



Success Motivational Videos on social media: A Study of Persuasion

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Abstract

Persuasion is the act by which a side tries to convince or influence another to adopt certain idea or attitude as their core belief system. Persuasion is an effective act that reflects on the life of individuals and on communities in general as it works on modifying and changing thoughts and feelings. Social media seems to be introducing a lot of persuasive contents. Short motivational videos are some of the most trending contents of those kinds on social media. This study randomly selects number of such videos(eight), specifically the ones which tackle the theme of success and how to be successful. The study aims at examining the stylistic means and devices of persuasion in those videos. It specifically seeks to answer the following questions: (i) what are the main rhetorical persuasive appeals used in those videos and which one of them is most commonly used? (ii) Which persuasive devices, among those introduced by Bueuer and Napthine (2008), are more commonly utilized than the others? And (iii) what purposes does each variety of persuasive style serve?



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1. Introduction

Persuasion is the act by which almost all the human perspectives and interactions are shaped. It is a process that aims at influencing thoughts and minds. However, shaping and changing minds is not an easy process that happens with one click. Mark Twain states that “habit is habit, and not to be flung out of the window, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time” (cited in Perloff, 2003:9). Therefore, changing minds require constant exposure to certain idea to be finally adopted by the audience as their belief system. This process is best practiced on social media. Social media like Facebook and Instagram keep their users exposed to specific ideas on daily base in a form of short videos. Those videos tackle almost all the topics related to human life. One of those contents is success motivational videos. Such videos are an example in which persuasive language is always quite obvious. The language of those contents is expected to be persuasive in a subtle way.

This study, thus, finds it important to analyze and investigate the means by which such content succeeds in convincing the target- the audience- to internalize certain ideas as their belief system. The study, therefore, aims at (i) figuring out the kind of rhetorical appeals used in success motivational videos, (ii) highlighting the specific devices utilized in establishing each kind of appeal in each speech and (iii) investigating the effects and the purposes of each device and appeal. It seeks to answer three questions: (i) what are the main rhetorical persuasive appeals used in those videos and which one of them is most commonly used? (ii) Which persuasive devices, among those introduced by Bueuer and Napthine (2008), are more commonly utilized than the others? And (iii) what purposes does each variety of persuasive style serve?

Data for this study consists of motivational videos shared on social media, namely Instagram. Eight videos are selected randomly and all of them tackle the topic of success in general and how to be successful in specific. The videos are short and have got millions of views. This means that they are highly accepted and favored by the audience. Further, the study adopts an eclectic model consisting of Aristotle’s (1926) theory of three pillars of persuasion and Breuer and Napthine’s (2008) devices of persuasion. It, next, analyses the videos in detail discussing the main findings and coming up with conclusions.

2. Literature Review

Persuasion is a kind of linguistic act by which human attitudes, beliefs and values are shaped or reshaped. It is a kind of human communication that aims to influence the receiver (Simons, 1976: 20). Reardon (1982: 25) see persuasion as “the activity of demonstrating and attempting to change the behaviour of at least one person through symbolic interaction”. Cegala (1987:13) and Johnstone (1994:7) argue supporting the same idea and indicating that persuasion refers to the transmitted symbolic act that modifies, or strengthens the beliefs, opinions, values, attitudes and behaviors of oneself or others. So, persuasion is simply “an act or process of displaying contentions to move, prompt, or alter your audience” (Lumen, 2023). The focus of persuasive act is, as everyone agrees, “to influence” someone or a group to do something or to act in certain way or manner.

Since persuasion is in a way or another a mother term for the concept of influence and influence is the main goal of persuasion, social media texts – as a stage of influence- establish persuasion as an essential weapon in addressing all kinds of topics. Therefore, addressing the persuasive language of social media content is a required area of study.

