

Rhetoric of Amateur Motivational Videos by AJ's Life YouTube Channel: A Positive and Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The study of rhetorical analysis has extensively been conducted on renowned orators such as politicians or celebrities, yet it seems to undermine that ordinary, non-famous people are capable of delivering powerful rhetoric of positive changes. This research analyzes six videos from an amateur motivational YouTube channel named "AJ's Life" on how it attempts to persuade its audience through empowering messages. Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) was used as the main framework to analyze the textual elements while also referencing Aristotelian rhetorical appeals to assess the persuasive power of the speeches. Taking account of the visuals, the videos were examined using Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to find out how they work together with the text. Results show that AJ from AJ's Life uses several strategies in his language to evoke persuasion, mainly through cultivating a sense of shared struggle as well as opening up to be vulnerable. Visually, the videos are taken in a candid style to enhance the genuineness of the speaker. AJ constructs himself as a figure of authenticity and relatability in efforts to gain trust, therefore allowing him to deliver positive messages in a sincere manner through shared lived experiences with his audience. Further research can be done in analyzing the audience's reception to validate his rhetoric or using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover underlying ideology and social values in the construction of AJ's messages.

Keywords: positive discourse analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, rhetoric, amateur motivational videos, AJ's Life

INTRODUCTION

Humans are natural-born storytellers, or as it is said "Homo narrans". Through poems, folklores, or fairy tales, storytelling has become the medium of human connection that shapes the world they live in (Niles, 1999). When one is eloquent enough to deliver a story to a lot of people, they are what would be called an 'orator'. With this skill comes the power to influence through words, or rhetorics. Greek philosopher Aristotle laid out the foundation of today's well-known method to make rhetoric successful. He posited that to successfully make people think or behave a certain way, one must be able to prove his credibility in the field (*ethos*), tap into the audience's emotions (*pathos*), and most importantly form well-thought reasoning of their arguments (*logos*) (Foss, 2018). This naturally suggests that experts in their fields, such as politicians to lawyers are among the most capable ones to deliver a persuasive speech. Indeed, as Lawrie (2021) stated that successful speeches, especially the ones that intend to motivate and deliver positive messages, are from famous people with expertise which also makes them more credible as they are able to speak from personal experiences.

The art of persuasion has long been performed and analyzed in the form of text up until recently when Hill and Helmers (2012) introduced "visual rhetoric", which takes visual elements in TV advertisements or movies into account and treats them as a valid form of persuading. This coincides with the rise of video-sharing sites such as YouTube in the past few decades where through digitally-shared sound and moving images, the dissemination of messages that can spread to a mass audience becomes easier than ever. Motivational speakers, then, take advantage of this by expanding their audience reach to the platform. Brendon Buchard is an exemplar of this, as examined by Mahmoudi and Meghezi (2022), having already established himself as a prominent motivational speaker beforehand, started to create self-help videos that have generated millions of views over the years.

On January 24th, 2025, a channel named "AJ's Life" uploaded its first video titled, "You'll see this when you're in between phases of life (then never again)". The motivational video is of an anonymous young man talking as he is walking on the streets for 2 minutes and 45 seconds. In just less than two months, the video successfully garnered 2.9 million views as

well as over 325 thousand likes. As rhetoric and its analysis has been extensively conducted on public figures with mass audience and strong persuasive skills, the existence of this video goes against the common notions of persuasion. This suggests that ordinary people as opposed to famous orators are also able to deliver powerful rhetoric to empower people, and that the videos by the channel are worth analyzing to find out how and why. Therefore, using the theory of Positive Discourse Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis, this research aims to analyze the language used by the channel AJ's Life in encouraging his audience to think and feel empowered through verbal and visual elements. It attempts to reveal:

1. How AJ's Life constructs his language to convey empowering messages and persuade its audience;
2. How the visual and textual elements work together to contribute to the motivational messages of the videos.

