Persuasive Discourse and Interpersonal Dynamics: An Analysis of Reactions to Contemporary Polemics

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ABSTRACT

Complex social issues increasingly affect individual mental well-being, especially in an environment overloaded with information from social media. Using attractive and effective language in social interactions can help individuals cope with stress through persuasive discourse. This study aims to identify and analyze the persuasive strategies used in interpersonal communication, particularly in responding to current issues. A qualitative content analysis approach is employed to examine various forms of persuasive speech found in social communication. The data indicates that the emotional appeal (pathos) is more dominant in social interactions when individuals face stress related to current issues. Additionally, imperative and indicative strategies are utilized to provide support and suggest solutions for those experiencing stress. The analysis also reveals that these strategies effectively maintain balance and encourage more rational thinking when dealing with current problems. Moreover, they significantly impact individual mental well-being. Therefore, within daily communication, the application of persuasive language warrants critical attention as a vital aspect of communication competence. It not only enhances the effectiveness of social interactions but also contributes to overall psychosocial well-being. As a result, it is crucial for individuals to master ethical, empathetic, and context-appropriate persuasive strategies as part of healthy communication practices that respect human values.

Keywords: Discourse; Persuasiveness; Social Interaction; Mental Well-Being; social media

INTRODUCTION

Persuasive discourse is a type of communication aimed at influencing and convincing the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of listeners in a structured and strategic manner. The primary tools for achieving this are rhetorical competence and linguistic finesse, which help ensure that messages are effectively conveyed and well-received. This process reflects a high level of communicative competence, allowing the speaker not only to deliver information but also to subtly and ethically shift an individual's perspective on an issue (Ganisya Tripangestuti Dewi et al., 2022). Through persuasive discourse, speakers seek to shape the perceptions and beliefs of their audience without resorting to coercion (Keraf, 2007). This approach fosters deeper understanding and creates an open, rational, and inclusive communicative environment, enhancing communication effectiveness across various social and professional contexts.

In today's communication landscape—shaped by globalization and advancements in digital technology—the use of persuasive language has significantly transformed in terms of form, technique, and rhetorical function. Social media, the primary communication medium of our time, expands the space for interaction among individuals but also cultivates a discursive ecosystem filled with emotional, provocative, and manipulative content (Siti Aisyah Hajar et al., 2021). Current statistics show that social media usage rates among Malaysians are high, with

WhatsApp (86.5%), Facebook (77.1%), Instagram (39.2%), Telegram (23.2%), X (11.7%), and LinkedIn (4.8%) among the most actively used platforms (Kosmo, 2025).

This situation continuously exposes users to provocative, unauthenticated, and sensitive content, which can disrupt their emotional balance (Abdul Rashid Abdul Aziz et al., 2021). Such content has the power to manipulate audiences emotionally, cognitively, and affectively, undermining perceptions of speaker credibility and disturbing users' mental stability. Additionally, digital interactions filled with impolite expressions can trigger emotional distress, resulting in feelings of inferiority, self-doubt, and a loss of social confidence among users.

These challenges present new threats to the psychosocial well-being of today's digital society. Content that is unauthenticated, toxic, or that touches on sensitive issues can induce emotional strain and destabilize individuals' mental equilibrium (Abdul Rashid Abdul Aziz et al., 2021). This is due to the ability of persuasive discourse on social media to shape perceptions, manipulate emotions, and subtly influence audience actions without their awareness (Hariri Ali Imran & Nasihah Hashim, 2023).

Therefore, the persuasive strategies employed in communicative discourse play a crucial role in shaping perceptions, influencing attitudes, and guiding audience actions regarding contemporary issues. Analyzing the forms, techniques, and linguistic dimensions of persuasion is essential to uncover how language is strategically used to address the psychosocial pressures arising from exposure to emotionally charged and controversial digital content. Consequently, this study aims to identify and analyze the persuasive strategies used in interpersonal communication, particularly in discourse that responds to the emotional pressures experienced by individuals due to contemporary digital content.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study by Nia Ramadhani et al. (2024) examines the dynamics of bullying conflict within the context of Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, particularly in pondok pesantren, with a focus on the effectiveness of persuasive communication strategies as a resolution approach. This study employed a qualitative method through a literature review approach to identify the causes, patterns, and management strategies of bullying conflict in boarding school environments. The findings indicate that persuasive communication is identified as a strategy with significant potential to reduce conflict. This approach not only deconstructs the confrontational communication patterns commonly found in bullying conflicts but also offers alternative channels of communication that are more conducive and ethical. The effectiveness of persuasive communication is seen to depend on the capacity of educational actors to build credibility, empathy, and positive influence through inclusive and constructive dialogue. Therefore, this strategy supports the creation of a more harmonious boarding school environment while emphasizing the importance of Islamic educational values such as compassion, respect, and social responsibility.

