

Classifying Persuasive Strategies in Head Boy Election Speeches Using the Elaboration Likelihood Model

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Abstract. This research examines the persuasive strategies used by student candidates in the 2020 Head Boy election at The Fulham Boys School in London, England. Specifically, on how teenagers convey persuasive messages in a formal school-based leadership context to persuade their peers. The study aims to identify and categorize the persuasive elements of their campaign speeches through Petty and Cacioppo's the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) which differentiates between central (logical, content driven) and peripheral (emotional, stylistic) routes to persuasion. With a qualitative descriptive approach, the campaign speeches were collected in video format and transcribed, then they were content analyzed according to several categories. Each persuasive statement was classified according to the ELM principles. All four candidates were found to be applying center and peripheral routes and had responsibility of both audience demands and the leadership image. Some candidates were predisposed to use rational solutions, while others made more use on emotional appeals. This highlights the complexities involved in a student speaker's role in a leadership speech that balanced the appeal of the message against the message itself.

Keywords: Elaboration Likelihood Model, Persuasive strategies, School election, Speech

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective communication holds a main role in human life as it fulfills the fundamental need for self-expression (Fardila, 2018; Thomas & McDonagh, 2013). Essentially, the ability to choose the right words and convey those words in a fashion that fits the audience and their comfort level is often noted as the basic building blocks of communication and human culture (Shaykhislamov, 2020). It is also a crucial component of educational leadership, especially for improving student voice and engagement. According to Wahyuni et al. (2020), speech forms a component of the communication process, and communication is effective if the message provided by the speaker can be received exactly as it exists in the mind of the speaker. An example of this is student's election campaign speeches, which candidates present when running for student leadership positions.

In the education system of the UK, the term "prefect" is used to refer to a student that has shown some type of leadership ability to embody the best in student qualities that a school has to offer. The prefect may be given certain powers to lead and discipline other students (Gupta, 2018; Muli, 2011). Prefects holds an essential role in keeping students dicipline in schools (Mukiri, 2014). It is said that the prefect will be part of a more formal structure which includes powers or defined responsibilities, clear disciplinary powers in the form of detention

or line writing, a written section in school regulations outlining powers or responsibilities, and duties or responsibilities would be determined by, or allocated to prefects (Ilahuya et al., 2024). Head Boy/Head Girl as a part of the prefect is a senior student representative that exemplifies many leadership qualities, and is not simply an honorary position. The election for this role offers students an opportunity to take part in formal processes as active participants in a public selection. In this sense, they are situated as one of few processes in British school life where students are required to offer persuasive dialogue in front of a public audience. While this mostly relates to supporting a school event, attending events representing student voice or liaising with staff, the speech represents an important moment where students claim not only a leadership position, but also a performative one.

Four student candidates in the 2020 Head Boy election at The Fulham Boys School are examined for this study. Each candidate made a speech to persuade their fellow students to vote for them. This research applies and draws on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as a framework to explore how teenager speakers deal with using central and peripheral persuasive cues when performing and conveying leadership and influence, as it describes the various functions of communication stimuli in audiences' persuasion outcomes and message elaboration (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984), and is therefore suitable for analyzing how student candidates use reason and feeling to persuade their peers in a school-based leadership circumstance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding communication studies and educational research is important to comprehending how students use persuasive messages to exhibit leadership in schools. Literature related to persuasive messages, student leadership, and teenager rhetorical genres provides a framework for analyzing how student speakers demonstrate leadership through their language. In this section, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) will first be summarized as the theoretical lens through which to conduct the analysis, before summarizing previous research regarding persuasive communication in contexts involving students and showing how rhetorical choices reflect representations of leadership.

Theoretical Framework

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is a dual-process theory of persuasion developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) that indicates people may be persuaded along two routes: the central route and the peripheral route. The central route considers the content of an argument and the reasoning behind the argument with contemplation and intention, while the

peripheral route focuses on surface cues such as speaker's likability, attractiveness, and emotion, reflecting a probabilistic model that incorporates both cognitive and emotional concerns while involving different brain zones (Kita & Kollá, 2019). Notably, the ELM has become known as a key theory over the past few decades and made significant contributions to the comprehension of the persuasion phenomenon across a range of fields, including political sciences (El Hedhli & Zourrig, 2023), however, the application of the ELM in school-based discourse, especially to teenagers communicating in leadership contexts, is limited. Therefore, the ELM is beneficial to examine either logical models or emotional models that young speakers use to engage their peers.

