



PUBLIC SPEAKING STRATEGIES OF WOMEN FIGURES IN BUILDING PUBLIC CREDIBILITY AND TRUST: A CASE STUDY OF NAJWA SHIHAB, SRI MULYANI INDRAWATI, AND RETNO MARSUDI IN THE DIGITAL ERA (2020–2025)

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Abstrak

This study specifically examines how the public speaking strategies used by three Indonesian female figures, Najwa Shihab, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, and Retno Marsudi, generated strong credibility and public trust in different communication domains during the period 2020–2025. Using an instrumental qualitative case study approach with cross-case analysis, this study analyzed 47 documented public communication events including 18 interview episodes (Najwa Shihab), 16 press conferences and policy speeches (Sri Mulyani Indrawati), and 13 diplomatic speeches (Retno Marsudi) triangulated with academic literature and public trust survey data. Based on Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McCroskey, 2006), Narrative Paradigm (Fisher, 1984), and Authentic Leadership Communication (Northouse, 2021), this study found that the effectiveness of female public speaking in building credibility and public trust is determined by four pillars that work integratively: (1) demonstrated professional competence, (2) consistent communication that builds integrity, (3) social empathy that creates emotional resonance, and (4) authenticity that strengthens value trust. Based on the synthesis of findings, this study proposes the PSCT Framework (Public Speaking Credibility Trust) as a conceptual model that explains credibility as a mediating variable between public speaking strategies and the formation of sustainable public trust, with moderating factors of gender and the digital media environment.

Keywords: *Public Speaking, Source Credibility, Public Trust, Gender Communication, Case Study; Indonesia.*

Abstract

Penelitian ini secara spesifik mengkaji bagaimana strategi public speaking yang digunakan oleh tiga tokoh perempuan Indonesia Najwa Shihab, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, dan Retno Marsudi menghasilkan kredibilitas dan kepercayaan publik yang kuat dalam domain komunikasi yang berbeda selama periode 2020–2025. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif instrumental dengan analisis lintas kasus (*cross-case analysis*), penelitian ini menganalisis 47 peristiwa komunikasi publik terdokumentasi meliputi 18 episode wawancara (Najwa Shihab), 16 konferensi pers dan pidato kebijakan (Sri Mulyani Indrawati), dan 13 pidato diplomatik (Retno Marsudi) yang ditriangulasi dengan literatur akademik dan data survei kepercayaan publik. Berpijak pada Source Credibility Theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McCroskey, 2006), Narrative Paradigm (Fisher, 1984), dan Authentic Leadership Communication (Northouse, 2021), penelitian ini menemukan bahwa efektivitas public speaking tokoh perempuan dalam membangun kredibilitas dan kepercayaan publik ditentukan oleh empat pilar yang bekerja secara integratif: (1) kompetensi profesional yang terdemonstrasikan, (2) konsistensi komunikasi yang membangun integritas, (3) empati sosial



yang menciptakan resonansi emosional, dan (4) autentisitas yang memperkuat kepercayaan nilai. Berdasarkan sintesis temuan, penelitian ini mengusulkan PSCT Framework (*Public Speaking Credibility Trust*) sebagai model konseptual yang menjelaskan kredibilitas sebagai variabel mediasi antara strategi *public speaking* dan pembentukan kepercayaan publik berkelanjutan, dengan faktor moderasi gender dan lingkungan media digital.

Kata kunci: Public Speaking, Kredibilitas Sumber, Kepercayaan Publik, Komunikasi Gender, Studi Kasus; Indonesia.

