

**MERGING THE LENSES-CHANGES IN THE USE OF RHETORIC BY  
AMERICAN PRESIDENTS DURING THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AND THE  
EFFECT OF THESE CHANGES ON THE AUDIENCE'S THOUGHT  
PROCESSES**

**ARTICLE III**

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***ABSTRACT:** Although research has long focused on the interrelationships between leader and followers, and the scholars, have learned a lot about the consequences of leaders' charismatic behavior on followers. Nevertheless, there is dichotomy in leadership area, between the "leader-centered perspectives" (e.g., the leaders' lens) and the "follower-centered perspectives" (e.g., the followers' lens) to date. Despite the call from numerous leadership scholars to examine the upward impact of follower behaviors on leadership, there has not been substantial progress in this area of research. Also, important gap remains within this developing line of inquiry. There has also been another call for promoting more integrative strategies for theory-building in the field of leadership. Therefore, to address this call we develop in this study a conceptual model (TPM) that merges between three psychological models: The Three Needs Theory, the Model of Convincing and Persuading and the Elaboration Likelihood Model. The research could make contributions in the field of political psychology and persuasive behavior, on the one hand, and in the field of rhetoric and philosophy of language, on the other. In this article we present the **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)** and the results of research question 3: **Are there positive associations between rhetorical strategies and public positive opinion about the president?***

**Keywords:** *Political communication, Political decision making, Leadership, Leader, Followers, Followership, charismatic leadership, self-concept, State of the Union Address, U.S. presidents.*

The cognitive science leadership literature is an area of research and theory containing a wide range of approaches that are united by their focus on explaining the way leaders and followers think and process information and how people's attitudes are formed, maintained, and changed. Humans strive for balance between their motivations for accurate judgments and their cognitive effort. In other words, individuals seek to balance their specific motivations for information processing and the cognitive effort that they must put forth (Chaiken & Eagly, 1989).

**A lot of research in political science study and in psychological study have examined the dual-process frameworks of persuasion such as Chaiken's (1980) heuristic/systematic model (HSM) and Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model (ELM): central/ peripheral routes** Gilens & Murakawa, 2002, p.17). Both models were predominately developed in the early-to-mid 1980's and share many of the same concepts and ideas (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

The psychological literature on "cognitive heuristics" (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) is predicated on the view of humans as "limited information processors" or "cognitive misers" (Lau & Sears, 1986) who have become quite adept at applying a variety of information "shortcuts" to make reasonable decisions with minimal cognitive effort in all aspects of their lives

That is, in any given context, the amount of elaboration, or thinking about the relevant message or issue, can vary continuously from very low to very high, and is determined by a combination of individual differences and situational factors. Individuals can think a lot, a moderate amount, or indeed very little about a

message, and the amount of thinking they engage in goes a long way in explaining how people will be persuaded (if at all) (Wagner & Petty, 2011, p.2).

The different variables of effective persuasion include: characteristics of the message source: attractiveness, credibility, expertise; the message itself: level of complexity, number of arguments, rational or emotional appeals; the message recipient: mood, intelligence, involvement in the issue; the context in which the message is presented: type of media, level of distraction in the communication environment; and depending on the likelihood of thinking: serving as cues or arguments, affecting the amount or direction of thinking, or influencing perceived validity of one's thoughts( Petty et al., 2009;Wagner & Petty, 2011, pp.12-17).

**To sum, these models posit that there are two general courses people follow when assimilating new information. One route entails a high level of careful, information-rich deliberation, whereas the second involves quick and efficient response, often marked by reaction to simple cues** (Mondak et al., 2004, p. 221). Cues are pieces of information that enable people to form evaluations about an attitude object without in depth knowledge (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Studies vary substantially in how they define the term heuristic. The term heuristic stems from the Ancient Greek *heuriskein*, which means "to discover". Most of the information known today on the subject comes from prominent twentieth century social scientists.

Heuristic is a broad term. Simon (1990, p.11), the founding father of heuristics, defined them as "methods for arriving at satisfactory solutions with modest amounts of computation." Heuristics is a system of mental shortcuts. instead of checking matters in depth and arriving at a logical conclusion (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). In the game-theoretic literature, a heuristic is defined as "a method or rules of thumb for solving problems" (Peyton, 2008, p.1).

The heuristic/systematic model and the elaboration likelihood model posit that individuals with low motivation or capacity prefer forming an impression or making a quick judgment using available heuristic cues without fully considering all relevant information (heuristic/ peripheral processing). For instance, they tend to accept a persuasive message when the message has a high number of arguments in it, when its source (communicator) has an attractive appearance or the credibility of the message source and when the message is well-received by others (Lee & Pingree, 2016, p.97; Wagner & Petty, 2011, p.17).

