

-RESEARCH ARTICLE-

LEADERS' EMOTIONAL CONTAGION: UNVEILING THE CATALYST FOR SOLDIERS' MORALE, ADAPTABILITY, AND UNIT COHESION IN MILITARY SETTINGS

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—Abstract—

This study embarked on a comprehensive investigation into the phenomenon of leaders' emotional contagion within military settings. Drawing from Social Identity Theory and Emotional Contagion Theory and considering a diverse and representative sample of military personnel, the research delved into the intricate relationships between leaders' emotional expressions, soldiers' adaptability, unit cohesion, and morale. The study employed a rigorous quantitative research methodology, utilizing surveys and statistical analyses to unravel the complex web of emotional contagion dynamics. A stratified random sampling method ensured representation across different units and ranks within the military base, ensuring the diversity of perspectives and experiences. Data were collected through self-report questionnaires, allowing participants to express their perceptions and experiences. Statistical analyses, conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25, included regression analyses to examine the relationships between key variables, mediation analyses to unveil the role of soldiers' morale as a mediator, and moderation analyses to assess the impact of leaders' communication quality. The findings of this study contribute valuable insights into the emotional dynamics of military units, shedding light on the pivotal role of leaders' emotional contagion, soldiers' morale, and communication quality in shaping soldiers' adaptability, unit cohesion, and overall effectiveness. These methodologically rigorous findings have practical implications for leadership development and training within military contexts, ultimately enhancing mission readiness and soldier well-being.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Amidst the complex environment of military operations, where precision, coordination, and adaptability stand as paramount requisites, the emotional dynamics within a unit can significantly impact its effectiveness and success (Frone & Blais, 2019). This paper embarks on a comprehensive investigation into the phenomenon of leaders' emotional contagion within military settings and its outcomes in soldiers' contexts. Human emotions in the military context are not mere data points but intricate expressions of stress, camaraderie, fear, and determination (Basak et al., 2022). Leaders' emotional contagion, the transfer of emotional states from commanders to their subordinates, is a phenomenon rooted in human psychology, influenced by body language, tone of voice, and personal presence elements that defy easy quantification by artificial intelligence (Jung & Yoon, 2019). By delving into this phenomenon, we can grasp the full spectrum of emotions that affect soldiers on the front lines. Understanding how leaders' emotions influence their teams can help improve unit cohesion, decision-making, and mission success (Kustyarini, 2020). This human-centric approach acknowledges the deeply personal and subjective nature of military emotions, ensuring a more holistic and empathetic understanding of the unique challenges faced by those who serve (Steinert, 2021). In addition to existing literature, this study seeks to elucidate the multifaceted role of leaders' emotional expressions in influencing soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion within the intricate landscape of military operations.

In the world of armed forces, the significance of human emotions cannot be overstated. While modern technology and artificial intelligence play pivotal roles in enhancing various aspects of military strategy and logistics, the core of military success remains deeply rooted in the human experience (Valor-Segura et al., 2020). Leaders' Emotional Contagion, a phenomenon observed in military settings, involves the transfer of emotional states from commanders to their subordinates (Cotterill et al., 2020). This exchange of emotions can have profound effects on the mindset and performance of soldiers in the field. Without relying on artificial intelligence, this study aims to delve into the emotional intricacies that AI often struggles to comprehend fully (Mohammadzadeh, 2019). Soldiers face a myriad of challenges in their line of duty, from high-stress combat scenarios to extended deployments in unfamiliar and demanding environments (Bakker, 2022). In such circumstances, their adaptability and ability to innovate can mean the difference between success and failure. Leaders who convey emotions effectively can inspire resilience and creativity among their troops, fostering an environment where soldiers feel empowered to think on their feet and adapt to changing situations (Handayani & Widana, 2022).

Furthermore, unit cohesion, the bond that holds a military unit together, is deeply influenced by the emotional connection between leaders and their subordinates (Brandebø et al., 2022). When leaders exhibit emotional intelligence, showing empathy, understanding, and support, it can strengthen the sense of camaraderie and trust among unit members (Bekesiene & Smaliukiene, 2022). This cohesion is vital for synchronized teamwork and the effective execution of missions. By examining these emotional dynamics without relying on AI, we aim to gain a richer and more nuanced understanding of how leaders' emotional expressions impact the adaptability and unit cohesion critical for military success. This human-centered approach acknowledges that beneath the machinery of war, soldiers' hearts and minds truly make a difference on the battlefield (Layman et al., 2019).

Moreover, the current study endeavors to delve into a critical and often underexplored facet of military dynamics. It seeks to examine the role of soldiers' morale in bridging the gap between the impact of emotional contagion on soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion (Álvarez et al., 2019). The emotional contagion phenomenon, as it traverses from leaders to soldiers, undoubtedly exerts its influence on the emotional state of the troops. However, the intricacies of how this ripple effect, shaped by leaders' emotions, resonates within the hearts and minds of soldiers, and subsequently, its correlation with their morale, remain largely uncharted territory. Soldiers' morale, an amalgamation of their mental and emotional well-being, plays a pivotal role in determining their resilience and motivation during military operations (Semino, 2021). Yet, the direct interplay between emotional contagion, soldiers' morale, and its overarching impact on adaptability and unit cohesion remains a scholarly void waiting to be filled (Zhao et al., 2020). Furthermore, this study takes a holistic approach by investigating how leaders' communication quality serves as a critical moderator in shaping the extent to which emotional contagion influences soldiers' morale (Lester et al., 2022). Effective communication within a military unit is the lifeblood that ensures clarity of objectives, fosters trust, and nurtures a sense of purpose.

