

Persuasion Beyond Argument: Integrating Pragmatics and Rhetoric in Contemporary Public Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Persuasion has traditionally been studied through two largely separate traditions: rhetoric, which examines persuasive appeals, argumentation, and audience adaptation, and pragmatics, which investigates communicative intention, contextual meaning, and interpersonal interaction. Although both disciplines address how language influences audiences, their parallel development has produced fragmented explanations of persuasive communication, in which persuasion is treated either as the product of argumentation and rhetorical technique or as the outcome of pragmatic processes such as speech acts, implicature, and politeness. This separation overlooks the fact that persuasive discourse emerges through the continuous interaction of pragmatic and rhetorical resources operating simultaneously within authentic communication. This paper argues that persuasion should be reconceptualised as strategic communication in which speakers coordinate communicative intention, interpersonal meaning, rhetorical organisation, and contextual inference to influence audience interpretation and behaviour. Synthesising literature from pragmatics, rhetoric, discourse analysis, and communication studies, the paper proposes an integrated pragmatic-rhetorical framework built around six interrelated communicative functions: managing attention, constructing credibility, building interpersonal alignment, guiding interpretation, generating emotional engagement, and mobilising behavioural action. Rather than treating speech acts, ethos, narrative, metaphor, politeness, and argumentation as isolated categories, the framework demonstrates how these resources jointly produce persuasive effectiveness. The discussion illustrates the framework's applicability across political, educational, organisational, media, public health, and AI-mediated discourse, drawing where relevant on empirical findings from the author's own published research on political and media discourse. By integrating two major traditions of linguistic inquiry, the study contributes to pragmatics, rhetoric, and discourse analysis while offering a theoretical foundation for future empirical research on persuasive communication.

KEYWORDS: Persuasion; Pragmatics; Rhetoric; Strategic communication; Public discourse; Pragmatic-rhetorical framework.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Persuasion is one of the most pervasive forms of human communication. Individuals, institutions, governments, educators, organisational leaders, and digital content creators continually use language to influence beliefs, shape attitudes, and motivate action, because communication rarely functions as a neutral exchange of information. Speakers routinely organise discourse to influence how audiences interpret events, evaluate alternatives, and respond to future possibilities.

Despite its centrality to human interaction, persuasion has traditionally been investigated through disciplinary traditions that rarely converge. Classical rhetoric conceptualised persuasion primarily as the strategic use of **ethos**, **pathos**, and **logos** to influence audiences (Aristotle, trans. 2007), a perspective later expanded by scholarship on argumentation, audience adaptation, narrative, framing, and metaphor (Charteris-Black, 2014; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Pragmatics, by contrast, investigates how speakers perform actions through language, communicate meaning beyond literal content, and negotiate interpersonal relationships within specific contexts (Levinson, 1983; Thomas, 1995): Speech Act Theory explains persuasion as communicative action (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle emphasises inferential meaning, and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) demonstrates how relationship management contributes to communicative effectiveness.

Although these traditions investigate complementary dimensions of persuasion, they have developed largely independently. Rhetorical scholarship prioritises persuasive organisation while devoting limited attention to contextual inference; pragmatic research explains communicative meaning without fully accounting for the rhetorical architecture within which persuasion is organized (Al-Mamoory & Rhaif, 2023). This separation is increasingly untenable in contemporary public discourse, where speakers

rarely persuade through logical reasoning alone: they establish credibility before presenting arguments, construct interpersonal relationships before offering recommendations, use narrative to facilitate identification, and adapt communicative behaviour to audience expectations. Persuasive communication therefore emerges through the coordinated interaction of pragmatic and rhetorical resources rather than through any single mechanism, a pattern equally visible in political questioning and press commentary (Rhaif & Mubarak, 2025).

The growing complexity of contemporary communication reinforces the need for such integration. Political discourse increasingly combines emotional appeal with strategic framing, organisational leaders pair storytelling with institutional vision, educators integrate interpersonal encouragement with instructional reasoning, and digital communication depends on audience adaptation and interactive engagement as much as on informational content. These developments indicate that persuasion functions as a multidimensional communicative process whose explanatory foundations extend well beyond traditional argumentation theory.

The central argument of this paper is that persuasion should be understood as **strategic communication** realised through the continuous interaction of pragmatic and rhetorical resources, in which argument represents only one component of a broader communicative system in which meaning, context, identity, credibility, and emotion are equally significant. Accordingly, the paper critically examines the theoretical traditions that have informed current understanding of persuasion, demonstrates the limitations of treating pragmatic and rhetorical explanations independently, and proposes an integrated pragmatic-rhetorical framework applicable across contemporary public discourse.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF PERSUASION THEORY

2.1 Classical and Modern Rhetoric

The systematic study of persuasion began with classical rhetoric in ancient Greece, where Aristotle's *Rhetoric* remains the most influential account of persuasive communication (Aristotle, trans. 2007). Aristotle defined rhetoric as the capacity to identify the available means of persuasion in a given situation, understood as a practical skill grounded in reasoned judgement rather than ornamentation. Central to his framework are three modes of appeal: **ethos**, the credibility and character projected by the speaker; **pathos**, the role of emotion in shaping judgement; and **logos**, reasoning, evidence, and logical organisation. Although discussed separately, Aristotle treated the three appeals as complementary resources operating simultaneously, a holistic view that remains one of the enduring strengths of classical rhetoric. Its principal limitation is that language functions largely as a vehicle for argumentation rather than as an object of linguistic investigation, leaving little room to explain how meaning emerges through contextual inference or interpersonal interaction.

