

## The Analysis of Rhetorical Devices in Two Tesla Promotional Videos

Jihan Nurul Savira Alyanto<sup>1</sup>, Samuel Gunawan<sup>2</sup>

English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries, Petra Christian University, Siwalankerto 121- 131, Surabaya, 60236, INDONESIA

E-mail: a11180087@john.petra.ac.id<sup>1</sup>, samgun@petra.ac.id<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to discover the rhetorical devices Elon Musk used when delivering Tesla promotional videos, namely the *Tesla Unveils Model 3* and *Tesla Semi & Roadster Unveil*. This study also wants to examine the messages that are underscored by the use of rhetorical devices. In this study, the writer used Harris' (2018) theory of rhetorical devices as the leading theory. The study was done by applying qualitative content analysis (QCA). The study showed that Elon Musk utilized climax, asyndeton, polysyndeton, sentential adverb, exemplum, amplification, anaphora, and hypophora in *Tesla Unveils Model 3*. Rhetorical devices such as climax, asyndeton, sentential adverb, exemplum, amplification, anaphora, and hypophora are found in *Tesla Semi & Roadster Unveil*. However, the data regarding polysyndeton is non-existent in *Tesla Semi & Roadster Unveil*. Each rhetorical device employed by Elon Musk helped underscore the messages in both videos. Ultimately, rhetorical devices affect the promotional video positively as they help amplify the meaning of the speech.

**Keywords:** rhetorical devices; elon musk; tesla

### INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is the man's public utterance, public issuing (Carnegie, 2018). Nevertheless, in terms of time and importance, the speaker needs to be, think, and feel things worthy of being put out. In this context, things can be defined as a problem that currently exists and occurs at the moment and needs to be addressed. According to Carwile (2012), public speaking has three aims: to inform, persuade, and entertain. During a public speaking activity, "a speaker always proposes something in his or her speech, whether it is implicit or explicit" (Taping et al., 2017). Public speaking aims to deliver the message to the target audience in an engaging manner so it will impact the audience. Public speaking may also help the company establish itself as an industry authority and raise brand recognition among its target audience.

To achieve sales, promotion is crucial in achieving the company's main goal. In this context, public speaking in a business setting can be used to gather employees, shareholders, consumers, or the general public. As a result, this is a crucial chance to inspire, enlighten, convince, and re-excite the audience about a certain issue. Utilizing public speaking in the business sphere can be an effective marketing tactic as it becomes an opportunity to enunciate one's brand publicly.

However, solely communicating the idea is not enough. Since the messages that the company wants to deliver should be able to entice people, rhetorical devices are a way to enhance

communication. Harris believes that knowing how to employ rhetoric well will help one become a better writer, which can also lead to a more effective communicator (2018).

The writer's curiosity was sparked when contemplating on why rhetorical devices are mostly used and most popular only in political spheres and only popular among storytellers who pour their thoughts into words. Thus, this study serves as a way for the writer to examine how rhetorical devices are utilized to promote a product. Specifically, for this study, the writer examined the utilization of rhetorical devices in electric car promotional videos. Furthermore, the writer also highlighted the underlying messages behind the electric car promotional videos. Additionally, showing how rhetorical devices achieve one of the three aims of public speaking, which is to inform, persuade, and entertain, also drives the writer to embark on this study.

## METHOD

The writer employed qualitative content analysis (QCA). The data source were two videos of Tesla electric vehicles promotion titled *Tesla Unveils Model 3* and *Tesla Semi & Roadster Unveil*. The data were the transcripts containing rhetorical devices from two videos of Tesla electric vehicles promotion. The speaker of those two videos is delivered by Elon Musk.