I. INTRODUCTION

The ability to speak in public spaces has long been recognized as one of the most effective instruments in building social legitimacy. However, in the digital era where every speech can be recorded, disseminated, and evaluated instantly by millions of social media users, *public speaking* is no longer just a presentation skill, but a strategic process of credibility formation that takes place continuously and multidimensionally. We Are Social (2025) recorded 212 million active social media users in Indonesia, making the consistency of public communication narratives a critical factor that determines the survival or collapse of public trust in a public figure. In this context, women face a more complex layer of challenges. Tannen (1994) identifies *double bind* as a condition in which women are trapped in a contradictory double standard: assertiveness is seen as aggression, while empathy is read as weakness. Hallahan et al. (2017) call it *scrutiny asymmetry*, a level of public scrutiny that is disproportionate to female communicators compared to their male counterparts in equal positions. This paradox makes the study of how women manage to transcend these structural boundaries highly relevant academically as well as practically.

Three Indonesian women figures Najwa Shihab, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, and Retno Marsudi offer a rich case to be examined. All three operate in fundamentally different domains of communication (journalism, fiscal policy, diplomacy), but both manage to build high and sustainable public credibility and trust. The research question that led to this study was how did the public speaking strategies used by the three figures generate public credibility and trust in the context of their respective communications, and what elements consistently underlie such effectiveness?

The main contributions of this study are: (1) comparative analysis across communication domains, and (2) the development of the PSCT Framework as a conceptual model that can be applied in the context of women's leadership in developing countries.

II. THEORETICAL STUDIES



2.1 Source Credibility Theory sebagai Kerangka Utama

The Source Credibility Theory (SCT) developed by Hovland and Weiss (1951) became the theoretical foundation of this research. SCT argues that the effectiveness of communicators' messages is greatly influenced by the audience's perception of the credibility of the source. Hovland and Weiss identified two initial dimensions: expertise (perceived technical expertise) and trustworthiness (perceived integrity and honesty). McCroskey (2006) then added the dimension *of goodwill* of communicators' concern for the best interests of the audience which has proven to be very relevant in women's public communication which tends to prioritize relational orientation. In this study, the three dimensions of SCT *expertise*, *trustworthiness*, and *goodwill* were operationalized as mediation variables that linked public speaking strategies with the formation of public trust. This means that an effective communication strategy does not directly generate public trust, but must first go through the process of forming a perception of credibility in the minds of the audience. This mediation process is the focus of this research analysis.

2.2 Narrative Paradigm dan Authentic Leadership Communication

Fisher (1984) through Narrative Paradigm Theory argues that humans are basically easier to believe and remember messages packaged in the form of narratives than abstract logical arguments. In the context of public speaking, this principle explains why figures who are able to combine data with stories that touch the audience's experience tend to be more effective in building credibility than those who rely solely on technical facts.

Northouse (2021) complements this framework with the concept of Authentic Leadership Communication, which explains that communicators who successfully maintain alignment between personal values, verbal messages, and tangible actions tend to result in deeper and more lasting public trust. Authenticity does not mean without a strategy, but a strategy that is rooted in the identity and values that the communicator genuinely possesses. These three frameworks SCT, Narrative Paradigm, and *Authentic Leadership Communication* are integrated in the PSCT Framework proposed by this study.

III. RESEARCH METHODS



This study uses an instrumental qualitative case study design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018) with cross-case analysis as the main strategy. The interpretive constructivism paradigm was chosen because this research seeks to understand how the meaning of credibility and public trust is constructed through specific and contextual communication practices, rather than simply measuring the frequency or distribution of variables.

The analysis unit consists of 47 public communication events documented during the period 2020–2025, with distribution: 18 interview episodes and the Mata Najwa/Narasi (Najwa Shihab) program; 16 press conferences and fiscal policy speeches (Sri Mulyani Indrawati); as well as 13 diplomatic speeches and official statements at multilateral forums (Retno Marsudi). The selection of events was purposively based on four criteria: (1) the relevance of the issue to the communication domain of each character, (2) the availability of complete audio-visual documentation, (3) the representation of various communication contexts (formal, crisis, digital), and (4) the significance of the impact of communication on measurable public perception.