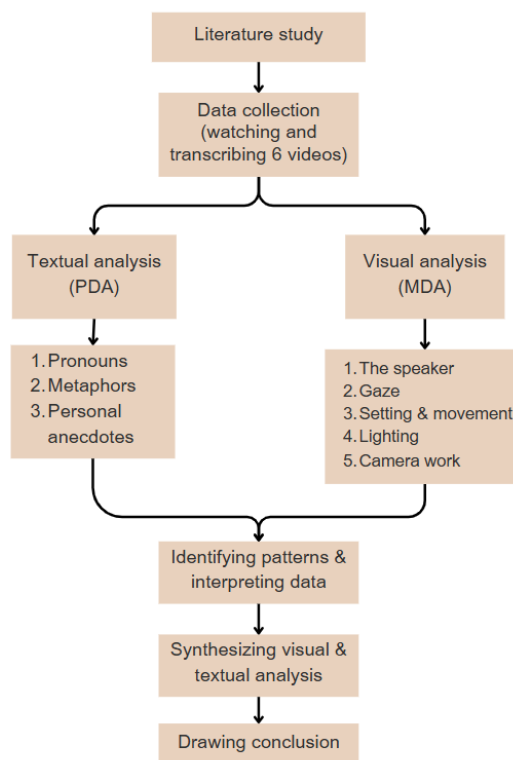
METHOD

This research uses the qualitative approach of Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) by Martin (2004) as the primary theoretical framework to analyze how language is used to construct positive and empowering messages for social transformation. Additionally, as motivational speeches aim to persuade people to think or behave a certain way, Aristotelian rhetorical appeals by Foss (2018) are also used to analyze the appeal to credibility (*ethos*), appeal to emotions (*pathos*), and appeal to logic (*logos*) used in AJ's Life videos. Lastly, this research uses multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) to take the visual elements of the videos to account in strengthening the rhetorical message.

The corpus was taken from the videos from a YouTube channel named AJ's Life (<https://www.youtube.com/@AJsLife25>). The channel was created on January 21st, 2025, and has been routinely posting motivational videos since then. This specific channel was chosen mainly due to the popularity of the first video posted titled "You'll see this when you're in between phases of life (then never again)". Uploaded three days after the channel's creation, the video has attained 2.9 million views and 332 thousand likes as of March 17th, 2025. Although created by an amateur motivational content creator, the video suggests that non-famous speakers are also able to deliver powerful rhetoric that is worth analyzing. This research will also analyze five other videos from the channel, which are "You find out by doing, not by thinking", "You experience the life you FOCUS on...", "The path will illuminate as you walk it", "Watch this if you're in a season of no (rant that I will probably delete)", and "This is killing our

dreams". These videos were chosen due to their consistent motivational themes of finding oneself and navigating life and a length that is compact of no longer than 3 minutes on average. In total, the videos are 17 minutes and 4 seconds in length and contain about 3000 words. Graphic 1 presents a systematic visualization of the methodology of this research.

Graphic 1
Research methodology



FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Textual Elements

1. Pronouns: I, You, and We

Positive Discourse Analysis looks at how language can build mutual connections to achieve social change (Martin, 2004). One of the ways AJ achieves this is by strategically using different pronouns to form a community of understanding and vulnerability with his audience. In the video titled "You'll see this when you're in between phases of life (then never again)," AJ started by saying:

"Alright, this video is for.. **you** young adults out there that are feeling kind of lost right now, and maybe it's not lost, maybe, maybe **you** know where **you're** going and where **you're** headed or at least **you** know a general direction but, **you're** not there yet, and **you're** starting to wonder like, "Is this ever going to happen for me?""

This opening sentence of the video serves as a way to directly address the audience in which AJ is targeting. By using the pronoun 'you', he tries to engage young adults into paying attention to what he says by identifying them and stating the struggles they might be going through. AJ is describing what they might feel like, which are feeling lost or uncertain of the future of their lives. He then is able to gain trust from his audience as he successfully captures their current situation. AJ creates a sense of connection as he acknowledges his audience's struggles. They are also prompted to reflect what he addresses in their own lives. Therefore, the strategy AJ uses to engage with his audience is with the pronoun 'you' so they get to listen to him, which aligns with the Aristotelian appeal of *ethos* as AJ establishes credibility of speaking by showing that he understands his audience's background and emotions (Foss, 2018). Not just by understanding, AJ also shares what he currently feels. He achieves this by using the pronoun "I" to tell his own story. In the same video, he states:

"**I'm** going through a similar season that's why **I'm** making this video because surely there's somebody else out there that is feeling the same way, you know, you, you have a lot of drive, you had a, have a lot of ambition, things just haven't clicked for you yet, **I** guess ... That's how it's felt for **me** lately and, **I** don't necessarily think that that's a bad thing."

