

Persuasive Strategies in Jacinda Ardern's Speeches: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Women Leadership in Crisis

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Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, women's language, leadership, persuasive strategies, crisis communication DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v10i1.1950 How to cite: Sartika, D. Ulfiati, L. & Hidayati, H. (2025). Persuasive Strategies in Jacinda Ardern's Speeches: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Women Leadership in Crisis. <i>Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics</i>, 10(1), 109-124	<i>Traditional views of leadership often associate strong leadership with directness, decisiveness, and dominance, which are stereotypically coded as masculine while perceiving empathy and collaborative orientation—qualities commonly associated with femininity—as less compatible with effective leadership. However, contemporary research increasingly highlights the importance of empathy in leadership, particularly during crises, which has brought women's leadership into the spotlight. This study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodological approach, using Fairclough's three-dimensional model as an analytical framework to examine the communicative strategies used by New Zealand's former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in her speeches following the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings. By analyzing six transcripts of her speeches, this study identifies discourse patterns that reveal her persuasive strategies and examines their role in crisis communication. The findings revealed three critical elements of Ardern's persuasive strategies: (1) combining transparency and compassion to foster trust, (2) demonstrating clarity and decisiveness to establish authority, and (3) using motivational and forward-looking discourse to inspire collective action. These elements illustrate how Ardern's empathetic communication built public trust and encouraged compliance, while her directive and decisive language facilitated actionable resolution, which enabled the nation's swift recovery. By critically challenging persistent gender stereotypes in leadership that frame empathy and decisiveness as mutually exclusive traits, this study underscores the transformative potential of empathetic leadership in crisis management and contributes to advancing gender equity in leadership discourse.</i>

1. Introduction

The role of language in leadership, particularly during crises, has garnered increasing scholarly attention. Traditional leadership paradigms often associate effective leadership with stereotypically masculine traits, such as directness, decisiveness, competitiveness, dominance, task-oriented approaches, and risk-taking tendencies. Meanwhile, qualities stereotypically associated with women, such as empathy, understanding, cooperation, person-oriented approach, and sensitivity to others' needs, are often perceived as less compatible with effective leadership (Blake-Beard et al., 2020; Eagly & Heilman, 2016; Walker & Aritz, 2015). These perceptions reinforce enduring stereotypes that position women as less suited for leadership roles, particularly in high-pressure situations where strategic decision-making is critical. However, contemporary leadership frameworks increasingly emphasize emotional intelligence as a fundamental component of effective leadership, especially in crisis contexts (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Rosette & Tost, 2010; Schoofs et al., 2022).

This reevaluation of leadership traits gained significant momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought women's leadership to the forefront. Studies highlight that women-led countries demonstrated more effective crisis management, achieving favorable outcomes, such as more efficient virus containment and lower mortality rates, compared to countries with similar profiles (Bruce et al., 2022; Garikipati & Kambhampati, 2021). Research attributes this success to women leaders' empathetic prioritization of public safety over economic risks, which fosters stronger public trust (Ozdenerol et al., 2023; Schoofs et al., 2022; Waylen, 2021).

Despite the growing recognition of women's leadership efficacy, little research examines how leaders, particularly women, strategically cultivate public trust through communication in high-stakes crises. Existing studies primarily focus on tangible policy outcomes, measured through quantifiable metrics, such as economic resilience and mortality rates (Johnson & Williams, 2020; Offermann & Foley, 2020), which are often determined by a country's logistical capacity. However, leadership effectiveness extends beyond measurable metrics. Strong leadership fundamentally involves shaping public responses and decisions, a process deeply shaped by language and the discourse of persuasion (Clementson, 2020; Joullié et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021). In crisis settings, where uncertainty and fear are heightened, persuasive leadership is essential not only for coordinating logistical responses but also for shaping public perception and fostering trust (Brown & Nwagbara, 2021; Clementson, 2020; Seeger, 2006).

