

## PERSUASIVE STRATEGIES IN TED TALKS ON GENDER

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**Introduction.** Persuasion, in its versatile language forms, penetrates our lives on a daily basis. Political leaders and the mass media seek to change or reinforce our beliefs, while advertising companies try to cajole us into purchasing their products. Persuasion exists in courtrooms, classrooms, and business negotiations. It permeates interpersonal relations in all social spheres, public and private. And persuasion impacts us via a large number of Internet resources.

**Objectives.** Various persuasion theories have been put forward to elucidate the attitude changes happening when people have been exposed to the so-called counter-attitudinal statements. Moreover, persuasion theories have deliberated different approaches to attitude change. For instance, some theories, such as cognitive response analysis [7] assert that people constantly strive for mental consistency and are persuaded by their own thoughts about the speaker's statement. Other theories highlight that people will be more apt to accept the message without much thought and rely on how the argument is presented to persuade them [8]. Elaboration likelihood model of persuasion states that productive persuasion relies on how successful the communication is at compelling a proper mental representation, which is the elaboration likelihood. Inoculation theory of persuasion indicates that a certain speaker can introduce a weak form of an argument that can easily be refuted in order to prepare the listener to ignore a stronger, full-fledged form of the claim from an opposing party.

Many aspects of the persuasive statement (e. g., power) and the way it is presented (e. g., source characteristics) have been researched. Although scholars have studied how some message aspects influence persuasion, there has been insufficient amount of research on the role of language means in the persuasion process in the media.

The **aim** of the present article is to examine the strategies in TED talks on gender influencing the speaker's persuasive appeal. The article examines three specific strategies of logos, ethos and pathos and their potential effects on persuasion.

The research **material** includes speeches on gender posted on the online TED channel (abbr. "Technology, Entertainment, Design") which is a media organization presenting talks online for free distribution under the slogan "ideas worth spreading". The talks that have become the focus of our study include: Roxane Gay "Confessions of a bad feminist" [10], Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie "We should all be feminists" [9], Jackson Katz "Violence against women — it's a men's issue" [11], Sheryl Sandberg "Why we have too few women leaders" [12].

**Findings and discussion.** TED talks are essentially persuasive in nature as they aim at persuading the audience to believe that whatever is being told by the speaker is true. For this purpose, oratories use all the three tools of persuasion: logos, the logic and

reasoning in the message; ethos, the character, credibility and trustworthiness of the communicator; and pathos, the emotional dimension.

The notion of persuasion in communication goes back to the ancient Greeks, who highlighted rhetoric and elocution as the highest standard for a successful and efficient orator. The Greek philosopher Aristotle offered the reasons for learning the art of persuasion suggesting that it was a wonderful instrument for teaching and a good way to defend oneself. He believed that truth and justice were perfect; thus, if a case was lost, the speaker was to blame.

The notion of persuasion should not be confused with the notion of manipulation. Teun van Dijk states that manipulation as determined as a communicative and interactional practice, in which a manipulator exerts control over interlocutors, usually against their will or against their vital interests. In common usage, the notion of manipulation evokes negative associations – manipulation is wrong – because such a practice deviates from social norms [3, p. 360]

V. Dosev says that manipulation exploits discourse to produce an illegitimate influence: manipulators compel others to believe in and do actions that are in the manipulators' interest and often run contrary to their own interests [4, p. 27]. D. J. O'Keefe notes that without the negative associations, manipulation could be treated as a form of the so-called "legitimate" persuasion [8, p. 23]. Evidently, the borderline between (illegitimate) manipulation and (legitimate) persuasion is obscure, and context dependent: some people may be persuaded by a statement that is unable to persuade others. Moreover, the same recipients may be more or less prone to manipulation in different circumstances, states of mind, and so on. However, the apparent discrepancy in this case is that in persuasion the interlocutors are free to think or act as they please, relying on whether or not they comply with the persuader's arguments, whereas in manipulation listeners are typically accredited a more passive function: they are victims of manipulation.

According to Aristotle, any spoken or written message aimed at persuading the audience contains three key rhetorical aspects: 1) the speaker's character (ethos); 2) the audience's emotions (pathos); 3) the rationality of the speech's arguments (logos) [2, p. 87]. Persuasive speech should convey the right impression of the speaker's character, arouse the audience's emotions, and prove the truth of the uttered statements. As Aristotle puts it: "Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. [...] Secondly, persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. [...] Thirdly, persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question" [1, p. 20, 25].