The writer applied several steps to collect the data. First, the writer watched the two videos mentioned in Table 3.1 on their original source: YouTube. Then, the writer began the manual transcription of two of the chosen videos because no valuable source provided a complete and correct transcription of the videos. In addition, there were no official subtitles provided for those three chosen videos. Thus, the writer transcribed each of the videos manually. The writer utilized auto-generated captions (CC) on YouTube, playback speed on YouTube, and Google Docs to put the transcription. The writer set the speed of the video from 1x (actual speed) to 0.75 (slightly slower). Sometimes the writer had to set the video even slower (0.5) to understand the difficult terminology that was used by Elon Musk. The manual transcription process began on the second of September 2022 to the sixth of September 2022. After the manual transcription, the writer began putting each utterance into a table. The final step was the analysis of each rhetorical device in accordance to Harris (2018) theory that the writer had chosen for this study, specifically emphasis I (climax, asyndeton, polysyndeton, sentential adverb), clarity (exemplum, amplification), restatement I (anaphora), and transition (hypophora). The writer also applied coding systems in order to determine the data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings of this study regarding what types of rhetorical devices are used in Elon Musk's videos under study, and what sort of messages are underscored by the use of rhetorical devices.

### Types of rhetorical devices

The rhetorical devices featured in video 1 are emphasis I (climax, asyndeton, polysyndeton, sentential adverb), clarity (exemplum and amplification), transition (hypophora), and restatement I (anaphora). In video 2, the emphasis I rhetorical devices (climax, asyndeton, sentential adverb) are

found except for polysyndeton. In addition, clarity (exemplum and amplification), transition (hypophora), and restatement I (anaphora) are also found in video 2.

### Underscored messages

The use of rhetorical devices influences the messages delivered through Tesla's electric vehicle promotional video in various ways. However, through rhetorical devices, Elon Musk has similar goals: to highlight, accentuate, and stress messages. Elon Musk also utilizes rhetorical devices to express the concerns of real-life situations regarding combustion vehicles emission, which brings the earth closer to the climate crisis. To avoid climate catastrophe, Elon Musk introduces Tesla electric vehicles as a way to transition from combustion cars towards sustainable and environmentally safe electric vehicles. Furthermore, Elon Musk also highlights Tesla electric vehicles, specifically electric trucks, as superior to others in the similar industry through comparison.

### Climax

The first rhetorical device in emphasis I is climax. Harris (2018) states that climax is beneficial to generate emphasis and gives strength to the idea by utilizing climactic order.

1.1.1: “We have record high CO<sub>2</sub> levels, we recently passed over 403 parts per million CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. You can see the chart and it looks like a vertical line, and it’s still climbing and the last time [stutters] there was this level of carbon concentration was 11 million years ago. Okay? That was approximately when primates started walking upright, the world was very different. **We do not want to return to that situation and what that CO<sub>2</sub> increase results in is a steadily increasing temperature. So, we’ve already increased by two degrees. In fact, that doesn’t tell the whole story because the extremes of temperature increased by as much as 20 degrees and that line is going to keep going for some time in the future.**”

The message that Elon Musk wants to underline through the use of climax as exemplified in 1.1.1 is to fearmonger the audience as the climate crisis worsens as years go by. This statement of Elon Musk becomes a reality as the World Meteorological highlights that in 2021 concentrations of the primary greenhouse gases- carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide - hit new highs (2022). Specifically, the harsher consequences of excessive carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere may cause warmer temperatures. Elon Musk showcases his prediction that is currently happening worldwide. To reduce the carbon footprint, Tesla was born to “... accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy” (Tesla, n.d.). Thus, by fear mongering the general public, they can feel the sense of urgency to start transitioning towards sustainable energy, and Tesla is the answer to this.