Using the speeches of New Zealand's former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern following the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings as a case study, this study addresses an existing research gap by shifting the focus from policy-based leadership evaluation to an examination of communicative strategies that enable effective crisis management. Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) through Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this study critically examines how Ardern's rhetorical choices facilitated crisis navigation. Unlike global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, which demand large-scale logistical responses, localized tragedies require leaders to address collective trauma while navigating complex sociocultural sensitivities. The Christchurch mosque shootings presented a particularly delicate challenge, as the attack deliberately targeted a religious minority—Muslims—which heightened the

risks of social divisions (Every-Palmer et al., 2021). Mishandling such a crisis could have led to deepened polarization, increased discrimination, and prolonged social unrest. Similar patterns have been observed in crises involving religious groups worldwide, such as the 2020 Delhi Riots (Kabir, 2020) and the 2015 Paris Attacks (Hellmuth, 2015).

Ardern's leadership during this crisis received widespread global recognition (Van Wart et al., 2022; Wilson, 2024). Her swift actions in guiding New Zealand toward recovery have set a global example of how great leaders navigate crises with empathy and decisiveness. Beyond the national context, this study explores how her approach offers transferrable lessons for crisis leadership worldwide. In an era marked by increasing global uncertainties, ranging from security threats to humanitarian crises, leaders must develop strong persuasive strategies to foster public trust, guide responses, and ensure compliance, all of which are foundational to effective crisis management. By examining Jacinda Ardern's rhetorical strategies, this study highlights how communicative approaches rooted in empathy can be as critical as policy decisions in shaping crisis responses.

The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on persuasive communication as a leadership tool in crisis settings. Rather than focusing solely on policy effectiveness or gendered leadership outcomes, this study investigates the specific rhetorical techniques that allow leaders to build trust and drive collective actions. Grounded on theories of persuasive communication and transformational leadership, this study addresses two research questions: (1) what persuasive strategies did Ardern employ in her crisis speeches and (2) how did these strategies build public trust and encourage compliance? By analyzing these understudied dimensions of leadership, this study challenges the notion that empathy and decisiveness are mutually exclusive and contributes to broader discussions on how effective leadership is constructed through discourse.

2. Literature Review

The analysis of Jacinda Ardern's speeches during the Christchurch mosque shootings requires theoretical frameworks that capture the evolving expectations of leadership and the unique communicative demands of crisis contexts. By integrating transformational leadership theory and crisis communication, this literature review establishes the conceptual basis for examining Ardern's persuasive strategies and their impact on public trust and collective action. Specifically, it focuses on how leadership traits traditionally deemed feminine, such as empathy and collaboration, align with contemporary demands for inclusivity and emotional intelligence in effective leadership, particularly in crisis settings.

2.1. Persuasion in Transformational Leadership

As societal values have evolved and workplaces become more interconnected, the qualities required for effective leadership have significantly shifted. Traditional associations of strong leadership with decisiveness, dominance, and assertiveness, which are traits stereotypically coded as masculine, have become less central. Modern leadership increasingly prioritizes transformational leadership, which emphasizes trust-building, collaboration, and shared values and goals (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Gotsis & Grimani, 2016). Within this framework, persuasion—defined as an act of aligning goals and values through emotional resonance—has emerged as a hallmark, as leaders must inspire cooperation rather than rely on coercion (Rosette & Tost, 2010; Saint-Michel, 2018).

The conceptual roots of persuasion date back to Aristotle's rhetorical framework, which defines persuasion as an act of influencing grounded on three fundamental elements: the credibility of the persuader (ethos), logical reasoning (logos), and emotional appeal (pathos) (Luo et al., 2021). In contemporary leadership research, persuasion is increasingly examined in the context of communicative power, particularly in how leaders inspire voluntary cooperation. Joullié et al., (2021) emphasize that effective leadership is legitimized by the consent of those being led, asserting that "...a leader's power is authorised by those to whom it applies. As such, any relationship that involves involuntary obedience is not one of leadership." (p. 10). Moreover, their work highlights how ethical persuasion—characterised by "sincerity, accurate descriptions, sound reasoning and a sense of responsibility" (p. 10)—facilitates voluntary cooperation.

This shift in leadership dynamics has particularly benefited women leaders, who often adopt a transformational leadership style centered on emotional intelligence to inspire trust and empower followers (Rosette & Tost, 2010; Saint-Michel, 2018; Sharif, 2019). Once often dismissed as "soft skills", emotional intelligence is now recognized as a fundamental aspect of effective leadership (Brown & Nwagbara, 2021; Görgens-Ekermans & Roux, 2021). Unlike forceful command, persuasion integrates authenticity and shared purpose, which enables leaders to guide individuals toward voluntary cooperation. This approach prioritizes collaboration over competition, fostering an environment where individuals feel valued and motivated to contribute to shared objectives (Asafo-Adjei et al., 2023; Meng & Neill, 2021).