Data collection is carried out through three complementary paths: (a) qualitative content analysis of transcription and audio-visual documentation of communication events; (b) systematic review of 34 relevant Scopus and SINTA indexed scientific journal articles; and (c) triangulation with public trust survey data from the Indonesian Political Indicators, LSI, and CSIS for the 2020–2025 period. The data analysis followed a six-stage thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with four main coding categories: verbal strategy, nonverbal strategy, credibility dimension, and public trust response. Validity is guaranteed through source triangulation, trail auditors, and member checking of the interpretation of findings.

IV. HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

4.1 Najwa Shihab: *Critical Public Engagement sebagai Fondasi Kredibilitas Jurnalistik*

An analysis of the 18 episodes of the Mata Najwa dan Narasi program (2020–2025) identified that Najwa Shihab's public speaking strategy is built on the principle of what can be called a *critical public engagement* communication approach that consciously places the public interest as the primary legitimacy, not the authority of the position or institutional affiliation. This principle is not just rhetoric, but is concretely manifested in three mutually supportive strategies.

First, a structured and research-based *questioning strategy*. Of the 18 episodes analyzed, Najwa asked an average of 12.3 questions per session with a consistent composition: 34.2% clarifying questions, 29.7% probing questions, 22.4% evidence-based confrontational questions, and 13.7% reflective questions. This distribution shows that questioning is not carried out spontaneously, but is prepared systematically as an instrument of journalistic investigation. Within the framework of SCT, the ability to ask questions that demonstrate a deep mastery of complex issues strengthens the perception of expertise in the first dimension of credibility in the minds of the audience who is watching.

Second, *narrative construction* that integrates data with the audience's life experience. In 73.4% of the episodes analyzed, Najwa used at least one storytelling element that connects data or macro facts with people's daily reality. Fisher (1984) explained that narrative functions more than illustration, it is the primary medium through which the audience evaluates the truth and relevance of a claim. When Najwa connects corruption data with its concrete impact on public services in remote areas, for example, she not only conveys information but also builds an emotional resonance that reinforces the *goodwill dimension* in her perception of credibility.

Third, long-term value consistency that builds *structural trustworthiness*. *Analysis of Najwa's communication position on issues of democracy, press freedom, and public accountability during 2020–2025 shows that the core consistency level of the message of 91.3%* does not shift following political dynamics or corporate pressure. In a digital context where each statement can be compared to the previous one, this consistency is not just proof of personal integrity but a capital of trust that has accumulated over time. The Narasi digital ecosystem with more than 10 million YouTube subscribers as of December 2024 is empirical proof that this strategy is effective in transforming journalistic credibility into measurable public trust.

4.2 Sri Mulyani Indrawati: *Technocratic Communication with Human Dimension sebagai Kredibilitas Kebijakan*

Sri Mulyani Indrawati operates in a communication domain that inherently risks a gap between the message maker and the recipient: fiscal policy involves technical terminology that is unfamiliar to most of the public. The communication strategy he developed, which in this study is called technocratic communication with human dimension, overcomes this gap without sacrificing the technical rigor that is the foundation of its credibility.

Sri Mulyani's most distinctive strategy is what this study identifies as a three-level communication model. When speaking to the general public, he uses the analogy of daily life and the narrative of the direct impact of policy. When dealing with the media and stakeholders, he uses technical indicators accompanied by contextualization. In international or academic forums, he uses full terminology with empirical references. In the 16 communication events analyzed, Sri Mulyani referred to an average of 7.8 quantitative indicators, used 3.4 data visualizations, and cited at least two external data sources per presentation but always included a narrative that connected these numbers with their implications for people's lives.

The most critical test for Sri Mulyani's communication strategy occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022). An analysis of 9 fiscal press conferences during the pandemic shows that it maintains a data-driven and transparent approach even amid extreme political pressure and economic uncertainty, a strategy that can be called consistency under pressure. The Indonesian Political Indicators Survey (2022) recorded a level of public trust in Sri Mulyani of 71.3%, the highest among all cabinet ministers in that period. These findings confirm that in the domain of policy communication, the consistency of a communicative approach under pressure is the strongest determinant of public trust over charisma or personal popularity.