2.1.8 “Now a Diesel truck is twice as expensive as a Semi. What this means is it’s not just economic suicide to use one Diesel truck, it’s economic suicide for rail. This beats rail! [Comparison between Diesel and Semi is shown again on the screen] That’s I think really quite profound, **we’re confident that this is a product that is better in every way from a future standpoint that wins on economics against Diesel trucks in a worst-case scenario and that defeats rail in a convoy scenario and production begins 2019. So, if you order now, get the truck in two years. Right, so that’s the Tesla Semi. I hope you guys enjoyed what you saw! All right guys take it away! Thank you! Thanks!**”

The message that Elon Musk wants to underline through the use of climax as exemplified in 2.1.8, is to display superiority over Diesel trucks by providing lists of comparisons to Diesel trucks through climactic order. In this utterance, Elon Musk stated that Tesla Semi would provide a substantially better experience for truck drivers while enhancing safety and drastically lowering cargo transport costs. Elon Musk informs the audience of the climate change situation that concerns the public at large. Thus, through his products, the idea of climate crisis can slowly be reduced due to Tesla's vision of sustainability which also correlates to the Paris Agreement on fully implementing technological development and transfer for both strengthening climate resilience and lowering Carbon footprint (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, n.d.). The climax is also beneficial to persuade the audience by emphasizing the superiority of the Tesla Semi compared to its competitor, namely the Diesel truck.

### **Asyndeton**

The second rhetorical device of emphasis I is asyndeton. Harris defines asyndeton as a list of things with no conjunctions that create the impression of unplanned multiplicity and a spontaneous rather than strained description (2018). Asyndeton can be particularly effective and more emphatic when the items in a list are arranged in climactic order. This is exemplified as follows:

#### **1.2.1 “We made the Roadster which is fast, it’s beautiful, it’s got great performance.”**

Elon Musk stated that in order to break the mold in which electric vehicles lack in performance and design, Tesla is here with the innovation in order to prove the statement wrong. As exemplified in 1.2.1, Elon Musk wants to display the superiority of the Tesla Roadster that other vehicles do not have. Furthermore, the Tesla Roadster may become the innovation to prove that electric cars can indeed have the best of both worlds: capability and design.

#### **2.2.3 “It’s a clutter of third-party devices, it’s very difficult to use, it requires integration, installation, these things don’t talk to each other, It’s- it’s- a pain in the neck, it has significant app, significant add-on costs....”**

Whereas, as exemplified in 2.2.3, Elon Musk utilizes asyndeton to stress Diesel trucks' complicated and difficult third-party devices, which also led to frustration towards himself due to the shortcomings that Diesel trucks have. The repetition of ‘and’ evokes the sense of piling up which brought the attention to the idea that Elon Musk wants the general public to grasp; electric vehicles can have the best of both worlds in terms of performance and magnificence. Essentially, Elon Musk wants to persuade the audience that the Tesla Semi is worth the money.

### **Polysyndeton**

Polysyndeton utilizes conjunction to produce the impression of purposeful piling up, of one-added-to-another multiplicity (Harris, 2018). This is exemplified as follows:

1.3.3 “**And** before the roadster, people thought an electric car would be slow **and** ugly and low-range **and** have bad performance **and** we had to break that mold.”

As exemplified in 1.3.3, Elon Musk accentuates the features and capabilities of Tesla electric vehicles, specifically Tesla Roadster. In addition, the repetition of ‘and’ evokes the sense of piling up which brought attention to the idea that Elon Musk wants the general public to grasp; electric vehicles can have the best of both worlds in terms of performance and magnificence.

1.3.5 “It’s tested by Road **and** Track **and** Motor Trend **and** others as the fastest four-door cars in history.”

As exemplified in 1.3.5, Elon Musk accentuates Tesla Model S superiority in terms of its agility. This proves that Tesla is never satisfied with the achievements they have obtained and certainly not for awards, “...It was important was not to achieve, you know awards or anything like that, it was to just show the car industry, show the world that an electric car really can be the best car...” (Tesla, 2016). Elon Musk wants to emphasize that Tesla will continue to vanquish over time and also grow in line with market demand and accentuate sustainability behind every product of the company. Thus, the innovation of electric cars is the way to prove Tesla’s capability as a company and to break stereotypes of electric cars which is “...**slow and ugly and low-range and have bad performance...**” (Tesla, 2016).

