improve overall performance. Empirical research supports the positive relationship between job satisfaction and performance. Katebi et al. (2022) reported that there is a significant positive correlation between job satisfaction and performance. Research by De Clercq et al. (2019) also shows that satisfied employees tend to exhibit extra work behaviors, such as helping colleagues and taking initiatives that increase team productivity. In addition, a study by Rosyida et al. (2020) confirmed that high job satisfaction can improve employee performance. Sopiah et al. (2020) reinforce the importance of managing talent to increase employee job satisfaction, which in turn has a positive effect on company performance. Research by Kevin and Muchsinati (2023) and Latifah et al. (2024) revealed that job satisfaction has a positive effect on employee performance. Proposed hypothesis

H5: Job satisfaction has a significant effect on performance.

2.7. The effect of female leadership competence on performance with motivation as a mediator

According to the transformational leadership theory proposed by Bass (1987), leaders who can inspire, provide emotional support, and encourage individual development increase employee motivation, which in turn has a positive effect on employee performance. With competencies such as empathy, good communication, and the ability to build interpersonal relationships, female leaders tend to use a more collaborative and supportive approach, which can increase employee motivation. Eagly & Carli (2003) assert that female leaders are more likely to use an empowering leadership style, which plays an important role in improving team motivation and performance.

Empirical research conducted by Putra & Dewi (2019) and Pradhan et al. (2017) shows that work motivation acts as a mediator between leadership style and employee performance. A study by Gutierrez et al. (2015) also revealed that motivation triggered by a supportive leadership style can significantly improve employee performance. In addition, research by Lingappa et al. (2024) in the context of MSMEs shows that female leaders who have high competence in communication and decision-making can increase employee motivation, which in turn drives performance improvement. These findings confirm the importance of strengthening women's leadership competence to maximize employee motivation and performance in various business sectors. A study by Khatami et al. (2024) revealed that women's leadership style has a positive effect on performance, with work motivation as a significant mediator. Research by Putra & Dewi (2019) shows that high motivation encourages employees to work harder, innovate, and improve the quality of their products or services, which ultimately contributes to improving the performance of MSMEs. Research by Paais & Pattiruhu (2020) revealed that female leaders who can motivate and discipline employees can significantly improve their performance. Proposed hypothesis

H6: Motivation mediates the influence of female leadership competence on performance.

2.8. The effect of female leadership competence on performance with job satisfaction as a mediator

According to Brayfield and Crockett (1955), high job satisfaction encourages employees to work more productively and make optimal contributions to the organization. Female leaders who have competencies such as empathy, good communication skills, and an inclusive leadership approach tend to create a supportive work environment, increasing employee job satisfaction. Locke (1976) asserts that leadership that pays attention to employee needs can increase job satisfaction, which in turn has an impact on improving performance.

Empirical research conducted by Amirudin et al. (2024) shows that there is a significant positive relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance. In addition, research by Eagly and Carli (2007) revealed that women's leadership styles, which are more participatory and supportive, tend to increase employee job satisfaction. Kevin and Muchsinati (2023) also showed that female leaders in the MSME sector who are highly competent in communication and decision-making can create a conducive work environment, which has a positive effect on job satisfaction and employee performance. Research by De Clerq et al. (2019) shows that leadership style and competence have positive effects on job satisfaction, which in turn can improve employee performance. In addition, research by Latifah et al. (2024) revealed that transformational leadership has a positive effect on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. Thus, the development of women's leadership competence plays an important role in increasing job satisfaction, which ultimately significantly drives employee performance. The following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Job satisfaction mediates the influence of female leadership competence on performance.

Based on the explanations and hypotheses presented, a conceptual framework for the research was developed, as shown in Figure 1.