The study by Dewi and Haziq Aisha (2021) focuses on the effectiveness of rhetorical language use in official government discourse, particularly in the context of information delivery during a public health crisis. The study emphasizes that the success of information delivery does not solely depend on content but is also influenced by the suitability of the messenger, the communication tools, and the channels used. The use of rhetorical language in official addresses is analyzed as a medium that functions not only to convey information literally but also as a vehicle to shape the audience's emotions, thoughts, and perceptions toward the discourse being delivered. Rhetoric is not only employed to reinforce political authority but also plays a significant role in fostering social harmony and strengthening governance through the cultivation of values of equality and unity within society.The findings reveal that only four dominant types of rhetoric were used, namely exposition (34%), explanation (30%), persuasion (33%), and argumentation (3%). These statistics indicate that persuasive and expository strategies were more frequently employed to stimulate public acceptance of government policies and actions during the pandemic. Meanwhile, argumentation techniques—which typically demand more complex evidence and logical reasoning—were less frequently utilized in the context of crisis discourse that requires swift and convincing communication.

Siti Marina Kamil (2022) analyzed the use of rhetorical appeals in Mahathir Mohamad's speech upon his return

as the seventh Prime Minister of Malaysia. The analysis focused on three specific aspects: (1) the extent of logos, pathos, and ethos employed; (2) the use of active versus passive sentences in assigning responsibility; and (3) the application of personal pronouns in rhetorical strategies. A total of six political speeches in Malay delivered by Mahathir Mohamad between 2018 and 2020, with a combined word count of 13,000, were examined using Aristotle's framework for rhetorical evidence. The findings revealed that Mahathir Mohamad predominantly utilized logos (56.17%) and pathos (39.63%), while his use of ethos was minimal (4.20%). This suggests that he positioned himself as a political leader who leaned heavily on rational arguments and represented the ruling government coalition. This was evident in his use of the pronoun "we," which accounted for 50.26% of all pronouns used, indicating a sense of unity between the speaker and the audience. However, in difficult situations, Mahathir tended to employ emotional appeals and used the pronoun "I" more frequently. This choice allowed him to express personal interpretations of specific issues and demonstrated his ability to adapt his rhetorical strategies according to the contextual situation and the characteristics of the audience.

Muhammad Faris Akram Rustu and Azean Idruwani Idrus (2024) conducted a study aimed at identifying the rhetorical techniques used by the renowned Malaysian singer and lyricist Malique, particularly in his song "Teman Pengganti." They also analyzed the factors that influence the use of these techniques. Adopting a descriptive approach and guided by the Modern Rhetorical Theory of Enos and Brown (1993), the researchers employed two primary methods: library research and content analysis. This analytical approach was carried out both textually and contextually to examine the lyrical content in a comprehensive and systematic manner. The findings revealed three main forms of rhetoric used in the construction of the song lyrics: narrative rhetoric, descriptive rhetoric, and persuasive rhetoric. Narrative rhetoric was utilized to convey a story with chronological progression and emotional development, allowing listeners to follow the trajectory of meaning expressed. Descriptive rhetoric, on the other hand, created vivid visual and emotional imagery, while persuasive rhetoric aimed to influence listeners' perceptions and reactions to the conveyed message. The effective use of rhetoric not only made the lyrics more engaging but also allowed the message to be delivered subtly yet profoundly.

