

Analysis of the Persuasive Methods in Barack Obama's Speeches from the Social Psychology's Perspectives

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ABSTRACT. *Speech, as a special genre of various literal forms, is not only installing as a basic language application for information transferring, but is putting weights to enhance audience's cognitive needs and intensify audience's emotion by properly exhibiting the article's context, structure and the orator's behavior which are dedicating to deeply change audience's attitudes, belief and following actions. For the sake of a more practicable study of persuasive strategies, this thesis will be based on six well-known speeches of President Barack Obama and will be on the grounds of western rhetorical theories and persuasive theories of social psychology to elucidate the most frequently used persuasive strategies as empathy, primacy and recency effects, central and peripheral channels, self-esteem, cognitive heuristics, cognitive dissonance. Besides, this thesis will elucidate the persuasive influential factors as self-personality, social compliance and depersonalization which are based on the social environment to explain the persuasive susceptibility. Then, the thesis concludes the utility of above frequently utilized persuasive strategies as empathy, primacy effect, recency effect and cognitive heuristics. If these persuasive strategies combine with colorful rhetoric functions, these strategies can maximize arousing audiences' emotions and unconsciously redeploy audiences' cognition into what orator wants.*

KEYWORDS: *Barack obama's speeches, Persuasive strategies of social psychology, Western rhetorical theories*

1. Introduction

Persuasion, an important and widespread communication skill, plays a crucial role in leading development of society and in progressing individual's cognitive strategy and living quality. No matter who the speaker is, every person under many circumstances will use persuasive strategies consciously or mindlessly - in the conditions of shopping, working and intercommunicating. Furthermore, speech, a common used tool for daily work, is always viewed as a specific genre in literature sphere, which not only covers plenty of contents and functions in delivering message, but also mainly serving as a channel for persuasion, has always been regarded as a strong weapon for persuasion contributing to changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of audiences and applying in every side of inter-relative society such as business, politics, education and even ordinarily availed in daily communication. That is because primarily, the language features of the speech deriving from the rhetoric, make the speech powerful and lucid for persuasion. Secondly, the persuasive methods, cognition, orator's personality and social context also play a fundamental role in persuasion. That is to say, language features of the speech bound with persuasive methods can reinforce the utility of persuasion. In addition, the functions of persuasion are utility-maximized in political speeches. According to Locus (1989), any leader of a nation or the world may have different perspectives of economic growth, environment protecting and partisan missions, but every one of them will act the same in addresses to maximize the effects of persuasion.

Accordingly, this thesis will focus on six speeches of Barack Obama, one of the most well-known persuaders in giving addresses in United States history and can skillfully apply persuasive methods with appropriate emotions and behaviour based on his experiences as a black man, to study the persuasive methods and utility.

All in all, this thesis will use methods of quantitative analysis and group analysis of multi-factor which are bound with specific persuasive methods and language features to analyze the approaches, conditions and effects of the persuasive methods. The comparison of Barack Obama's several celebrated speeches, he gave in his presidential duration will be made. The viewpoint of this thesis is that the persuasive strategies including empathy, self-esteem, cognitive heuristics, central channel and peripheral channel are most frequently used by Barack Obama, which also shed light on how ordinary people can increase their persuasiveness in daily life communication.

2. Examples Illustration and Analysis

2.1 Illustration and Analysis Based on Persuasive Strategies

Firstly, as for the persuasive strategy of central and peripheral channels, it can deliver information quite effective in persuasion. In Barack Obama's six well-known speeches, this thesis found that Barack Obama is good at using peripheral channel in arousing emotions. Besides, as for central channel for persuasion, it is similar with Aristotle's *logos*, one of the three persuasive strategies (Tan 2009), which means to persuade shrewd people by using precise and detailed information not only discussing positive information but also analyzing negative information. The reason is that not all people are fellows and fans of the orator who can be incredibly crazy and zealous. These people are more likely thinking logically and sensibly. In this way, central channel is useful in taking advantage of logical persuasion, which can grasp closer sensible audiences' hearts.