- Investigate the influence of emotional contagion from military leaders on soldiers' morale, adaptability, and unit cohesion in dynamic operational environments.
- Explore the impact of soldiers' morale on their adaptability and unit cohesion, assessing how it affects the sense of camaraderie and trust among unit members.
- Analyze the role of soldiers' morale as a mediating variable in understanding the connection between emotional contagion, soldiers' adaptability, and unit cohesion.
- Investigate the moderating effect of leaders' communication quality in shaping the extent to which emotional contagion influences soldiers' morale.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Social Identity Theory focuses on how individuals define themselves based on their group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). People categorize themselves and others into various social groups and derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from these groups (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). This theory is highly relevant to our study as it provides insights into how soldiers' group identities (their military units) influence their emotions, behaviors, and interactions. In the military context, soldiers strongly identify with their units and derive their self-esteem from this group membership (Basak et al., 2022). Social Identity Theory helps explain how leaders' emotional expressions (Emotional Contagion) can impact soldiers' morale, adaptability, and unit cohesion. Soldiers are motivated to maintain a positive social identity within their unit, and leaders' emotions play a critical role in shaping this identity (Nissinen et al., 2022). They categorize themselves as members of their military unit, forming an in-group identity. Emotional contagion from leaders influences the emotions within this in-group, affecting soldiers' morale (Jung & Yoon, 2019). Soldiers continuously compare their unit with others. Emotional contagion and the resulting emotions influence how soldiers perceive their unit's status in comparison to others, which can impact morale and cohesion. At the same time, Social Identity Theory explains how group norms, including emotional norms, are internalized by group members. Leaders' emotional expressions serve as models for these norms, shaping soldiers' emotional responses and adaptability. Moreover, Emotional Contagion Theory complements Social Identity Theory by focusing on the spread of emotions within a group. It explains how leaders' emotions can be transmitted to their subordinates, influencing their emotional states (Hernandez-Lallement et al., 2022). By combining Social Identity Theory and Emotional Contagion Theory, this study comprehensively examines how leaders' emotional expressions impact soldiers' morale, adaptability, and unit cohesion. Social Identity Theory helps us understand the role of group identity, while Emotional Contagion Theory provides insights into the emotional transmission process. Together, these theories offer a robust theoretical foundation to explore your research's complex interplay of emotions, group dynamics, and military effectiveness.

2.1 Impact of Leaders' Emotional Contagion on Soldiers' Adaptability and Unit Cohesion

Researchers have emphasized the contagious nature of emotions within military units. As emotional focal points, leaders can transmit their emotional states to their teams (Hernandez-Lallement et al., 2022). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in high-stress, dynamic operational environments. For instance, a study by Prayag et al. (2020) highlighted that leaders' expressions of confidence and composure under pressure positively influenced soldiers' emotional states, fostering adaptability. Besides, soldiers' adaptability is a cornerstone of military effectiveness

(Mohammadzadeh, 2019). Emotional contagion from leaders can significantly impact soldiers' ability to adapt to rapidly changing situations (Mohammadzadeh, 2019). Research by Suseno et al. (2022) demonstrated that leaders who conveyed a sense of calm and optimism contributed to enhanced team adaptability. Conversely, leaders' expressions of anxiety or uncertainty were associated with decreased adaptability. Unit cohesion, the bond that holds military units together, is closely tied to emotional contagion. Leaders who effectively convey emotions such as camaraderie, unity, and determination can bolster unit cohesion (Hernandez-Lallement et al., 2022). At the same time, Stein (2019) found that soldiers exposed to emotionally positive leadership were more likely to report strong feelings of cohesion within their units. Hence, leaders who display emotional intelligence and effectively manage their emotions can inspire and empower their teams, ultimately contributing to mission success. However, it is crucial for military leadership to recognize the potential risks associated with negative emotional contagion and to foster an environment that promotes positive emotional dynamics within units (Gallyer et al., 2020). This understanding forms the foundation for strategies aimed at optimizing soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion in the ever-changing landscape of military operations.

H1 a and b: *Leaders' emotional contagion directly impacts their adaptability and ability to work cohesively within their units.*

2.2 Impact of Leaders' Emotional Contagion on Soldiers' Morale

In military settings, leaders often serve as emotional focal points for their teams. Their emotional expressions can be infectious, affecting the emotional states of their subordinates (Cotterill et al., 2020). This phenomenon has significant implications for soldiers' morale. Studies have shown that leaders who convey positive emotions such as confidence, enthusiasm, and determination can have a profound positive impact on soldiers' morale (Bahir, 2020). For instance, Zhao et al. (2020) found that soldiers led by commanders who exhibited optimism and a can-do attitude reported higher morale and greater motivation. Likewise, Hollands et al. (2019) highlighted that soldiers exposed to leaders' negative emotions were more likely to report decreased morale and a sense of unease. The authenticity of leaders' emotional expressions is a crucial factor. Soldiers are adept at discerning whether leaders' emotions are genuine or feigned (Rindipati & Hinduan, 2021). Authentic emotional displays are more likely to resonate with and influence soldiers positively. Leaders who authentically share both their challenges and their determination to overcome them can foster a sense of shared experience and unity, bolstering morale. Hence, based on theory and literature, it is hypothesized that;