Modern rhetorical scholarship substantially broadened this scope. Rather than restricting persuasion to formal oratory, contemporary rhetoric examines persuasive communication across political discourse, advertising, organisational communication, education, journalism, and digital media, reflecting a growing recognition that persuasion permeates virtually every domain of social communication. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) *New Rhetoric* argued that persuasion depends on the reasonableness of arguments as judged by particular audiences rather than on universal logical validity, while Toulmin (2003) showed that practical argumentation rests on warrants, backing, and contextual assumptions rather than deductive proof.

Communication studies extended persuasion further by examining it as a process of attitude formation and behavioural influence rather than public speaking alone. **Strategic communication** conceptualises persuasion as the purposeful design and management of communication to achieve defined objectives (Hallahan et al., 2007; Holtzhausen & Zerfass, 2015), so that persuasive success depends on the coordinated management of audience attention, message consistency, and contextual adaptation rather than on persuasive arguments in isolation. Framing research similarly demonstrated that audience interpretation is shaped not only by the information presented but by how it is organised and contextualised, while narrative persuasion showed that stories influence audiences by encouraging transportation into narrative worlds and facilitating emotional identification rather than explicit reasoning (Green & Brock, 2000). Discourse analysis subsequently repositioned persuasion as social practice: scholars in this tradition argue that persuasive communication constructs identities, institutional legitimacy, and ideological worldviews, and not merely attitudes (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008), while research on evaluation and stance shows that persuasion often depends on subtle linguistic positioning rather than overt argumentative claims, and that persuasive meaning frequently emerges through inference and contextual interpretation rather than explicit expression.

2.2 Limitations of Existing Approaches

Despite this cumulative richness, four limitations motivate the integration proposed in this paper. First, rhetorical scholarship continues to conceptualise persuasion primarily through argumentative organisation, underplaying processes that emerge through interpersonal communication and identity construction. Second, pragmatic research explains how meaning is communicated without fully accounting for the persuasive architecture within which communicative intentions operate. Third, communication studies foreground behavioural outcomes while devoting comparatively little attention to the linguistic organisation through which persuasive influence is achieved. Fourth, and most importantly, relatively few models explain how pragmatic and rhetorical resources operate simultaneously in authentic discourse: speakers do not first employ pragmatics and then rhetoric, but continuously

combine communicative intention, interpersonal meaning, credibility, and emotional engagement as discourse unfolds. These limitations indicate the need for a perspective capable of explaining persuasion as a genuinely multidimensional communicative process.

3. PRAGMATIC FOUNDATIONS OF PERSUASION

3.1 Speech Acts, Implicature, and Relevance

Pragmatics approaches persuasion not as argumentative structure but as communicative action. Speech Act Theory holds that utterances do not merely describe states of affairs but perform acts — assertions, commitments, recommendations, expressives — with illocutionary force that audiences must recognise for communication to succeed (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Persuasive discourse is therefore usefully analysed as a sequence of speech acts through which speakers commit themselves to positions, direct audiences toward action, and express evaluations, rather than as a single undifferentiated appeal. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and its associated maxims further explain how persuasive meanings frequently exceed literal content: audiences derive implicatures by assuming that speakers are being relevant, informative, and sincere, so that a great deal of persuasive work is accomplished through inference rather than explicit assertion. Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory develops this insight cognitively, proposing that hearers interpret utterances by seeking the greatest contextual effect for the least processing effort — a principle that explains why persuasive speakers favour economical, high-impact formulations such as slogans and strategically placed emphasis over exhaustive argumentation.

These mechanisms rarely operate in isolation. A single utterance frequently performs several illocutionary acts simultaneously — asserting a fact, implying a criticism, and inviting a commitment — and audiences resolve this multifunctionality by drawing on contextual assumptions about speaker purpose, institutional role, and communicative genre. Institutional political discourse illustrates how these mechanisms interact with power. In oversight hearings, for example, an ostensible question may function as a veiled accusation and a declarative may pre-frame the answer expected of a witness, so that persuasive force depends on audiences recovering an intended illocutionary act that is never stated directly (Rhaif & Mubarak, 2025). Such indirection is not incidental; it allows speakers to accomplish face-threatening or adversarial communicative goals while preserving a surface appearance of cooperative, information-seeking discourse.

3.2 Politeness Theory and Interpersonal Relationship Management

Persuasion is rarely accomplished through reasoning alone; audiences are more receptive when communication preserves interpersonal harmony and respects the social relationship between speaker and listener. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory explains this relational dimension through the concept of **face**: the public self-image speakers seek to maintain, comprising **positive face** (the desire for approval and solidarity) and **negative face** (the desire for autonomy). Because persuasive acts such as recommendation, criticism, or instruction potentially threaten face, speakers routinely deploy politeness strategies to minimise interpersonal resistance while pursuing communicative goals. Positive politeness — inclusive pronouns, shared values, compliments, humour — reduces social distance by positioning speaker and audience as members of a shared community, while negative politeness — hedging, modal expressions, tentative formulations such as *you may wish to consider* — preserves audience autonomy and reduces the appearance of imposition.