By using the pronoun 'I', AJ does two things in amplifying his positive message. Firstly, using first person pronouns allows AJ to personalize his narrative according to what he feels and experiences. He shares his own story and describes what he had been feeling that motivates him to create the video beforehand. This way, he builds transparency and gives the audience their turn to understand AJ— creating a shared understanding of problems. Secondly, AJ is able to open up about his feelings which makes him vulnerable. Through vulnerability, AJ connects to a deeper level with his audience that constructs him as a genuine and complex human with feelings. This further creates and reinforces his authenticity as a person which makes him more credible and deserving to be listened to. Lastly, AJ utilizes inclusive pronoun of 'We', such as in the video "Watch this if you're in a season of no (rant that I will probably delete)":

"**We** can go do that if we absolutely wanted to, but **we're** in a season right now where **we're** choosing not to, uh, because our finances aren't where

we want them.”

The use of inclusive pronouns is an attempt to connect with the audience that they are in the same situation as him. It suggests a sense of shared responsibility (Hakansson, 2012) and that AJ wants them to know that they are united in one struggle together and that they have a shared goal. This way, AJ positions himself not as an authority figure but as a fellow peer going through the same problem. AJ is able to control and uplift his audience by creating a sense of community of the same vision in order to navigate their lives as young adults together. Table 1 presents data of the use of pronouns in all of the six videos, in which “I” functions as establishing credibility and vulnerability, “You” is for identifying the audience, and “We” is for building a sense of collectiveness. The absence of inclusive pronoun “We” in the videos 2, 3, and 4 can be interpreted as AJ’s choice to position himself more as a mentor or guide, focusing on building credibility for himself (pronoun “I”) and leading the audience (pronoun “You”) to think and do certain ways.

Table 1

Example of the use of pronouns I, You, and We in the six videos analyzed

Video Title	Pronoun	Example
1. You’ll see this when you’re in between phases of life (then never again)	I	“ I’m going through a similar season that’s why I’m making this video ...”
	You	“And I hope that’s what keeps you going.”
	We	“I just think it means we’re aware, you know, we’re aware of the current season of life we’re in ...”
2. You find out by doing, not by thinking	I	“... so, where I got stuck for the longest time is hyperanalyzing every decision I was going to make ...”
	You	“And if you’re anything like me, you understand that you have to do shit to get shit.”
	We	N/A
3. You experience the life you FOCUS on...	I	“ I thought that that was like, extremely profound when I heard that ...”
	You	“... , so now that you’re seeing this video, and you have the option to choose, start hardwiring your brain ...”
	We	N/A
4. The path will	I	“If you think like me , ...”

illuminate as you walk it	You	"And you have to see the entire path before you even feel comfortable taking the first step, ..."
	We	N/A
5. Watch this if you're in a season of no (rant that I will probably delete)	I	"..., and I just wish I was there, I wish I was doing that, you know?"
	You	"I don't know if you guys are in a similar, like, situation or whatever, ..."
	We	"..., , but we're in a season right now where we're choosing not to, uh, because our finances aren't where we want them."
6. This is killing our dreams	I	"If I did that, I would be a 100 times better off than I am right now, ..."
	You	"The gap between where you are right now and where you want to go is simply being able to execute on what's in front of you ."
	We	"There's a good chance you know exactly what you need to do but something, is holding us back, ..."

2. Metaphors and Analogies

To make his messages easier for the audience to understand his points, AJ used several metaphors and analogies in his speeches. One of these appeared in three of the six videos analyzed, which is using the word "season" to describe life phases. In the video "The path will illuminate as you walk it," he says:

"... but you're also, like, in a **season of your life** where you're seeking answers ..."