Women leaders, in particular, foster inclusivity and collaboration by prioritizing open communication, mutual respect, and team cohesion (Blake-Beard et al., 2020; Gotsis & Grimani, 2016). These strategies create culture where individuals feel empowered and motivated to contribute meaningfully (Aydogmus et al., 2018; Mölders et al., 2018). This challenges traditional leadership norms that prioritize hierarchical authority and dominance. In crisis contexts, where uncertainty and emotional distress are heightened, leaders must adopt communicative strategies that reassure the public and maintain stability.

2.2. Transformational Leadership and Crisis Communication

Leading through crisis situations requires a distinct set of skills beyond those needed for routine governance. Studies emphasize that trust-building communication is key to effective crisis mitigation. Unlike routine leadership, crises are marked by heightened uncertainty, emotional distress, and public skepticism. Forceful command, often associated with hypermasculine leadership styles (Waylen, 2021), is insufficient to address these complex dynamics. Instead, effective crisis leadership requires persuading people to trust authority, comply with directives, and work collectively toward resolution (Clementson, 2020; Clementson & Xie, 2021; Seeger, 2006).

Studies highlight the limitation of hypermasculine leadership styles in crisis contexts, particularly those characterized by dominance, control, and unilateral decision-making. During the COVID-19 crisis, for instance, leaders who underestimated the severity of the pandemic and framed it as an adversary to be conquered through strength often failed to mobilize public trust (Waylen, 2021). This leadership approach overlooks the emotional and social complexities of crisis management. Crises like the COVID-19 pandemic demand more than logistical solutions; they demand public trust and cooperation with preventive

measures. Achieving these outcomes largely depend on effective communication rather than forceful leadership.

Empathetic communication plays a pivotal role in crisis leadership, not only in logistical management but also in psychologically reassuring the public (Ozdenerol et al., 2023). Seeger (2006) asserts that the strength of empathetic communication lies in the acknowledgment of public emotions and validation of concerns. This approach helps individuals feel seen and understood, increasing their willingness to cooperate with crisis measures (Bruce et al., 2022; Yarchi & Hershman-Shitrit, 2023). When leaders express genuine empathy, the public perceives their actions as legitimate and appropriate, which reduce skepticism and resistance and create conditions for more effective recovery (Schoofs et al., 2022).

Women leaders have excelled in this domain, as their empathetic and collaborative communication styles align with the demands of crisis leadership. Crisis situations require not only decisive action but also adaptability, as leaders must respond dynamically to rapidly evolving circumstances. Women leaders' ability to combine emotional intelligence with strategic decision-making enables them to address both emotional trauma and logistical management inherent in crises (Zenger & Folkman, 2020). This contrasts sharply with hypermasculine approaches, which prioritize immediate control over fostering long-term trust and collaboration.

However, while transformational leadership is widely praised, scholars have identified key limitations in its application to high-pressure crisis environments. In situations where immediate safety is primary concern, transactional leadership may be more effective as it prioritizes structured decision-making, strict protocols, and rule enforcement over persuasion and voluntary cooperation (Willis et al., 2017). Moreover, in long-term crisis management, an overreliance on empathetic leadership can place undue pressure on leaders, as it often depends on charisma and personal connection to sustain public trust and morale (Anderson & Sun, 2015; Lin et al., 2019; Zwingmann et al., 2016). This emotional strain can lead to leadership fatigue, making it unsustainable without clear mechanisms to distribute responsibility.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design, utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary method to examine the persuasive strategies in six speeches delivered by New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern following the 2019 Christchurch mosque shootings. This tragic event, which claimed 50 lives and injured another 50, sent shockwaves across New Zealand and the global community. Ardern's response, widely praised for its empathy and decisiveness, provides a compelling case for analysing leadership communication in crisis contexts. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how Ardern's linguistic strategies contributed to facilitating the nation's rapid recovery.