Empirical analysis of American commencement speeches illustrates how these strategies operate together in motivational public discourse. Examining ten speeches delivered at leading American universities between 2010 and 2019, Mubarak and Rhaif (2021a) and (2021b) found that speakers combined positive politeness — establishing solidarity with graduating audiences through shared values and encouragement — with negative politeness realised chiefly through hedging devices such as *I think*, which soften recommendations and leave interpretive latitude to the audience. This pattern demonstrates that even highly asymmetrical communicative events, in which an authoritative speaker addresses a large audience, depend on carefully calibrated face-work rather than on unmitigated directive language; persuasion succeeds in part because speakers manage the relational costs of advice-giving. This politeness patterning operates alongside, rather than instead of, illocutionary structure: Mubarak and Rhaif (2021c) show that the same commencement corpus is organised around recurrent expressive and representative speech acts, so that the interpersonal calibration achieved through hedging and solidarity markers is realised through, and inseparable from, the speech acts that carry the speaker's persuasive intent.

3.3 Audience Design and Stance

Persuasion is also fundamentally audience-oriented. Clark's (1996) notion of **common ground** explains why persuasive speakers organise discourse around assumptions they expect audiences to share, introducing new information in ways that connect with existing knowledge rather than replacing it outright. Bell's (1984) concept of **audience design** extends this principle by showing that speakers systematically adjust vocabulary, formality, and argumentative complexity according to audience characteristics; a political speech, a classroom lecture, and an advertising campaign therefore differ not because persuasion operates differently in each context but because speakers design communication to maximise engagement within particular institutional conventions.

Stance, in turn, captures how speakers express attitude, evaluation, and certainty throughout discourse (Du Bois, 2007; Hyland, 2005). Evaluative adjectives, modal verbs, and evidential expressions communicate speaker positioning while guiding audience interpretation, often without requiring explicit argument; speakers who express calibrated confidence are generally perceived as more credible than those whose discourse is either uncertain or dogmatically overconfident. Engagement markers — questions, direct address, inclusive pronouns — further transform persuasion from monologic presentation into a more interactive process, inviting audiences to participate in constructing the intended conclusion rather than simply receiving it.

4. RHETORIC AND PERSUASION

4.1 Ethos: Persuasion Through Credibility

Among Aristotle's three appeals, *ethos* occupies a foundational position because persuasion depends fundamentally on how audiences perceive the speaker: regardless of argumentative or emotional quality, audiences rarely accept messages from speakers they judge to lack competence, integrity, or sincerity. Classical rhetoric treated *ethos* as moral character demonstrated through discourse itself rather than prior reputation (Aristotle, trans. 2007); modern scholarship has extended this view, showing that credibility is a dynamic communicative construction built through confident yet balanced evaluation, coherent reasoning, and acknowledgement of alternative viewpoints (Hyland, 2005). Narrative frequently contributes to *ethos* indirectly: personal stories of challenge and eventual achievement allow speakers to demonstrate competence experientially rather than through direct assertion, generating impressions of authenticity that bare claims of expertise rarely achieve. Public discourse provides numerous illustrations of this process: political leaders construct *ethos* by presenting themselves as competent stewards of public interests, educators build credibility through demonstrated expertise combined with concern for learners, and organisational leaders strengthen *ethos* by aligning institutional values with personal commitment. In each case, persuasion depends on the successful construction of speaker identity before audiences evaluate substantive claims. Because credibility develops cumulatively rather than being secured in an opening statement, persuasive discourse depends on consistency between linguistic behaviour and communicative purpose throughout an entire text.

4.2 Pathos: Persuasion Through Emotional Engagement

Audiences seldom evaluate arguments independently of their emotional state. *Pathos* refers to the strategic organisation of discourse to generate emotional engagement appropriate to communicative purpose, a phenomenon well supported by research on the interaction of emotion and judgement (Damasio, 1994; Nabi, 2003). Persuasive speakers cultivate hope, empathy, concern, and moral responsibility because these emotions connect messages with audiences' own experiences and aspirations, and narrative is a particularly efficient vehicle for this process because it allows audiences to experience events indirectly rather than through abstract instruction.

Emotional intensification is also achieved through stylistic devices such as hyperbole, metaphor, and rhetorical questioning, which amplify or minimise the perceived significance of events. Analysing Fox News and CNN coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, Al-Azzawi and Rhaif (2022) found that overstatement devices — chiefly hyperbole and metaphor — considerably outnumbered understatement across both outlets, indicating that news organisations across the political spectrum relied on emotionally amplifying language to heighten the perceived urgency of the crisis. This finding illustrates that *pathos* operates not only through explicit emotional vocabulary but through the rhetorical intensity of ordinary descriptive language, and that its persuasive force depends on remaining proportionate to context: excessive emotionality risks appearing manipulative, while flat, unmodulated reporting risks under-engaging audiences whose behavioural compliance the coverage was, in part, designed to secure.

4.3 Logos: Persuasion Through Reasoning

Logos provides the intellectual foundation of persuasion: the organisation of arguments, evidence, and examples through which speakers demonstrate that a conclusion is reasonable. Contemporary scholarship recognises that persuasive reasoning extends beyond formal deduction to include practical judgement, analogy, and experiential evidence (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Toulmin, 2003); public discourse rarely proceeds through deductive proof, relying instead on examples and analogies that transform abstract claims into accessible reasoning. Because arguments persuade insofar as they correspond to audience knowledge and expectations rather than satisfying abstract logical criteria, *logos* is inherently audience-dependent: it requires continuous adaptation of evidence and explanation rather than a fixed argumentative formula, reinforcing that reasoning is embedded in overall discourse organisation as much as in individual propositions.