According to Syaza Fuhat and Juliana Abdul Wahab (2024), political rhetoric plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse and societal perceptions of critical issues such as corruption, integrity, and political accountability. In the context of modern democracy, the ability of rhetorical discourse to influence public thought and attitudes significantly impacts the level of trust in political institutions as well as the support for certain political figures or parties. In this context, anti-corruption discourse is not merely a narrative about institutional reform but also a rhetorical tool used to defend political positions and shape public perceptions of leadership legitimacy. This study aims to critically examine the rhetorical strategies employed by Dato' Sri Najib Tun Razak in his responses to allegations and judicial decisions related to corruption, which have sparked widespread debate in the public sphere and media. Based on a qualitative content analysis of 21 news broadcasts from ASTRO Awani, the study utilizes Aristotle's framework, which includes the elements of ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and logos (logical reasoning), as the foundation for evaluating the forms and functions of the persuasive strategies employed. The findings reveal that Najib Razak was more inclined to use logos and pathos in his discourse. These strategies involved using logical arguments to structure self-defensive narratives, as well as exploiting emotional appeals to garner public sympathy. Conversely, the use of ethos—specifically efforts to explicitly demonstrate integrity or moral credibility—was minimal and limited in the analyzed broadcasts. The selective use of these rhetorical strategies reflects a carefully designed communicative approach aimed at influencing public perceptions of himself amid a serious legal crisis.

The reviewed literature demonstrates the diversity of research approaches to the use of rhetorical strategies and persuasive communication in various contexts, namely education, politics, music, and crisis communication. Collectively, these studies affirm that rhetoric and persuasive communication not only function in the delivery of information but also serve as strategic tools in shaping perceptions, building empathy, and influencing audience behavior. The elements of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* operate synergistically, depending on the communicative context, audience profile, and situational needs. Therefore, this study is significant in understanding how language is strategically utilized by ordinary members of society to influence opinions, express positions, and negotiate meaning regarding various current issues circulating within the social sphere, both physically and virtually.

METHODS

Study Sample and Data Collection

This study is a survey conducted at the Kulliyyah of Sustainable Tourism and Contemporary Languages at Universiti Islam Internasional Malaysia, as well as the Centre for Language and General Studies at Universiti Islam Internasional Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (UniSIRAJ). A total of 107 students participated in this study. Each respondent was instructed to read the guidelines before completing the questionnaire based on the given scenario. The completed questionnaires were then collected and reviewed to ensure that all respondents provided thorough and complete answers, prior to the data analysis.

Research Questionnaire

This questionnaire is divided into two parts: Part A, which includes the demographic data of the respondents, and Part B, which covers the methods used to influence the audience through persuasive discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Demographics

The study participants included 107 students from the Kulliyyah of Sustainable Tourism and Contemporary Languages at the International Islamic University Malaysia, as well as the Centre for Languages and General Studies at Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin International Islamic University (UniSIRAJ). The information regarding the respondents is presented in the table below:

Table 1: Respondent Demographics

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	50	46.7
Female	57	53.3
TOTAL	**107**	**100**

Table 1 displays the demographic analysis of respondents, revealing that a total of 107 participants in this study comprised 50 males (46.7%) and 57 females (53.3%).

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage %
18-24	105	98.1 1.9
25-34	2	0
35-44	0	
TOTAL	**107**	**100**

Table 2 presents the demographic data of the respondents in this study, which includes individuals aged 18 to 44. Specifically, among the respondents, 105 people (98.1%) were between the ages of 18 and 24, while 2 people (1.9%) were aged 25 to 34. There were no respondents in the 35 to 44 age range.

Table 3: Respondent's Education Level

Education	Frequency	Percentage %
Diploma	2	1.8
Bachelor's Degree	105	98.2
Master's	0	0
TOTAL	**107**	**100**

Table 3 presents the education levels of the respondents: 2 individuals (1.8%) held a Diploma, 105 individuals (98.2%) had a bachelor's degree, and none possessed a master's degree.