On the other hand, motivated and able individuals aim for an accurate judgment and tend to make a judgment on a message based on the strength of its arguments and judgment-relevant information including evidence and the soundness of an argument's logic (systematic/central processing) rather than simple heuristics, which requires greater cognitive effort than cue-based heuristic/ peripheral processing.

**For centuries scholars have argued that source credibility is an important variable in the evaluation of persuasive messages.**

Vis (2019, p.42) remarked that from the heuristics and biases (H&B) tradition, pioneered by Tversky and Kahneman, availability (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973) and representativeness (Kahneman & Tversky, 1972) heuristics are especially relevant to political decision-making, which are relevant to our research (Gigerenzer, 2001; Gilovich et al., 2002; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

Much literature focuses on the heuristics applied by political elites - presidents, members of cabinet, party leaders, or members of parliament (MPs) (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Vis, 2019; Weyland, 2014) and on the heuristics voters use (Bartels, 1996; Brady & Sniderman, 1985; Gilens & Murakawa, 2002; Lupia, 1994; Redlawsk, 2004; Sniderman et al., 1991).

**Political elites use the availability and the representativeness heuristics for making complex decisions under uncertainty** (Vis, 2019, p.41).

**Studies concerning political communication also show that citizens tend to turn to simple heuristics instead of systematically processing the message** (Carmines & D'Amico, 2015; Mondak, 1993a, 1993b).

As a resource-saving device, individuals will rely on trusted experts and political elites to form their opinions on political issues without having to work through the details of those issues themselves.

**Of important note, heuristic information processing may involve the use of relatively general rules (scripts, schemata) developed by individuals through their past experiences and observations** (Abelson, 1976; Chaiken, 1980, p. 753; Stotland & Canon, 1972). Moreover, most people have schemas, images or stereotypes (similar to political schema heuristics) for political leaders (Miller et al., 1986) and thus Kahneman and Tversky's (1972) representativeness heuristic can easily come into play (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001, pp. 954-955). Statements such as "She will win the election; you can see she is a winner" (Kahneman, 2011, p.150) indicated that someone relies on representativeness, same as when someone judges "the potential leadership of a candidate for office by the shape of his chin or the forcefulness of his speeches." A cue might involve an emotional state (e.g., "happiness") that becomes associated with the message's advocated position in a positive way.

As Chaiken (1980, p.753) clarified it,

For example, persons may possess and utilize the rule or categorical script (Abelson, 1976) that statements by experts can usually be considered veridical, or that statements by generally trustworthy persons probably reflect those persons' honest opinions. With respect to source attractiveness, recipients may agree with attractive communicators because they employ the rule that "people generally agree

with people they like." Such a script may derive from past experiences with others or, alternatively, may stem from a lower-order rule suggesting a fairly consistent association between the concepts of liking and interpersonal similarity (Stotland & Canon, 1972). Citizens will apply simple inferences such as "the in-group expert knows best" when making political decisions (Waheed & Baumgartner, 2014, p.93).

In personal communication, Weyland indicated that he identified the representativeness heuristic in the qualitative material for his 2014-book by looking for emphasis on similarities with a vivid, dramatic precedent and especially through the claim "we can do this too!" (Vis, 2019, p.45), concerning the idea of political polarization about in-groups and out-groups (van Dijk, 1997, p.28).

In this paper, we concentrate on the influence of elite cue-givers - that is, those whose views are communicated through their speeches and on the basing judgments on such simplified cues which may be a simple heuristic for citizens, the cue-takers; the cue to make political judgments, drawing from cognitive models of political persuasion.

**Research Question 3: Are there positive associations between rhetorical strategies and public positive opinion about the president?**

### **Methodology**

The sample will consist of all 20 speeches (N=20), given by the Presidents of the United States during the 21ST century: George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump.

**The independent variables consisted of the five rhetorical strategies: Collective Focus; Temporal Orientation; Follower's Worth; Similarity to Followers and Action** (Davis & Gardner, 2012; Seyranian & Bligh, 2008; Shamir et al., 1994, p. 29; Shamir et al., 1993, p. 586).

### **Dependent Variables**

**To assess the impact of the rhetorical strategies and charisma characteristics, level of popularity of each president will be collected using the results of national surveys of the presidents.** This main outcome will be used as the estimated result of the speeches. That is, leaders that use various of rhetorical strategies and charisma characteristics in their speeches, are expected to have high popularity index, while leaders who use few rhetorical strategies and charisma characteristics in their speeches are expected to have low popularity index.

