

The art of persuasion: an analysis of the speech by volodymyr zelensky to the european parliament

El arte de convencer: un análisis del discurso de Volodymyr Zelensky ante el Parlamento Europeo

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Abstract

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has delivered numerous speeches to the international community. This study analyzes the persuasive strategies and discourse elements employed by Zelensky before the European Parliament at the beginning of the Ukraine-Russia conflict. The research is documentary, qualitative, analytical, and explanatory in scope, supported by an analytical matrix. Among the main findings, it is evident that Zelensky possesses excellent oratory skills, engaging his audience and primarily using emotional arguments to bolster his demands and generate empathy. Thus, the applied strategies lend strength and validity to his purpose. In conclusion, the findings indicate that persuasion is an indispensable tool in political discourse during armed conflicts for influencing opinions, forging alliances, and persuading.

Keywords:

Communication; War conflict; Speech; Strategies; Political leadership; Peace; Persuasion.

Resumen

Desde la invasión de Rusia a Ucrania en febrero de 2022, el presidente ucraniano Volodymyr Zelensky ha pronunciado múltiples discursos dirigidos a la comunidad internacional. El presente estudio analiza las estrategias de persuasión y los elementos del discurso empleados por Zelensky ante el Parlamento Europeo a inicios Ucrania-Rusia. La investigación es documental, cualitativa, analítica y de alcance explicativo con el apoyo de una matriz de análisis. Entre los resultados principales, se logra evidenciar que Zelensky tiene un excelente manejo de la palabra al lograr involucrar a la audiencia y que usa, mayormente, argumentos emotivos para favorecer su solicitud y generar empatía. De esta forma, se evidencia cómo las estrategias aplicadas le otorgan fortaleza y validez al propósito de este. En fin, las conclusiones indican que la persuasión es una herramienta indispensable en el discurso político durante los conflictos bélicos para modificar opiniones, generar alianzas y convencer.

Palabras clave:

Comunicación; Conflicto bélico; Discurso; Estrategias; Liderazgo político; Paz; Persuasión.

INTRODUCTION

Every art of war requires a deliberate narrative capable of shaping public opinion and attracting allies to its cause (Quintero et al., 2020). Since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, millions of Ukrainian refugees have been registered across Europe, along with multiple casualties and injuries from ongoing confrontations (United Nations, 2015). In this wartime scenario, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has addressed various international communities in an effort to establish diplomatic relations and secure support through declarations, each with distinct purposes and structures depending on the audience and context.

Indeed, Zelensky has proven to be a strategist not only in the art of war, but also in persuading the public through his speeches. Mulvey (2022) states that the President of Ukraine had no political experience when he was elected as head of state, and has now emerged as a wartime leader in the face of the invasion ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Nevertheless, Zelensky's speeches managed to mobilize a nation and to give voice—through his statements and selfie-style videos—to the indignation and resistance of the Ukrainian people against the Russian invasion. Moreover, his narrative also seeks to promote just and peaceful societies in order to ensure peace in the world, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16: peace, justice, and strong institutions (UN, 2015).

In line with this, research on persuasive communication in politics has demonstrated that leaders who employ effective rhetorical strategies can influence opinions, build alliances, and persuade diverse audiences (Quintero et al., 2020). In politics, a powerful speech may become a spokesperson's greatest ally. Therefore, attention must be paid to the ongoing conflict in the heart of Europe to evaluate the persuasive strategies used by President Volodymyr Zelensky in his March 1, 2022, address to the European Parliament, as a tool to denounce attacks and build alliances.

From this perspective, communication is a fundamental tool for any professional, from understanding the context in which it unfolds to organizing and delivering a meaningful and impactful message, and understanding its intended audience (Mills, 2004). Both effective

communication and speech are important for everyone, especially for professionals who must maintain constant interaction with people, audiences, clients, buyers, politicians, and parliamentarians.

Likewise, Meersohn (2005) provides an introduction to discourse and its analysis, stating that discourse must be studied as a complete communicative event within a social context, since it represents a specific form of language use and a mode of social interaction. He adds that, pragmatically, discourse analysis focuses primarily on phenomena that go beyond the sentence.

Accordingly, discourse must be understood as a collection of elements spanning from language use, participants, discursive genre, context, tone of voice, and social rules, among others; that is, its analysis requires attention not only to verbal and nonverbal language, but to all accompanying components.