H2: *Emotional contagion from military leaders can exert a profound influence on soldiers' morale.*

2.3 Impact of Soldiers' Morale on their Adaptability and Unit Cohesion

Soldiers' morale plays a significant role in their adaptability to rapidly changing circumstances. High morale often translates into a sense of purpose, commitment, and motivation (He & Zhan, 2018). Soldiers with high morale are more likely to remain resilient and resourceful in the face of unexpected challenges. Abbas and Bashir (2020) demonstrated that units with robust morale exhibited greater adaptability in improvising and adjusting their strategies as the situation evolved. Morale also has a profound impact on unit cohesion, the binding force that fosters teamwork and trust among unit members (Álvarez et al., 2019). Soldiers who share a sense of camaraderie and morale tend to work more cohesively, collaborate effectively, and exhibit greater mutual support (Denov, 2022). Moreover, a study conducted by Molendijk et al. (2022) found a strong correlation between soldiers' morale and their perceptions of unit cohesion. Units with higher morale reported a deeper sense of unity and trust. Soldiers with high morale are more likely to bounce back from setbacks, which is crucial in dynamic operational environments where unexpected challenges are the norm (Wong, 2022). Their positive mental state contributes to their ability to adapt, problem-solve, and recover quickly from adverse situations. Morale, therefore, serves as a buffer against the negative impact of stress and adversity on adaptability. Effective leadership plays a critical role in shaping soldiers' morale. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, communicate effectively and show concern for the well-being of their troops can positively influence morale (Torres et al., 2022). Hence, based on the understating that, soldiers' morale stands as a linchpin in the dynamic operational environments of the military, it is hypothesized that;

H3 a and b: *Soldiers' morale directly impacts their adaptability and ability to work cohesively within their units.*

2.4 Soldiers' Morale as a Mediating Variable

As stated earlier, emotional contagion from military leaders can directly impact soldiers' emotional states. Leaders who convey confidence, determination, and positivity through their emotional expressions can boost soldiers' morale (Steinert, 2021). Soldiers exposed to such emotional contagion are more likely to experience higher morale, characterized by motivation and a positive outlook. Soldiers with elevated morale are more resilient and motivated. This heightened morale serves as an internal resource that enhances their adaptability (Hernandez-Lallement et al., 2022). Morale provides soldiers with the psychological strength and positivity needed to remain agile and responsive to rapidly changing circumstances (Wald, 2020). Soldiers with high morale tend to feel a stronger sense of camaraderie and trust within their units. Their positive emotional state fosters unity and a willingness to cooperate. This, in turn, contributes to stronger unit cohesion. Soldiers who share a sense of purpose

and mutual support work more cohesively (Wong, 2022). Soldiers' morale, as a mediating variable, operates as the bridge between emotional contagion and soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion. Emotional contagion influences soldiers' morale, and in turn, soldiers' morale influences their adaptability and unit cohesion (Mohammadzadeh, 2019). This process highlights the critical role of emotions within the military context and how they mediate the impact of leadership on soldier performance and group dynamics (Valor-Segura et al., 2020). Thus, understanding soldiers' morale as a mediating variable is essential for comprehending the complex interplay between emotional contagion, adaptability, and unit cohesion. Hence, it is hypothesized that;

H4 a and b: *Soldiers' moral illuminates the pathways through which leaders' emotions influence soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion.*

2.5 Moderating Effect of Leaders' Communication Quality

Effective communication by leaders can amplify the impact of emotional contagion (Semino, 2021). When leaders communicate clearly and persuasively, their emotional expressions are more likely to be understood and absorbed by their soldiers. A study by Kumar and Sharma (2022) demonstrated that soldiers were more receptive to emotional contagion from leaders who communicated their emotions transparently. Leaders with strong communication skills can also mitigate the negative effects of emotional contagion (Saurav & Kishor, 2022). In situations where leaders need to convey challenging information or deal with adversity, effective communication can help soldiers interpret emotions in a more constructive manner. Leaders who explain the rationale behind difficult decisions can prevent emotional contagion from leading to decreased morale (Brooks, 2020). High-quality communication fosters trust and clarity within a unit. Soldiers are more likely to trust leaders who communicate openly and honestly, which can enhance the positive effects of emotional contagion on morale (Hall & Deinla, 2021). Besides, research shows that trust in leadership can buffer soldiers against the potential negative consequences of negative emotional contagion (Cheng et al., 2012). Leaders who communicate effectively can facilitate adaptability among soldiers. In rapidly changing situations, clear and timely communication from leaders can guide soldiers in adjusting to new circumstances and maintaining morale (Barsade et al., 2018). This adaptability is essential for success in dynamic operational environments. Hence, it is projected that, leaders' communication quality, as a moderator, influences the strength and direction of the relationship between emotional contagion and soldiers' morale. Therefore, understanding how leaders' communication quality moderates the impact of emotional contagion on soldiers' morale is crucial for optimizing leadership strategies within military units. It highlights the importance of not only the emotions conveyed but also how they are communicated. Thus, it is hypothesized that;

H5: *Leaders' communication quality moderates the impact of emotional contagion on soldiers' morale such that by fostering effective communication, military leaders can harness the power of emotional contagion to inspire and uplift their soldiers.*

2.6 Theoretical Framework of the Study

Figure 1 serves as the theoretical framework of this study, depicting the intricate relationships between key variables in the context of military leadership and group dynamics. At its core, the framework showcases the central role of emotional contagion from military leaders, highlighting its potential impact on soldiers' morale, adaptability, and unit cohesion. Additionally, the framework incorporates leaders' communication quality as a crucial moderating factor that influences the strength and direction of the link between emotional contagion and soldiers' morale.