### **Data analysis**

Each speech will be carefully read, and will be analyzed in the following two ways:

(1) **Content analysis** – for each speech, the rhetorical strategies will be extracted, that is in what specific tools the presidents used in order to deliver their messages. 2) **Scoring the rhetorical strategies** –Following the content analysis, each of the rhetorical strategies will be scored regarding the level of use in the speech on a 1 (not used at all) to 10 (used very intensively). After scoring the rhetorical strategies, descriptive statistics will be produced describing the use of rhetorical strategies by each of the presidents.

**In addition, we calculated the ratings of each president and the use of main rhetorical strategies using descriptive statistics.** The data on public opinion were gathered from Gallup<sup>1</sup>.

Level of significance for all analyses is P-value < .05.

### **Results**

To address this research question, we calculated the ratings of each president and the use of main rhetorical strategies using descriptive statistics. The data on public opinion were gathered from Gallup<sup>1</sup> and presents the average public positive opinion for all presidency period.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://news.gallup.com/poll/4729/presidency.aspx>

Table 1 presents the associations between rhetorical strategies and the public positive opinion about each president.

As shown in table 1, a close public positive opinion about the president was found between Bush (49.40%) and Obama (47.90%), but lower public positive opinion was found for Trump (41.10%).

Results showed differences in the use of rhetorical strategies between the presidents in Temporal Orientation, Follower's Worth and Action.

Specifically, results showed that when the both presidents, Bush and Obama had high variance in using Similarity to Followers and since they used Collective Focus in a similar level and lower use of Temporal Orientation as conducted by Bush (2.10%) and Obama (2.39%) and in addition, relatively lower use of Follower's Worth as conducted by Bush (3.49%) and Obama (2.79%) together with high use of Action as conducted by Bush (4.09%) and Obama (3.33%) were associated with higher positive ratings.

In contrast, when Trump also had high variance in using Similarity to Followers and also used Collective Focus in a similar level like Bush and Obama but unlike them demonstrated high use in Temporal Orientation (3.74%) and in addition high use in Follower's Worth (4.17%) together with low use of Action (2.89%) was associated with low positive rating.

However, high use in Action as conducted by Bush (4.09%) and Obama (3.33%) provides higher positive rating in comparison with low use as conducted by Trump (2.89%).

<b>Rhetorical Strategies / President</b>	<b>Collective Focus</b>	<b>Temporal Orientation</b>	<b>Follower's Worth</b>	<b>Similarity to Followers</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Public positive opinion about the president</b>
George W. Bush	7.65%	2.10%	3.49%	11.81%	4.09%	49.40%
Barack Obama	7.05%	2.39%	2.79%	15.03%	3.33%	47.90%
Donald J. Trump	7.97%	3.74%	4.17%	16.47%	2.89%	41.10%

Table 1: Rhetorical strategies and public positive opinion about the president

Note: M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

The purpose of this research was to advance the discussion of leadership as a process co-produced by both leader and followers, and to expand the followership and leadership literature by providing detailed data concerning followers' impact on the leadership as well as the interaction between the leader and his followers. The literature review made it clear that much more attention has been given to the leaders' influence on followers. Therefore, why in this study the lenses were merged, and the followers' impact was analyzed through the perspective of the leader.

**An analysis of the data in our study showed three essential findings concerning: 1) The five most common rhetorical strategies in the political speeches; 2) The rhetorical strategy Similarity to Followers is the most frequent used; and 3) The public opinion about the president and the role of the followers in the process.**

**The first finding is that the most common rhetorical strategies among American presidents in their political speeches are: Similarity to Followers,**

**Collective Focus, Temporal Orientation, Follower's Worth, and Action**, according to the results of research question 1.

The State of the Union address is a "once-a-year chance for the modern president to inspire and persuade the American people" (Saad, 2002) and to establish his agenda (Cohen, 1995). The most effective leaders define their group's social identity to fit with the policies they plan to promote, enabling them to position those policies as expressions of what their constituents already believe.

In Trump's (2019) words: "This is the time to rekindle (e.g., Action) the bonds of love and loyalty (e.g., Follower's Worth) and memory (e.g., meaning of Temporal Orientation) that link us (e.g., Similarity to Followers) together as citizens (e.g., Collective Focus), as neighbors, as patriots. **The corollary is that the wider the category of those who feel part of a group, the greater the mobilization the leader can achieve.**

Such findings are consistent with Shamir and colleagues' (1994, p. 29) propositions about the contents of charismatic leaders' speeches and are essential to convince and to persuade listeners in the political arena, concerning the followers' self-concept theory (Shamir et al., 1993).