In our study we will deal with the three discussed modes of persuasion, namely ethos, logos and pathos applied by TED speakers in their talks on gender.

**Ethos** is defined as the speaker's trustworthiness, disposition, character, or fundamental values [5, p. 29]. Ethos is shaped by three features: moral character or integrity, intelligence and goodwill. Thus, ethos is understood as an appeal to ethics, and it is a means of persuading someone of the character or credibility of the speaker.

G. A. Kennedy states that the speaker should deliver his/her speech in such a way that he/she builds his/her credibility since listeners believe impartial, unbiased and trustworthy speakers willingly and easily [6, p. 38-39].

According to Aristotle, there exist three aspects of ethos, including: 1) phronesis – practical skills and wisdom; 2) arete – virtue, goodness; 3) eunoia – goodwill towards the audience [1, p. 26]. To establish their trustworthiness TED speakers endeavor meeting these three aspects, applying the following strategies:

- quoting from the sources that are trustworthy in the eye of the audience, for example:

*The late Kenyan Nobel Peace laureate, Wangari Maathai, put it simply and well when she said: "The higher you go, the fewer women there are." [9]*

*Now, among the many great things that Martin Luther King said in his short life was, "In the end, what will hurt the most is not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends." [11]*

- using expert terminology pertaining to the topic of the talk:

*I'm going to share with you a paradigm-shifting perspective on the issues of **gender violence: sexual assault, domestic violence, relationship abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse** of children. That whole range of issues that I'll refer to in shorthand as "**gender violence issues**," they've been seen as women's issues that some good men help out with, but I have a problem with that frame and I don't accept it [11].*

- appealing to one's own experience:

*I have two children. I have a five-year-old son and a two-year-old daughter. I want my son to have a choice to contribute fully in the workforce or at home, and I want my daughter to have the choice to not just succeed, but to be liked for her accomplishments [12].*

*When I was younger, mostly in my teens and 20s, I had strange ideas about feminists as hairy, angry, man-hating, sex-hating women -- as if those are bad things [10].*

- convincing the audience of the speaker's own expertise (competence):

*I'm old school on some fundamental regards. I make films and I work with high tech, but I'm still old school as an educator, and I want to share with you this exercise that illustrates on the sentence-structure level how the way that we think, literally the way that we use language, conspires to keep our attention off of men [11].*

*But you know what's missing? The leadership.*

- including the listeners in a discussion by means of addressing the audience and using the inclusive pronouns “we”, “us”, “our” and tags, for example:

*So for **any of us** in this room today, let's start out by admitting we're lucky. **We** don't live in the world **our** mothers lived in, **our** grandmothers lived in, where career choices for women were so limited [12].*

***We** know so much about how to prevent domestic and sexual violence, **right?** [11]*

**Logos** is considered as an appeal to logic, and is a way of persuading the listener by reason. Using logos the speaker tries to persuade the audience using logical arguments and supportive evidence.

Thus, generally speaking, appeal to logic is a powerful tool of persuasion since a

human being is a rational creature and needs some evidence before believing in something. A speech without logical data and evidence is perceived as insincere, therefore diminishing credibility of the speaker. Means of achieving *logos* consist in 1) exercising inductive logic, providing the listener with appropriate examples and using them to indicate back to the overall statement; 2) through deductive body of proof, supplying the listener with general scenarios and then retreating a certain truth [8, p. 36]. In their talks on such highly debatable topic as gender, TED speakers use the following strategies to achieve *logos*:

- presenting evidence, for example:

*Because what **the data shows**, above all else, is one thing, which is that success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women [12].*

*There's a really good **study that shows this** really well [12].*

- presenting statistics:

*There's slightly more women than men in the world, about **52 percent of the world's population is female** [12].*

*Women are not making it to the top of any profession anywhere in the world. The numbers tell the story quite clearly. **190 heads** of state - nine are women. Of all the people in parliament in the world, **13 percent** are women. In the corporate sector, women at the top, C-level jobs, board seats - tops out at **15, 16 percent** [12].*

- stating general truth, facts, axioms, for instance:

***Women can have babies, men can't** [9].*

***Men have testosterone and are in general physically stronger than women** [9].*

*We have different hormones, we have different sexual organs, we have different biological abilities [9].*