A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen as it enables an in-depth examination of the rhetorical strategies used in leadership and crisis discourse. This study is built on the premise that the persuasive dimension of leadership operates through discursive mechanisms, where

language is strategically employed to elicit specific effects or responses from listeners (Nwagbara & Belal, 2019; Scannell et al., 2021).

3.2. Data Collection

The speeches analysed in this study were sourced exclusively from YouTube, as it is a publicly accessible platform that hosts government statements and media broadcasts. The selected speeches, delivered on March 15 (two speeches), March 16, March 18, March 21, and March 29, 2019, provide a comprehensive view of Ardern's evolving discourse throughout the crisis.

The selection was guided by two main criteria: timing and thematic significance. The speeches span three critical phases of crisis response, including the immediate reaction (March 15-16), the government interventions (March 18-21), and nationwide recovery efforts (March 29). This selection ensures that the trajectory of Ardern's crisis communication, from immediate response to long-term crisis resolution, is fully captured. Additionally, these selected speeches received widespread public and media attention, reinforcing their impact on national and global audiences.

Speech transcripts were generated using digital application, i.e. Transcribe Speech to Text" and "Live Transcribe." To ensure accuracy and reliability, these digitally generated transcripts were manually reviewed and corrected, with careful attention to lexical nuances, rhetorical features, and discourse markers essential to the analysis. The final transcripts provide a precise textual representation of Ardern's speeches, allowing for an in-depth examination of her communicative strategies.

3.3. Data Analysis Procedures

The study employed Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional CDA model as its primary analytical approach to uncover Ardern's persuasive strategies. The textual analysis involved the identification of lexical choices and sentence structures that indicate persuasive strategies that contribute to persuasion. This includes Ardern's use of inclusive language, emotional appeals, rhetorical repetitions to reinforce key messages. The discursive analysis examined how Ardern's speeches progressed logically over time, which indicated strategic messaging and thematic progression in response to the evolving crisis situation and communication objectives. The sociocultural analysis explored how Ardern's persuasive strategies resonated within New Zealand's sociocultural landscape. This provides insights into how her discourse reinforced or redefined leadership expectations, particularly in gendered and crisis contexts.

To enhance the analytical depth of this study, thematic analysis was also applied to identify recurring patterns in Ardern's persuasive strategies. This thematic framework enabled the classification of persuasive techniques into distinct categories, such as emotional appeals, authoritative reassurance, and calls for collective action. This combined approach ensures a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of Ardern's persuasive leadership.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Since the data were collected from publicly accessible sources, the study adhered to ethical guidelines by ensuring that all transcripts and analyses were used solely for academic purposes. As no personal or sensitive information was involved, the study strictly operates within the context of public discourse analysis.

To mitigate potential interpretive bias, the study followed a transparent coding process and cross-referenced findings with existing literature on leadership communication and crisis rhetoric. Furthermore, neutrality was maintained throughout the analysis by focusing solely on linguistic and rhetorical strategies. Careful attention was given to accurate transcription and contextualization of speech excerpts, considering both the timing of the speeches and the stages of the crisis in which they were delivered. This approach ensured that Ardern's statements were interpreted in alignment with their intended meaning and communicative function.

4. Results

The analysis of Jacinda Ardern's speeches in response to the Christchurch mosque shootings identifies three core elements of persuasion: (1) combining transparency and compassion to foster trust, (2) demonstrating clarity and decisiveness to provide actionable resolution, and (3) using motivational and forward-looking discourse to inspire collective action. These elements reflect how her persuasive strategies were instrumental in crisis leadership, particularly in fostering national unity and managing public response.

The following sections explore each of these persuasive strategies and contextualize them within the broader framework of persuasive communication, empathetic and transformational leadership, and crisis communication. This analysis highlights how leaders can harness discourse to build trust, mobilize communities, and sustain national resilience in time of crisis. To facilitate discussion, the speeches are numbered according to their delivery sequence, with two speeches delivered on March 15 coded as Speech 1 and Speech 2, followed by Speech 3 (March 16), Speech 4 (March 18), Speech 5 (March 21), and Speech 6 (March 29).