Additionally, regarding **the Model of Convincing and Persuading**, Cattani (2020) explained that persuasion is centered chiefly on the speaker/ addresser and refers primarily to the realm of actions. According to Shamir and colleagues (1993) charismatic leaders, in their speeches, recruit and engage the self-concept of followers by two principal methods: role modeling, and frame alignment.

Connected with the previous ideas, regarding **the Elaboration Likelihood Model** (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), scholars have found how different types of source cues like political elites-for example, presidents, members of cabinet, party leaders, or members of parliament (MPs)-to be a potent cause of opinion change in political discourse (Lupia, 1994; Mondak, 1993a, 1993b; Mondak et al., 2004).

According to Chaiken (1980, p. 753), heuristic information processing may involve the use of relatively general rules (scripts, schemata). Through this approach, the primary goal of this chapter, then, is to bring together and discuss the central frame, schemas, cues, references and statements applied by the orators in their persuasive communication in the political speeches based on the five rhetorical strategies.

**The second finding is that, specifically, the most frequent used rhetorical strategy is Similarity to Followers (14.0%) for all the presidents.**

Regarding **the Model of Convincing and Persuading and the Elaboration Likelihood Model**, charismatic leader appeals to his interlocutors by pointing out cues about the similarities between him and his followers in their backgrounds, experiences, values, moral justification, goals, common past and tradition, through the five rhetorical strategies, as noted above (Davis & Gardner, 2012; Shamir et al., 1994; Shamir et al., 1993).

Thus, charismatic leaders use word choices that place them on the same level, demonstrate familiarity and commonality, or reference human-interest topics (Bligh et al., 2004a). **In doing so, the leader is building trust with the followers by impacting on people's emotions to earn their trust and gaining the followers' acceptance of his/her mission** (e.g., ethos and pathos) (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Shamir et al., 1994; Tan & Wee, 2002).

The focus on the leader's identification with the followers and also an emphasis on the collective identity enables the leader to demonstrate his belonging to the same collectivity and to posit himself as a "representative character" as well as a potential role model, according to the previous examples.

It is commonly understood that the sense of familiarity, attachment, and preference for certain characteristics displayed by a leader encourages and persuades a person to want to be identified with this leader and the group.

In summary, definitely, regarding **the Elaboration Likelihood Model**, the persuader, the cue-giver, when he chooses the "peripheral route" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) in his discourses, tries to show the audience/ receivers that he is reliable, credible, and trustworthy presidential source cue and attractive communicator, the leader prototype.

The analysis of the data revealed one of the most significant finding **about the public opinion about the president and the role of the followers/addressees, the cue-takers, in the process**, according the results of research question 3.

The third finding concerning the associations between all the rhetorical constructs and the level of positive/negative public opinion about the president are in correlated with the mix of using rhetorical strategies by the presidents, the cue-givers, as well as the followers' perceptions of transformational and charismatic leadership behavior.

It should be noted that not to treat each rhetorical dimension separately in a linear line but the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

**Hence, the level of the integration between all the rhetorical strategies is significant to predict president's rating.** This finding comports with our own presumption: leaders that use various of rhetorical strategies in their speeches, are expected to have high popularity index, while leaders who use few rhetorical strategies are expected to have low popularity index.

**However, high use in Action, as conducted by Bush and Obama, provides higher positive rating.** So, the extent to which the leader engages the rhetorical strategy Action contributes to positive follower perceptions.

In the words of Follett (1949/1987): **Leader and followers are both following the invisible leader- the common purpose.** The best executives put this common purpose clearly before their group. Invisible leadership is defined as "leadership in which the common purpose, rather than any particular individual, is

the invisible leader that inspires leaders and followers to take action on its behalf' (Hickman & Sorensen, 2013, p. 1).

Burns (1978) saw leaders and followers working together in mutual growth through charismatic and transformational leadership. Thus the power of followers in relation to leaders in the leadership equation was born. Meindl (1990) highlighted the importance of placing equivalent weight on followers' perspectives in the leadership equation.

**This important finding, in the content analysis of the 2001-2020 United States presidential speeches, in the present investigation, sheds light on the role of followers in the leadership's process.**

Thus, regarding **the Model of Convincing and Persuading**, through the lens of the followers, Cattani (2020) explained that conviction is centered more on the addressee, refers primarily to the realm of thoughts and focuses on one's capacity of being convinced and evaluating rationally.