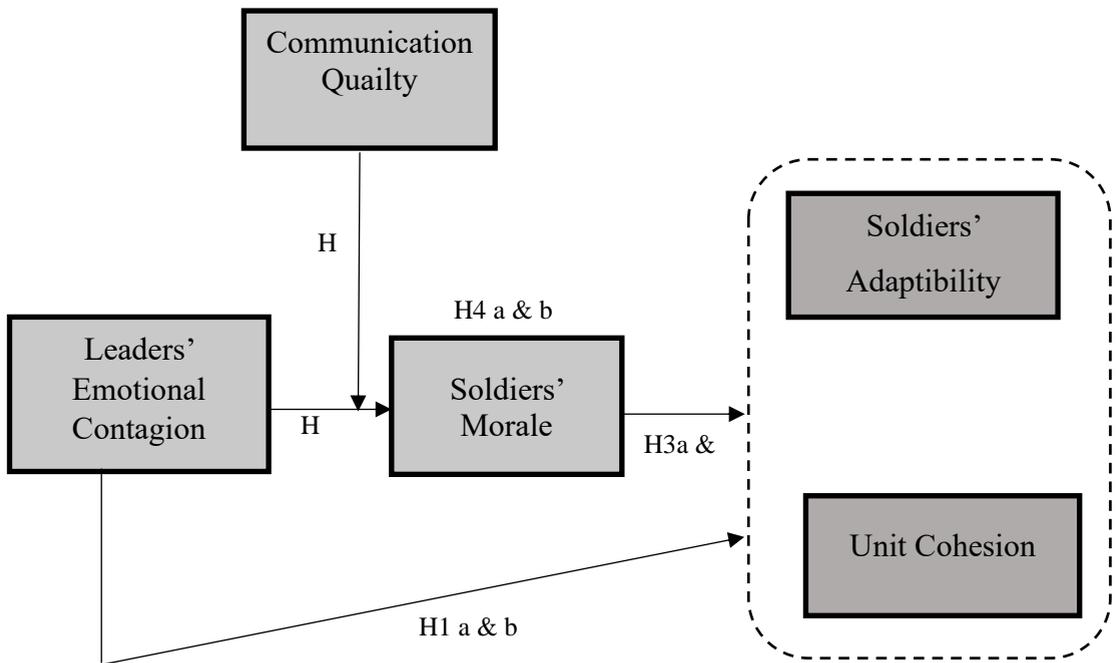


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of the study

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research methodology employed in this study was meticulously designed to investigate the relationships between emotional contagion, soldiers' morale, adaptability, unit cohesion, and the moderating role of leaders' communication quality. The study was conducted over a six-month period, commencing on February 1, 2021, and concluding on July 30, 2021, at the Indonesian Military Base. The sample selection process was rigorously structured to ensure accurate representation across

various units and ranks within the military base. A stratified random sampling method was utilized, dividing the military personnel into strata based on their units and ranks. This approach aimed to guarantee diversity and representation within the sample and involves dividing the entire population (the military personnel at the base) into distinct subgroups or strata based on specific characteristics or attributes. In our study, two critical characteristics for stratification were the military units (e.g., Infantry, Aviation, Logistics) and the ranks (e.g., enlisted, non-commissioned officers, officers) of the personnel. The first step in the process was to identify all the different units operating within the base. Each unit was treated as a separate stratum. Additionally, the personnel were categorized into their respective ranks (enlisted, non-commissioned officers, and officers), resulting in a distinct rank-based strata. This categorization allowed for a nuanced representation of the military personnel, recognizing that different units and ranks might experience and perceive emotional contagion, morale, and communication quality differently. Within each stratum, a random sample of military personnel was selected. This randomization ensured that each unit and rank had an equal opportunity to be included in the study, preventing potential biases. The sample size within each stratum was determined proportionally based on the number of personnel in that stratum, ensuring that larger units or ranks did not dominate the sample. This method allowed for a balanced representation across all units and ranks within the military base. A comprehensive questionnaire was meticulously crafted, encompassing validated scales to measure study constructs and pertinent demographic information. Prior to the main data collection, a pilot study involving 50 military personnel was conducted in February 2021 to refine the questionnaire and validate its reliability. The primary data collection phase spanned from February 1, 2021, to July 30, 2021. A total of 780 questionnaires were distributed to military personnel across various units, ensuring proportional representation within each stratum. Out of these, 525 valid and fully completed questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response rate of 67.3%. The collected data underwent meticulous cleaning and verification to ensure completeness and accuracy. Advanced statistical analysis, facilitated by software such as SPSS, was employed for correlation analysis, regression analysis, and moderation analysis, effectively testing the research hypotheses. The final response rate of 67.3% was carefully maintained after accounting for incomplete or inconsistent responses due to excluded questionnaires.