By using the ELM to analyze speeches of Head Boy candidates, researcher may distinguish between two types of persuasion: content-based persuasion (such as specific ideas or solutions to issues) and style-based persuasion (such as the use of comedy, personal anecdotes, or passionate stories). These tactics show how well the candidate knows their audience and how they view their own leadership abilities.

Persuasion and Leadership

Creating effective persuasive communications is a very important endeavor, because it demands a thorough awareness of the audience and a strong listener focus (Derin et al., 2020), as promoting a particular action or behavior is a possible goal is the intended aim of such messaging (O'Keefe & Hoeken, 2021). Persuasion is an absolute necessity for students in high-stakes contexts like Head Boy elections. In contrast to a traditional environment of adult authority and control, the lack of power from the base positionality as peers expect adult features causes student candidates to create rhetorical "moves" in an attempt to socially influence their peers. As the student candidates effectively positioned themselves as their peers, while providing enough foundational knowledge so that their peers could agree on leadership achievements.

Rhetorical Strategies in Student Speeches

In school-based public speaking, young people use rhetoric to communicate their identities, values, and leadership abilities. Therefore, the goal of an effective speech is to share information and persuade the audience to believe in the speaker's message (Darminto, 2019). Student speeches also provide a useful opportunity to observe how teenagers make a use of rhetorical strategies to persuade their peers to act, particularly in leadership situations like Head Boy elections. These speeches often use a variety of rhetorical strategies designed to develop credibility and engage the audience.

A study by Lemzaouak & Khadija (2024) entitled “Exploring high school students’ logical and rhetorical argumentation patterns incorporated in their performed speeches during classroom debates” looked at logical reasoning and rhetorical strategies used by high school students of English as a foreign language (EFL) in classroom debates. The study also pointed the importance of persuasive components such as *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, in relation to peer influence. Regarding context differences (debates versus election campaign speeches), the study emphasizes the importance of higher rhetorical ability among teenagers in public speaking situations. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) theory of persuasion was not applied in this study, which focused on the factors that influence the leadership identity of student candidates by examining how they rely on central and peripheral routes and where peripheral routes lead to more structured and purposeful situations.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the persuasive language used in speeches by four student candidates in Head Boy elections at The Fulham Boys School. This was the best method to enable interpretative understanding of how students build constructions of persuasive messages related to formal school leadership. The data contained four videos of campaign speeches from Fulham Boys School's official YouTube account, which were recorded during the 2020 principal election. Each speech was transcribed and analyzed using Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM).

The content analysis was conducted in three steps. First, persuasive sentences were collected from all speech transcripts. Second, the individual sentences were classified using Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), which includes central and peripheral routes. Finally, the results of persuasive strategy classification to show how the candidates promote themselves for votes by making use of persuading languages.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Identification of Persuasive Strategies

Based on the transcriptions of the four Head Boy candidates, namely Armand, Ed Jackson, Tobi, and Ayman, various persuasive strategies were found. The persuasive sentences include the use of inspirational quotes, rhetorical questions, personal narratives, explicit calls to vote, and specific program proposals. These sentences show each candidate's efforts to build credibility, evoke emotions, and convey ideas that are relevant to their audience, who are fellow students.

Classification Based on Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

In this section, the researcher provides a categorization of persuasive statements in the speeches of the four Head Boy candidates using Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). Each statement is classified in accordance with the central or peripheral routes to persuasion, based upon the message.

Table 1. Persuasive Statements - Armand

Speech Segment	Central Route	Peripheral Route	Notes
"What we will do together is that we will represent the school perfectly..."	✓		Offers concrete plans and touches on disciplinary values, contains rational arguments about leadership qualities.
"I would really appreciate it if you vote for me."		✓	Personal appeals, relying more on sympathy.
"That was my year seven house captain speech. I didn't get the position."		✓	Personal anecdote aimed at building emotional closeness.
"I realised that my ideas aren't important... Your ideas are important."	✓		Initially emotional (peripheral), but then leads to participatory values that can be considered central if followed up systemically.
"I am in no place to dictate how I think this school could be improved."		✓	Emphasis on humility, building credibility rather than substantive content.
"My job is to represent your ideas..."	✓		Boosts a clear function as a student representative.
"As head boy, I would make it prefect led, I would restructure it..."	✓		Systematic and specific plans, full of argumentative content.
"So I ask, would you rather have one student come up with the brilliant ideas? Or should it be all 900 of us..."	✓		Uses rhetorical questions to obtain collective arguments and democratic values, encourages cognitive elaboration.
"Vote for a say. Vote for the school. Vote Lambilly."		✓	A catchy short slogan, appealing to self-identity.