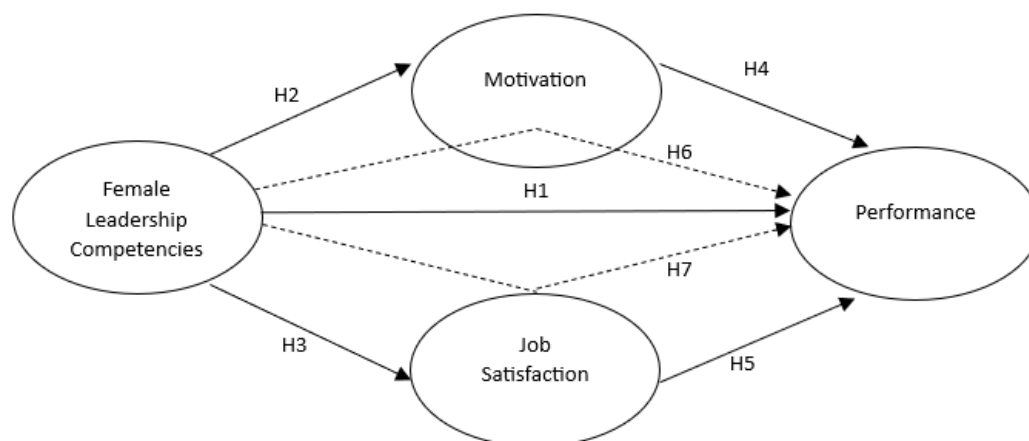


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework.

Source: Researchers (2024).

3. Method

3.1. Participants and procedures

This quantitative research used structural equation modeling (SEM) to validate the conceptual framework, a method commonly employed in business and social sciences for model construction or theory evaluation (Henseler et al., 2016). This study investigated MSMEs in East Java, Indonesia. The sampling framework was developed based on the geographical distribution and business classification of creative MSMEs registered with local cooperatives and SME agencies. Through purposive sampling, this study involved 335 MSME employees who met specific inclusion criteria: (1) they must be actively

employed in creative sector MSMEs (such as fashion, crafts, culinary, or design); (2) they have held their current position for at least one year; and (3) their MSMEs are owned or managed by women leaders. These criteria ensured the sample was contextually relevant and aligned with the study's focus on female leadership. Two forms of data were collected for this study: primary data from online questionnaires distributed via business networks and community groups, and secondary data from books and journal articles.

3.2. Measurements and data analysis

The variables in this study were measured via a five-point Likert scale (Rahmi et al., 2022), with scores ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The instrument used for this investigation was developed using indicators from various sources. The indicators of female leadership competence are strategic visions, operation management, professional knowledge, hands-on experience, and relationship building (Prajawati et al., 2023; Cong & Thu, 2021; Cong & Hai, 2015). According to Kaplan and Norton (1996) and Chong (2008), performance indicators include increased turnover, operational efficiency, customer growth, and business sustainability. According to Guay et al. (2015) and Trepanier et al. (2022), motivation is an indicator of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic regulation, extrinsic regulation, identified regulation, and amotivation. Job satisfaction consists of the job, wages, promotions, coworkers, and supervisors (Spector et al., 2007; Talukder et al., 2018; Susanto et al., 2022). For data processing, the study applied quantitative data analysis techniques via structural equation modeling based on partial least squares (SEM-PLS). The data analysis process consisted of several stages, including the outer model, inner model, and model goodness tests. The outer model was evaluated via validity and reliability tests. Validity was assessed through the AVE test and cross-loading, whereas reliability was examined via Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and Rho tests. The inner model was utilized to test the research hypotheses, and model goodness was evaluated via R^2 and Q^2 tests (Putri & Miranti, 2024).

Table 1, that all tested variables meet the required criteria for validity, as the loading factors are greater than or equal to 0.6 and the AVE is equal to 0.5. This finding indicates that each variable demonstrates a sufficiently high level of validity, making them suitable for further use and analysis.

Table 1 Validity Test.