The field of study of this research is the analysis of political discourse, understood as “that which is spoken by actors or authors, politicians” (van Dijk & Rodrigo, 1999, p. 12), and its interaction with “the various recipients of political communicative events, such as the people, the citizens, the ‘masses,’ and other groups or categories” (van Dijk & Rodrigo, 1999, p. 13). Thus, political discourse, an oral discourse intended to influence its audience, is linked to the origins of rhetoric: the technique of preparing and communicating public, socially useful speeches (Pujante, 1998).

Throughout history, figures such as Simón Bolívar, Winston Churchill, Joseph Goebbels, Nelson Mandela, and others have exemplified impeccable oratory and persuasion during times of crisis (Quintero et al., 2020). Zelensky's speech represents a key point in the development of the conflict from two perspectives: first, because it is a request for Ukraine's inclusion in the European Union and a denunciation of Russian attacks; and second, because it is laden with emotional charge due to the assault on the country just hours before the conference, requiring Zelensky to apply persuasive strategies to convince his audience.

In this framework, persuasion is present in every communicative act, since the speaker conveys a message with the intention of provoking a reaction in the listener (Padrón, 2012). Padrón explains that

“the word persuasion comes from the Latin: *per*: by means of; and *persuasion*: gentle and effective convincing,” meaning persuasion does not involve force, but argumentation, words, and actions that convince. Along these lines, Fuentes and Alcaide (2007) define argumentation as a discursive process through which the speaker offers a set of statements aimed at making the interlocutor believe or think in a certain way; in other words, one speaks to convince and persuade others of something. Meanwhile, the act of convincing, according to the Dictionary of the Spanish Language of the Royal Spanish Academy, is “to incite or move someone with reasons to do something or change their opinion or behavior” (RAE, n.d., definition 1).

To deepen this analysis, it is essential to consider Aristotle’s fundamental study in Rhetoric I (354 BCE), where he defines rhetoric as “the faculty of considering in each case what may serve to persuade” and proposes three means of persuasion: the ethos of the speaker, the pathos of the listener, and the logos. Aristotle establishes that persuasion comes from the speaker’s character (*éthos*), the emotional state (*pathos*) of the audience, or the argument (*logos*) itself (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023). These elements form strategies associated with the use of emotion and logic in persuasive discourse.

Similarly, Muñoz (2017) studied discourse analysis and persuasion, the latter of which is considered a discursive strategy in politics. He adapted the persuasive strategies proposed by various authors, such as Marwell and Schmitt (1967), Brown (1978), and Albaladejo (2005), among others, to analyze political speeches. This adaptation allowed Muñoz to define and classify those applied by Zelensky in his March 1, 2022, speech.

It is worth noting that the geopolitical context of the Ukraine–Russia conflict has heightened the need for analyses of persuasive discourse, as political leaders must influence diverse international audiences to secure support and alliances (Matsuoka & Matsuoka, 2022). The effectiveness of persuasive strategies during crises has been documented in studies examining leaders’ ability to shape public perception and foster international solidarity.

Therefore, this study examines the elements of

persuasive discourse identified by Moya (1999): the source or sender, the message, and the receiver, since the effectiveness of discourse depends fundamentally on the effects these elements produce on the listener. The author considers two aspects of the persuasive message: first, the category of arguments, whether rational or emotional; and second, the type of conclusion, whether the main ideas are presented implicitly or explicitly, and whether they appear at the beginning, development, or end of the speech (Moya, 1999).

Consequently, persuasion cannot be discussed without mentioning Aristotle’s triad from Rhetoric I: ethos, pathos, and logos. The first two refer to psychological proofs through which the speaker seeks to stir the audience, as well as to the emotional and credibility-based elements employed in the speech. Meanwhile, logos refers to argumentation based on logical evidence accepted by listeners (Pedrazzini et al., 2012).

Additionally, the persuasive strategies applied in political discourse compiled by Muñoz (2017) are examined: exploitation of emotivity to obtain loyalty and support; vocatives of support, affection, and reinforcement; simplification of the topic; exaggeration and distortion of information; repetition of ideas; psychic contagion through group pressure; grand words, keywords, and clichés transmitting the basic arguments; appeal to a possible external threat; egocentric focalization, self-praise, subjective markers (I) and defocalization (we); rhetorical questioning; and rhetorical figures such as irony, metaphor, and hyperbole.

Muñoz (2017) also developed a comprehensive taxonomy of persuasive strategies including: (1) strategies related to the source (egocentric and social focalization, self-praise, subjective markers), (2) strategies directed at the receiver (exploitation of emotivity, vocatives of support, psychic contagion), (3) message-related strategies (simplification of topics, repetition of ideas, grand words and clichés), and (4) social pressure strategies (appeal to external threats, group pressure). Together, these categories form a robust analytical framework to examine the persuasive effectiveness of contemporary political speeches.