4.4 Narrative and Metaphor: Persuasion Through Experience and Conceptual Framing

Narrative constitutes a mode of persuasion in its own right rather than an illustrative device. Stories organise events into meaningful sequences, encourage emotional identification, and simplify complex realities through human experience, often lowering audiences' critical resistance because attention shifts from evaluating propositions to following narrative development (Green & Brock, 2000). Narrative also integrates multiple rhetorical appeals simultaneously — strengthening *ethos* through demonstrated authenticity,

evoking pathos through emotional engagement, and supporting logos by illustrating general principles through concrete experience — which explains its prevalence across political speeches, leadership communication, and digital media.

Metaphor performs a related but distinct function by shaping conceptualisation itself rather than merely embellishing language. Conceptual Metaphor Theory holds that speakers understand abstract domains through more concrete experiential ones (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980); expressions such as the road to success or building a better future encourage audiences to conceptualise achievement or reform through familiar experiences of movement or construction. Political communication relies heavily on such framing — economic reform as a journey, national recovery as rebuilding — because metaphor combines emotional resonance with ideological structuring, allowing speakers to communicate complex evaluations through apparently ordinary language (Charteris-Black, 2014). Because audiences construct the relationship between source and target domains for themselves, metaphorical persuasion is experienced as personally derived rather than externally imposed, which is part of what makes it so durable a rhetorical resource.

4.5 Framing and Stylistic Patterning

Persuasion depends not only on what is communicated but on how information is organised for interpretation. **Framing** refers to the strategic selection and arrangement of information that encourages audiences to interpret events from a particular perspective without necessarily altering factual content; the same policy may be framed as economic reform, public investment, or fiscal responsibility, each label directing evaluation differently. Syntactic organisation performs a comparable function at the sentence level. Analysing non-canonical constructions in Barack Obama's electoral campaign speeches, Faisal and Rhaif (2021) showed that preposing and postposing strategies — shifting given or salient information to marked positions — were systematically deployed to foreground particular referents and evaluative content within the information structure of the discourse, demonstrating that persuasive emphasis is achieved through syntactic choice as much as through lexical selection or explicit argument.

Stylistic patterning through repetition, parallelism, and contrast operates at a still broader level, increasing memorability and reinforcing thematic coherence (Atkinson, 1984). Repetition emphasises central ideas and strengthens recall; parallelism organises related propositions into balanced structures that are easier to process; contrast invites audiences to evaluate alternatives by juxtaposing present difficulty with future opportunity. None of these devices functions independently: framing, syntactic emphasis, and stylistic patterning jointly determine which interpretations become cognitively available to audiences before explicit arguments are even introduced.

5. PERSUASION BEYOND ARGUMENT

5.1 Argument as One Resource Among Many

Argument has occupied a privileged position within persuasion theory for centuries, from Aristotle's logos to modern argumentation theory, which typically evaluates persuasion according to logical validity, coherence, and evidential support. This model explains legal reasoning, academic debate, and policy analysis well, but it creates significant limitations when extended to public communication more broadly. Many persuasive interactions contain remarkably little formal argumentation: a commencement address motivating graduates typically relies more on narrative and identity construction than on systematic reasoning, organisational leaders more often motivate employees through shared vision than through detailed argumentative analysis, and public health campaigns commonly pair factual information with emotional narrative and visual symbolism because behavioural change depends on engagement as much as on evidence. Persuasive outcomes, moreover, frequently occur even when audiences cannot recall specific arguments; research on narrative persuasion shows that audiences retain stories, emotional experience, and speaker authenticity more readily than explicit reasoning (Green & Brock, 2000), while research on organisational communication indicates that commitment depends heavily on trust and shared identity rather than on logical demonstration alone (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2014). Argument-centred perspectives also underestimate the active role of audiences in constructing persuasive meaning: communication rarely consists of speakers presenting fully articulated arguments for passive evaluation, since audiences continuously interpret, infer, and personalise communicative messages according to their own knowledge and experience. These observations do not diminish the importance of argument; they indicate that argument functions within a broader communicative system in which reasoning derives much of its persuasive force from the credibility, relationships, and emotional engagement that surround it.

5.2 Identity, Interpersonal Relationships, and Emotional Engagement

Communication simultaneously conveys information and constructs identity. Speakers routinely invoke collective categories — citizens, communities, professional colleagues — before presenting substantive proposals, and inclusive language such as we face this challenge together encourages audiences to interpret persuasive messages through collective rather than individual perspectives. Identity construction also strengthens ethos, because speakers perceived as sharing audience experience typically achieve greater persuasive influence than those relying on institutional authority alone; identity therefore functions simultaneously as a pragmatic resource for interpersonal alignment and a rhetorical resource for credibility.

This relational dimension extends beyond politeness in the narrow sense to encompass trust, empathy, and cooperative interaction more broadly. Audiences evaluate messages according to perceived speaker sincerity before assessing substantive content, so that

credibility develops through sustained interaction characterised by consistency and responsiveness rather than through isolated persuasive episodes. Because emotion and cognition operate collaboratively rather than independently in human judgement (Damasio, 1994; Nabi, 2003), emotional engagement — hope, empathy, pride, moral responsibility — is not an alternative to reasoned persuasion but a mechanism through which persuasive messages become personally significant; logical arguments presented without emotional relevance frequently fail to engage audiences, while emotional appeals unsupported by credible reasoning often appear manipulative. Persuasion therefore depends on the coordinated integration of interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive processes rather than on the dominance of any single one.

5.3 Narrative and Future Vision

Narrative occupies a distinctive position among persuasive resources because it integrates reasoning, emotion, credibility, and interpersonal engagement within a single communicative structure. Stories organise information into causally and temporally coherent sequences that are easier to process and remember than isolated propositions (Bruner, 1986), and they communicate values indirectly: a story of professional failure followed by eventual success implicitly promotes resilience without requiring explicit exhortation, inviting audiences to draw their own moral or practical conclusions.