### Sentential adverb

The last rhetorical device of emphasis I is the sentential adverb. Harris described a sentential adverb as a word or brief phrase that frequently interrupts a sentence and is used to emphasize the words immediately before and to follow the sentential adverb (2018). This is exemplified as follows:

1.4.4 “...so we actually have an S and an X on the side there **and of course** the Falcon wing doors which did cause us some challenges, but now it’s working.”

As exemplified in 1.4.4, the placement of ‘of course’ in the middle of the explanation generates a forced pause, together with the sentential adverb itself, which brings focus and emphasis to that part of the sentence. Elon Musk underlines the improvement of the Tesla Model S and Tesla Model X. Elon Musk also expresses the struggle towards achieving the falcon wing doors towards the audience purposely to persuade the audience that Tesla is a responsive company when it comes to its products to suit its customers and target market.

2.4.9 “**I think** really quite profound, we’re confident that this is a product that is better in every way from a future standpoint that wins on economics against Diesel trucks in a worst-case scenario and that defeats rail in a convoy scenario and production begins 2019.”

As exemplified in 2.4.9, the use of ‘I think’ signals that Elon Musk wants to persuade the public that the Tesla Semi is much superior to Diesel trucks in terms of the low cost of ownership, massive range, and brilliant performance.

### Exemplum

As a device of clarity, Harris stated that exemplum supplies a specific detail to enable the audience to perceive an idea or concept in their imagination through examples (2018). Exemplum allows the speaker to elaborate on abstract discussions that are often difficult to follow. A relevant case, application, tale, or other types of examples can make a merely abstract subject or concept simpler to understand (Harris, 2018). This is exemplified as follows:

**1.5.2 “... And beyond global warming, there’s just the fact that combustion cars emit toxic gases and according to MIT study are 53.000 deaths per year in the US alone from auto emissions.”**

As exemplified in 1.5.2, Elon Musk provides a specific example of the danger of combustion cars emission by including an MIT study. By providing real evidence, Elon Musk wants to emphasize the importance of transitioning towards sustainable transportation for a better future. Therefore, by providing a real and evident-based example, Elon Musk’s argued the importance of sustainable transportation.

**2.5.10 “... It takes up to 15 minutes or more to actually fill up a truck and you got to sit there for 15 minutes while the tanks get filled as compared to charging a Tesla truck, you can charge at your origin and or destination so while you’re unloading your cargo you can charge.”**

As exemplified in 2.5.10, Elon Musk utilizes exemplum to strengthen the capability of Tesla over Diesel truck in terms of refuelling speed. By pointing out the downsides of Diesel trucks, Elon Musk wishes to persuade the audience that the Tesla Semi can overcome existing issues through such comparisons. On the other hand, the costs of repairing, refilling, and maintaining an electric car are cheaper. Ferris (2018) asserts that the annual cost of those costs for a diesel truck is \$35,676, whereas the electric vehicle would be less than half the price, at \$14,306.

### **Amplification**

One of the rhetorical devices for clarity is amplification, which works by restating a word or concept and adding extra information. Harris states that amplification allows a speaker to draw attention to a statement that might otherwise be overlooked and is valuable for clarity and emphasis (2018). This is exemplified as follows:

**1.6.2 “...So, it stands to reason that if a vehicle is spewing toxic gas, that’s obviously bad for your health. So, to address this, what we came up with Tesla ways and what we called the secret master plan.”**

As exemplified in 1.6.2, the overlooked information is held back after the initial presentation of the idea. After presenting the idea regarding the negative effect caused by combustion car emissions, Elon Musk amplifies the negativity by restating it. Then he adds more detail to amplify the idea by introducing Tesla Way as an alternative to combustion vehicles’ toxic emissions.