In this context, AJ describes the life phase using the word "season". This is a metaphoric expression in which he puts an emphasis on the fact that life uncertainties are temporary and will eventually pass like seasons of a year. The audience is then given an optimistic view, as AJ wants them to know that they will also be able to go through the life phases just like he does. Rather than seeing the difficult moments of life as permanent or hopeless, AJ encourages his audience to reframe how they see their lives so that they are motivated to keep pushing through. The same metaphor also appears in the video titled "Watch this if you're in a season of no (rant that I will probably delete)":

“..., we can go do that if we absolutely wanted to, but we're in a **season** right now where we're choosing not to.”

By describing a present situation as a “season” that prohibits him to do something, AJ acknowledges that someday, he will be able to do that certain thing as the “season” will eventually pass. This metaphor signals a positive message to the audience who will be convinced that their limitations in life will also go away eventually. Additionally, this aligns with the Aristotelian appeal to emotions (*pathos*). In using the word “season” to describe life uncertainties, AJ opens himself up to be vulnerable and invites the audience to connect with him in a deeper emotional state as they can also relate to the idea that difficult times are temporary, enhancing relatability (Foss, 2018). This metaphor is most used by AJ, also appearing in “You’ll see this when you’re in between phases of life (then never again)” (see Table 2) and occurring in three out of six videos. Another metaphorical expression he uses is observed in the video “The path will illuminate as you walk it,” in which he says:

“And you have to see the entire path before you even feel comfortable taking the first step, and let me tell you that is a **prison**. **You are living in your own prison ...**”

In the full context, AJ directly compares the state of waiting to figure everything out before actually doing something as being in a prison. The word “prison” carries a strong connotation of being physically and mentally confined. He frames the reluctance to start doing action as a self-imposed form of suffering as prison is the place where people are locked up as a result of punishment. Although this metaphor carries a negative meaning, AJ strategically attempts to encourage his audience towards self-awareness. By framing inaction as something restrictive and self-damaging, AJ aims to motivate the audience to undergo a radical shift in way of thinking and doing. Table 2 presents examples of metaphors found in all the six videos.

Table 2
Example of metaphors in the six videos analyzed alongside explanation of function

Video Title	Metaphor	Function
1. You’ll see this when you’re in between phases of life (then never again)	“I just think it means we're aware, you know, we're aware of the current season of life we're in.”	Frames difficult moments in life as something temporary

2. You find out by doing, not by thinking	"Perfectionism, and what that did was, created a huge mental roadblock to actually putting something out into the world, ..."	Emphasizes perfectionism as a significant hindrance of growth
3. You experience the life you FOCUS on...	"... start hardwiring your brain to focus on the good things in life, and I promise everything around you will change."	Encourages radical change by adopting a new mindset to be better
4. The path will illuminate as you walk it	"And you have to see the entire path before you even feel comfortable taking the first step, ..."	Frames life as a journey to be ventured on with an end destination/goal
5. Watch this if you're in a season of no (rant that I will probably delete)	"I'm kind of everywhere right now, ..."	Shows vulnerability by describing the feeling of mentally disorganized
6. This is killing our dreams	"Procrastination is killing my dreams."	Emphasizes procrastination to have a destructive effect on achieving life goals

Beyond words or phrases, AJ also uses several extended metaphors or analogies in explaining his points to be better understood. In the video "The path will illuminate as you walk it," AJ presents an analogy of driving to prove that navigating life is just to trust the immediate circumstances and not thinking too much about the uncertain future. He explains that when someone is driving at night, the headlights do not lighten the entire pathway but instead only reveal the path in front of them. He argues that the person will continue driving anyway as the headlights will eventually guide them to the destination, and he wants his audience to think about life the same way by not worrying too much about what is beyond the current circumstances. A similar strategy occurs in the video "You'll see this when you're in between phases of life (then never again)," where AJ presents an analogy of being lost in the woods to convince that progress begins by taking action (in this case, start walking around) so that one can know which direction they are going in life. Lastly, in the video "You experience the life you FOCUS on..." AJ highlights the audience's agency to see the world positively or negatively by describing a metaphor of walking: He argues that someone can focus on their knee pain when walking or rather be grateful to have a pair of legs that allows them to walk. The three analogies function as a complementary argument in order to strengthen his motivational messages. Positive discourse is seen in all three analogies that AJ