Closely related is future-oriented discourse, through which speakers encourage audiences to imagine alternative futures and evaluate present decisions against anticipated outcomes. Because future possibilities do not exist independently of communication, speakers construct them linguistically through vision, scenario, and metaphor; election campaigns habitually contrast present difficulty with projected prosperity, while organisational leaders present visions of innovation to justify current disruption. Future-oriented communication performs at least three functions: it provides direction by linking present behaviour to long-term objectives, it strengthens coherence by organising discourse around a stable communicative goal, and it intensifies emotional engagement by encouraging hope and anticipation before behavioural change actually occurs. Vision construction also interacts closely with identity, since speakers frequently invite audiences to imagine not only what they might achieve but who they might become — a pattern that reinforces the broader argument of this section: persuasive commitment develops because speakers enable audiences to imagine futures that make present action meaningful, not merely because speakers demonstrate that a particular future is more probable than its alternatives.

6. INTEGRATING PRAGMATICS AND RHETORIC

6.1 Historical Separation and Points of Convergence

The relationship between rhetoric and pragmatics has long been characterised by parallel development rather than integration. Classical rhetoric was principally concerned with the strategic production of persuasive discourse — credibility, emotional appeal, stylistic organisation — because its central objective was explaining how successful public persuasion could be achieved. Pragmatics emerged later with different priorities, seeking to explain how meaning is communicated beyond literal linguistic expression; persuasion was recognised as one possible communicative objective among others but was rarely the central object of pragmatic analysis. These differing priorities produced complementary strengths and a persistent disciplinary gap: a political speech may be examined rhetorically through ethos, pathos, and framing, or pragmatically through speech acts and politeness, and both analyses remain valid without either capturing the communicative process in full, since speakers do not alternate between rhetorical and pragmatic behaviour but employ both simultaneously.

Despite this history, pragmatics and rhetoric converge in several respects. Both disciplines treat communication as purposeful, recognising that speakers use language not merely to transmit information but to influence interpretation, negotiate relationships, and achieve communicative objectives. Both are audience-oriented: rhetorical audience adaptation and pragmatic notions of common ground and relevance describe closely related processes despite emerging from different traditions. Both emphasise context, assuming that linguistic expressions possess no fixed persuasive meaning independent of communicative situation. A further point of convergence concerns speaker intention: rhetoric investigates how speakers strategically organise discourse to achieve persuasive objectives, while pragmatics explains how communicative intentions are recognised and interpreted, so that persuasion depends simultaneously on the strategic production of discourse and on successful audience recognition of intended meaning. Perhaps the most consequential convergence, however, concerns audience participation: both traditions increasingly reject transmission models of communication, treating audiences as active interpreters who collaboratively construct persuasive meaning through interaction with speakers rather than as passive recipients of persuasive messages. These shared assumptions suggest that pragmatics and rhetoric investigate different dimensions of the same communicative phenomenon rather than fundamentally incompatible conceptions of communication.

6.2 Complementary Functions and the Limits of Independent Models

Pragmatic resources primarily explain how communication functions during interaction: speech acts account for communicative action, implicature explains implied meaning, politeness clarifies relationship management, and audience design explains adaptation. Rhetorical resources, by contrast, explain how persuasive discourse is strategically organised: ethos constructs credibility, pathos generates emotional engagement, and narrative, metaphor, and framing structure conceptual understanding. A

commencement speaker recounting personal failure, for instance, employs narrative as a rhetorical resource while simultaneously performing expressive and representative speech acts; the story establishes ethos, evokes pathos, encourages implicature, and strengthens interpersonal alignment through positive politeness, all within a single communicative episode. Separating these elements into rhetorical and pragmatic categories facilitates theoretical description, but the communicative event itself remains fundamentally integrated.

The limitations of treating either tradition independently follow directly from this observation. A purely rhetorical account explains how speakers organise persuasive appeals but cannot fully explain the inferential processes through which audiences interpret them; a purely pragmatic account explains communicative intention and interpersonal interaction but provides limited explanation of why particular discourse structures consistently produce persuasive effects across contexts. Independent models also struggle with the dynamic, increasingly multimodal character of contemporary discourse: political speeches integrate storytelling, visual imagery, and audience participation, while AI-generated communication combines contextual adaptation with strategically organised discourse. These developments further weaken the disciplinary boundary between pragmatics and rhetoric, because persuasive communication increasingly depends on their coordinated operation rather than their separate application. Pragmatics provides the mechanisms through which persuasive meanings are interpreted; rhetoric provides the organisational principles through which persuasive discourse is designed; together they form a unified communicative system substantially broader than models centred exclusively on argumentation.

7. AN INTEGRATED PRAGMATIC-RHETORICAL FRAMEWORK OF PERSUASION

7.1 Principles of the Framework

The framework proposed here rests on five principles. **First, persuasion is communicative rather than purely argumentative:** although arguments remain important, speakers also persuade through interpersonal interaction, emotional engagement, identity construction, and strategic discourse organisation. **Second, persuasion is interactional:** audiences actively interpret discourse, construct inferences, evaluate credibility, and integrate persuasive messages with existing beliefs, so persuasion emerges through interaction between speaker intention and audience interpretation rather than through unilateral transmission. **Third, persuasion is strategically organised:** effective speakers combine communicative resources systematically according to objectives, audience characteristics, and institutional context rather than at random. **Fourth, persuasion is multifunctional:** individual resources frequently perform several persuasive functions simultaneously — a personal narrative may establish credibility, strengthen emotional engagement, construct shared identity, and encourage behavioural commitment within a single episode — which is why the framework organises analysis around communicative functions rather than isolated linguistic forms. **Fifth, persuasion is context-dependent:** no strategy possesses universal effectiveness, since communicative resources derive their persuasive force from their relationship to audience expectation, institutional setting, and cultural norm. Together, these principles provide the conceptual foundation for an account of persuasion that combines pragmatic interaction with rhetorical organisation rather than treating either as sufficient on its own. A political address, leadership presentation, or classroom lecture does not first establish rhetorical appeals and then activate pragmatic processes; rather, credibility, emotion, reasoning, contextual inference, interpersonal relationship, and audience adaptation operate continuously throughout communication, each reinforcing the others as discourse unfolds.