Leader effectiveness is usually based on ratings made by the leader's supervisor, peers, or subordinates (Day, 2012, p. 5). Presidential approval ratings are measured as the monthly average of the percentage of respondents who approve of the president's job performance according to the Gallup Poll (Eshbaugh-Soha, 2010a, p.5) **Presidents, strategically, emphasize advantageous issues with the hope of making those issues salient in the minds of voters** (Druckman et al., 2004; Murray, 2001).

In light of the above, regarding **the Elaboration Likelihood Model**, Mondak et al. (2004) theorized that in order to gain efficiency in political decision making, citizens rely on a great number of psychological models of information processing. **Research in political cognition has demonstrated that individual-level opinion moves in response to elite political signals such as source cues, cognitive heuristics, or simple rules of thumb, especially policy signals**

**transmitted by the president.** Citizens use a variety of heuristic shortcuts to simplify the often complex task of evaluating their political representatives (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001).

As noted by certain leadership scholars (Hogg, 2001; van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003) **leadership effectiveness is determined, by followers' perceptions of the degree to which the leader is seen as a member of their group with whom they share social identity,** and the capacity of the charismatic leadership to influence group members to contribute to group goals that is seen to derive from the distinctive charismatic qualities of a leader. That is, the best leaders are prototypical of the group - they not only seem to belong to it but also exemplify what makes the group distinct from and superior to rival groups. (Haslam et al., 2011). A leader is representative of attributes that are shared by in-group members but also that the leader is representative of those things that distinguish the in-group from other out-groups.

Effective leaders gain status and influence by representing the "we-ness" of the group: the norms, values, purposes and qualities that define our groups. leaders' effectiveness rests on their capacity to build and advance a sense of shared social identity (a sense of "us-ness") with those they are seeking to influence and to motivate.

Shamir and colleagues' "the motivational effects of charismatic leadership: a self- concept based theory" (1993, p. 588) gave followers a central place in implying that followers may actively choose a leader and decide to follow him or her, based on the extent to which the leader is perceived to represent their values and identities. Through the lens of the followers, once people have determined their group identification, it is expected for them to distinguish traits and norms which distinguish their group from others (Waheed & Baumgartner, 2014, p.93).

The findings indicated that persuasion was achieved by means of appeal to the followers perceive the leader as a role model; trustworthy, reliable, powerful and confident, through arousing positive emotions in the audience, making people feel part of a bigger purpose, establishing unity mainly through identifying core common values, establishing common ground with the audience and motivate them to action while linking them to a common purpose (Avolio & Bass, 1988; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Shamir et al., 1993).

**Most importantly, trust can be built between the charismatic leader and the followers when there is a perception that they have similar characteristics** (Zucker, 1986). Thoroughgood and Sawyer (2018) stated that followers "tended to choose the leader who they perceived to be most similar to them" (Breevaart, & de Vries, 2019) and accept the message only if the source is deemed "like minded" (Gilens, & Murakawa, 2002, p. 26).

In this regard, an important element in group members' willingness to follow a leader and be open to the leader's influence is the expectation that the leader acts with the group's best interest in mind. People will apply to politics the same information shortcuts they have learned to use throughout life (Downs, 1957; Nicholson, p. 2). When motivation and/or ability are low, relatively more shallow, "heuristic," or "peripheral route" processing will occur.

In sum, an example may clarify the nature of individual-level cue-based processing, when the presidents, the cue-givers, declared:

"... we can achieve that together. We can achieve it together" (Obama, 2015), or "We all have things we want to accomplish and promises to keep. Juntos podemos -- together we can" (Bush, 2001).

(e.g., Juntos Podemos, translation from Spanish to English: together we can), and "... together, we can achieve absolutely anything" (Trump, 2018), then the listeners, the cue-takers, may apply a variety of heuristic shortcuts such as:

**"The leader is clearly one of us"** (Haslam et al., 2011, p.75); **"The leader is doing it for us"** (Haslam et al., 2011, p. 126); "The leader looks like one of us"; **"We are all in it together"**; **"Together we can make a difference**, the leader represents what the group stands for!" (Haslam et al., 2011, p.95); "He is also prototypical of us"(Haslam et al., 2011, p.104), when making political decisions.

Overall, this study contributes to the existing knowledge concerning the leader- followers interaction. This model should provide leadership studies with a different way of looking at the leader- followers relationship through bi – directionality: downward toward followers and upward toward leaders, to whole picture, through merging the lenses.

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