**2.6.14 “...Truck breaks down, you disappointing your customers, it's a horrible day, it could be a horrible week, it could break down in the middle of nowhere, it's the safety issues.”**

As exemplified in 2.6.14, Elon Musk provides additional views likely to be overlooked by the audience. Although Elon Musk provides an additional idea that may sound unnecessary to the public, his goal is not just to inform but also to accentuate. Elon Musk wants to accentuate the risk of driving a Diesel truck. By showcasing the risk of driving a Diesel Truck, Elon Musk encourages the audience to choose a Tesla Semi instead of a Diesel truck. Thus, amplification enables Elon Musk to stress a concept without overwhelming the public at large.

### Anaphora

Anaphora entails using the same word or words at the start of consecutive phrases, clauses, or sentences (Harris, 2018). Anaphora can be combined with climax purposely to help the speaker to emphasize an idea or concept. This may be exemplified as follows:

1.7.2 “**Why** does Tesla exist, **why** are we making electric cars, **why** does it matter?”

As exemplified in 1.7.2, due to its flexibility, it combines hypophora and climax to stress Tesla's missions as a company driven by the vision of sustainability. The sustainable vision of a world powered by solar energy, operating on batteries, and conveyed through electric cars. (Tesla n.d.).

2.7.3 “**This is the base model**, okay? **This is the base model**. We’re going to talk about things beyond base maybe next year, sometime. **This is the base model**.”

As exemplified in 2.7.3, Elon Musk emphasizes the capability of the second-generation Tesla Roadster. However, the showcased car is still a base model. The capability is extraordinary, especially in range, record-setting acceleration, and performance which enthrone Tesla Roadster as the quickest car in the world, with record-setting acceleration, range, and performance (Tesla, n.d.).

In general, the use of anaphora helps Elon Musk to announce Tesla’s Vision as an automobile company that is driven to achieve the future of sustainability as well as to persuade the audience of the great quality of its products.

### Hypophora

As a transition device, hypophora asks a question and proceeds to answer directly. Hypophora is beneficial due to the naturalness of the question, which can stimulate curiosity, to change direction or to continue with the same idea (Harris, 2018). This may be exemplified as follows:

1.8.1 “**Why we are doing this**, why is Tesla- **why does Tesla exist**, **why are we making electric cars**, **why does it matter?**”

As exemplified in 1.8.1, Hypophora is combined with anaphora through the repetition of ‘why’ and climax to accentuate further the sense of progressing towards a significant notion. As exemplified above, the significant notion is located in “why does it matter”. As a company that is motivated by sustainability, Elon Musk wants to emphasize Tesla's goal as a company. Tesla's objective is to accelerate the global transition to sustainable energy by creating products that will replace some of the world's worst polluters.

2.8.6 “**What about safety?** Now, when I say safety, I’m talking about the driver safety, I’m talking about other cars on the road, I’m talking about pedestrians, safety for everyone...”

As exemplified in 2.8.6, Elon Musk utilizes hypophora to anticipate the audience’s concerns and move to a different topic. Elon Musk wants to accentuate the importance of safety in the automotive industry. Elon Musk believes that consumers are unlikely to choose things only based on their low lifetime carbon footprint. To persuade people to buy Tesla’s products, they must be superior in performance, cost of ownership, safety, enjoyment, and so on. Thus, Tesla strives to create goods that people like to use. In the Tesla impact report, safety elements are not optional because every Tesla vehicle comes equipped with a comprehensive range of safety features.

In general, Elon Musk utilizes hypophora to announce Tesla’s vision as a company driven by sustainability to the general public. In addition, by utilizing hypophora, Elon Musk also announces the importance of safety in every Tesla vehicle. It may also persuade the public at large to purchase Tesla’s electric vehicle to experience the safety of Tesla’s vehicles but also its other features within the same product.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of rhetorical devices and their functions in *Tesla Unveils Model 3* and *Tesla Semi & Roadster Unveil* videos delivered by Elon Musk. This study aims to find out the types of rhetorical devices and to study the messages underscored by the use of the rhetorical devices in *Tesla Unveils Model 3* and *Tesla Semi & Roadster Unveil* videos delivered by Elon Musk. The theory of rhetorical devices was based on Harris (2018) rhetorical devices theory. The rhetorical devices namely climax, asyndeton, polysyndeton, and sentential adverb which belongs to emphasis I. Another rhetorical devices that the writer picked are exemplum and amplification which belongs to clarity, and also anaphora which belongs to restatement I. Lastly, hypophora which belongs to transition. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is applied for this study. The data were the transcripts containing rhetorical devices from two videos of Tesla electric vehicles promotion titled *Tesla Unveils Model 3* and *Tesla Semi & Roadster Unveil* delivered by Elon Musk.