Persuasive Strategies in the Context of Responses to Current Issues

This study analyzed data and found that 329 persuasive strategies were used in interpersonal communication, particularly in relation to current issues. The analysis revealed that all three persuasive strategies—ethos, pathos, and logos—were present in the data. Among these, logos was the most frequently used rhetorical strategy, accounting for 182 instances (54.55%), while pathos was used 135 times (42%), and ethos only 12 times (3.5%), as illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Persuasive Strategies in the Context of Response to Current Issues
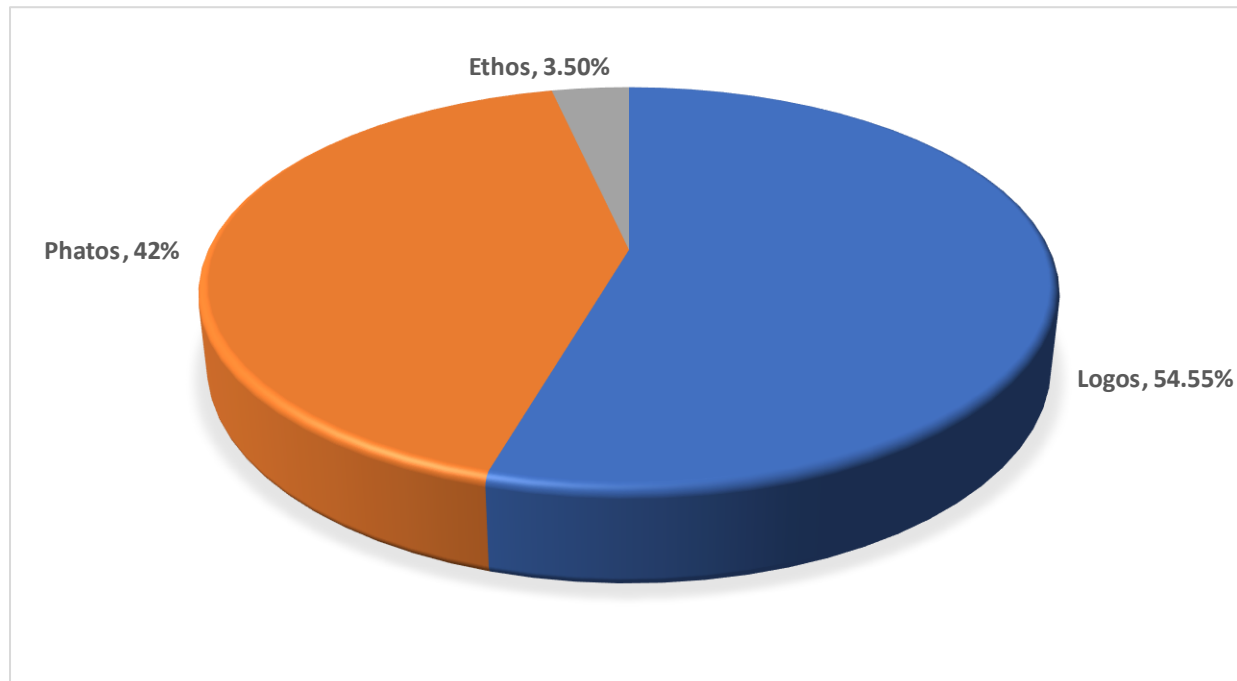
The use of logos as a strategy is most prevalent in responses to current issues. This indicates that logos is employed through logical and rational suggestions aimed at problem-solving. This study analyzes six out of 329 instances of rhetorical strategies identified, selecting two examples from each rhetorical strategy. Below is a detailed description of each rhetorical strategy based on the given situation.

Situation: Your friend is feeling down because of the social issues happening in society.

Your friend says**, "The world is going crazy right now. I can't sleep or eat because I keep thinking about the social issues around me. This is affecting my work performance and my relationships with others."** What would you say to your friend in this situation?

I would say, "............................."

Logos

The rhetorical strategy of logos can be examined through the following statements:

1. "Don't overthink social issues that arise, as we cannot control what happens."

2. "The world's problems will not disappear; focus on what can bring good to ourselves and those around us, and leave behind matters that do not need emphasis, such as gossip that can cause harm to ourselves and others."

According to the analysis, the rhetorical strategy of logos is seen as the most dominant approach in interpersonal communication, particularly when expressing responses to current issues. Logos, as described by Aristotle (in Nur Ilyana Nasarudin et al., 2023), refers to persuasive power based on rational arguments and logical reasoning.

This approach typically relies on the presentation of facts, empirical data, proposed solutions, or advice derived from critical thinking and objective, structured discourse.

The phrase "Don't overthink social issues that arise because we cannot control what happens" employs the logos approach by offering solutions grounded in a rational assessment of the situation. These statements not only serve to calm the recipient's emotions but also educate them to think realistically about their capabilities and the importance of choosing issues that are worth their attention. Effectiveness in communication amid social pressure largely depends on the presenter's ability to structure information in a logical and easily digestible manner.