Variable	Indicator	Loading Factor	AVE
FLC	Strategic visions	0.792	0.583
	operation management	0.754	
	professional knowledge	0.826	
	hand on experience	0.688	
	relationship building	0.748	
Motivation	psychological needs	0.834	0.555
	safety needs	0.715	
	social needs	0.833	
	esteem needs	0.670	
	self-actualization needs	0.651	
Job Satisfaction	Job	0.710	0.551
	Wages	0.765	
	Promotion	0.869	
	coworkers	0.671	
	supervisor	0.765	
Performance	increased turnover	0.898	0.756
	operational efficiency	0.846	
	customer growth	0.891	
	business sustainability	0.843	

Reliability testing is conducted to evaluate the extent to which the indicators used to measure the constructs in the model exhibit adequate internal consistency and stability. For the reliability test, Cronbach's alpha > 0.60 and composite reliability > 0.70 are considered acceptable thresholds. Table 2, shows that the composite reliability values for all the constructs exceed 0.70. Consequently, no reliability issues were identified in the model. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha value for each construct is above 0.60, indicating that all the constructs meet the reliability criteria.

Table 2 Reliability Test.

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability
FLC	0.823	0.836	0.874
Motivation	0.807	0.809	0.860
Job Satisfaction	0.828	0.842	0.858
Performance	0.893	0.899	0.925

3.3. Goodness-of-fit test

The inner model test is essential for examining the relationships between constructs, significance values, and the R-square (R^2) of the research model. Table 3 presents an R-square value of 0.431 (43.1%) for performance, indicating that female leadership competence, motivation, and job satisfaction can explain 43.1% of the variance in performance, with the remaining 56.9% influenced by other variables not considered in this study. Additionally, the Q-square value of 0.569 suggests that the model demonstrates a reasonable degree of accuracy in predicting performance.

Table 3 Goodness-of-fit test.

	R Square	R Square Adjusted	Q-Square
Performance	0.431	0.426	0.569

4. Results

Hypothesis testing is indicated by the path coefficient value, which reflects the level of significance (Table 4 and Figure 2). The criteria for assessing the hypothesis test suggest that the relationship between two variables is considered significant if the p value is less than 0.05, and the relationship is deemed influential if the t statistic exceeds 1.96. Additionally, the path coefficient value ranges from -1 to +1, where values closer to +1 indicate a strong positive relationship, whereas values closer to -1 suggest a strong negative relationship between the variables. Meanwhile, for the indirect effect, motivation and job satisfaction simultaneously partially mediate the relationship between female leadership competencies and performance. So, this is a case of double partial mediation. In other words, female leadership competencies directly affects performance and increases employee motivation and job satisfaction. Supports transformational (Bass, 1987) and two-factor (Herzberg) theories that strong leadership improves work outcomes by enhancing the psychological aspects of employees.

Table 4 Hypothesis Test.

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
FLC -> Performance	0.191	0.192	0.037	5.147	0.000
FLC -> Motivation	0.310	0.317	0.039	7.899	0.000
FLC -> Job Satisfaction	0.407	0.413	0.038	10.669	0.000
Motivasi -> Performance	0.469	0.471	0.033	14.175	0.000
Job Satisfaction -> Performance	0.192	0.189	0.050	3.824	0.000
FLC -> Motivasi -> Performance	0.145	0.149	0.021	6.776	0.000
FLC -> JS -> Performance	0.078	0.078	0.021	3.677	0.000