*I hold certain truths to be self-evident: **Women are equal to men. We deserve equal pay for equal work** [10].*

- referring to authoritative sources:

*And when I **looked up the word in the dictionary** that day, this is what it said: "Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes." [9]*

- appealing to the listener's common sense:

*Today women in general are more likely to do the housework than men, the cooking and cleaning. **But why is that? Is it because women are born with a cooking gene?** [9]*

S.K. Foss states that **pathos** is understood as an appeal designed to cause emotions in the listener [5, p. 29]. According to G.A. Kennedy, emotions influence the judgment of the listener, thus, they are a powerful tool of persuading [6, p. 39].

TED rhetoric on gender issues relies more upon *pathos* than on *logos* or *ethos*. For creating positive persuasive *pathos* (emotional appeal), TED speakers make use of the following strategies:

- mentioning own emotive incidents:

*And I'm about to tell a story which is **truly embarrassing for me**, but I think important [12].*

*There was an incident. I call it an **incident so I can carry the burden** of what*

happened. Some boys broke me, when I was so young, I did not know what boys can do to break a girl. **They treated me like I was nothing** [10].

- stating or referring to the speaker's own emotions or feelings:

*Each time they ignore me, I feel invisible. I feel upset* [9].

- using emotionally charged words, for example:

*The **saddest** thing about all of this is that it's really hard to remember this* [12].

*It was a **glorious** spectacle to see this pop star openly embracing feminism and letting young women and men know that being a feminist is something to celebrate* [10].

- using expressive stylistic means and devices including metaphors, epithets, personification, metonymy, repetitions, antithesis, aposiopesis, parallel structures, periphrasis, etc.

a) metaphor: *Of course a lot of this was tongue-in-cheek, but that **word** feminist is so heavy with baggage, negative baggage* [9].

*We define masculinity in a very narrow way, **masculinity becomes this hard, small cage and we put boys inside the cage*** [9].

***Gender colors the way** we experience the world* [9].

b) repetition: *I used to look up to my grandmother who was **a brilliant, brilliant** woman, and wonder how she would have been if she had the same opportunities as men when she was growing up* [9].

c) parallel structures: ***You hate men, you hate bras, you hate African culture, that sort of thing*** [9].

*A man is as likely as a woman **to be intelligent, to be creative, to be innovative*** [9].

d) aposiopesis: *We police girls, we praise girls for virginity, but we don't praise boys for virginity, and it's always made me wonder how exactly this is supposed to work out because ...* [9]

e) antithesis: *Culture does not make people, people make culture* [9].

*I am **a bad feminist**, I am **a good woman**, I am trying to become better in how I think, and what I say, and what I do, without abandoning everything that makes me human* [10].

f) periphrasis: *I read the words of women who might understand a story like mine, and women who looked like me, and understood what it was like to move through the world **with brown skin*** [10].

**Conclusions and research perspectives.** Language offers three main instruments for persuasion, namely: ethos, logos and pathos which are widely used by TED speakers in their talks on gender. By building credibility with the audience, the speaker also builds trust with his or her audience. The strategies of ethos is employed to stress the speaker's personal credentials and reputation which include: quoting from the sources that are trustworthy in the eye of the audience; using expert terminology pertaining to the topic of the talk; appealing to one's own experience; convincing the audience of the speaker's own expertise (competence); including the listeners in a discussion. TED speakers use the following strategies to fulfil the mode of logos: presenting evidence; presenting statistics; stating general truth, facts, axioms; referring to authoritative sources; appealing to the listener's common sense. To hold the audience's emotional appeal, TED speakers

make use of the following strategies within the mode of pathos: mentioning own emotive incidents; stating or referring to the speaker's own emotions or feelings; using emotionally charged words; using expressive stylistic means and devices including metaphors, epithets, personification, metonymy, repetitions, antithesis, aposiopesis, parallel structures, periphrasis, etc. The perspective of the further research is the comparative study of persuasive strategies used by TED female and male speakers.

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### Резюме

Стаття присвячена персуазивним стратегіям у промовах на тему «гендер», розміщених на онлайн каналі TED. Персуазивність є універсальним феноменом для соціо-функціональних дискурсів, що об'єднуються комунікативно-мовною практикою. Персуазивність у промовах TED реалізується в межах трьох аргументів: етос, логос та пафос.