encourages the audience to focus on progressing and upholding optimism. Moreover, he uses simple action-based metaphors, such as walking and driving, as those activities are what young adults commonly do every day in their lives in commuting to school or work. There are two effects that can be observed: first, the audience are able to understand AJ's messages more clearly, second, AJ further strengthens his relatable persona as he uses mundane examples that most of his audience go through every day, making the metaphors relevant and accessible. Ultimately, encouraging messages are effectively carried out by AJ as he constructs analogies that make his arguments stronger. Additionally, according to Aristotelian rhetorical appeals by Foss (2018), this can be categorized as *logos* and *ethos*, as AJ presents coherent and logical metaphors to support his messages that could not be easily refuted (*logos*) and the relatability of the metaphors makes him a credible speaker to be listened to (*ethos*).

3. Personal Anecdotes

As a way to construct compelling narratives, AJ is shown to share his personal anecdotes in his videos several times. In "Watch this if you're in a season of no (rant that I will probably delete)" which talks about how he is trying to limit self-indulgence and wishing a financially more stable life, he starts his speech by saying:

"Alright, I got a vent for just a second. Um, I was just walking downtown where I live, dropping off a package for my girl, um, at UPS. It was in the middle of a huge shopping and dining district, very nice, and I just see a bunch of people around me being social, eating at great restaurants, having a good time, the food smells good, and I just wish I was there, I wish I was doing that, you know?"

In conveying his message to the audience in the video, AJ sets out a background context of what triggers him by telling his personal observations, which is that he wished to be like the people at restaurants he saw prior who do not have to worry about expenses to go out and eat. He creates a narrative that can be seen as spontaneous as he immediately makes a video talking about it then sharing his thoughts. This allows AJ as a motivator to be seen on a deeper level because he is also sharing his personal stories in making positive messages that the audience might feel related to. The spontaneity of his anecdote can be also argued to help construct AJ as a more authentic person. Furthermore, the choice of AJ to "vent" (expressing strong emotions in form of words) shows his attempt to establish trust to his audience by letting the audience see a more sensitive, vulnerable side of him. AJ positions himself again as a peer to the audience

that wants to express his frustrations in life, the same strategy he uses with the use of inclusive pronouns discussed previously. In the near end of the video, he ends his vent with a positive message:

“And, and to be honest, I’m glad that I just did that. I’m glad I went there. I’m glad I’m feeling this way because it, it, it’s pulling me to achieve that even more so.”

By expressing that his ventings are something to be happy about, AJ cultivates a positive environment for the audience as they are able to see that the same frustration they might be going through is something to not be ashamed of, but to reframe it as a power to motivate.

Another instance of sharing personal stories occurs in the video “This is killing my dreams.” AJ starts the video saying that he is having a problem with getting his tasks done due to procrastinating. He suggests that this might be caused by ADHD or low attention span due to social media after researching and it has impacted him so much that it is “killing his dreams.” In the end, AJ tries to provide a solution he heard from a podcast by starting to do immediate tasks, saying “The gap between where you are right now and where you want to go is simply being able to execute on what’s in front of you.” As explained above, AJ tries to make the audience empathize with him by showing vulnerability through his story of struggling with procrastination. He creates a narrative that is easy to be followed and prompts the likened audience to relate with him. The discursive choice of AJ to present his personal stories fits well into the Aristotelian appeal of *pathos*. By letting himself open up to being vulnerable, AJ taps into the audience’s emotions so that they can empathize while also prompting them to reflect on themselves and relate on his struggles. (Foss, 2018). Table 3 summarizes all personal anecdotes AJ gives in the six videos.