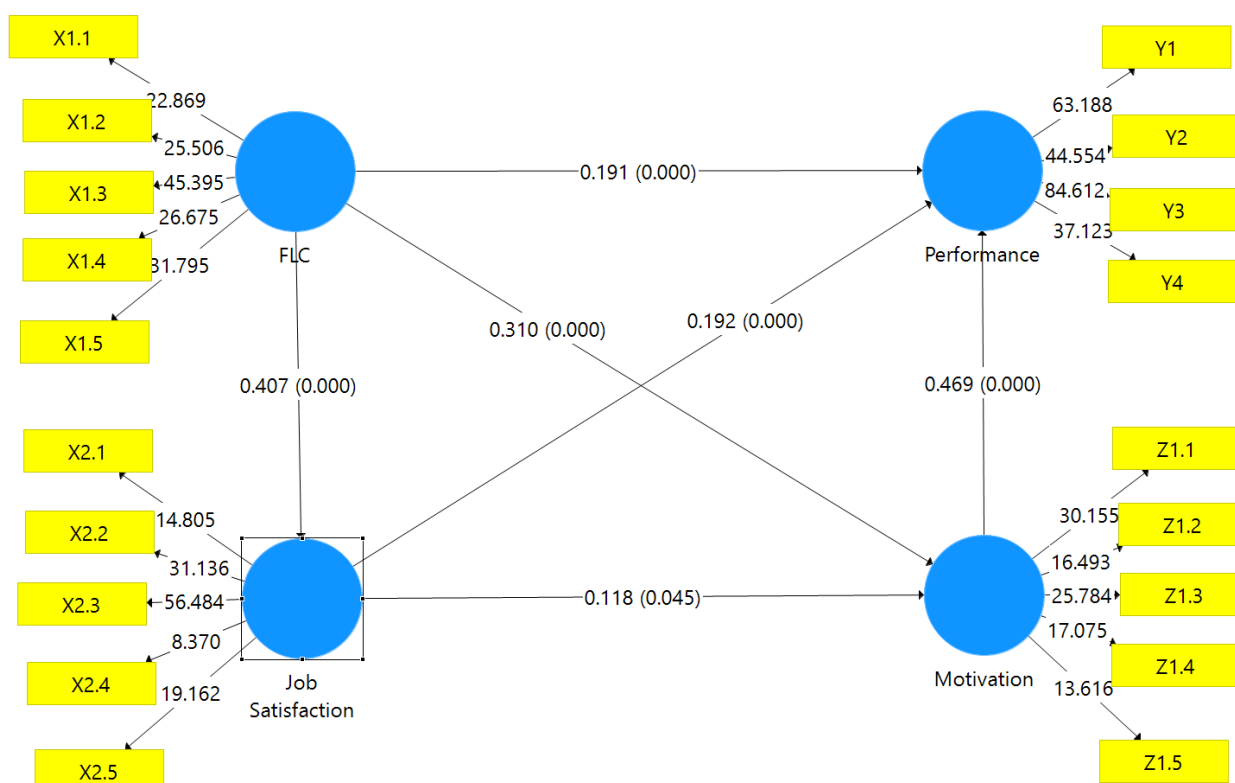


Figure 2 SmartPLS output.

5. Discussion

5.1. Female leadership competence significantly affects performance.

The results showed that female leadership competence has a significant effect on performance, as indicated by a p value of 0.000. This means that Hypothesis 1 is accepted. This confirms that women's leadership competence significantly affects the performance of MSMEs in the creative sector in East Java. In the context of MSMEs, female leaders who have competencies such as empathy, effective communication, and the ability to innovate can create a productive work environment, improve operational efficiency, and expand market share, which contributes to increased turnover and business sustainability. In creative sector MSMEs, female leadership competencies such as implementing a strategic vision, understanding operational management, having experience, and being able to adapt well will be very helpful in improving MSME performance. This is especially true if female leaders have professional knowledge that will make it easier for them to achieve MSME goals and certainly improve MSME performance.

These results are in line with research conducted by Aristana et al. (2024) and Campos (2021), who confirmed that women's leadership competencies, which include the ability to collaborate and interact effectively, play a significant role in driving MSME performance. Eagly and Carli (2007) reported that women leaders tend to use a collaborative and participatory leadership approach, which is highly relevant in the creative sector, which requires high levels of innovation and adaptation. In addition, a study by Susanti et al. (2023) confirmed that women's leadership competencies, which include the ability to collaborate and interact effectively, play a significant role in driving MSME performance. Therefore, the results of this study strengthen the understanding that developing women's leadership competencies in the creative sector can be an effective strategy to encourage the performance of MSMEs in East Java, especially in the face of dynamic market challenges and fierce competition.