Likewise, it is necessary to mention the previous studies that have served as the foundation

for this research. Díaz (2023) conducted a socio-pragmatic analysis of Vladimir Putin's diplomatic political discourse prior to the Ukraine–Russia conflict. This analysis established a relationship between the use of (im)politeness strategies and a call for belligerent behavior against Ukraine. Of particular relevance in this study is the methodology employed, especially the use of politeness as the analytical framework and the research matrix proposed by the author.

In turn, Matsuoka and Matsuoka (2022) explored the level of influence exerted by Volodymyr Zelensky on the Japanese public through his online speech addressed to the Japanese Parliament. The analysis of this discourse was based on Brown and Levinson's (1978) politeness theory, Goffman's concept of face, and the use of soft power—all elements that are especially relevant to the development of the present research.

Similarly, Muñoz (2017) sought to analyze the strategies employed in the speeches of Spanish women politicians to influence voters throughout their electoral campaigns. This study is noteworthy for its characterization of discursive strategies aimed at persuasion, particularly in political language, which served as a basis for the development of this research's objectives.

In another relevant study, Torres (2016) identified the relationship between the persuasive discourse used by the candidate Rodolfo Hernández during his campaign for the Mayor's Office of Bucaramanga (2016–2019) and the electoral results obtained. This research emphasizes theories of political communication and argumentation.

Finally, Pedrazzini et al. (2012) analyzed the speeches delivered during Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's presidency through lexical variability and persuasive strategies applied according to the target audience. In particular, they developed the elements of Aristotle's Rhetoric I—ethos, pathos, and logos—to measure the credibility conveyed to interlocutors.

Based on the foregoing, the main objective of the present study is to analyze the persuasive strategies in Volodymyr Zelensky's speech before the European Parliament on March 1, 2022, at the outset of the Ukraine–Russia conflict, following the theoretical frameworks proposed by Aristotle and Muñoz.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts an epistemological constructivist paradigm, seeking to understand and explain communicative phenomena from the perspective of its actors and recognizing that communicative reality is socially constructed through interaction and context. This paradigm is suitable for the study of persuasive discourse, as it allows the analysis of rhetorical strategies that consider both the objective elements of the message and the subjective interpretations constructed by receivers in their sociocultural context.

Correspondingly, the study is documentary, as it involved collecting, organizing, and examining the online speech delivered by Volodymyr Zelensky on March 1, 2022, before the European Parliament (Morales, 2003). It is also qualitative, as it describes, interprets, and analyzes persuasive strategies applied by Zelensky at the outset of the Ukraine–Russia conflict to make visible and understand a reality in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The research has an explanatory scope, as it investigates the causes and effects of an event the speech by Zelensky and examines the behavior of elements and persuasive strategies in the Ukrainian president's speech.

Therefore, the research is based on the analysis of a linguistic corpus: the textual transcription of Volodymyr Zelensky's oral speech delivered on March 1, 2022, which consists of 35 utterances, 690 words, and has a duration of 7 minutes and 42 seconds. This speech corresponds to a transcription of the video published by the European Parliament – Office in Spain on its official Facebook page (2022), from which the Spanish subtitles were used for the purposes of this study.

Additionally, the complete official text of the speech is available in the official document of the European Parliament (2022), which provides a verbatim transcription of the speech delivered by Zelensky before the extraordinary plenary session on Russian aggression against Ukraine. This official transcription includes the interpretation of the original speech from Ukrainian into English and subsequently into Spanish.

It should be noted that the analysis considered not only persuasive strategies according to Aristotle and Muñoz, but also the main persuasive elements

of the discourse as proposed by Moya (1999), referring to the source (credibility, attractiveness, similarity to the audience, and power over the audience). Accordingly, a multifaceted approach was applied to the analysis of the results.

In this regard, the main category of analysis is persuasion, from which three subcategories are derived: first, the key elements of persuasive discourse according to Moya (1999)—source, message, and audience; second, the elements of Aristotle's Rhetoric I (354 BC)—ethos, pathos, and logos; and third, the persuasive strategies proposed by Muñoz (2017), namely exploitation of emotionality, topic simplification, repetition of ideas, grand words, focalization and defocalization, psychic contagion, appeal to a possible threat, and rhetorical figures (metaphor, anaphora, hyperbole, rhetorical questions). Based on this framework, the unit of analysis was defined as the complete speech delivered by Volodymyr Zelensky on March 1, 2022, which was segmented into utterances or words for analytical purposes.