Example 1:

Our country is badly weakened, a consequence of greed and irresponsibility. Home has been lost; jobs shed; business shuttered but the time has come to our enduring spirit; to choose our best history; to carry forward our precious gift; to pursue our honorable cause.

From this example, Barack Obama used the persuasive strategies of central and peripheral channels. Barack Obama persuaded audiences by firstly proclaiming the negative features that existed in the huge failure of 2008 economic recession and then he also adopted positive features to explain why Americans can achieve so many achievements today and what he will perform in reality to lead America recovery. This is so-called the key points of persuading people with *logos*. On the other hand, peripheral channel is actually equal to the *pathos* which Aristotle appealed as one of his three persuasive theories in rhetoric (Tan 2009). The peripheral channel is to persuade people by using only highlighted, strengthened words and phrases to urge people to be highly emotional and easy-following.

Secondly, the strategy of cognitive dissonance is frequently used by Obama, especially in 2008. The reason is that audiences felt gloomy and suffered high psycho-pressure after the American economic recession. They would like to accept the emotional encouragement and support the orator who stimulated them. This kind of strategy of making use of people's psychological pressure is so-called cognitive dissonance.

Example 2:

Let it be told to the future world that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive.

In this example, Barack Obama took advantage of persuasive strategy of cognitive dissonance. The reason is that this example is extracted from the Barack Obama's inauguration address of 2008. The America and Americans suffered a lot of economy recession, which caused Americans being deeply miserable and worried about future. In this process, a majority of American people have cognitive dissonance. In this process, Barack Obama combined metonymy to compare America and Americans as hope and virtue in order to make Americans be superior and be proud of the hopes and virtues they have endowed. With the emotion arousing and encouragement, audiences are more willing to hope Obama's lead.

Thirdly, the persuasive strategy of empathy is powerful for persuasion due to audiences are pleasanter and willing to comply with orator who knows audiences' thoughts and needs.

Example 4:

On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflicts.

From this example, Barack Obama made use of persuasive strategy of empathy. This phrase is quite short but with powerful strength. That is because fear and conflicts are the difficulties that punish the ordinary people and hope and purpose are the bright future ordinary people are longed for. Barack Obama can comprehend the feelings and expects of the people because of the experiences of Barack Obama's early life. He used to be a member of a gang in his middle school life and he decided to work in black-men communities for at least ten years as a voluntary lawyer and low-income director after determining to leave a high-income job in Wall Street. Importantly, he is a hybrid normal black-man who suffered a lot violence and bully. In this way, Barack Obama has gotten a train of knowledge and experience about bottom masses and black-men. With the knowledge, he has constructed a lifetime belief that everyone in the world enjoys the equal life, and right and he has contributed to help everyone out of the poverty and inequity.

Fourthly, as for the fourth persuasive strategy, self-esteem, this strategy persuades audiences by making them realize the capability of achieving self-potential as long as they observe orders of the orator.

Example 5:

We must be like a source of hope to the poor, the sick, the marginalized, the victims of prejudice.

From this example, Barack Obama took used of the persuasive strategy of self-esteem. He combined the rhetoric device of simile to compare Americans as a source of hope. This is directly calls for Americans to act together as an invincible power. The poor, the sick, the marginalized, and the victims of prejudice are occupied quite a large part of the American population. The conditions of mess, poverty, inequality and apathy have already become the social panorama of the America. In this way, the ordinary are feeling sad and pathetic. However, the benevolence and righteousness are hiding under these filthy conditions which can be digging out by audiences. This kind of highly positive evaluation towards the ordinary can stir up their self-esteem and make them give out positive evaluation towards orator interactively.

Fifthly, as for the fifth persuasive strategy, cognitive heuristics means to lead audiences recalling their brilliant past. Then, this strategy leads the audiences to face and solve the current problems. Finally, it leads the audiences to pursue a future promising.