Armand tends to dominantly use the central route in his speeches, with clear proposals such as restructuring the student voting system, but still inserting elements of the peripheral route such as personal narratives of past failures.

Table 2. Persuasive Statements – Ed Jackson

Speech Segment	Central Route	Peripheral Route	Notes
“I’m very grateful for the opportunity and it means a lot to me.”		✓	Emotional expression, building positive attitudes.
“I consider that one of my greatest skills is that of being a skilled communicator.”		✓	Points out personal qualities (credibility).
“A main priority of mine would be to communicate with both the boys and the staff...”	✓		Focus on logical and specific work plans.
“...will endeavour to resolve problems and create a legacy that as a school we are proud of.”	✓		Promotes solutions and long-term vision.
“I know that many students feel that the school does not listen to our issues...”	✓		Raises real issues and shows awareness.
“I want to make sure that everybody feels that I’m approachable... We are a community within FBS and as Head Boy, I want to make you as comfortable as possible.”		✓	Builds a humble and approachable image to gain trust.
“I’d like to introduce mentoring between different key stages...”	✓		Proposing programs that are realistic and can be implemented.
“A vote for me as Head Boy is a vote for inclusion, voice and change.”		✓	A concise slogan that is persuasive.

Ed Jackson's speech offered equal use of both central and peripheral persuasive routes when presenting clear ideas of solutions with emotional appeal and credibility.

Table 3. Persuasive Statements – Tobi

Speech Segment	Central Route	Peripheral Route	Notes
“Head Boy to me is a really important position, where I can build...”		✓	Personal thoughts about the role.
“Meat-free Mondays is something that we’re trying to campaign for.”	✓		Conveys aspirational policy ideas.
“...inside the cage and that’s not really the best environment. So, I want to change that.”	✓		Criticism of current conditions and commitment to change.

“...we want to help you and support you in your journey through life... We’re just here to support you guys.”		✓	Motivational general affirmation, friendly, but vague.
“My name is Tobi. I’m running for Head Boy. A vote for me is a vote for change.”		✓	Identity statement and a simple campaign slogan to appeal people.

Tobi's approach is ultimately more peripheral, giving an emphasize on connection as opposed to more detailed policies and proposals. Central routes are mentioned, but not as heavily promoted.

Table 4. Persuasive Statements – Ayman

Speech Segment	Central Route	Peripheral Route	Notes
“Fall seven times, stand up eight.”		✓	Motivational quotes to raise emotions.
“...I want to make school life better not only for the boys but also for the teachers.”	✓		A commitment to a policy that includes two groups, substantially exists.
“I will not focus on one year in particular but listen to all of you... I want to put new things like a microwave or a vending machine with hot food in the sixth form centre...”	✓		Shows inclusive approach as a part of leadership strategies and tells detailed aspirations and does not only appear as a symbol.
“I want to send out anonymous Google Form... asking what change you would like to see...”	✓		A proposal to hear student voices.
“I forget to do my homework, I didn’t get all nines at GCSEs... In short, I’m trying to say that I make mistakes.”		✓	Personal recognition, building closeness and humility.
“I’ve gone to the teachers or asked them for help and I’ve shown my vision to do my best.”		✓	Personal narrative as a form of character assertion.
“I’ve fallen but I’ve gotten back up, better and stronger than ever before.”		✓	Inspirational style, but not explanation of policies or plans.

Ayman used mainly peripheral routes, such as personal relatability in order to come off as humble and emotional appeal, though a few, even if not as prevalent, central routes appeared in the speech.

Results of Persuasive Strategy Classification

This section presents the classification of persuasive strategies employed by the four student candidates in their Head Boy campaign speeches according to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) proposed by Petty and Cacioppo. As persuasive strategy was identified within the speech, the analysis determined the route of persuasion as either central or peripheral. The intention for this classification is to analyze how each candidate constructed a strategically convincing message to influence their audience. The analysis of the frequency purposeful strategies was expressed highlighted not only individual rhetorical preference, but also considerable similarities in the spread of persuasive communication as a mechanism for influencing the student leadership context.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the persuasive strategies used in the 2020 Head Boy election at The Fulham Boys School, in which the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) guided the study to understand better about how student candidates conveyed speeches in the election. The data suggests that all candidates combining both of the to express leadership in various ways. Candidates used both central route strategies, to suggest perceived competence and problem-solving considerations, and peripheral routes to gain likeability and trust, with the aim of gaining votes through emotional connection. However, this study is restricted to one school and election year, the findings may be limited in relevance to larger contexts. Future research could sample multiple schools with larger samples and/or expand the age range of participants.

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