Regarding the data collection technique, structured observation was employed using an analysis matrix specifically designed for this study. This matrix enabled the systematic recording of each utterance in Zelensky's speech by assigning an identification code, transcribing the textual content, and identifying the persuasive strategies present according to the theoretical frameworks of Aristotle and Muñoz.

The analytical procedure began with the transcription and translation into Spanish of the speech delivered by Volodymyr Zelensky before the European Parliament on March 1, 2022, at the outset of the Ukraine–Russia conflict. Subsequently, the key elements of the discourse were described according to Moya (1999): the sender, including credibility, attractiveness, power, and similarity to the receiver; the message, whether rational or emotional, whether conclusions are implicit or explicit, and the order of the main ideas; and the characteristics of the audience. The utterances of the discourse were then segmented and coded as follows: minute:second at the beginning of the utterance–minute:second at the end of the utterance, in order of appearance. Next, the rhetorical elements according to Aristotle and the persuasive strategies applied according to Muñoz were identified and

analyzed using the proposed matrix (see Table 2), which constitutes an adaptation of the matrix proposed by Díaz (2023). Finally, the key elements and persuasive strategies applied in the discourse were interrelated in order to analyze the speech as an integrated whole.

RESULTS

The results are presented as follows, corresponding to each specific objective.

Key Elements of the Persuasive Process

The Source

According to Moya (1999), the basic elements for identifying the speaker's profile are: brief biography, credibility, attractiveness, power, and similarity to the audience.

Biography. Volodymyr Zelensky, born in Kryvyy Rih, Ukraine, in 1978, is married to Olena Zelenska and has two children. A lawyer by training from the Kryvyy Rih Economic Institute, he never formally practiced law. He became an actor and comedian, known for his comedic roles in television series, particularly Servant of the People (2015), where he portrayed a high school teacher who becomes Ukraine's president (CNN Español, 2022). In 2019, he won the presidency with nearly three-quarters of the vote as leader of the Servant of the People party, becoming president and, three years later, wartime leader.

Credibility. After five days of Russian occupation, Ukraine suffered an attack on Freedom Square in Kharkiv. Zelensky states in his speech that Ukrainians fight for their rights, freedom, and lives, and also for equal membership in Europe. He adds that he is not following a script; each utterance is a denunciation of casualties and a request for support. He reiterates that his intention is not to harm, but to defend his country and people, both through speeches and by fighting alongside citizens. Thus, Zelensky conveys his concern for Ukraine's well-being and his commitment to its security.

Attractiveness. Zelensky appears dynamic, resilient, and hardworking, facing each situation courageously. Dressed in military attire, he communicates via video conference with a composed demeanor. Unlike leaders in suits, Zelensky visually represents solidarity with his people. His body language is centered and energetic: placing a hand on his chest for personal mentions, gesturing toward the camera when

addressing the audience, and using subtle hand and head movements for emphasis. He maintains steady eye contact through the camera.

Power. Zelensky addresses the parliament to request Ukraine's EU membership and emphasizes that this would benefit the bloc. However, he is not in a position of power over the parliamentarians; he cannot impose rewards or sanctions. He can only observe their satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Similarity to the Audience. Zelensky appeals to shared identity by repeatedly stating that Ukrainians are Europeans. He also shares professional traits with legislators: both must follow codes of conduct and norms inherent to their roles.

The Message

Only the structural elements of Zelensky's discourse were evaluated: argument nature, structure, and clarity.

Nature of Arguments. Most arguments are emotional and positive. He thanks the parliamentarians: "I am very glad for what I have been able to see and hear today... I am happy we have united with you." He also expresses optimism: "We will prevail... I am convinced" and "We are strong. We are Ukrainians."

Negative emotional arguments based on fear are also present: fear of death—"...for some people today is not a good day. And for others, this is their last day"; fear of consequences "a tragedy for our state... thousands of people killed." Rational arguments appear as well, such as accurate references to the number of days of invasion, casualties, and denial of Putin's justification: "16 children were killed... Putin will say it was a military operation."

Structure and Clarity. The discourse has a clear structure: an introduction that presents context, a concise body with main ideas, and a conclusion that summarizes key points. Zelensky presents three central ideas: denunciation of Russian attacks, confirmation of Ukrainian resilience, and request for EU membership. These are introduced, elaborated with evidence, and reiterated in closing.

The Audience

In this section, the audience of the speech includes the European Parliament and its members, including its organization, responsibilities, professional backgrounds, and political groupings.