In the same context, Sonja P. Brubacher et al. (2023) explain that the strategic use of logos enhances the credibility of the message by providing a basis for rational thought, particularly in urgent situations that require immediate consideration, such as when facing crises or emotional stress related to current issues. Thus, the rationality conveyed through this strategy contributes to constructive meaning and reduces the audience's psychological stress since the message received offers solutions rather than mere emotional expression.

Furthermore, emphasizing rationality in persuasive communication alleviates the audience's psychological burden by providing constructive messages that contribute to potential solutions rather than just emotional expressions. In the second statement, "The world's problems will not end; focus on what can bring good to ourselves and those around us, and leave behind matters that do not need emphasis, as they can cause harm to ourselves and others…" clearly showcases the strategic use of logos combined with an imperative dimension.

This statement encourages a focus on beneficial aspects while discarding elements that could provoke harm. This aligns with the findings of Hazlin Falina (2020), who emphasizes the necessity of maintaining logical balance in contemporary digital communication.

Moreover, the use of imperative sentence structures (commands) in the form of polite and non-authoritative advice, such as "don't overthink..." and "focus on what... and leave...," further reinforces the persuasive element. Such utterances exemplify the implementation of directive speech acts oriented towards politeness and empathy. In the realm of interpersonal communication, non-coercive imperatives allow the audience to reprocess information and make rational judgments without feeling pressured or coerced.

Communication strategies that integrate logos with imperatives significantly enhance the clarity of information and foster a supportive, non-judgmental atmosphere. Meanwhile, Brown and Levinson (1987) emphasize that imperative utterances, in the context of positive politeness strategies, enable messages to be received more constructively.

In conclusion, the combination of logos and imperatives in the above statements demonstrates that interpersonal discourse not only emphasizes strategy but also plays a crucial role in guiding, assisting, and alleviating the audience's pressure when addressing current issues in a rational and constructive manner.

Situation: Your friend is feeling down due to the social issues happening in society.

Your friend says, **"The world is going crazy right now. I can't sleep or eat because I keep thinking about the social issues around me. This is affecting my work performance and my relationships with others."** What would you say to your friend in this situation?

I would say, "............................"

Phatos

The rhetorical strategy of pathos can be analyzed using the following statements:

3. … to consider that neglecting eating and sleeping will only harm yourself and also negatively impact your work and relationships with others.

4.   … I understand that social issues can be very burdensome and affect our well-being.

In persuasive discourse, pathos refers to a strategy that emphasizes the emotional influence on the audience,

with the goal of touching their hearts and evoking an emotional response that supports the communicator's purpose. In the context of addressing stress due to current issues, pathos is crucial for triggering empathy, concern, and recognition of the internal suffering experienced by the audience. This strategy does not simply seek sympathy; rather, it acts as a catalyst for changing the audience's attitudes and actions through directed emotional influence.

In statement (3), the speaker expresses concern by highlighting the negative physical and social effects of prolonged emotional stress, such as "not eating and sleeping," "affecting work," and "relationships with others." This message is conveyed not as an accusation but as an empathetic reflection of the audience's suffering. The goal is to make the listener emotionally aware of the consequences of unmanaged psychosocial stress, thereby promoting self-awareness without putting the audience in a defensively threatened state.

Meanwhile, statement (4) includes an element of direct emotional recognition through the phrase "I understand." This expression demonstrates the speaker's effort to adopt the audience's perspective, which is a key feature of the pathos strategy. Such empathic recognition is vital in interpersonal communication as it fosters trust and creates a more open space for message reception. This strategy is significant in building social relationships because it combines a non-threatening delivery with the establishment of a safe psychological space for constructive interaction.

The use of pathos alongside indicative utterance structures shows the effectiveness of an emotional-rational approach in communicating about current issues. This approach not only conveys concern but also encourages the audience to take action based on a progressively developed emotional awareness. The indicative structure— being factual and non-coercive—allows the message to be received more freely and reduces the audience's defensiveness. This combination of pathos and non-threatening language effectively mobilizes emotions for persuasion, going beyond mere expression of feelings.