Table 3
Personal anecdotes found in the six videos, summarized

Video Title	Personal Anecdote
1. You’ll see this when you’re in between phases of life (then never again)	N/A
2. You find out by doing, not by thinking	AJ shares perfectionism made him overthink and overanalyze his decisions to the point that it hinders him in making real progress in life.
3. You experience the life you FOCUS on...	N/A

4. The path will illuminate as you walk it	N/A
5. Watch this if you're in a season of no (rant that I will probably delete)	AJ vents to the audience and says that wishes his finances were in a better condition.
6. This is killing our dreams	AJ tells his struggle with procrastination and how it prevents him from being productive, looking up things like ADHD or short attention span to explain his problem.

Visual Elements

As the motivational content is carried out by AJ in the form of videos, is it then important to take visual elements into account on how they work together with the text to make meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

1. The Speaker

All six motivational videos analyzed from the YouTube channel AJ's Life feature a young man speaking to the camera, from which it is assumed that the man is AJ himself as the creator of the videos (Pictures 1-6). As AJ himself is physically a young person, he is able to gain credibility through the shared experiences with the audience of young adults in his speeches. The positioning of the speaker is mostly the same: he occupies the center of the frame for all videos from the start to finish. The audience can only see the upper part of his body which is his shoulders and his face. The limited view of AJ's frame gives a sense of closeness and intimacy to the audience, ensuring that the audience's attention is always locked into him as he speaks.

Picture 1

"You'll see this when you're in between phases of life (then never again)"



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

Picture 2

"You find out by doing, not by thinking"



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

Picture 3

"You experience the life you FOCUS on..."



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

Picture 4

"The path will illuminate as you walk it"



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

Picture 5

"Watch this if you're in a season of no (rant that I will probably delete)"



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

Picture 6

"This is killing our dreams"



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

In terms of physical appearance, AJ is seen to be wearing different attires throughout the videos. Pictures 1-3 shows him to be wearing the same outfit: a black hoodie and a pink under shirt. In Picture 1, he is seen with earphones, while in Picture 2 he is not covering his head with the hoodie. He is wearing a jacket over a blue under shirt as well as a turned-around baseball cap in Picture 4. In Picture 5, AJ is wearing a black shirt and a watch while in Picture 6, he is shown to be only wearing a sleeveless shirt. These clothes that he wears are considered to be casual attire and it is closely related to young adults who prioritizes comfort and individuality. As

a young adult, AJ wears clothes that he feels comfortable in and automatically his audience of the same age will also resonate to his fashion. Moreover, his choice to put a low-effort look in his attire can reflect his attempt to be authentic and unstaged. This works well with the message of relatability and vulnerability he shares that has been discussed in the previous sections. The clothes AJ is wearing in the videos help to present himself as an approachable figure so that the audience can feel welcomed to hear what he wants to say.

2. Gaze

In multimodality, gaze is discussed by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) by determining whether a person looks at the camera/audience or not. In his videos, AJ utilizes both direct and avoiding eye contact to help convey his messages, but he utilizes indirect gaze for the most part.

In the video “This is killing my dreams”, AJ shares his struggle with procrastination and how it is hindering his goals. While talking, he is seen to be looking elsewhere and not towards the camera (see Picture 7). The choice of avoiding direct eye contact can be seen as an “offer” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) in which the audience is prompted to observe and reflect on what is shown on frame. Through the lack of direct gaze, AJ gives the audience the power and opportunity to “scrutinize” him and try to reflect on him candidly. This further creates vulnerability as it works together with the personal struggle he is sharing at the same time.

Picture 7

AJ looking away from the camera while talking



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

On the other hand, AJ utilizes direct eye contact in some parts of his videos (see Picture 8). In the video “You find out by doing, not by thinking,”

AJ wraps up his speech by using imperative language to motivate action, “start lifting weights, start, you know, making calls, talking to people, sending DMs, getting connected with people that you want to get connected with, ... Don't overthink it, cause there's not enough time,” and while doing so, he looks directly at the audience. In this example, AJ seeks to establish direct connection with the audience, or a “demand” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). It is a form of call to action utilized by AJ ensuring that the audience is engaged with him as well as internalizing what he says. Moreover, it can be seen that direct eye contact functions as a subtle authoritative power from AJ so that the audience starts doing in line with his message, therefore influencing their behavior.