5.2. Female leadership competencies significantly affect motivation

The results showed that female leadership has a significant effect on motivation, which is indicated by a p value of 0.000. This means that Hypothesis 2 is accepted. This finding indicates that female leadership competence can directly increase employee work motivation in creative sector MSMEs in East Java. On the basis of the transformational leadership theory proposed by Bass (1987), female leaders who are competent in motivating, inspiring, and paying attention to individual employee development will increase their work enthusiasm and dedication. More empathetic and inclusive female leadership, which makes room for collaboration and creative ideas, is likely to result in greater intrinsic motivation in employees, which in turn improves their performance and productivity in a sector that relies heavily on innovation, such as the creative sector. Women leaders who implement a supportive and empowering leadership style can create a work environment that meets these needs, increasing employees' intrinsic motivation. Research by Pradhan et al. (2017) shows that a participative leadership style and attention to employee welfare can significantly increase motivation. In the context of creative sector MSMEs in East Java, the results of this study reinforce the importance of women's leadership competence in creating a motivating work atmosphere, which is crucial for encouraging creativity and innovation in this challenging industry.

5.3. Female leadership competencies significantly affect job satisfaction

The results showed that female leadership has a significant effect on job satisfaction, which is indicated by a p value of 0.000. This means that Hypothesis 3 is accepted. This finding shows that female leadership competence has a strong positive effect on employee job satisfaction in creative sector MSMEs in East Java. On the basis of the transformational leadership theory proposed by Bass (1987), female leaders who can inspire and pay individual attention and create mutually supportive working relationships can increase employee job satisfaction. This research is in line with Eagly and Carli (2007), who state that female leaders are more likely to use a more collaborative and inclusive leadership approach, which plays an important role in increasing job satisfaction. In addition, Pawirosumarto et al. (2017) reported that leadership style has a positive effect on job satisfaction and employee performance. Research by Campos (2021) also revealed that female leaders in MSMEs can increase job satisfaction through good communication skills and fair decision-making. Therefore, promoting and supporting female leadership development is crucial to enhancing employee satisfaction in creative MSMEs. Training programs should focus on nurturing soft skills such as empathy, active listening, and collaborative decision-making. Organizations should also foster a workplace culture that values open communication and emotional intelligence, empowering female leaders to create environments where employees feel heard, supported, and motivated to contribute their best work.

5.4. Motivation significantly affects performance

The results showed that motivation has a significant effect on performance, which is indicated by a p value of 0.000. This means that Hypothesis 4 is accepted. This finding shows that employee motivation has a strong direct effect on performance in creative sector MSMEs in East Java. In the context of creative MSMEs, high work enthusiasm makes employees

more active in creating new solutions, completing tasks efficiently, and pursuing achievements, which has a direct impact on improving performance. Research by Moon et al. (2020), Lee & Hidayat (2018) and Robbins & Judge (2014) also confirms that motivation is positively related to performance, as employees who feel valued and allowed to develop work more optimally. Thus, these findings suggest that effective management of employee motivation can encourage the achievement of optimal performance in creative sector MSMEs in East Java. The practical implication is that female leaders must design HR management strategies that focus on strengthening motivation, such as rewarding creativity, training for self-development, and creating a supportive work environment.

5.5. Job satisfaction significantly affects performance

The results showed that job satisfaction has a significant effect on performance, which is indicated by a p value of 0.000. This means that Hypothesis 5 is accepted. This finding indicates that employees' job satisfaction level has a strong effect on their performance in creative sector MSMEs in East Java. On the basis of the job satisfaction-performance hypothesis proposed by Brayfield and Crockett (1955), employees who are satisfied with their jobs tend to perform better because they are more motivated, engaged, and committed to the organization. High job satisfaction is usually created when factors such as fair pay, comfortable working conditions, good relationships with superiors and coworkers, and growth opportunities are met, which ultimately increases productivity and performance. Research by De Clercq et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of job satisfaction in driving positive work behavior and productivity. MSMEs owners should create a supportive work environment, provide recognition for achievements, and provide room for career growth to maintain high levels of job satisfaction.