Furthermore, a thoughtfully designed pathos strategy that includes empathetic statements and linguistic structures supportive of indicative forms can significantly enhance communication in addressing complex emotional stress. This approach not only promotes change but also contributes to the development of strong social solidarity, which is crucial in today's context of social crisis and uncertainty.

In conclusion, these findings confirm that the effectiveness of persuasive discourse in interpersonal situations does not solely depend on logical strength or argument structure. It also requires a profound understanding of the audience's emotional management. A systematically and empathetically implemented pathos strategy can build a significant network of meaning, making the message not only moving and persuasive but also establishing a solid basis for acceptance among audiences experiencing emotional stress related to current issues.

Situation: Your friend is feeling very sad due to the social issues occurring in society.

Your friend says, *"**The world is going crazy right now. I can't sleep or eat because I keep thinking about the social issues happening around me. This is affecting my work performance and my relationships with others."***

What would you say to your friend in this situation?

I would say, "............................"

Ethos

Ethos rhetorical strategies can be examined through the following statements:

5. "That's right, I completely agree; I'm also worried about the current situation."

6. "I understand your feelings. It is indeed difficult to face these social issues."

The ethos strategy in persuasive discourse refers to the construction of the speaker's self-credibility, which helps convince the audience of their moral integrity, reliability, and social or emotional authority. In the context of interpersonal communication regarding current issues, ethos plays a crucial role in building trust and strengthening social relationships based on a mutual recognition of shared concerns and worries.

Statements (5) and (6) illustrate the implementation of the ethos strategy through phrases like "I completely agree," "I am also worried," and "I understand your feelings." These expressions demonstrate the speaker's intention to connect with the audience's experiences, thereby building credibility through emotional support and alignment. In this context, ethos encompasses not only rational credibility but also emotional and social credibility, making the speaker more approachable, trustworthy, and authentic in the eyes of the audience.

Both statements are written in an indicative mode, using sentences that express views or feelings in a neutral and understated manner. This delivery style normalizes experiences through phrases like "it's hard" and "I'm also worried." Such normalization validates the audience's experiences and fosters an inclusive, non-judgmental communication atmosphere. This approach, as noted by Indrawati and Arina Johari (2020), enhances the speaker's social credibility by aligning verbal statements with consistent emotional expressions.

Moreover, the indicative style in this context helps reduce the cognitive and emotional burden on the audience, as the communication is not directive or coercive. This allows the audience to evaluate and engage with the message more openly, without feeling threatened or defensive. The combination of a simple linguistic style and implicit empathy strategies establishes a strong ethos in persuasive communication; the speaker not only acknowledges the situation but also implicitly offers support through shared feelings and perspectives. Overall, the ethos strategy, coupled with the use of indicative forms, demonstrates that credibility in persuasive discourse lies not only in the validity of facts or the speaker's status but also in their ability to exhibit emotional authenticity and social sensitivity. In effective interpersonal communication, particularly concerning current issues that challenge the audience's emotional stability, ethos serves as a vital rhetorical tool to reinforce messages of acceptance and create a space for collective psychosocial healing.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that persuasive discourse significantly influences the emotional and psychosocial stress of individuals exposed to current issues through social media. By focusing on interpersonal communication strategies, the study reveals that the logos strategy is the most commonly used form of persuasion, followed by pathos and ethos. The predominance of logos indicates society's tendency to respond to current issues in a rational and structured manner, while the use of pathos emphasizes the importance of empathy and acknowledgment of the audience's emotional suffering. Although the ethos strategy is used less frequently, it remains crucial for establishing credibility and building a trusting relationship between the speaker and the listener. The combination of linguistic structures, such as imperative and indicative forms, in rhetorical strategies shows that persuasive discourse relies not only on content but also on an ethical and empathetic delivery style. These findings highlight the necessity for a balanced communication strategy that integrates rationality and emotion, particularly in the digital era, which challenges users' emotional stability. This study contributes to the fields of linguistics and communication by demonstrating language as a tool for social intervention that serves not just to convey information but also as a psychological mechanism for emotional recovery, social solidarity, and fostering collective consciousness. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the mastery of ethical and contextual persuasive discourse strategies in communication education and training, enabling society to cultivate more inclusive, effective, and humane interactions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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