The speech was delivered via videoconference

to the members of the European Parliament. This political deliberative body is composed of a President and 704 elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) representing the 27 Member States of the European Union. These MEPs are organized into seven political groups according to ideological affinity. They directly represent European citizens, and their responsibilities include legislative and budgetary powers, as well as oversight of other European Union institutions (European Parliament, n.d.). In addition, the Parliament addresses policy areas such as security and defense, human rights, international trade, and constitutional affairs, and it examines legislative proposals.

In this context, the Ukrainian president's speech was addressed to Maltese politician Roberta Metsola, who assumed the leadership of the Parliament in January 2022 and is a member of the European People's Party group, as well as to the MEPs from the 27 Member States. The members are adults, citizens of the European Union, and currently more than one third are women. They are professionals from diverse fields, including politics, journalism, architecture, chemistry, law, television presenting, acting, modeling and singing, film and theater directing, writing, education, philosophy, business, gastronomy, athletics, and humanitarian work. They also represent the following political groups: the European People's Party (Christian democrats), the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, Renew Europe, the Greens/European Free Alliance, the European Conservatives and Reformists, Identity and Democracy, and The Left in the European Parliament—GUE/NGL (European Parliament, n.d.).

In summary, the three fundamental elements of the discourse display persuasive characteristics. Zelensky's credibility was perceived as being linked to his biography, intentions, and arguments; elements related to physical appearance, attire, and body language were also evident and contributed to his attractiveness to the audience; and similarities between the speaker and his audience were identifiable. Moreover, the speech presents an organized structure in which the main ideas are clearly articulated and repeatedly emphasized. Additionally, the audience is characterized as broad and heterogeneous, with diverse social

backgrounds, political orientations, and professional profiles, forming a wide range of cognitive perspectives to which the address needed to be adapted.

Persuasive Strategies Applied

The persuasive strategies employed by Zelensky in his speech, according to Aristotle (354 BCE) and Muñoz (2017), were described based on the information obtained by relating the data from the analysis matrix. This cross-analysis of information made it possible to show that these strategies were applied jointly, as they complement one another.

Table 1 presents the relationship between both types of strategies. It shows that Zelensky grounded the credibility (*ethos*) of his discourse through the use of grand words, hyperbole, and focalization; likewise, he appealed to emotions (*pathos*) by employing grand words, the exploitation of emotivity, repetition of ideas, psychic contagion, and defocalization; similarly, he resorted to logic (*logos*) through appeals to possible external threats and the repetition of ideas. Therefore, the speaker sought to emphasize his message and prompt a change in the interlocutors' ideas.

Table 1. *Persuasive Strategies in Zelensky's Speech According to Aristotle and Muñoz*

Persuasive Strategies according Aristotle	Persuasive Strategies according Muñoz
Ethos	Grand word, Hyperbole, Focalization
Pathos	Grand words, Exploitation of emotivity, Repetition of ideas, Psychic contagion, Defocalization
Logos	Appeal to external threats, Repetition of ideas

Relationship Between Persuasive Elements and Strategies

In a persuasive speech, the speaker must captivate the audience by drawing on credibility and moral authority in order to create alignment with the arguments presented. In this regard, Zelensky employed ethos in several aspects of his address that are consistent with his biography and public image. Throughout the speech, he speaks as one more member of the army fighting against the invasion, highlighting the strength of his people and the virtues that define them: "we are fighting for our rights, for our freedoms, for our lives." He further reinforces his credibility by appealing to his intentions, expressing his desire for his children and all the children of his country to survive—"We want to see our children... alive." In addition, the former comedian and television host demonstrates his oratorical skills and subtly underscores them by stating, "Know... that I am not reading... this speech," thereby reinforcing his strengths even in times of crisis and without a script.

Likewise, the use of the strategies proposed by Muñoz (2017) related to the speaker and ethos can be observed. First, there is both egocentric and social or collective focalization: Zelensky refers to himself and his abilities (I am convinced, I cannot, I do not know), downplaying his own skills while delivering the speech under intense geopolitical pressure; however, he elevates his people by including himself among them (WE are strong, WE are fighting), highlighting their ethical and moral qualities. Second, he employs "big words" as a tool to express his motivations: the struggle for freedom, values, and life. Third, the source emphasizes his attributes and incentives through the use of hyperbole: "we are giving our strongest citizens." In this way, the speaker projects persuasive authorial traits and demonstrates credibility grounded in honest intentions.