7.2 Pragmatic and Rhetorical Resources

The framework distinguishes **communicative resources** — the linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms available to speakers — from **communicative functions**, the strategic purposes these resources jointly accomplish. Pragmatic resources include speech acts, implicature, relevance, politeness, common ground, audience design, and stance; together they explain how persuasive meanings are communicated, interpreted, and adapted during interaction. Rhetorical resources include ethos, pathos, logos, narrative, metaphor, framing, and stylistic patterning (repetition, parallelism, contrast); together they explain how persuasive discourse is organised to maximise engagement and effectiveness. These two categories are not independent communicative systems but complementary sets of resources that speakers integrate continuously throughout discourse.

7.3 Strategic Communicative Functions

Building on the preceding review, the framework proposes that persuasive communication operates through six interdependent strategic functions.

Managing attention is the precondition for all subsequent persuasion: before audiences can evaluate arguments or experience emotional engagement, communication must first become cognitively salient. Attention is managed rhetorically through openings, questions, narrative, and contrast, and pragmatically through establishing relevance to audience expectations and shared knowledge.

Constructing credibility follows once attention is secured. Credibility emerges through rhetorical ethos — coherent reasoning, demonstrated expertise, acknowledgement of alternative views — reinforced pragmatically through politeness, calibrated stance, and audience-sensitive language that signals sincerity and competence; credibility therefore develops dynamically throughout discourse rather than existing prior to it.

Building interpersonal alignment reduces social distance and encourages audiences to perceive themselves as participants in a shared communicative experience through positive politeness, inclusive pronouns, empathy, and narrative identification. Persuasion frequently fails not because arguments are weak but because speakers fail to establish a productive relationship with their audience.

Guiding interpretation determines which meanings audiences construct from discourse. Pragmatic mechanisms such as implicature and relevance explain how audiences derive intended meanings, while rhetorical framing, metaphor, and evaluative language determine which interpretations become cognitively prominent; this function represents one of the principal ways persuasion operates beyond explicit argumentation.

Generating emotional engagement integrates rhetorical pathos with narrative, metaphor, and interpersonal alignment to encourage hope, empathy, confidence, or responsibility. Rather than opposing rational persuasion, emotional engagement supports it by making persuasive messages personally meaningful and by strengthening attention and memory.

Mobilising behavioural action is the ultimate objective toward which the preceding five functions converge, encouraging audiences to make decisions, adopt beliefs, or commit to future action through explicit recommendation, indirect directive, or future-oriented vision. Behavioural mobilisation should not be equated with coercion: effective persuasion preserves audience autonomy while encouraging voluntary commitment through strategically organised communication.

7.4 The Integrated Model

The framework may be represented as a progressive communicative system linking speaker intention to persuasive outcome. Pragmatic resources and rhetorical resources jointly realise the six strategic functions described above, which in turn shape audience responses — cognitive engagement, trust, identification, emotional commitment, attitude formation, and behavioural intention — that produce the ultimate persuasive outcomes of attitude change, decision-making, and social influence, as summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: The Pragmatic-Rhetorical Model of Persuasion

Level	Components
Communicative resources	Pragmatic: speech acts, implicature, relevance, politeness, common ground, audience design, stance. Rhetorical: ethos, pathos, logos, narrative, metaphor, framing, stylistic patterning
Strategic functions	Managing attention; constructing credibility; building interpersonal alignment; guiding interpretation; generating emotional engagement; mobilising behavioural action
Audience responses	Cognitive engagement, trust, identification, emotional commitment, attitude formation, behavioural intention
Persuasive outcomes	Attitude change, decision-making, behaviour change, social influence

The model illustrates that persuasive outcomes are not produced directly by rhetorical technique or pragmatic process individually: both sets of resources contribute jointly to broader communicative functions, which subsequently shape audience cognition, evaluation, emotion, and behaviour.

7.5 Original Contribution of the Framework

The framework's principal contribution lies in shifting analytical focus from persuasive **devices** to persuasive **functions**. Existing research commonly investigates persuasion through individual resources — metaphor, speech acts, ethos, politeness, narrative — treated as independent analytical categories; the present framework instead explains how these resources interact to accomplish broader communicative objectives. This functional perspective offers a common analytical vocabulary capable of integrating findings from pragmatics, rhetoric, discourse analysis, and communication studies; it accommodates the multidimensional character of authentic persuasive discourse, in which individual linguistic choices routinely perform several communicative roles simultaneously; and it allows comparison of persuasive communication across institutional contexts without reducing analysis to genre-specific rhetorical devices. The framework also offers a flexible foundation for empirical investigation: corpus studies, experimental research, and multimodal analyses may operationalise the six communicative functions while examining how individual pragmatic and rhetorical resources contribute to each. Rather than treating persuasion as the product of isolated arguments or techniques, the framework conceptualises it as an integrated system of strategic communication in which meaning, credibility, emotion, and discourse organisation operate collaboratively to shape audience interpretation and action.