4.1. Combining Transparency and Compassion

Jacinda Ardern's response to the Christchurch mosque shootings demonstrates a cohesive integration of transparency and compassion as key persuasive strategies. From the outset, Ardern prioritized factual clarity while maintaining a strong empathetic tone. In Speech 1, delivered around 4 p.m. on March 15, 2019, shortly after the attacks, Ardern acknowledged the limitations of available information, stating "Uh, while I cannot give any confirmation at this stage..." while immediately connecting with public emotion, stating "...what I can say is that it is clear that this is one of New Zealand's darkest days."

This opening balanced honesty with reassurance, acknowledging the uncertainty of available information while committing to truthfulness and clarity. As Fröhlich & Jungblut's (2021) argue, transparency is essential in distinguishing credible communication from dubious narratives, and Ardern leveraged it effectively in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy. Furthermore, by framing the tragedy as "one of New Zealand's darkest days", a phrase that resonated with public shock, Ardern reinforced shared national grief, which set the foundation for trust-building.

In Speech 1, Ardern directly addressed the victim's migrant and refugee backgrounds, stating:

"Many of those who will have been directly affected by this shooting, uh, may be migrants to New Zealand. They may even be refugees here. They have chosen to make New Zealand their home and it, is their home. They are us."

Ardern's use of inclusive language "They are us" not only validated the victims' belonging but also challenged potential divisions within the national identity. This aligns with Seeger's (2006) study, which highlights that compassionate communication fosters trust by validating public emotions and creating a sense of solidarity.

Ardern's first speech demonstrated a clear structure of her priorities in the crisis: reducing uncertainty and panic by delivering accurate updates and actionable instructions while showing empathy for the public's emotional trauma. She communicated these intentions with clarity through expressions such as "It's my expectation..." and "I intend...".

Later that evening at around 7.25 p.m. Ardern held a press conference, opening with a statement that signaled the urgency of factual accuracy amidst public shock. As she said, "I have now had the opportunity to be fully briefed with the details ..." (Speech 2). By grounding her speech in verified information, Ardern built credibility by reassuring the public that her statements were based on reliable data. She used factual language to ensure public understanding of the full extent of the tragedy, such as mentioning the exact number of casualties and injured victims. Ardern's approach to building trustworthiness by communicating evidence and facts aligns with Fröhlich & Jungblut's (2021) study, which reveals that evidence-based communication enhances credibility and differentiates leadership discourse from misinformation or propaganda.

The Christchurch shooting was particularly unique because the attackers were white men, and the victims were Muslims. This challenges the stereotype that associates terrorism with Islamic belief. Unlike many political leaders who tend to avoid making explicit statements on politically sensitive issue, Ardern chose not to politicize the tragedy. Instead, Ardern consistently used strong, non-political, and explicit language, labelling the violence as "extreme violence" and "a terrorist attack" from her earliest public address of the tragedy. This underscores her commitment to providing clear and truthful descriptions of the situation.

In Speech 3, Ardern provided detailed information about the weapons used in the attack, stating "...two semi-automatic weapons and two shotguns. The offender was in possession of a gun license." Beyond offering specific, factual details, she transparently disclosed that the attacker had legally obtained firearms. Her decision to openly reveal this information, despite potential political repercussions regarding gun licensing regulations, demonstrated her commitment to accountability and truthfulness over political image management.

Such honest, apolitical communication is rare among leaders in similar situations, as such disclosures often expose governments to public scrutiny. For example, public responses to mass shootings in the United States frequently express harsh critiques and frustration toward political leaders, whose rhetoric is often perceived as deflecting the urgency of stricter gun laws. The impact of Ardern's truthful communication aligns with Clementson's (2020) study, which highlights how ethical, truthful narratives enhance trustworthiness in crisis communication (see also Clementson & Xie, 2021; Seeger, 2006).

Ardern's transparent and straightforward description of the attack was accompanied by her demonstration of profound empathy. By using careful word choices, she acknowledged the pain and suffering experienced by the victims and the broader New Zealand community. Her use of lexicons such as "New Zealand's darkest days", "extreme sadness", "pain", "suffering", "grief of a city" highlighted her deep understanding of the emotional toll caused by the attack

on individuals and communities. These terms allowed her not only to express sympathy openly but also validate the pain of those affected. Furthermore, Ardern's use of inclusive pronouns like "we" and "our" such as in "our compassion" and "We are a proud nation" created a collective identity and framed the tragedy as a shared national grief. It emphasized that the grief belonged not only to the victims and their families, who were mostly New Zealand's migrants and refugees, but also to the entire nation.