3. Theories of Persuasion

Persuasion is tackled from many perspectives. Scholars have attempted to investigate several aspects of persuasion which resulted in introducing number of theories. One of the oldest and most famous theories is the one introduced by Aristotle (1926), namely the three pillars of persuasion. This theory aims to investigate the rhetorical means of persuasion. Another theory

documented in persuasion literature is the one introduced by Breuer and Napthine (2008). This theory tackles the linguistic devices used in approaching persuasion in communication. It therefore analyses the main stylistic means of persuasion established by the speaker/writer. These two theories are going to be explained below in detail as they are adopted in this study.

3.1 Rhetorical Pillars

In Aristotle's (1926) theory, the attempt to make your communication persuasive requires accounting to three main elements of persuasive speech. Those three elements, as (Cited in Kennedy, 1985:24), are:

1. **Ethos -the appeal by ethics or credibility:** it is the effort made to influence an audience or persuade an audience by means of being sincere, truthful and honest, i.e., by making them believe that the speaker is an honest, sincere, trustworthy and a qualified person with regard to the topic of discussion.
2. **Pathos -the appeal by emotion:** it is to create an emotional connection between the speaker and the audience. This kind of persuasive move focuses on the emotional sense of identity, the self-interest and heartstrings of the audience.
3. **Logos- the appeal by reason:** it is to be intellectual and logical in presenting reasons and evidence such as statistics, facts, logic, numbers and examples.

3.2 Persuasion Devices

It is a necessary requirement to establish variation in the devices and the techniques of persuasion in speeches where influencing audience socially is the main goal. Breuer and Napthine (2008: 5-6) introduce seven devices or techniques to make speeches more persuasive. Those are as follows:

3.2.1 Rhetorical questions: are expressions that typically have the structure of a question but the function of an assertion. They are questions that neither seek nor elicit information or answer. They are only asked for effect (Han, 2002: 202). The use of this device implies that the idea expressed is too net, clear and obvious to be asked. It implies that the idea communicated is something that has to be taken for granted.

3.2.2 Action: by this persuasive device, the speaker motivates the listener to play certain role with regard to the topic of talk. It is achieved by activating the sense of necessity and urgency in the listener towards certain thing. It also pictures actions possibly taken with regard to certain topic.

3.2.3 Inclusive and Exclusive Language: the use of pronouns such as we, us and our is the indicator of an inclusive speech. The speaker tries to build an in-group sense with the listener to make them feel related. The sense of belonging helps the speech to be more persuasive and more easily accepted by the listener. However, the use of "them" reflects the opposite sense, i.e., the exclusiveness.

3.2.4 Adjective: the kind of adjectives used to describe nouns central to the speech point also plays a role in the degree of speech persuasiveness. The more the adjectives are related to the noun, the more persuasive they are.

3.2.5 Repetition: the way the speech sounds and the more they are repeated play a role in its persuasiveness too. Repeating certain phrases, sentences, ideas and sounds -such as consonants (alliteration) and vowels (assonance) contributes in emphasizing certain ideas.

3.2.6 Connotations (Associations): refer to the psychological, social or emotional overtones of words. Speakers are expected to choose their words carefully, which involve paying attention to the proper connotation communicated with respect to the context. Connotations may decide the appropriateness and the meaning of words in particular use. Connotations refer to "the range of further associations that a word or phrase suggests" (Baldick, 2001: 49).

3.2.7 Generalisation: is a statement that "ascribes some property to group of individual things". It is a statement used by a speaker to indicate that the case must be true for everyone

because it is true in some cases. Walton (2006:15) adds that “sometimes a generalization is called a rule or general rule because it states how things generally go in a wide range of specific cases”.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

This section analyses the persuasiveness of each speech separately:

Speech 1: “If you stay in your comfort zone, that's where you will fail. You will fail in your comfort zone. Success is not a comfortable procedure. It is a very uncomfortable thing to attempt. So, you get comfortable being uncomfortable if you ever wanna be successful.” In this short motivational speech on success, *logos* is the main appeal used. The first line establishes *logos* via the conditional persuasive device of action. This can be considered as a sub kind of “action” device. It communicates the sense that if you act in this way (stay in comfort zone), the end result is definitely a failure (fail). Another use of the device of action is seen in the concluding line. The line “you gotta get comfortable being uncomfortable” communicates the effect that the only way to be successful is by starting to leave the comfort zone. For that, the speaker asks the audience to take the action of being comfortable with being uncomfortable. Another device is noticed in this short speech emphasizing the same effect of (success requires being uncomfortable) which is the use of repetition. A whole statement is repeated twice to emphasize specific meaning (You will fail in your comfort zone).