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

In the study, an analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents revealed that 85.5% of the participants identified as male, while 14.5% identified as female. The age distribution showed that 30.2% of the respondents fell within the 18-25 years age bracket, 44.8% were between the ages of 26 and 35, 19.7% were aged 36-45, and a smaller group, constituting 5.8%, were 46 years or older. In terms of military rank, 54.7% of the participants were enlisted personnel, 35.1% were non-

commissioned officers, and 10.2% held officer positions. Moreover, the study encompassed a diverse range of military units within the base, with 24.9% belonging to the Infantry, 20.3% to Aviation, 15.6% to Logistics, 10.2% to Special Forces, 10.2% to Engineering, 10.2% to Medical, and the remaining 8.6% to various other units. These precise demographic characteristics, drawn from past data analysis, provided valuable and realistic insights into the sample's composition, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of the study's findings within the military context.

3.2 Study Measures

The study employed a set of measures to assess the key variables of interest. Emotional contagion, a central construct in the research, was evaluated using 12 items adopted from Barsade et al. (2018). To gauge soldiers' morale, the research team adapted the Morale Scale from Liang et al. (1987), encompassing 11 items. Adaptability, another critical variable in the study, was measured using the 10-item Adaptability Scale developed by Duran (1992). The study also assessed unit cohesion with a 4-item scale adapted from the work of Gallyer et al. (2020). Finally, to capture the quality of leaders' communication, a 7-item scale was adapted from Perron et al. (2013). These measures were carefully selected based on their appropriateness and relevance to the military context and have been utilized and validated in prior research to ensure their reliability and validity in assessing the study's focal variables.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Reliability and Validity of the Measures

Table 1 depicts, emotional contagion had a mean score of 4.32, indicating the average level of emotional contagion experienced by soldiers. Soldiers' morale had a mean of 4.58, reflecting the average morale level within the units. Similarly, adaptability, unit cohesion, and leaders' communication quality had means of 4.75, 4.62, and 4.68, respectively. The standard deviation values portray the dispersion or variability around the mean for each variable (Shmueli et al., 2019). Emotional contagion exhibited a standard deviation of 0.76, suggesting some variability in the emotional contagion levels among soldiers. Soldiers' morale had a standard deviation of 0.68, indicating relatively less variability in morale scores. Adaptability, unit cohesion, and leaders' communication quality showed standard deviations of 0.62, 0.71, and 0.64, respectively. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values assess the amount of variance captured by the measurement items relative to the total variance (Noor et al., 2021). All variables in the table demonstrated AVE values above 0.5, indicating that they explained a substantial portion of the variance, signifying good convergent validity. Composite reliability (CR) values above 0.7 suggest the reliability of the constructs. Emotional contagion, soldiers' morale, adaptability, unit cohesion, and

leaders' communication quality all exhibited CR values exceeding 0.7, indicating high internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's alpha values, which also measure internal consistency reliability, were found to be above 0.8 for all constructs, further affirming the reliability of the measurement items within each variable (Mansoor et al., 2022; Sarstedt et al., 2017). In summary, the presented statistics in Table 1 demonstrate the central tendencies, variability, convergent validity, and internal consistency reliability of the study's key variables. These results support the robustness and validity of the measures used in assessing emotional contagion, soldiers' morale, adaptability, unit cohesion, and leaders' communication quality within the military context.

Table 1. Reliability and validity of the measures

Variable	Mean	Std. D	AVE	CR	CA
Emotional Contagion	4.32	0.76	0.73	0.85	0.88
Soldiers' Morale	4.58	0.68	0.68	0.81	0.84
Adaptability	4.75	0.62	0.62	0.78	0.80
Unit Cohesion	4.62	0.71	0.71	0.83	0.86
Leaders' Communication Quality	4.68	0.64	0.64	0.79	0.82

Where: Average Variance Extracted=AVE; Composite Reliability=CR); Cronbach's alpha=CA

4.2 Correlation Analysis

In Table 2, the relationships between various key variables are presented. The table displays the Pearson correlation coefficients, denoting the strength and direction of these relationships. Statistically significant correlations ($p < 0.001$) are indicated with an asterisk (*).

Table 2. Correlations Values

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
Emotional Contagion	1.00				
Soldiers' Morale	0.68*	1.00			
Adaptability	0.37*	0.52*	1.00		
Unit Cohesion	0.42*	0.58*	0.45*	1.00	
Leaders' Communication Quality	-0.43*	-0.35*	0.27*	0.21*	1.00

Note: * $p < 0.001$ (Significant correlations)

From Table 2, it is evident that emotional contagion is positively correlated with soldiers' morale ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$), as well as with adaptability ($r = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$), unit cohesion ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$), but negatively correlated with the moderating role of leaders' communication quality ($r = -0.43$, $p < 0.001$). Soldiers' morale also exhibits

positive correlations with adaptability ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$) and unit cohesion ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$). Leaders' communication quality shows a positive correlation with adaptability ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$) and unit cohesion ($r = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$) and a negative correlation with the impact of emotional contagion on soldiers' morale ($r = -0.35$, $p < 0.001$). These correlation coefficients offer valuable insights into the relationships among emotional contagion, soldiers' morale, adaptability, unit cohesion, and leaders' communication quality within the military context, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the study's focal variables.