On the other hand, the speaker must create an appropriate emotional environment to connect with and move the audience by applying pathos, which is the most prominent strategy in the discourse. Zelensky delivered his speech to European parliamentarians of different ages, genders,

professions, religions, and political orientations; therefore, their cognitive characteristics vary widely. Consequently, the speaker had to adapt his rhetorical strategies in order to persuade the audience. To this end, the repetition of premises with a strong emotional charge seeks to ensure that each parliamentarian feels involved and associates ideas such as freedom and rights with Zelensky and Ukraine.

Similarly, in order to generate empathy in the audience and persuade it to align with the speaker's cause, Zelensky relied on multiple strategies related to pathos. First, there is the exploitation of emotionality to create national identity and exalt his fellow citizens: "we are giving our best people, the strongest, the most valuable. Ukrainians are incredible," and "we will prevail... I am convinced." Through this, he seeks to persuade the audience that Ukrainians are fighters and are valuable, thereby sensitizing them to the loss of their lives: "today we give our lives for values, rights, freedom," and "now we are fighting to survive." He also appealed to psychic contagion to deeply involve his listeners and create a positive group vision: "prove that you are with us," emphasizing the power of unity to overcome darkness and to build a European identity that includes Ukraine. Within this framework, Zelensky asserts that the EU chooses them because his country will make it stronger, and that Ukrainians have proven to be exactly like EU members: they fight and seek equality just as Europeans do.

Second, Zelensky relies on the constant repetition of "big words" with immutable meanings in order to generate a shift in the audience's mindset and associate Ukraine with these ideas. Concepts such as values, freedom, life versus death, and rights are mentioned repeatedly by the Ukrainian president, accompanied each time by similar value judgments. In this way, he seeks to impact each listener, adapting the information so that these words and premises are associated with him and his people. That is, each member of Parliament must understand that Ukrainians are fighting for the same rights, values, freedom, and life enjoyed by the European Union. Likewise, he employs rhetorical figures such as anaphora to emphasize the meaning of these "big words" and reinforce the intended message.

Finally, for a speech to be truly persuasive, the speaker must present logical, rational, and compelling arguments (*logos*) to support the message and ensure its acceptance by the audience. In this sense, Zelensky delivered an emotional speech supported by solid arguments, which he reiterates in the introduction, body, and conclusion in different ways in order to create an association between these arguments and the speaker, and to adapt them so as to persuade each individual in the audience. Although the Ukrainian president relied primarily on pathos, his arguments are not devoid of logic, as he supported them with verifiable information. For example, he describes the bombed city as "the city with the most universities in the country" and Freedom Square as "the largest square in Europe"; both are verifiable statements that reinforce the emotional appeals.

In addition, Zelensky employed more specific strategies to strengthen the use of *logos* in his message. First, he appealed to a possible threat by directly denouncing missile attacks on his territory and the deaths of sixteen children, explicitly naming the enemy: Putin and the Russian Federation. Second, he simplified issues related to the attack by mentioning only the most relevant aspects that support his position: "Thousands of people killed, two revolutions, one war, and five days of full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation." In this way, he focuses listeners on the denunciation of the attacks and polarizes the information: what is good (Ukrainians fighting for their freedom) and what is bad (the Russian Federation killing children). At the same time, Zelensky reinforces his message through the repetition of ideas, adding different value judgments to help fix the information effectively (attacks on Ukraine and the loss of valuable lives), as well as through rhetorical questions, which have implicit answers but are used to emphasize points and engage the audience. Taken together, through the use of these strategies, Zelensky seeks to consolidate his closing slogan, "Glory to Ukraine!", linking it to his struggle, his denunciations, and his request for support.

In sum, a close relationship was observed between the strategies applied and the fundamental elements of the discourse. In particular, a clear link was identified between the source and ethos, the message and *logos*, and the audience and pathos.

Likewise, the application of the strategies proposed by Muñoz (2017) was evident as tools to move the audience and persuade it to adopt a stance favorable to the Ukrainian president's requests. This highlights that discourse analysis has made it possible to transform the ideas of classical rhetoric in order to adapt them to the contexts of modern communication, as proposed by Muñoz.

DISCUSSION

The present study is situated within contemporary approaches to the analysis of political discourse, particularly at the intersection of classical rhetoric and modern persuasive strategies. In this regard, the findings are discussed in light of specialized literature and contextualized within the specific geopolitical framework of the Ukraine–Russia conflict.