The findings of this study unveil that there are eight rhetorical devices found in video 1 titled *Tesla Unveils Model 3* are climax, asyndeton, polysyndeton, sentential adverb which belongs to emphasis I. Secondly, exemplum and amplification which belongs to clarity. Anaphora which belongs to restatement I and lastly, hypophora which belongs to transition. In video 2, titled *Tesla Semi & Roadster Unveil*, seven rhetorical devices are found. They are climax, asyndeton, sentential adverb which belongs to emphasis I, exemplum, and amplification which belongs to clarity. Anaphora which belongs to restatement I and lastly, hypophora which belongs to transition. The only missing rhetorical device in video 2 is polysyndeton is non-existent in the data. Overall, the top three most used rhetorical devices by Elon Musk are amplification, exemplum, and hypophora. Each rhetorical device helps Elon Musk underline messages to the audience, stressing the importance of sustainability by fear-mongering the audience towards the effect of greenhouse gases. It also enables Elon Musk to persuade the audience to purchase their products due to their superior



capabilities compared to other vehicles in the industry. For the persuasion to work, Elon Musk compared his product with similar products in the industry by showcasing data, design, and capabilities. In addition, Elon Musk also anticipates the audience's concerns by addressing them through questions and answers.

Since the current study was a small case based on a promotional video, further research into other rhetorical devices is recommended. A study on the multifunctionality of rhetorical devices in various fields of business would also be recommended. For instance, the use of rhetorical devices in content marketing or branding. Despite the limitations, hopefully, the study contributes to the use of rhetorical devices in a promotional video and how rhetorical devices enable the speaker to underscore some important message through certain types of rhetorical devices.

## REFERENCES

- Carnegie, D. (2018). *The art of public speaking: The original tool for improving public oration*. Clydesdale Press.
- Carwile, A. M. (2012). *Constructing Effective Speeches: A Step-by-Step Guide to Public Speaking*. Cognella.
- Ferris, R. (2018, January 11). *Tesla Semi could save money over diesels within 2 years of ownership*. CNBC. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/11/tesla-semi-could-save-money-over-diesels-within-2-years-of-ownership.html>
- Harris, M. (2020, November 14). *More Logical Than Ludicrous: Tesla Semi Will Need to Deliver Reliability*. Car And Driver. <https://www.caranddriver.com/news/a15338914/more-logical-than-ludicrous-tesla-semi-will-need-to-deliver-reliability/>
- Harris, R. A. (2018). *Writing with clarity and style: a Guide to rhetorical devices for contemporary writers* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Taping, M. G., Juniardi, Y., & Utomo, D. W. (2017). *Rhetorical devices in Hillary Clinton concession speech*. *Journal of English Language Studies*, 2(2).
- Tesla. (n.d.). *About*. <https://www.tesla.com/about>
- Tesla. (n.d.). *Impact*. [https://www.tesla.com/en\\_eu/impact](https://www.tesla.com/en_eu/impact)
- Tesla. (n.d.). *Vehicle Maintenance: Tesla Support*. <https://www.tesla.com/support/vehicle-maintenance>
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. (n.d.). *The Paris Agreement*. *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*. <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>
- World Meteorological Organization. (2022, November 6). *Eight warmest years on record witness upsurge in climate change impacts* [Press release]. <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/eight-warmest-years-record-witness-upsurge-climate-change-impacts>