The use of these devices in a logical way leads the audience to reach the conclusion that reads as “Hard work pays for itself in a form of a deserved success” and “hard work is the only key to success”.

Speech 2: “Never give up. Without commitment, you'll never start. Or more importantly, without consistency, you'll never finish. It's not easy. It'd be no Denzel Washington. So, keep working. Keep striving. Never give up. Fall down seven times; get up eight. Ease is a greater threat to progress than hardship. Ease is a greater threat to progress than hardship.”

This motivational speech is constructed from two main kinds of rhetorical appeals: *logos* and *ethos*. *Logos*, on the one hand, is established via the use of action device, generalization, adjectives, and repetition. The speaker motivates the audience to take certain actions to reach success. Those actions are: “never give up”, “keep working”, “keep striving”, and “get up”. The necessity to take such kinds of actions is supported by some generalizations with regard to results of various actions. For instance, the speaker generalizes the result of “failure” in relation to being not committed or consistent (which are the opposite states of the actions the speaker motivates the audience to take). Further, emphasis is shown when two ideas are repeated throughout the speech, namely “never give up” and “Ease is a greater threat to progress than hardship”. Finally, *logos* is also communicated via the adjective “not easy” communicating the fact that success is not an easy job.

Ethos, on the other hand, is established via the use of connotations. The reference to the name of the speaker himself “Denzel Washington” is an apparent mark of trustworthiness with regard to topic of discussion. The implications of the name itself read as a role model for success. This is because Denzel Washington is known as one of the most successful actors. So the connotations of the name reflect trustworthiness.

Speech 3: “If you want to be successful, learn from other people’s mistakes. Don’t learn from the successful stories”. This short motivational speech is apparently based on the appeal with *logos*. The speaker logically calls the audience to take one main action to be successful. The action is to learn from mistakes.

Speech 4: “I don't believe in talent. I'm here because I worked hard in my whole life. Without that work, no one in this room would know who I am except my family. So, to all the kids around the world watching, paying attention and inspiring to be like one of us or even on the stage someday, put the work in and watch the magical ride you go on.”

This speech is a mixture of the three kinds of rhetorical appeals together: logos, ethos and pathos. Logos is established in the first line via an exclusive language. The speaker tells the audience about his own perspective on success and uses the pronoun “I” to reflect that the idea is his own and the reasons he gives are personal. He keeps going with logos adding some sense of generalization, “Without that work, no one in this room...etc”. The speaker, then switches his language into an emotional one. He addresses certain group of people, also using an exclusive language, referring to “all the kinds”. Pathos is apparent by the use of such lexical items and adjectives as “inspiring, someday, and magical ride”. These are emotional lexis that triggers specific feelings in the side of the audience and motivates them to take certain action, namely work harder.

Meanwhile, the speaker refers to his own character and success via the use of connotation when saying “who I am”. This specific use of connotation and reference to his, Ray Allen, famous and successful character is a way of appealing by ethos because it reflects credibility. The character fits the topic. He is a famous and successful person. Those qualities make him trustworthy to talk about a topic like success.

Speech 5: “Whatever you hold in your mind will tend to occur in your life. If you continue to believe as you have always believed, you will continue to get what you have always gotten. You want different results in your life? All you have to do is change your mind.”