The choice of AJ to mostly maintain an indirect gaze and occasional direct gaze in his videos can be interpreted in synergy with his approach of motivation which is to be non-judgemental but also casually encouraging to take action.

Picture 8

AJ establishes eye contact by looking directly at the camera



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

3. Setting and Movement

Beyond the speaker which takes the foreground part, it is also important to take the background setting and the action of the speaker themselves into account. In the six videos analyzed, it is found that five videos take place in a city setting while one video takes place in a car. For example, Picture 9 is taken from the video “You find out by doing, not by thinking,” and skyscrapers can be observed in the background. The skyscrapers suggest that AJ is residing in a city, which symbolizes the urban life where a lot of young people seek opportunities in, therefore enhancing relatability to his audience of young adults.

In the videos that take place outside, AJ is seen to be walking along the streets while talking. The act of walking that AJ does can be interpreted

as a supporting tool of the theme of “start doing and stop thinking” that he discusses in his videos. Additionally, AJ incorporates his action of walking as a rhetorical strategy observed in the video “You experience the life you FOCUS on...” To give an example in strengthening his argument, AJ says, “for example, I’m walking right now, this is a very stupid example I feel like but, I’m walking right now, I got a little knee pain,” and goes to explain that it is one’s choice to focus on the positives or negatives of their lives. By creating a spontaneous analogy of his movement of walking that can be observed visually by the audience, AJ creates a compelling argument that is both based on practical examples as well as making it easier to understand.

Additionally, one video features AJ speaking in a car which is “Watch this if you’re in a season of no (rant that I will probably delete)” (see Picture 10). The video starts with him saying “All right, I got a vent for just a second. Um, I was just walking downtown where I live, dropping off a package for my girl, um, at UPS” as he drives throughout the video. It can be interpreted that the speech of “venting” that AJ gives while visually driving shows that he attempts to look candid and grounded to real-life experiences so that the audience will think that he is giving a raw and unstaged speech. Therefore, the spontaneity of the visual movements done by AJ (whether walking or driving) contributes in strengthening his rhetorical messages by creating a sense of casualness and authenticity.

Picture 9

Buildings seen on the background



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

Picture 10

AJ driving in a car while talking



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

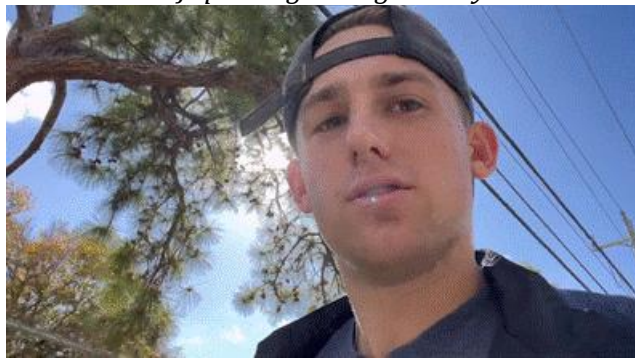
4. Lighting

Lighting can contribute to the overall atmosphere or mood of a multimodal text. It is found that five videos have a dark lighting as they are recorded at nighttime. The choice of AJ to record most of his videos at night can be interpreted as a stylistic one. Nighttime is commonly associated with rest and reflection, and by telling stories in this time, AJ attempts to build a narrative as someone who seeks to express his thoughts after a busy day to his audience. This setting strengthens the sense of intimacy and contemplation that AJ builds through his speeches. Moreover, AJ’s persona as a relatable figure is reinforced as he portrays himself as someone who

reflects on life like his audience at nighttime when distractions fade and periods of self-reflection occurs. However, one video, "The path will illuminate as you walk it," has a well-lit lighting due to it being recorded during the day (see Picture 11). AJ's choice to record the video at daytime can be understood because the bright environment goes on theme with the topic of the speech he specifically gives in the video, which is about building self-confidence in oneself to start navigating life by walking "the path of life" and trusting their own journeys.