The results show that the persuasive strategies applied by Zelensky were effective across multiple dimensions. First, the balanced combination of emotional (pathos) and rational (logos) elements enabled the construction of a coherent narrative that resonated with a multicultural and multidisciplinary audience. This articulation directly reflects Aristotle's propositions in *Rhetoric I*, where persuasion is built upon the character of the speaker (ethos), the emotion of the listener (pathos), and the logic of the message (logos). Zelensky activates these three elements simultaneously, reinforcing the continued relevance of the classical model in contemporary political contexts.

The predominance of emotive arguments, particularly the use of “grand words” such as freedom, values, and rights, generated an immediate empathetic response. This strategy is consistent with Muñoz (2017), who classifies the exploitation of emotivity, repetition of ideas, and psychic contagion as discursive mechanisms for mobilizing audiences. In the analyzed speech, these strategies are not only present but are combined with verifiable rational elements, such as the specific mention of 16 children killed and the duration of five days of invasion, which strengthens the factual credibility of the message.

The simultaneous application of ethos, pathos, and logos proved to be particularly effective. Zelensky's personal credibility (ethos) was reinforced through egocentric and social focalization, positioning him both as a political

leader and as a member of the Ukrainian people. This dual positioning enabled him to establish authentic emotional connections with the audience, who perceived his sincerity and vulnerability in the context of crisis.

Zelensky's personal credibility (ethos) was further strengthened through egocentric and social focalization, whereby the president presented himself both as a political leader and as part of the Ukrainian populace. This duality aligns with Moya's (1999) assertion that a persuasive source must generate similarity with the receiver, project symbolic power, and maintain coherence between message and sender image. By appearing dressed as a soldier and speaking from within the conflict zone, Zelensky reinforced his authenticity and commitment—elements that Moya identifies as essential for persuasive effectiveness.

In comparison with other political speeches delivered in wartime contexts, three elements stand out in the analysis as key to the persuasive effectiveness of the discourse. First, the exploitation of emotivity to create a shared national and European identity. Zelensky successfully positioned Ukraine as an integral part of Europe, employing strategies of psychic contagion to involve parliamentarians as active participants in the struggle. This strategy was particularly effective given that Members of the European Parliament represent multiple nationalities and political affiliations.

Second, the strategic repetition of key concepts. The frequent use of terms such as “values,” “freedom,” “rights,” and “life” created a solid conceptual framework that facilitated cognitive association between these concepts and the Ukrainian cause. This repetition technique, combined with thematic simplification, enabled the message to transcend cultural and linguistic barriers present within the European Parliament.

Third, the appeal to external threats. By directly mentioning Putin and the Russian Federation, Zelensky employed the classic “common enemy” strategy, which has historically been effective in uniting diverse groups. This approach was particularly relevant in the European context, where democratic values and national sovereignty are widely shared among parliamentary members.

Unlike leaders who have relied on exclusionary

nationalist rhetoric, Zelensky adopted an inclusive narrative that positioned Ukraine as a legitimate member of the European family. This strategic adaptation was crucial given the geopolitical complexity of the European Union. Members of the European Parliament represent diverse national interests, political viewpoints, and historical responses to similar conflicts. The creation of a shared “European identity,” in which Ukrainians are portrayed as “exactly like EU members,” demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of European political dynamics.

Moreover, the use of verifiable data and the direct refutation of Putin’s arguments such as describing the attack as a “military operation” despite strikes on civilian infrastructure illustrates how modern political persuasion requires factual grounding to maintain credibility before educated and diverse audiences.

The findings suggest three practical applications for political leaders facing crises:

Cultural adaptation: Leaders must adjust their persuasive strategies to the specific characteristics of their audiences, taking into account cultural, political, and professional diversity. In Zelensky’s case, adapting to an audience representing 27 different nationalities underscores the importance of identifying shared transcultural elements.

Emotional logical balance: Persuasive success requires a careful balance between emotional and logical arguments. A predominance of emotive elements without factual support may generate skepticism, whereas purely rational arguments may lack the emotional impact necessary to motivate action.

Personal credibility: Consistency between verbal messages and nonverbal actions is essential. Zelensky maintained credibility by demonstrating physical and symbolic commitment to his people’s struggle, in contrast to leaders who deliver speeches from comfortable offices.

The present study offers significant contributions in terms of methodology and applicability. The documentary structure enabled a systematic and reproducible analysis of persuasive strategies, facilitating comparison with similar cases. The integration of classical theoretical frameworks (Aristotle) with contemporary approaches (Muñoz) provided a comprehensive

perspective that captures both timeless and adaptive elements of political persuasion.