The message in this speech is communicated logically. The speaker explains the reasons that make everybody's believe and thoughts essential to their success. The speaker establishes reason, first, via generalization. The device of generalization is used to state the absolute state of mind and thought relation to and effect on life. Second, the speaker introduces a rhetorical question directing the mind of the audience towards the necessity of taking the action he is about to recommend. He then utilizes a device of action. Audience is motivated to start working on their mind and make changes if they want to change their life and be even more successful.

Speech 6: “Life does not happen to you; it happens for you. My father could've been a great comedian but he didn't believe that that was possible for him and so he made a conservative choice Instead. He got a safe job as an accountant and when I was 12 years old, he was let go from that safe job and our family had to do whatever we could to survive. I learned many great lessons from my father. Not the least of which was that you can fail at what you don't want so you might as well take a chance on doing what you love the speech is a form of pathos. It communicates sincere feelings and tries to connect with audiences' feeling and desire of successes. It does so by the use of an obvious exclusive language. The speaker divides the parties into “I” which represents himself and “you” which represents the audience- whoever is interested. He via an exclusive language asserts his own and his father's story of hard work. He tries to indicate that failure can be a bridge to success. You- the audience- should take failure as a normal process to success. The use of lexis such as “a great comedian, conservative, survive, great lessons, and love” is an indication of appeal by emotion.

Speech 7: “Most of you are happy to be losers part-time. You want to escape. That's why you joined. You don't want to be a loser anymore, but then that new video game comes out. I'll just play the video game. I'll just be a loser for two more week. Then I'll get back to trying to escape the matrix. It doesn't work that way because you jump in and out of complacency, from I am happy to be a loser and do loser things to I can't be a loser anymore. When you

jump in and out you never get momentum. You cannot quit. You cannot give up. You need that momentum to break free. When a rocket is flying out towards the moon to escape the atmosphere, it doesn't pause halfway up the sky. Does it? No, it keeps going every single second. You're not in hustler's university. There are things happening. Conversations happening that you're not watching information that could be the one little piece of information you need to break out. It could be that one little sentence that changes everything.”

This is another motivational speech built on logic and reasons. The speaker appeals the point logically. He does so via three main devices: action, exclusive language and rhetorical question. With regard to the device of action, there are three sets of actions presented in the speech. The first of which is a set of actions to be avoided in order to be successful which include actions like wasting time (“play the video game”), being loser intentionally (“I'll just be a loser for two more week”), quitting and giving up. The second set of actions includes the things that audience should do in order to be successful such as to keep going without stops (“keeps going every single second”). The third set includes actions happening in the world which the speaker state to help audience get motivated to start taking the actions the speech calls for. They help to trigger the sense of urgency in the audience.

The second device noticed in the speech is the use of exclusive language. The speaker puts the audience in an opposite side as the party opposite to him, i.e., the ones who work hard VS. the ones that do not work hard. The use of exclusive style is apparent again by the use of pronouns such as you and I. The function of exclusive language here is to make the audience feel the need to take certain action to be no longer part of the group addressed by the speaker and start being named as an inclusive party.

Further, one rhetorical question is used in the middle of the speech and it directly contributes to the logic of the speech. The speaker concludes the statement “when a rocket is flying out towards the moon to escape the atmosphere, it doesn't pause halfway up the sky.” with a “Does it?”. However, “does it” there does not really function as a question seeking information. It rather seeks a taken for granted agreement on the base of logic and reasons from the audience.

Speech 8: “You become the leader that you wanted to become. You had the team that you wanted to build. You have the project that you wanted to create, the book that you wanted to write and the weight that you wanted to lose. Whatever it may be, you just keep showing up and doing the work over and over again. Most people get bored with the work. Most people get distracted from the work. Most people get afraid of the work. Greats just do the work. This is the cost. This is the cost. Are you willing to pay the cost? Or not? that's really what boils down to getting better.”