Example 6:

These men and women struggled and sacrificed till we might live a better life. They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions.

From this instance, Barack Obama used the persuasive strategy of cognitive heuristics. Barack Obama mentioned the tough time that forebears struggled, sacrificed and overcame to critically remind Americans of the American dreams and spirits. The recalling of the American tough history and American dreams can successfully illuminate the audiences to evaluate what difficulties they are suffering - economic recession, and what solutions they can adopt - working together under a leader. Besides, this recalling of the laborious but respected past is played a role as emotional arousing, especially for the feeling of patriotism, which can largely increase the persuasive effects.

Sixth, as for the persuasive strategy, primacy and recency effects mean that audiences will be more memorable of the beginning and the end of a topic. In this way, orators can persuade people by putting tempering information in the right place.

Example 7:

The use of primacy effect: Together, we resolved that a great nation must care for the vulnerable and protect its people. The Use of recency effect: Through it all, we have never relinquished our skepticism of central authority.

From this example, Barack Obama bounded persuasive strategy of primacy and recency effects altogether. Barack Obama always talked about the issues that the ordinary people care to make people in zeal. The reason is that people always be sensitive about the political issues - great nation, the authority and dictatorship in a democracy system. In this way, the powerful promise to eliminate these acts as an anchor - to establish a real ideal democratic political system taking care of Americans, which can extremely arouse audiences to be zealous. This anchor can be utilized in any political condition to make people feverish more than once due to this anchor is formed from the America history of democratic consciousness which has already been immobilized as automatic thinking. In this way, the use of anchor putting at the beginning can make people fanatic and be persuaded. Barack Obama also used the parallelism to bind the end with the beginning together in order to make the anchor not only to be memorable but to be powerful and emotional. In a speech which always lasts for a long time, orator should always remember to place the advantage points onto the top or the end of the speech in order to urge people thinking carefully.

2.2 Persuasive Utility Analysis

In the wake of the specific elucidating of the uses of persuasive theories with rhetoric devices in Barack Obama's addresses, this thesis continues to analyze the utility of persuasive strategies on the basis of statistics rooted in the six Barack Obama's addresses. The statistics of the utility of persuasive strategies and rhetoric devices is summarized in the three tables as follows.

Table 1 Frequency of Using Persuasive Strategies by Barack Obama

	Total amount in six famous Barack Obama's addresses	The order of degree of frequency
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Published by Francis Academic Press, UK

Central and peripheral channels	30	5
Empathy	44	2
Cognitive disorders	24	6
Primacy and recency	38	3
Cognitive heuristics	45	1
Self-esteem	31	4

In Table 1, in order to prove the persuasive strategies have extremely high utility in persuasion, this thesis summarizes the frequency of persuasive strategies - as empathy, primacy and recency effects, central and peripheral channels, self-esteem, cognitive heuristics, cognitive dissonance - from Barack Obama's six addresses to find out whether the persuasive strategies are useful.

According to Table 1, the frequently used persuasive theories can be well defined. The three most frequently used persuasive strategies are cognitive heuristics, empathy and primacy and recency effects. They are tremendously far beyond the other persuasive tactics. This phenomenon means that the three methods can better arouse people's emotions and make people think fanatic to go after what orator appeals than any other persuasive methods. As for the utility of these three methods in detail, firstly, cognitive heuristics always uses as a function of anchor. Orators recall people with noted events that happened at that time with the similar emotions with what orators want to provoke at this moment. For example, in a political address, if an orator is discussing and disclaiming about terrorism, he may recall people of 911 to provoke the feeling of disgust and anger in order to make people feel the righteousness and correctness of the orator. The accompanied feature, anchor, with the meaning that if people with the same feeling of an event mentioned, they would become unwilling to change their minds and attitudes. Secondly, as for empathy, the thesis has already mentioned a lot in the former text, but in particular, an orator has to learn in the heart that empathy can be easily used by always reminding oneself to take the stand of audiences and feel what they believe. Lastly, as for primacy and recency effects, orators should take in mind that pause lasted for no shorter than five seconds can be regarded as a new beginning of a turn-taking¹. In this way, the last information mentioned in the former turn can be seen as the recency and the following information as the primacy.