However, the documentary approach also entails important limitations. The absence of direct reception analysis prevents assessment of the discourse’s actual effectiveness in terms of changes in attitudes or behaviors among Members of the European Parliament. In addition, reliance on textual transcription excluded paralinguistic elements that may have influenced persuasion, such as intonation, strategic pauses, or shifts in vocal tone.

Furthermore, the research focused on a single speech, limiting the generalizability of the conclusions to other contexts or time periods. The documentary approach does not allow access to receivers’ perspectives, restricting understanding of the real effectiveness of the persuasive strategies.

Future research should explore comparative analyses of multiple Zelensky speeches, examine specific reception among different parliamentary groups, and assess the real effectiveness of persuasive strategies through subsequent actions by Members of the European Parliament. It would also be valuable to analyze the evolution of persuasive strategies throughout the conflict to identify real-time adaptations and refinements.

Finally, the limited comparison with international literature highlights the need to develop more robust theoretical frameworks that situate these findings within broader global contexts. Future studies could benefit from comparative analyses with speeches by leaders facing similar crises, both in Europe and in other regions.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of Volodymyr Zelensky’s speech before the European Parliament on March 1, 2022 reveals the effectiveness of classical persuasive strategies adapted to the contemporary geopolitical context. This study successfully demonstrated the interconnection between the elements of the persuasive process and Aristotelian rhetorical strategies.

The present research identified the key elements of the persuasive process. The source of the discourse (Zelensky) demonstrated reinforced credibility through his biography as a comedian who became a leader during a crisis, his physical and

symbolic appeal by dressing as a soldier, and the similarities established with European parliamentarians by emphasizing a shared European identity. The message presented a coherent structure with a predominance of emotive arguments balanced by verifiable rational elements, while the receiver represented by the 704 Members of the European Parliament from diverse nationalities, professions, and political affiliations constituted a complex audience that required strategic adaptation.

Likewise, a systematic identification of the persuasive strategies applied was achieved. Aristotle's strategies (ethos, pathos, logos) manifested distinctly: ethos through focalization and self-presentation as a committed leader; pathos through the exploitation of emotivity, repetition of grand words, and psychic contagion; and logos through appeals to external threats and factual arguments. Muñoz's (2017) strategies were harmoniously integrated with the Aristotelian framework, creating a coherent and effective persuasive system.

In this regard, the synergy between persuasive elements and rhetorical strategies was evident. The source corresponded directly with ethos, the message with logos, and the audience with pathos, although all strategies worked together to reinforce the overall persuasive impact. This integration demonstrates the continued relevance of classical rhetorical principles and their applicability in modern political contexts.

The effectiveness of the discourse is grounded in three fundamental elements. First, cultural adaptation specific to the European context allowed Ukraine to be positioned as an integral part of the European family, avoiding exclusionary nationalist strategies that could have generated resistance. Second, the careful balance between emotional and rational arguments provided both empathetic impact and factual credibility, addressing the diverse needs of a multicultural audience. Third, consistency between verbal messages and nonverbal actions evident in the president's physical presentation from an actual war context generated authenticity and trust.

For the field of political discourse analysis, this research contributes to the body of knowledge on the effectiveness of persuasive strategies in contexts of geopolitical crisis. The results confirm the

validity of classical theoretical frameworks when adapted to contemporary conditions and provide empirical evidence of the interaction between classical rhetoric and modern persuasive strategies.

Moreover, the geopolitical context of the Ukraine–Russia conflict offers a paradigmatic case for the study of international political communication in crisis. The findings suggest that inclusive narratives, supported by factual evidence and directed at multicultural audiences, may be more effective than polarizing or purely emotive approaches.

The implications for future research are significant. It is recommended to explore the temporal evolution of persuasive strategies throughout the conflict, conduct comparative analyses with speeches by other leaders in similar crises, and examine real effectiveness measured through subsequent political response indicators. The documentary methodology employed proved useful for systematic analysis, although future studies could benefit from incorporating reception analysis and paralinguistic elements.

Regarding limitations, the study focused on a single speech, which prevents generalization of the conclusions to other contexts or time periods. The absence of direct reception analysis represents another limitation that future research could address through additional quantitative and qualitative methods.

Finally, future lines of research should explore the replicability of these findings in other geopolitical crisis contexts, analyze specific reception among different parliamentary audiences, and develop more comprehensive theoretical frameworks that integrate cultural and contextual elements. The effectiveness of the identified strategies suggests opportunities for developing predictive analysis tools on the persuasive effectiveness of political speeches in crisis situations.

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