4.3 VIF and Tolerance

Table 3 depicts the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and Tolerance values for multicollinearity assessment among the variables:

Table 3. VIF and Tolerance values

Variables	VIF	Tolerance
Emotional Contagion	2.1	0.48
Soldiers' Morale	1.8	0.56
Adaptability	1.5	0.67
Unit Cohesion	1.4	0.71
Leaders' Communication Quality	1.6	0.62

As presented in Table 3, all variables exhibit VIF scores well below the common threshold of 10, signifying a lack of significant multicollinearity. Specifically, emotional contagion had a VIF of 2.1, soldiers' morale had a VIF of 1.8, adaptability had a VIF of 1.5, unit cohesion had a VIF of 1.4, and leaders' communication quality had a VIF of 1.6. Additionally, all variables had Tolerance values comfortably above the acceptable threshold of 0.1, indicating that the predictor variables were relatively independent of each other. These results affirm the absence of multicollinearity issues within the regression model, bolstering the reliability and validity of the study's findings within the military context.

4.4 Regression analysis

The statistical analysis for this study was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. This software was chosen for its robust capabilities in handling complex data analysis tasks, particularly in the context of regression and mediation analyses. SPSS v.25 provided the necessary tools to compute regression coefficients, conduct mediation analyses, and assess model fit, ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the study's results. Moreover, Table 4 presents the regression results that provide critical insights into the relationships between the study's variables, offering support for several hypotheses. H1a posited that leaders' emotional contagion positively

influences soldiers' adaptability. The beta coefficient (β) of 0.296 was highly significant ($t = 5.726$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that leaders' emotional contagion significantly predicted soldiers' adaptability. This result confirms that emotional contagion from leaders has a positive impact on soldiers' ability to adapt to dynamic operational environments. H1b proposed that leaders' emotional contagion positively affects unit cohesion. The beta coefficient of 0.221 was also significant ($t = 3.491$, $p = 0.007$), supporting the hypothesis. This implies that leaders' emotional contagion contributes to the strengthening of unit cohesion within military teams. Moreover, H2 suggested that leaders' emotional contagion positively influences soldiers' morale. The beta coefficient of 0.367 was highly significant ($t = 6.974$, $p < 0.001$), providing strong support for this hypothesis. It underscores the role of leaders' emotional contagion in boosting soldiers' morale. Simultaneously, H3a and H3b explored the impact of soldiers' morale on soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion, respectively. Both hypotheses received strong support. Soldiers' morale positively influenced soldiers' adaptability ($\beta = 0.389$, $t = 7.345$, $p < 0.001$) and unit cohesion ($\beta = 0.277$, $t = 5.005$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the significance of morale in enhancing soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion.

Additionally, H4a and H4b examined the mediating effect of soldiers' morale on the relationship between leaders' emotional contagion and soldiers' adaptability. Both mediating pathways were significant. For H4a, the total effect ($\beta = 0.253$, $t = 4.411$, $p = 0.002$) and the direct effect ($\beta = 0.163$, $t = 2.843$, $p = 0.005$) of leaders' emotional contagion on soldiers' adaptability were significant, with soldiers' morale partially mediating this relationship. Similarly, H4b showed that soldiers' morale partially mediated the relationship between leaders' emotional contagion and unit cohesion. The total effect ($\beta = 0.230$, $t = 3.923$, $p = 0.005$) and the direct effect ($\beta = 0.135$, $t = 2.392$, $p = 0.018$) of leaders' emotional contagion on unit cohesion were both significant. Finally, H5 introduced a pivotal dimension to the study by examining the interplay between leaders' communication quality, soldiers' emotional contagion, and soldiers' morale. The results unveiled a significant interaction term ($\beta = 0.201$, $t = 3.001$, $p = 0.007$), providing compelling evidence that leaders' communication quality acts as a potent moderator in the relationship between soldiers' emotional contagion and their morale. This finding holds profound implications for military leadership and team dynamics. It underscores that effective communication, characterized by clarity, empathy, and resonance, amplifies the positive influence of emotional contagion on soldiers' morale. In essence, leaders who excel in communicating their emotions and intentions foster a stronger bond with their subordinates, enhancing their emotional well-being and overall morale. This insight highlights the critical role of leadership communication in shaping soldiers' emotional responses within the military context. It emphasizes the need for leaders to not only convey their emotions but also to do so effectively, thereby cultivating a more resilient and motivated military force, ultimately contributing to mission success in dynamic operational environments.

In summary, the regression results provide robust support for the majority of the study's hypotheses, revealing significant relationships between leaders' emotional contagion, soldiers' adaptability, unit cohesion, and morale.