8. APPLICATIONS ACROSS CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC DISCOURSE

8.1 Political Discourse

Political communication has long been recognised as among the most persuasive forms of public discourse because political leaders seek to influence not merely belief but voting behaviour and civic participation. Managing attention is evident in agenda-setting and thematic emphasis, through which speakers determine which issues audiences perceive as deserving priority before arguments are even presented. Credibility develops through the interaction of rhetorical ethos — demonstrated competence and responsibility — with pragmatic interpersonal management, including audience-sensitive language and acknowledgement of public concern, while interpersonal alignment is realised through collective identity constructions such as our nation and our shared responsibility that reduce the distance between leaders and citizens.

Institutional political discourse also illustrates how these functions intersect with power. Analysing an American congressional oversight hearing, Rhaif and Mubarak (2025) found that questioners relied predominantly on hard-power strategies — chiefly coercion through pressure and legitimation — supported by discursive strategies such as perspectivisation and argumentation to assert control over witnesses, while softer power was reserved for appeals to public opinion that avoided direct confrontation. A comparable dynamic emerges at the level of turn-taking: Al-Tufaili and Rhaif (2022) show that adjacency-pair organisation in English and Arabic televised political interviews likewise allows questioners to constrain the interpretive latitude of respondents, indicating that control over persuasive framing operates through both macro-level discursive strategy and micro-level sequential structure. This finding demonstrates that guiding interpretation and constructing credibility in political questioning are not neutral pragmatic processes but strategically calibrated according to the relative power of speaker and addressee, with coercive and cooperative resources deployed selectively depending on communicative objective. Political discourse further demonstrates emotional engagement through appeals to hope, pride, and collective responsibility integrated with reasoning rather than opposed to it, and it culminates in behavioural mobilisation, encouraging audiences to vote, participate in civic life, or support policy initiatives — the practical outcome toward which the cumulative processes described by the framework are directed.

8.2 Educational Discourse

Educational communication is inherently persuasive because effective teaching depends on motivating learners and sustaining engagement as much as transmitting knowledge. Teachers manage attention through questions, examples, and problem-solving activities that establish relevance to learners' existing experience, and they construct credibility through clarity, fairness, and consistency rather than subject expertise alone. Interpersonal alignment is particularly consequential in this context: positive teacher–student relationships, sustained through inclusive language, encouragement, and recognition of effort, significantly increase learner receptiveness to instruction. Teachers guide interpretation through explanation, analogy, and classroom discussion calibrated to learners' background knowledge, while enthusiasm and encouragement generate the emotional engagement that sustains motivation through academic difficulty. Behavioural mobilisation in educational discourse takes the form of invitations to participate, practise, and pursue sustained intellectual engagement rather than immediate agreement, illustrating that the framework accommodates persuasive objectives considerably more gradual than the immediate decisions typical of political or commercial communication.

8.3 Leadership and Organisational Communication

Leadership communication represents one of the clearest illustrations of strategic persuasion, because organisational leaders continually communicate to influence employee attitudes, organisational commitment, and collective behaviour, and effective leadership depends substantially on communicative competence rather than formal authority alone. Leaders direct employee attention toward institutional priorities through carefully structured narratives and visions before addressing operational detail, and they construct credibility through honesty, consistency, and transparency, particularly under conditions of organisational uncertainty. Interpersonal alignment is achieved by framing institutional objectives as shared commitments rather than external requirements, encouraging employees to identify with collective goals. Future orientation is especially prominent in this domain: leaders routinely articulate visions of innovation and long-term resilience that encourage employees to interpret present disruption as investment in future opportunity rather than as immediate loss. Ultimately, leadership communication seeks behavioural mobilisation in the form of increased collaboration and professional engagement, outcomes that emerge because leaders integrate pragmatic responsiveness with rhetorical organisation rather than relying on managerial authority alone.

8.4 Media and Public Discourse

Digital and news media operate within highly competitive information environments, so attention management assumes particular importance: headlines, visual design, and concise storytelling function to secure engagement before substantive communication occurs. Credibility in these environments depends increasingly on perceived authenticity and consistency rather than institutional authority alone, and interpersonal alignment develops through online communities and direct audience interaction that transform persuasion into an ongoing conversational process rather than a single communicative event.

Opinion journalism offers a particularly clear illustration of how guiding interpretation and interpersonal alignment interact in mediated persuasion. Examining criticism of domestic political matters in five opinion columns from *The Guardian*, Al-Mamoory and Rhaif (2023) found a deliberate balance between direct criticism — negative evaluation, statement of problem, and caution about consequences — and indirect strategies such as invoking normative standards, proposing correction, and expressing calculated uncertainty. This balance indicates that persuasive critique in the press is rarely realised through unmitigated evaluative language; rather, columnists mitigate the face-threat inherent in criticism through the same politeness resources identified in interpersonal contexts, while still guiding readers toward a clearly evaluative conclusion. Comparable dynamics appear in factual news coverage: as the analysis of pandemic reporting discussed above (Al-Azzawi & Rhaif, 2022) demonstrates, ostensibly informational genres regularly employ stylistically intensified language whose persuasive effect operates independently of, and sometimes despite, editorial claims to objectivity. Narrative and emotional engagement remain highly influential across these formats because stories sustain attention and facilitate sharing in ways that formal argument rarely achieves, reinforcing the continuing relevance of rhetorical organisation within technologically mediated communication.