5.6. Motivation mediates the influence of female leadership competence on performance

The results showed that motivation can mediate the effect of female leadership competence on performance, which is indicated by a p value of 0.000. This means that Hypothesis 6 is accepted. This finding indicates that female leadership competence not only directly affects performance but also increases employee motivation. On the basis of the transformational leadership theory of Bass (1987), female leaders who are competent in motivating, inspiring, and paying attention to individual employee development can increase their motivation. When employees feel more valued and empowered by their leaders, their intrinsic motivation increases, which in turn encourages them to achieve better performance. Motivated employees tend to work harder because they believe their efforts will yield commensurate results. Women's leadership competencies play an important role in building those positive expectations by demonstrating that employees' efforts will be rewarded and improve performance. Research by Pradhan et al. (2017) and Lingappa et al. (2024) supports this, emphasizing that a supportive leadership style enhances employee motivation, boosting performance. Therefore, to optimize performance in creative MSMEs, it is important to develop women leaders who can inspire, encourage, and empower their teams. This can be achieved through targeted leadership training programs focused on emotional intelligence, recognition practices, and individualized support. Creating a culture where employee efforts are recognized and rewarded will help sustain motivation and performance over the long term.

5.7. Job satisfaction mediates the influence of female leadership competence on performance

The results showed that job satisfaction can mediate the effect of female leadership competence on performance, which is indicated by a p value of 0.000. This means that Hypothesis 7 is accepted. This finding suggests that female leadership competence plays an important role in increasing employee job satisfaction, which in turn improves employee performance. On the basis of transformational leadership theory by Bass (1987), female leaders who are competent in building good interpersonal relationships, who listen to employee needs, and who provide the support needed can create a positive work environment. This supportive environment increases employees' job satisfaction, which encourages them to work more productively and contribute more to organizational performance. In the creative sector, which relies heavily on creativity and collaboration, good leadership is essential to create a pleasant and motivating work atmosphere for employees. Job satisfaction occurs when work fulfills values important to employees, such as rewards, recognition, and growth opportunities. Female leaders who are competent in creating a supportive atmosphere and who pay attention to employee welfare increase their job satisfaction. Research by Latifah et al. (2024) revealed that transformational leadership has a positive effect on employee performance, with job satisfaction as a mediating variable. Therefore, female leadership must strengthen interpersonal skills, empathy, and employee empowerment. MSME owners are also advised to create a system of rewards, recognition, and career development opportunities so that job satisfaction remains high and employee performance can be improved sustainably.

6. Conclusions

The research results, indicate that female leadership competence has a significant influence on performance, motivation, and job satisfaction in the context of creative sector MSMEs in East Java. Women's leadership competencies, through their ability to build good relationships, inspire, and provide support, are proven to increase employee motivation, which in turn has a positive impact on performance. In addition, women's leadership competence influences employee job

satisfaction, which acts as a mediator between women's leadership and performance. All of these results point to the important role of women's leadership competencies in improving MSME performance, particularly in a sector that relies on creativity and innovation, such as the creative sector in East Java. This research makes an important contribution to enriching the literature on the relationship between women's leadership competencies and performance in creative sector MSMEs. This research also introduces the role of motivation and job satisfaction as mediating variables, showing how women's leadership can improve performance through increasing employee motivation and job satisfaction.

The findings provide deeper insights into leadership dynamics in the context of creative MSMEs in East Java. The practical implication of this research is that women leaders in the creative MSME sector are advised to continue developing their competencies, especially in terms of communication, empathy, and employee empowerment, to increase motivation and job satisfaction. Managing a supportive work environment, which prioritizes recognition and opportunities for employees to develop, can encourage greater productivity and performance. MSMEs in the creative sector should pay more attention to leadership factors to achieve long-term success. The theoretical implications of this research, include enriching transformational leadership theory by showing that motivation and job satisfaction can function as mediators between women's leadership competencies and performance. This research also provides empirical evidence that empowering women's leadership can improve performance, which was previously found more in large organizations but is also relevant in the context of creative sector MSMEs. Future researchers can expand this research by examining the effect of female leadership competence on performance in other industrial sectors or by involving a larger and more diverse sample. Research that examines other factors that may influence this relationship, such as cultural factors or organizational characteristics, could also provide a more complete understanding of leadership dynamics in the context of MSMEs. In addition, longitudinal research could be conducted to examine the long-term impact of women's leadership on MSME performance and growth.

Ethical considerations

The study followed the research guideline in data collecting by informing all participants of the purpose of the research and ensuring that their participation was fully voluntary. Each respondent provided informed consent and were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and anonymous.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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