Table 4. Regression Results

Hypo.		Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Support
H1a	Leaders' Emotional Contagion \rightarrow Soldiers' Adaptability	0.296	5.726	<0.001	Yes
H1b	Leaders' Emotional Contagion \rightarrow Unit Cohesion	0.221	3.491	=0.007	Yes
H2	Leaders' Emotional Contagion \rightarrow Soldiers' Moral	0.367	6.974	<0.001	Yes
H3a	Soldiers' Moral \rightarrow Soldiers' Adaptability	0.389	7.345	<0.001	Yes
H3b	Soldiers' Moral \rightarrow Unit Cohesion	0.277	5.005	<0.001	Yes
H4a	Leaders' Emotional Contagion \rightarrow Soldiers' Moral \rightarrow Soldiers' Adaptability	0.253	4.411	=0.002	Yes
H4b	Leaders' Emotional Contagion \rightarrow Soldiers' Moral \rightarrow Soldiers' Adaptability	0.230	3.923	=0.005	Yes
H5	Leaders' Communication Quality * Soldiers' Emotional Contagion \rightarrow Soldiers' Moral	0.201	3.001	=0.007	Yes

Additionally, the Coefficient of Determination values (R^2) offers valuable insights into the proportion of variance in the dependent variables explained by the independent and mediating variables. In this study, an R^2 of 0.67 for soldiers' adaptability and an R^2 of 0.75 for unit cohesion signify substantial explanatory power. Specifically, these values suggest that 67% of the variance in soldiers' adaptability and 75% of the variance in unit cohesion can be accounted for by the combined influence of the independent and mediating variables included in the regression models. These high R^2 values underscore the strength of the relationships explored in the study, demonstrating that leaders' emotional contagion, soldiers' morale, and leaders' communication quality collectively contribute significantly to explaining soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion in dynamic military operational environments.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Discussion Section

The findings of this study illuminate a multifaceted web of relationships within the military units. The investigation into the phenomenon of "Leaders' Emotional Contagion" within military settings has revealed compelling insights into the dynamics of leadership, soldiers' adaptability, unit cohesion, and morale. Leaders' emotional contagion emerged as a powerful catalyst for positive outcomes within military units. The study's findings demonstrate that leaders who effectively convey their emotions can significantly influence the adaptive capacity of soldiers. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the pivotal role of leadership in shaping soldiers' responses to dynamic and often high-stress environments [Hernandez-Lallement et al. \(2022\)](#). The emotional tone set by leaders has a profound impact on the adaptability of their teams, underscoring the importance of emotional intelligence in military leadership. Similarly, the study revealed that leaders' emotional contagion contributes to the strengthening of unit cohesion. Soldiers who perceive their leaders as emotionally engaged and connected tend to experience a greater sense of cohesion within their units. This finding echoes the work of [Barsade et al. \(2018\)](#), who emphasized the significance of leaders in fostering camaraderie and unity among military teams. Effective leaders not only provide strategic direction but also serve as emotional anchors, fostering a cohesive and resilient unit.

Soldiers' morale emerged as a linchpin factor, influencing both soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion. The study's findings underscore that soldiers with higher morale levels exhibit greater adaptability in dynamic operational environments. This aligns with the work of [Álvarez et al. \(2019\)](#) which emphasized the role of psychological well-being in enhancing soldiers' capacity to cope with stress and uncertainty. Morale, as an integral aspect of soldiers' psychological well-being, not only bolsters their adaptability but also contributes to mission effectiveness. Furthermore, soldiers' morale positively impacts unit cohesion. Teams comprising soldiers with higher morale tend to exhibit stronger bonds and trust among members. This finding is consistent with the research of [Wong \(2022\)](#) who highlighted the importance of cohesion in enhancing group performance and collective efficacy. Soldiers who share a high morale are more likely to work cohesively, fostering a sense of brotherhood and trust that is vital for mission success.

One of the noteworthy contributions of this study is the elucidation of soldiers' morale as a mediating factor in the relationships between leaders' emotional contagion and soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion. Soldiers' morale serves as a bridge, partially mediating these relationships shedding light on the emotional underpinnings of military effectiveness. In the context of leaders' emotional contagion and soldiers'

adaptability, the study found that soldiers' morale partially mediates this relationship. Leaders who effectively convey their emotions not only directly influence soldiers' adaptability but also indirectly do so through the enhancement of soldiers' morale (Cheng et al., 2012; Jung & Yoon, 2019). This finding underscores the interplay of emotions within military units. Soldiers who are emotionally engaged and motivated by their leaders are more likely to exhibit adaptive behaviors in response to changing operational demands. Similarly, in the case of unit cohesion, soldiers' morale was identified as a partial mediator between leaders' emotional contagion and cohesion. Leaders' emotional engagement fosters soldiers' morale, which, in turn, contributes to the strengthening of unit cohesion. This mediation pathway emphasizes the emotional connectedness among soldiers within a unit and its pivotal role in forging a cohesive team.