This is one more motivational speech based on logic and reason. The speaker logically discusses what keeps success up and what breaks it down. Logic is established here via the device of generalization, adjectives, action, exclusive language and rhetorical question. Generalization is seen in the part where the state of most people is described, “Most people get bored with the work. Most people get distracted from the work. Most people get afraid of the work”. The device shows that everyone, except the real successful ones, act in the way described. This device is followed by the use of an adjective, namely greats- which modifies an elliptic noun. This adjective- stands for a noun here- reflects the quality of the successful people.

Then, the device of action is used. The speaker represents two sets of actions to choose between and highlights the results of each one with the reasons. The first set of actions includes getting bored, distracted, etc. and therefore quitting the hard work at certain stage. The second set of actions includes doing jobs, accepting the cost and getting better. The speaker expects the audience to start taking actions of the second sort. This is apparent from

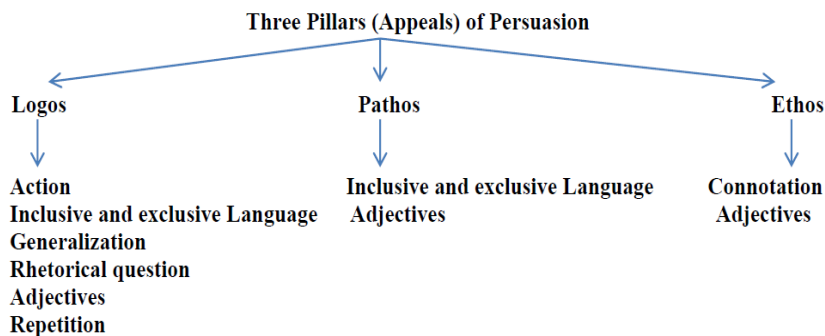
the use of a rhetorical question. The speaker rhetorically asks “Are you willing to pay the cost? Or not?” which is not a real question seeking an answer. It is a question with a definite yes answer which leads audience to get motivated to take the actions required.

The last device utilized is the use of exclusive language. Just like the style used in speech 7 earlier, the speaker uses an exclusive reference to address the audience. The purpose is again the same. It is to motivate them to always work hard and be successful.

On the base of the detailed analyses above, the aside table summarizes the kind of rhetorical appeal utilized in constructing each motivational speech and the devices utilized in establishing each appeal:

Speech No.	Kind of Rhetorical Appeal	Devices Utilized
1	Logos	Action and repetition
2	Logos	Action , generalization, adjectives, and repetition
	Ethos	Connotation
3	Logos	Action
4	Logos	Exclusive language and generalization
	Ethos	Connotation
	Pathos	Adjective
5	Logos	Generalization, rhetorical question and action.
6	Pathos	Exclusive language and adjectives
7	Logos	Action, exclusive language and rhetorical question.
8	Logos	Generalization, adjectives, action, exclusive language and rhetorical question.

Furthermore, and on the base of the above findings, a figure can be drawn to show the kind of devices that can be employed in the construction of each of the three rhetorical appeals of persuasion:



It is apparent that, in addition to the specific purposes (effects) that each device serves, each set of the devices- as the figure above shows- serves to establish one kind or more of the three kinds of rhetorical appeals. For instance, connotation is only used to establish appeals with emotion whereas the device of adjective contributes in all the three kinds of appeals each in its own way. Further, the appeals and the devices all together serve to systematically persuade the audience about ways and means to be successful.

6. Conclusion

This study has come up at the following conclusions:

- Motivational speeches of success on social media mainly consist of appeals by logic and reasons, i.e., logos. The reason can be related to the fact that success is a more practical thing than emotional.
- Various kinds of devices are used in the formation of the appeals constructing those speeches.
- Some of the most common devices which are utilized in the logical appeals for the theme of success include: the device of action, generalization and exclusive language.
- The use of exclusive language is more frequent than the inclusive one.
- Action is the most common device used in motivational speeches on success on social media.
- Pathos and ethos are less frequently used than logos. Also, less variation of devices is established in the formation of those two former appeals.