4.2. Demonstrating Clarity and Decisiveness

Beyond transparency and compassion, Ardern's speeches exhibited unwavering clarity and decisiveness, particularly in outlining actionable steps to address the crisis. Her use of direct language, primarily through simple, clear statements, provided both reassurance and direction, ensuring that the public understood the government's priorities. In Speech 2, delivered just hours after the attack, she declared:

"It is clear that this can now only be described as a terrorist attack ... Our national security threat level has been lifted from low to high. This, I want to assure people, is to ensure that all our agencies are responding in the most appropriate way."

Ardern's choice of lexical items such as "It is clear", "assure", and "ensure" signaled firm control over the situation while maintaining public confidence. She reinforced the government's swift response, using definitive phrases such as "ensuring agencies respond appropriately", which demonstrated her commitment to an immediate and coordinated response. Through this assertive yet reassuring tone, Ardern instilled confidence that the government's ability to handle the crisis effectively.

In Speech 3, delivered just one day after the attack, Ardern made a groundbreaking announcement regarding gun law reform, declaring "I can tell you one thing right now: our gun laws will change...". This powerful assertion of leadership signaled her commitment to immediate action. She further reinforced this stance by referencing previous unsuccessful attempts to strengthen New Zealand's gun laws, stating "There have been attempts to change our laws in 2005, 2012 and after an inquiry in 2017. Now is the time for change." By framing the moment as a critical turning point, Ardern underscored the urgency of decisive leadership. Her use of the phrase "Now is the time" functioned as a powerful rhetorical device, which emphasizes her commitment to breaking away from past inaction and implementing meaningful reforms. This language positioned Ardern as a proactive leader who was not merely reacting to the crisis but actively steering the nation toward progress.

Ardern's firm and unhesitant stance on gun law reform, demonstrated through her swift response to tightening gun restrictions, distinguished her from many world leaders. In countries that have experienced mass shootings, political leaders often resort to neutral, vague, or clichéd rhetoric to avoid responsibility and deflect attention from systematic failure in gun legislation. They typically offer condolences and express grief while sidestepping policy discussions that address the root causes of gun violence. Common phrases such as "it is not the gun but the person..." are frequently used to shift the narrative away from legislative reform. In the United States, for example, political discourse surrounding gun reform is often softened or diluted to minimize political backlash (Kantack & Paschall, 2020; Merry, 2018). Ardern, on the other hand, did not hesitate to confront the issue head-on and pushed for immediate legislative action rather than relying on symbolic expression of sympathy without concrete policy changes.

In Speech 4, delivered just three days after the attack, Ardern reaffirmed her commitment to swift legislative action, stating, "... within 10 days of this horrific act of terrorism we will have announced reforms which will, I believe, make our community safer..." She further emphasized the urgency of reform by directly acknowledging that the tragedy had "exposed a range of weaknesses in New Zealand's gun laws." Ardern's assertive, unambiguous, and resolute stance sent a clear message to the public that her government was committed to action rather than political convenience.

Ardern's approach aligns with Al-Dabbagh's (2020) study on decision-making in crisis management. The study suggests that clarity in leaders' priorities and the rationale behind their decisions are critical factors in effective crisis management. Clear messaging enables the public to comprehend the situation rather than resorting to "the safe inaction" (p. 2). Another critical factor in crisis leadership is decision-making swiftness, which involves immediate recognition of threats and rapid implementation of necessary measures. Ardern's phrase "This ultimately means that within 10 days..." showcased the swiftness of her actions, which indicated her decisive leadership.

4.3. Using Motivational and Forward-looking Discourse

A defining feature of Ardern's persuasion strategy was her ability to timely shift the discourse from providing precise updates on the attack to fostering national healing and restoring New Zealand's identity as a diverse and peaceful nation. In Speech 6, delivered two weeks after the attack, she framed the tragedy as a shared experience, stating, "We gather here, 14 days on from our darkest of hours... These stories, they now form part of our collective memories. They will remain with us forever. They are us." Her use of collective pronouns such as "we", "our", and "us" and lexical choices like "collective memory" created a shared sense of belonging, which positions the citizens as part of a mourning community. By first acknowledging the communal pain, Ardern effectively transitioned her discourse toward solidarity, which allowed the nation to connect emotionally and take shared responsibility in the healing process together.