Picture 11

AJ speaking during the day



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

5. Camera Work

Camera work looks at the positioning, framing, as well as the way a scene is shot in conveying messages. Picture 12 and 13 shows AJ occupying the central portion of the frame. This is called a close shot where AJ fills most of the screen and that the audience can only see his head and shoulder, making him the focus of the videos. The close distance that AJ maintains with the camera creates a sense of intimacy as his facial expressions and gaze can be seen more clearly. AJ tries to establish a relation to the audience as an empathetic and vulnerable peer whom he feels comfortable to share struggles with through this close shot. The camera distance positions AJ to have a one-on-one conversation with the audience if it was a reality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The camera work is shaky for all videos as he is recording while walking, except in "Watch this if you're in a season of no (rant that I will probably delete)" where the camera is stationed inside a car (see Picture 13). It can be presumed that AJ is recording the videos with a handheld camera (such as a smartphone). This shaky camera technique suggests a feeling of unpreparedness, reinforcing AJ's authenticity who positions himself as a genuine person with the same level as the audience. Moreover, all of the videos are mostly raw footage, in which major editing could not be

observed except for a few cuts to merge two footages into one observed in the videos “You find out by doing, not by thinking,” “The path will illuminate as you walk it,” and “This is killing our dreams”. Combined with the setting and movement that has been discussed above, the stylistic choices of AJ in creating the videos analyzed suggest that he is doing a personal video call with his audience, creating a sense of intimacy.

Picture 12

AJ using a handheld camera



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

Picture 13

AJ puts the camera in a car



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

Speaking of camera height, the videos are shot with a low angle, which means the audience is lower than AJ as the subject in a vertical level (see Picture 14). Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) describes this angle as a relationship “in which the represented participant has power over the interactive participant.” This means that power difference exists between AJ and his audience. The low angle shot suggests a sense of authority from AJ as he is the creator and speaker for his videos, but if other modalities discussed above are taken into account, this functions to reinforce AJ's persona as someone who is down-to-earth but also trying to persuade his audience to listen and take action in accordance of his motivational speeches.

Picture 14

Low angle shot of AJ



Source: YouTube (AJ's Life)

CONCLUSION

In conveying positive and empowering messages, AJ from the YouTube channel “AJ’s Life” shapes his language and presents himself visually in a way that constructs a persuasive nature to his audience of young adults through relatability and authenticity. This research finds that AJ utilizes the pronoun ‘I’ to evoke emotional responses, ‘you’ to directly identify and address his target audience, and ‘we’ to establish a sense of community of shared struggle. AJ also makes use of metaphors and analogies to frame his arguments to be more clearly understood. Lastly, through the act of sharing personal anecdotes, AJ is able to gain empathy from his audience as he opens up to be vulnerable and personalises his argument. Beyond the text, through a multimodal analysis of the six different motivational videos, it is found that AJ relies on constructing a sense of familiarity by ensuring that everything the audience sees is relatable and narratively coherent. The videos are filmed candidly, such as AJ wearing casual clothes, having a familiar city backdrop, giving spontaneous examples based on what is shown in the camera, and filming them while doing other mundane actions to give an unstaged feel.

This research sheds light on how amateur motivational speakers like AJ from “AJ’s Life” have the means to influence people using textual and visual rhetorics, bringing a perspective of the widely unspoken belief that only famous orators such as celebrities or politicians are able to deliver powerful speeches. Instead of constructing as someone with authority or expertise, AJ positions himself as a fellow peer who shares real lived experiences to his audience. This makes AJ an authentic persona that allows him to deliver compelling positive messages through casual means in social media. However, as discourse is inherently contextual and not limited to only the speaker and message, aspects such as the audience themselves and their receptions are not discussed in this research. It is also important to take AJ’s social background into account, such as his race and gender, as factors that influence and shape his motivational discourse. Future research could benefit from using other theoretical frameworks like CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) to uncover how AJ’s identity, ideology, and underlying social values are constructed and pushed to the audience.

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