Table 2 Frequency of Using of Rhetoric Devices

	Total amount in six famous Barack Obama's addresses	The order of degree of frequency
Metaphor	51	4
Metonymy	43	5
Allusion	86	3
Alliteration	143	2
Parallelism	170	1

In Table 2, the thesis generalizes the six rhetoric devices mentioned above-metaphor, metonymy, allusion, alliteration and parallelism- to make an order of degree of frequency according to six Barack Obama's addresses in terms to testify the rhetoric devices have powerful utility in persuading audiences.

According to the Table 2, the thesis found that parallelism, alliteration and allusion are the three most frequently used in the Barack Obama's address to persuade people. For example, the third one, allusion, is two times more than the fourth and nearly two times less than the first. In this way, in the perspective of Barack Obama, rhetoric devices may have quite different efficiency for persuading audience apparently and deeply. Besides, the two most efficient rhetoric devices, parallelism and alliteration, exist some similarities in the structures and functions and possess the unusual rates of adoption. In this way, when orators want to persuade people, they can probably choose parallelism and alliteration. It seems that the effects they own are distinctively powerful than the other devices.

Table 3 the Relevance of Rhetoric Devices and Persuasive Strategies

	Cognitive heuristics	Empathy	Primacy and recency effects	Totality (Σ)
Parallelism	8	18	14	40
Alliteration	4	10	8	22
Allusion	10	1	32	43

Totality (Σ)	22	29	54	105
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$$K_{0.05,4}^2=9.49, \quad X_{0.05,4}^2=24.549, \quad P(X^2 \geq K)=99.95\%$$

In Table 3, according to the Table 1 and Table 2, the persuasive strategies and rhetoric devices both have the utility in persuasion. In this way, the Table 3 is supposed to find out whether the combination of persuasive strategies and rhetoric devices can have higher utility in persuading audiences. This thesis extracts the each three most frequently used persuasive strategies and rhetoric devices on the grounds of Table 1 and Table 2. Then, using non-parametric test of chi square distribution calculates the relevant rate between persuasive strategies and rhetoric devices and compares the relevant rate with table of chi square distribution. Furthermore, the relevant rate can reveal whether the persuasive strategies and rhetoric devices can have higher utility.

In this way, based on the statistics, this thesis apply the chi square distribution to calculate the relevant rate between rhetoric devices and persuasive strategies which is 24.549. The relevant rate is much far than the relevant standard as 9.49. Although this thesis just extracted each four frequently used strategies from the dimensions of rhetoric devices and persuasive strategies, the relevance between rhetoric devices and persuasive strategies can be alleged to due to the calculated relevance is nearly twofold above than academic standard. In other words, this thesis has the 99.95% probability to deduce that rhetoric devices and persuasive strategies have high relevance in persuading people. In this way, the thesis finds out that the utility of persuasive strategies will be more efficient with the combination with rhetoric devices that means when orators touch in minds of audiences, they prefer to make persuasive strategies more colorful and powerful in order to add up the success of persuasion to a high degree.

$$\text{Formula (1): } X^2 = N \left(\sum_{p=i} \frac{P_i^2}{R_i \times C_i} - 1 \right), \quad K = (R-1) \times (C-1)$$

3. Conclusion

In summary, Barack Obama is a proficient orator with agreeable personality for persuading audiences, especially in delivering speeches. He can positively use plenty of persuasive methods. The persuasive methods that Barack Obama most frequently used are empathy, cognitive heuristics of archer, and primacy and recency effects that he always uses these persuasive strategies with the most powerful rhetoric devices as parallelism and alliteration. In this way, these most frequently used persuasive methods can also be proficiently mastered by people at large if people follow the examples and take advantage of the proper rhetoric devices.

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