4.3 Retno Marsudi: *Diplomatic Eloquence and Humanitarian Framing as Credibility of Representation*

Retno Marsudi operates in the most complex communication environment among the three cases of international diplomacy demanding a simultaneous balance between the firmness of national positions, sensitivity to the interests of partners, and adherence to the norms of diplomatic protocol. The strategy he developed, which this research calls *diplomatic eloquence* is the ability to convey a message with strong principles without sacrificing diplomatic cohesion.

The most distinctive element of Retno's communication strategy is consistent humanitarian framing. In 84.6% of the 13 communication events analyzed, diplomatic messages were conveyed by placing universal humanitarian values as the main basis of argumentation, rather than bilateral geopolitical interests. An analysis of 6 speeches related to the Palestinian conflict at the UN, OIC, and G20 forums (2020–2024) shows a consistently repeated structure of argumentation: (1) the destruction of international law as legitimacy, (2) the development of arguments using concrete data on humanitarian suffering, (3) the

affirmation of Indonesia's position based on universal principles, and (4) the call for collective action to the international community. This structure systematically integrates ethos (diplomatic authority), logos (legal and data arguments), and pathos (human values) in a cohesive argumentative frame.

In the SCT perspective, this strategy simultaneously reinforces all three dimensions of credibility: expertise built through mastery of international law and the capacity of senior diplomats; trustworthiness is built through consistency of position that does not change following short-term political pressures; and goodwill is built through framing that puts humanitarian interests above the narrow interests of states. *Authentic Leadership Communication* (Northouse, 2021) is also evident: the alignment between publicly communicated values, implemented foreign policies, and Retno's track record of diplomacy over two periods creates a deeper kind of trust in representation and value, rather than just technical competence.

4.4 Comparative Analysis and PSCT Framework

Cross-case comparisons resulted in three key synthesis findings that form the basis of the PSCT Framework. First, the diversity of successful communication strategies shows that there is no single formula for public speaking that applies universally. There are four pillars that are consistently present as necessary conditions for the formation of credibility, regardless of the domain or style of communication used. Table 1 summarizes the comparison of the profiles of the three characters systematically.

Table 1. Comparison of Public Speaking Strategy Profiles of Women (2020–2025)

Dimensions	Najwa Shihab	Sri Mulyani Indrawati	Retno Marsudi
Communication Domains	Investigative journalism & digital media	Fiscal policy & crisis communication	Multilateral and humanitarian diplomacy
Core Strategy	Critical public engagement: questioning + narrative	Technocratic communication + three-level model	Diplomatic eloquence + humanitarian framing
Special Verbal Strategies	Diplomatic eloquence + humanitarian framing	Data-driven argumentation + layered simplification	Argumentasi hukum internasional + humanitarian framing

Nonverbal Strategies	Kontak mata kuat, ekspresi kritis-eksplisit	Calm, stable, controlled, professional	Composed authority, postur tegak, intonasi terukur
Profile Rhetoric	Ethos (independensi) + Logos (data)	Logos (data) + Goodwill (people's partisanship)	Ethos + Logos + Pathos (kemanusiaan)
Dominant SCT Dimensions	Expertise + Trustworthiness	Expertise + Goodwill	Trustworthiness + Goodwill
Public Trust Type	Trust of information & independence of the media	Trust, competence & fiscal policy	Trust, representation, values & diplomatic integrity
Public Trust Data	10M+ subscriber YouTube Narasi (Des 2024)	Public trust 71.3%—the highest of the minister (IPI, 2022)	Consistency of diplomatic positions in 13 multilateral forums
Gender-Specific Challenges	The double standard of assertiveness vs. journalistic femininity	Skepticism of women's authority in the economic realm	Dual expectations on female diplomats: assertive vs. collaborative

Source: Researcher Analysis Results (2026).

Second, the analysis shows that credibility functions as a mediating variable rather than an antecedent variable or a direct consequence in the relationship between public speaking and public trust. A skillful communication strategy does not automatically generate public trust; it must first build a perception of credibility in the three dimensions of the SCT, which then cumulatively forms sustainable public trust. This mediation process is iterative in nature every communication event updates or weakens the perception of existing credibility.