8.5 Public Health Campaigns

Public health campaigns illustrate persuasion beyond argumentation particularly clearly, because behavioural change depends on emotional engagement, credibility, and audience adaptation as much as on scientific evidence. Successful campaigns typically combine logical reasoning with personal narrative, metaphorical representation of illness and recovery, and emotionally resonant appeal, following strategies comparable to those promoting environmental sustainability or road safety. The framework explains such campaigns by showing how attention management, credibility, interpersonal alignment, and emotional engagement operate together to encourage voluntary behavioural change: scientific information becomes persuasive not in isolation but when embedded within strategically organised communication. Guiding interpretation is especially consequential in this domain, since audiences must translate general epidemiological or behavioural guidance into personally relevant action, a translation that campaigns typically accomplish through narrative and metaphor rather than through statistical presentation alone.

8.6 AI-Mediated Persuasive Communication

The rapid development of conversational artificial intelligence has introduced new forms of persuasive communication, as large language models increasingly generate educational guidance, professional coaching, and health-related recommendations adapted to individual users. Current systems demonstrate considerable capacity for coherent, contextually continuous discourse, but persuasive effectiveness depends on considerably more than linguistic fluency: artificially generated communication must also establish credibility, manage interpersonal relationships, guide interpretation, and support behavioural decision-making. Because the proposed framework identifies communicative functions rather than specific linguistic forms, it offers a useful basis for evaluating AI-generated persuasive discourse according to how effectively systems manage attention, establish trust, and encourage behavioural commitment, rather than assessing fluency alone. This perspective also highlights the importance of adaptive audience modelling: human speakers continuously adjust persuasive strategy according to audience response and contextual development, and conversational systems capable of comparable pragmatic adaptation may substantially improve the quality — and the accountability — of AI-mediated persuasive communication.

9. CONCLUSION

Persuasion has occupied a central position in the study of communication since classical rhetoric, yet it continues to be explained through largely separate disciplinary traditions: rhetoric has examined argumentation, credibility, and stylistic organisation, while pragmatics has examined communicative intention, contextual interpretation, and interpersonal interaction. This paper has argued that such separation no longer adequately reflects the complexity of contemporary public discourse. Persuasion is not achieved through logical argumentation alone, nor can it be fully explained through pragmatic mechanisms in isolation; it involves the continuous interaction of communicative action, contextual inference, interpersonal relationship management, credibility construction, emotional engagement, narrative, and metaphorical framing.

Tracing the development of persuasion theory from classical rhetoric to contemporary discourse studies showed that understanding has gradually expanded from formal public speaking towards broader conceptions incorporating cognition, identity, and social interaction, even as these developments have generally remained confined within separate disciplinary traditions. The review of pragmatic foundations demonstrated that persuasion is fundamentally communicative action shaped by inference, relationship management, and audience adaptation, while the review of rhetorical resources showed that credibility, emotion, reasoning, narrative, metaphor, and stylistic organisation operate collaboratively rather than in isolation — a pattern illustrated throughout by empirical findings drawn from commencement rhetoric, pandemic media coverage, electoral syntax, congressional questioning, televised political interviews, and opinion journalism (Al-Azzawi & Rhaif, 2022; Al-Mamoory & Rhaif, 2023; Al-Tufaili & Rhaif, 2022; Faisal & Rhaif, 2021; Mubarak & Rhaif, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Rhaif & Mubarak, 2025). A central argument of the paper was that persuasion extends substantially beyond argumentation, since arguments derive much of their persuasive force from the interpersonal, emotional, and identity-related environment in which they are embedded.

Building on this synthesis, the paper's principal contribution is an integrated **Pragmatic-Rhetorical Framework of Persuasion**, which conceptualises persuasion as strategic communication realised through six interrelated functions: managing attention, constructing credibility, building interpersonal alignment, guiding interpretation, generating emotional engagement, and mobilising behavioural action. Unlike models organised around individual persuasive devices, the framework adopts a functional perspective in which speech acts, politeness, ethos, narrative, metaphor, and framing are treated as complementary resources contributing to shared communicative objectives, reflecting how multiple resources operate simultaneously in naturally occurring discourse. Its applicability was illustrated across political, educational, organisational, media, public health, and AI-mediated discourse, domains that realise the same underlying functions despite substantial differences in institutional purpose and communicative convention. The framework carries broader implications: it positions persuasion as a complex communicative achievement rather than a peripheral application of pragmatic theory, strengthens the relationship between pragmatics and rhetoric by demonstrating their complementary explanatory roles, and offers computational linguistics a conceptual basis for evaluating persuasive communication according to communicative performance rather than grammatical fluency alone. The study remains conceptual, however: it synthesises existing scholarship and advances a theoretical model but does not empirically test the six communicative functions identified. Corpus-based studies may examine how pragmatic and rhetorical resources interact across different genres of public discourse; experimental research may explore how individual communicative functions influence audience credibility judgements and behavioural intention; and comparative studies may investigate cross-cultural and cross-linguistic variation in how the six functions are realised, extending the Arabic–English comparative work already undertaken in adjacent areas of political and media discourse. Future research should also extend particular attention to how strategic communicative functions operate within human–AI interaction as conversational systems increasingly generate persuasive discourse. In sum, this paper has argued that persuasion should be reconceptualised as strategic communication realised through the coordinated interaction of pragmatic and rhetorical resources — a perspective that advances scholarship on persuasion while contributing to a deeper understanding of language as one of the most powerful instruments of social influence in contemporary public discourse.

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