Ardern further reframed the narrative from tragedy and victimhood to strength and bravery, particularly through the phrase "But with that memory comes a responsibility." This rhetorical shift pushed the nation forward, urging people to move from grief to action and transform recovery into a collective journey toward a stronger and more inclusive society that rejects hatred and violence. This shift from loss to strength reflects a transformational leadership strategy, wherein leaders reframe crises as opportunities for growth and solidarity (Brown & Nwagbara, 2021; Schoofs et al., 2022).

In Speech 6, Ardern emphasized individual responsibility in combating hate in her powerful call to action:

"Our challenge now is to make the very best of us, a daily reality. Because we are not immune to the viruses of hate, of fear, of other. We never have been. But we can be the nation that discovers the cure. And so to each of us as we go from here, we have work to do, but do not leave the job of combating hate to the government alone."

This statement empowered individuals by highlighting that the solution to hatred and violence lies in everyday actions. By shifting the responsibility to all citizens, Ardern

reinforced the idea that social change is a collective effort rather than solely dependent on political leadership.

In the concluding part of Speech 6, Ardern articulated her vision for the "legacy of the 15th of March", which sent a powerful message that New Zealand's painful experiences should serve not only as a national lesson but also as a global call against violence and extremism. This forward-looking narrative positioned New Zealand as a model of resilience and compassion, which inspires both citizens and the international community to commit to fostering peace and humanity.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Jacinda Ardern's response to the Christchurch mosque shootings provides a compelling case of crisis leadership that integrates emotional intelligence with decisive action. This section contextualizes these findings within the broader framework of transformational leadership and crisis communication, which contributes to a deeper understanding of persuasive communication in crisis contexts.

Traditional leadership models often associate effectiveness with traits stereotypically coded as masculine, such as assertiveness and dominance, while perceiving qualities associated with femininity such as empathy as a sign of weakness (Heilman, 2012; Schoofs et al., 2022). Ardern's approach challenges this dichotomy by demonstrating how empathetic communication can coexist with decisive leadership. Her speeches skillfully combined transparency, compassion, decisiveness, and forward-looking discourse that fostered trust and facilitated collective action. These findings challenge the conventional notion that empathy compromises strength. Instead, it highlights its critical role in fostering trust and compliance during crises.

The analysis of Ardern's speeches shows a cohesive progression of persuasive strategies aligned with the evolving nature of the crisis. In the initial stages, she prioritized reducing uncertainty through transparent updates and expressions of heartfelt empathy. Her acknowledgment of the scale of the tragedy and the grief of affected families demonstrated her commitment to transparent and compassionate leadership. These elements align with Seeger's (2006) framework, which emphasizes that empathetic communication fosters public trust by validating emotions and making people feel seen and understood.

A distinctive feature of Ardern's leadership was her recognition of New Zealand's sociocultural values. She openly acknowledged the country's vulnerability to the "viruses of hate, of fear, of other", which demonstrated her understanding of New Zealand's identity as a diverse society. By framing the tragedy within this cultural context, Ardern connected her speeches to the nation's collective values. This helped her foster a deeper emotional connection with her audience. This cultural sensitivity was essential in leaders' ability to respond to the public emotional trauma during the crisis, as it allows leaders to align their communicative approach with public values and expectations (Joullié et al., 2021). As a result, leaders are perceived as authentic and trustworthy, which allows them to secure public voluntary obedience with their crisis response.

As the crisis evolved, Ardern transitioned from empathetic reassurance to decisive actions, particularly in advocating for immediate gun law reform. Her ability to enact legislative changes within weeks of the tragedy underscores the effectiveness of persuasive leadership

in mobilizing public support and driving political will. Unlike the inaction often observed in other political contexts following mass shootings, Ardern's swift response reinforced her government's credibility and commitment to protecting public safety. This finding aligns with Waylen's (2021) critique of hypermasculine leadership, which often prioritizes authority and control over trust-building and public cooperation. Ardern's leadership, in contrast, exemplifies how persuasive communication can drive not only public sentiment but also tangible policy change. The successful implementation of gun law reform in New Zealand, only within two weeks after the Christchurch tragedy, represents a rare instance where crisis leadership directly led to legislative action. This highlights the potential transformative power of persuasive leadership in effecting real-world policy change.