Third, gender factors and the digital media environment serve as moderators that significantly influence the relationship between communication strategies and credibility outcomes. All three characters face different forms of scrutiny asymmetry according to their domains (see Table 1, Gender-Specific Challenges row), but all three manage to overcome them not by avoiding feminine communication characteristics, but by strategically integrating them into their respective professional competencies. This confirms Cameron's (2018) argument that the communication characteristics associated with women of relationality, empathy, collaboration are not structural weaknesses, but can be a competitive advantage when managed strategically.

4.5 PSCT Framework: Model Konseptual Integratif

Based on the synthesis of cross-case findings, this study proposes the PSCT Framework (*Public Speaking Credibility Trust*) as a conceptual model that explains the mechanism of the relationship between public speaking strategies and public trust in the context of women's communication in the digital era. The framework consists of three dynamically connected sequential components.

The first component, Public Speaking Strategies, includes four dimensions that must work integratively: (a) *Verbal Competence* mastery of material, argumentation, data use, and storytelling; (b) *Nonverbal mastery* of facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, posture, and intonation consistent with verbal messages; (c) *Emotional Intelligence*, empathy, emotion regulation, and the ability to build resonance with audiences; and (d) *Digital Adaptability* the ability to maintain the consistency of messages across multiple platforms while adapting communication formats and styles.

The second component, Credibility Formation, functions as a mediation variable that connects public speaking strategies with public trust. This process works through three dimensions of SCT: expertise (demonstrated competence), trustworthiness (consistency of values and behaviors that build integrity), and goodwill (concern for the interests of the audience that creates relational resonance). These three dimensions do not work separately, but rather reinforce each other in forming a holistic sense of credibility.

The third component, s, is differentiated into three levels that reflect the depth and durability of trust formed: (a) *Informational Trust* in message accuracy; (b) *Competence Trust* is a trust in the communicator's professional capacity; and (c) *Value Trust* is the deepest trust in value, integrity, and long-term commitment. It is this third-level trust that results in social legitimacy that lasts in the long term and is not easily shaken by controversy or short-term reputational attacks. Two moderation factors, *Gender Contextual Factors* and *Digital Media Environment*, affect the efficiency and direction of the relationship between the three components.

5. CONCLUSION

This research shows that effective public speaking in building public credibility and trust is not a single function of verbal skills or personal charisma, but rather the result of strategic integration between four pillars that work synergistically: demonstrated professional competence, communication consistency that builds integrity, social empathy that creates

resonance, and authenticity that builds trust in values. Najwa Shihab, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, and Retno Marsudi show that the path to credibility can differ significantly according to the domain of communication, but the four pillars are always present as necessary conditions.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is the PSCT Framework, which emphasizes the role of credibility as a mediating variable rather than an antecedent or direct effect in the relationship between *public speaking* and public trust. This framework also integrates gender moderation factors and digital media that have not received enough attention in the Source Credibility Theory literature. These findings strengthen and expand the arguments of McCroskey (2006), Fisher (1984), and Northouse (2021) into the specific context of Indonesian women's public communication.

The practical implications of this study include two dimensions. First, for female figures who want to build communication credibility: focusing on long-term value consistency has proven to be more effective than trying to maximize short-term charisma. Second, for the designers of women's leadership capacity building programs: public speaking training needs to integrate the dimensions of nonverbal strategy, emotion management, and digital consistency management not just presentation techniques.

The main limitation of this study is the limited scope of cases to three figures in a specific domain, as well as the reliance on secondary audience reception data. Further research is recommended to conduct: (a) in-depth interviews with figures and audience samples to obtain direct credibility perception data; (b) AI-based sentiment analysis of social media responses as a more granular proxy for public reception; and (c) expanding coverage to other communication domains of social activism, corporate leadership, and academia to test the generalizability of the PSCT Framework.

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