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فيديوؤى پالنه ر بؤ سه ركه وتن له سؤشمال ميديا: ليكؤلينه وهيهك له رازيكردن

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پوخته

پازيكردن بريتيه له و كرده يه كه لايه نيك هه ولى پازيكردن يان كاريگه رى له سه ر لايه ني ديكه ده دات بؤ وه رگرتى بيروكه يان هه لؤيستيكي دياريكراو وه ك قه ناعه تيكي بنه رپه تي. پازيكردن كرده يه كي كاريگه ره كه كاريگه ريه كاني له سه ر ژباني تاكه كان و له سه ر كؤمه لگاكاني به گشتي په ننگ ده داته وه، چونكه كار له سه ر ده سئكاريكردن و گؤرپني بيكرده وه و هه سته كان ده كات. سؤشمال ميديا ناوه رپؤكيكي زؤر به مه به ستي پازيكردن داينن ده كات. كورته فيديوؤى پالنه ره كان هه نديك له ناوه رپؤكه كاني ئه م جوړه ن له سؤشمال ميديا دا. بؤيه ئه م توؤزينه وه به به شيوه يه كي هه رپه مه كي ژماره به ك له م كليپانه (هه شت) هه لده بؤرپت، به تايه تي ئه وانه ي كه باس له باه تي سه ركه وتن و چؤنيه تي به ده سته پنيان سه ركه وتن ده كه ن. ئه م توؤزينه وه به تاناجي روونكرده وه ي ئامراز و شيوازه ستايليسيته كاني پازيكرده له م برگانه دا. به تايه تي هه ولده دات وه لامى ئه م پرسيارانه ي خواره وه بدانه وه: (ئه) ئامپره سه ره كييه رپتؤريكييه قايلكه ره كان چين كه له م برگانه دا به كارهيتراون و كاميان زؤرتريين به كارهيتراون؟ (ب) كام ئامپري قايلكه ر، به تايه تي له تپوان ئه وانه ي كه له لايه ن بوير و(2008) نابثاين خراوه تپوو، ده ركه وتوو كه زياتر له ئامپره كاني تر به كارده هپنرين؟ (سيه م) هه ر كؤمه له شيوازيكي قايلكردن خزمه ت به چ ئامانچيك ده كات؟

وشه سه ره كييه كان: پازيكردن، سؤشمال ميديا، پالنه ر، زمان

فيديوها ت النجاح التحفيزية على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي: دراسة في الإقناع

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ملخص

الإقناع هو الفعل الذي يحاول به أحد الأطراف إقناع الآخر أو التأثير عليه لتبني فكرة أو موقف معين كقناعة اساسية. الإقناع هو فعل مؤثر ينعكس اثاره على حياة الأفراد وعلى المجتمعات بشكل عام لأنه يعمل على تعديل وتغيير الأفكار والمشاعر. أن وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي تقوم بتقديم الكثير من المحتويات التي غرضها الإقناع. وتعد مقاطع الفيديو التحفيزية القصيرة من أكثر المحتويات شيوعاً من هذا النوع على وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي. ولذلك تختار هذه الدراسة وبشكل عشوائي عدداً من هذه المقاطع (ثمانية)، وتحديداً تلك التي تتناول موضوع النجاح وكيفية تحقيق النجاح. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى بيان الوسائل والأساليب الأسلوبية للإقناع في تلك المقاطع. حيث تسعى على وجه التحديد إلى الإجابة على الأسئلة التالية: (أ) ما هي الوسائل الإقناعية البلاغية الرئيسية المستخدمة في تلك المقاطع وأي منها هي الأكثر استخداماً؟ (ب) ما هي الأجهزة الإقناعية، تحديداً من بين تلك التي قدمها بوير ونايثن (2008)، والتي يتبين استخدامها بشكل أكثر شيوعاً من غيرها؟ (ثالثاً) ما هي الاهداف التي تخدمها كل مجموعة من الأساليب الإقناعية؟

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإقناع، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، التحفيز، اللغة