In the final stages of her crisis response, Ardern employed motivational and forward-looking discourse to guide the nation toward recovery. By framing the tragedy as a turning point and emphasizing shared values, she transformed collective grief into a unifying purpose. Her use of the phrase "the legacy of the 15th of March" positioned the tragedy not merely as a moment of loss but as a catalyst for societal change. It inspired citizens to take an active role in maintaining peace and inclusivity. This aligns with theories of transformational leadership, which emphasize leaders' persuasive ability to inspire followers toward collective goals (Joullié et al., 2021; Rosette & Tost, 2010). Ardern's discourse successfully shifted the national narrative from mourning to unity, which demonstrates that leadership is not only about managing crises but also about shaping a vision for the future.

The theoretical framework of persuasive communication offers a valuable lens to analyze Ardern's communicative strategies in leading the nation through crisis. However, while empathy was a central component of Ardern's leadership, it is important to consider its limitations in politically polarized societies. Empathy-driven leadership relies on shared values, but in highly fragmented societies, where trust in leadership is deeply divided, persuasive communication alone may not be sufficient. Leaders in such contexts often face resistance from political opposition, media-driven skepticism, or ideological divisions, making it difficult to secure widespread public trust and compliance. Additionally, as highlighted earlier, prolonged reliance on persuasive leadership and empathetic rhetoric may lead to leadership fatigue, especially when public confidence is overly tied to leader's personal charisma rather than institutional trust. This raises an important question: Can Ardern's approach be as effective in societies with weaker social cohesion? Future research could explore how empathetic leadership functions in environments where public trust in government is low or where crisis narratives are heavily politicized.

Future research could build on these findings by exploring how similar persuasive strategies function in different crisis contexts, across various leadership styles and cultures. Comparative studies between male and female leaders or between different forms of crises, such as health crisis, security threats, or economic downturns, could provide deeper insights into the role of gender and discourse in leadership effectiveness. Additionally, investigating public reception and media framing of empathetic leadership could further elucidate how persuasive crisis communication influences long-term political and social stability. In sum, this study not only challenges traditional leadership paradigms but also reinforces the growing recognition that persuasion, emotional intelligence, and rhetorical strategy are indispensable tools in modern leadership. Ardern's leadership in the Christchurch tragedy

provides a practical framework for crisis leaders worldwide, offering a model for balancing strength with compassion, ensuring that leadership remains both decisive and deeply human.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the persuasive strategies employed by Jacinda Ardern in her speeches following the Christchurch mosque shootings, demonstrating how her integration of empathetic communication, decisive action, and a forward-looking narrative played a crucial role in crisis leadership. Ardern's ability to balance transparency, compassion, and assertiveness, enabled her to build public trust and compliance, address national grief, and mobilize collective action. These findings highlights that effective crisis leadership is not solely dependent on policy decisions or logistical responses but also on strategic communication that fosters unity and resilience.

The study findings directly address the research questions by identifying the specific persuasive strategies Ardern employed, including her acknowledgment of public emotions and clear calls for collective responsibility. Her leadership approach challenges traditional gendered assumptions that frame empathy and decisiveness as incompatible. Instead, the study shows that emotional intelligence and assertive leadership can coexist as equally powerful components of effective crisis management. By leveraging persuasion rather than coercion, Ardern's leadership style exemplifies the potential of empathetic yet firm governance in navigating crises.

Beyond the specific case of Ardern, this study contributes to a broader understanding of persuasive crisis communication, emphasizing the importance of aligning rhetorical strategies with public needs, cultural values, and emotional landscapes. In an era where crises are increasingly complex, globalized, and emotionally charged, Ardern's approach offers valuable insights for leaders across different cultural and political contexts. Given the growing urgency of social cohesion in crisis management, future leaders must recognize that effective crisis leadership extends beyond authoritative decision-making to include persuasion, emotional intelligence, and cultural sensitivity. The study underscores that empathetic leadership is not merely an ethical choice but a pragmatic necessity for navigating crises that demand public trust and compliance. Leaders—regardless of gender—can apply Ardern's communication model to foster resilience and guide communities through collective healing, particularly in crises involving social divisions, ideological conflicts, or humanitarian emergencies.

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