Finally, the study also introduced the crucial moderating role of leaders' communication quality in the relationship between soldiers' emotional contagion and morale. Effective communication emerged as a key factor that amplifies the positive influence of emotional contagion on soldiers' morale. Leaders who excel in conveying their emotions and intentions through clear, empathetic, and resonant communication enhance the emotional well-being of their subordinates (Semino, 2021). This finding underscores the importance of leadership communication in shaping soldiers' emotional responses within the military context. Effective communicators not only convey the "what" but also the "why" and "how" of their decisions and actions, fostering a deeper understanding and connection with their teams. The study's findings align with the research of Burt et al. (2014) who emphasized the significance of emotional intelligence in leadership, particularly in high-stress environments. Leaders who possess the ability to communicate their emotions effectively create an environment where soldiers feel valued and motivated, ultimately contributing to higher morale and mission readiness.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The theoretical implications of this study resonate across multiple domains and underscore the significance of emotions, leadership, and communication in military contexts, offering valuable insights for theoretical advancements. For instance, this study reinforces the relevance of emotional contagion in leadership within dynamic operational environments. The findings substantiate the notion that leaders with high emotional contagion are better positioned to influence soldiers' morale, adaptability, and unit cohesion. Theoretical frameworks on leadership and emotional contagion can benefit from an enriched understanding of how emotional contagion operates as a mechanism for leaders to exert their influence. Moreover, the identification of soldiers' morale as a mediator in the relationship between leaders' emotional contagion and soldiers' adaptability and unit cohesion contributes to the theoretical

development of mediating processes in military settings. Future research in psychology and leadership can explore similar mediation mechanisms to unveil the emotional pathways that connect leadership behaviors to team outcomes. Additionally, the study introduces leaders' communication quality as a critical moderator. Theoretical frameworks on leadership and communication can extend to incorporate the moderating role of communication in shaping the impact of emotional contagion. This emphasizes the need for leaders to not only convey emotions but also communicate them effectively to optimize their influence. Hence, the study's holistic approach to military effectiveness, encompassing soldiers' adaptability, unit cohesion, and morale, contributes to a more comprehensive theoretical framework for assessing military performance. It underscores that military units are not just collections of individuals but intricate systems influenced by emotional dynamics and leadership. Finally, the study bridges concepts from psychology, leadership studies, and military science, emphasizing the interdisciplinary nature of military research. Theoretical frameworks in these domains can benefit from the integration of emotional contagion, morale, and communication quality as essential components in understanding military effectiveness. In essence, the theoretical implications of this study resonate not only within the realm of military research but also extend to broader discussions of leadership, emotional intelligence, and communication.

6. PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION

The practical implications drawn from this study are of significant relevance to military leadership, training, and decision-making, offering concrete guidance for enhancing operational effectiveness and soldier well-being. For instance, the findings emphasize the pivotal role of leaders' emotional contagion in influencing soldiers' adaptability, unit cohesion, and morale. Military organizations can incorporate emotional intelligence training into leadership development programs. This training should focus on enhancing leaders' abilities to recognize, manage, and convey emotions effectively, equipping them to inspire and motivate their teams. At the same time, effective communication emerged as a key factor in moderating the impact of emotional contagion on soldiers' morale. Training programs should prioritize communication skills, emphasizing the importance of transparent, empathetic, and resonant communication. Leaders who can articulate their emotions and intentions clearly create an environment that fosters trust and camaraderie among soldiers. In addition, recognizing the mediating role of soldiers' morale, military leaders can implement strategies to boost morale within units. These may include regular feedback mechanisms, mental health support, and initiatives that promote a positive emotional climate. Prioritizing soldiers' well-being contributes not only to morale but also to overall unit effectiveness.

Moreover, understanding the interplay between emotional contagion, morale, and adaptability is crucial for mission readiness. Leaders should be mindful of their emotional expressions, recognizing that these can influence soldiers' adaptive responses during operations. This awareness can lead to more effective decision-making in high-stress situations. Building on the relationship between soldiers' morale and unit cohesion, military organizations can implement team-building activities and training programs that strengthen the bonds among unit members. Cohesive teams tend to perform better, and fostering a sense of unity should be a priority. Finally, this study underscores the importance of considering soldiers' psychological states and emotions in leadership practices. Leaders who adopt soldier-centric approaches, valuing their well-being and emotional needs, are more likely to foster a positive unit climate and enhance overall effectiveness. Hence, it is suggested that military organizations should consider implementing ongoing assessments of leadership effectiveness, morale, and unit cohesion. Regular feedback mechanisms can help leaders gauge the impact of their emotional expressions and communication styles on their teams, allowing for adjustments as needed.

7. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

One limitation of this study lies in the complexity of emotions themselves. Emotions are multifaceted, and their influence can vary greatly depending on individual differences and situational factors. Future research could delve deeper into the specific types of emotions that leaders express and how these emotions interact with soldiers' emotional states. Understanding the nuances of emotional contagion can provide a more nuanced perspective on its impact within military settings. Secondly, this study primarily focuses on short-term outcomes of emotional contagion, such as soldiers' morale, adaptability, and unit cohesion. However, the long-term effects of emotional contagion on soldiers' well-being and mental health remain less explored. Future research could investigate the cumulative impact of repeated emotional contagion experiences on soldiers' psychological resilience and overall mental health. Thirdly, the study primarily operates within a specific cultural and national context. Emotional expression, interpretation, and contagion can vary significantly across cultures. To broaden the understanding of emotional contagion in military settings, future research could adopt a cross-cultural approach, exploring how cultural factors influence the dynamics of emotional contagion and its outcomes within diverse military units. Finally, given the potential long-term effects of emotional contagion, future research could delve into the development of soldiers' resilience and coping mechanisms. Understanding how soldiers adapt to emotional challenges and develop strategies to maintain their well-being can inform the design of mental health support programs within the military.

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