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FROM EVALUATION TO ALIGNMENT: RHETORICAL PERSUASION IN JOURNALISTIC AUTOMOTIVE REVIEWS

ВІД ОЦІНЮВАННЯ ДО УЗГОДЖЕННЯ: РИТОРИЧНА ПЕРЕКОНЛИВІСТЬ У ЖУРНАЛІСТСЬКИХ АВТОМОБІЛЬНИХ РЕЦЕНЗІЯХ

Meleshkevych L.M.,

orcid.org/0000-0002-6537-8683

Candidate of Philology,

*Associate Professor at the Department of English Philology and Philosophy of Language
Kyiv National Linguistic University*

The article investigates the linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms of implicit persuasion in contemporary journalistic automotive reviews. Positioned at the intersection of information and evaluation, this genre performs a dual communicative function: it provides expert-driven factual reporting while simultaneously shaping readers' attitudes and judgments without resorting to overt recommendation. The study addresses the scholarly problem of how persuasion operates in professional journalistic discourse under conditions where direct prescriptive judgment would undermine credibility, objectivity, and genre legitimacy.

The research is grounded in classical rhetorical theory, primarily Aristotle's conception of persuasion as the coordinated interaction of ethos, logos, pathos, and kairos (situational appropriateness), supplemented by modern discourse-analytic approaches to evaluation and stance. Journalistic automotive reviews are treated as persuasive evaluative texts in which influence emerges through discursive alignment rather than directive instruction. The empirical basis of the study consists of reviews published across diverse market segments, including electric vehicles, luxury and performance cars, family vehicles, and heritage models. This diversity enables a genre-wide examination of persuasive strategies while preserving discourse coherence.

The analysis demonstrates that persuasiveness in journalistic automotive reviews is realized through recurrent linguistic patterns, including evaluative vocabulary, structured comparison, concessive argumentation, hedging, metaphor, experiential narration, and reader-oriented stance markers. These features function collectively to guide interpretation, manage uncertainty, and construct professional authority. The study shows that rhetorical appeals rarely operate in isolation; rather, persuasion arises from their systematic interaction and contextual calibration. Logical reasoning is reinforced by experiential credibility, emotional resonance is constrained by journalistic norms, and contextual framing aligns evaluation with broader technological, cultural, and market conditions.

The scholarly contribution of the article lies in conceptualizing persuasiveness as a form of rational, ethically constrained alignment within journalistic discourse. By integrating classical rhetoric with contemporary linguistic analysis, the study expands the understanding of implicit persuasion beyond promotional and political genres and offers a replicable methodological framework for analyzing evaluative discourse in professional media contexts.

Key words: media discourse, text interpretation, journalistic automotive review, rhetoric, evaluative language, pragmatics, persuasiveness, stance marker.

У статті аналізуються мовні та риторичні засоби імпліцитного переконування в сучасних журналістських автомобільних рецензіях. Цей жанр, що поєднує інформування з оцінюванням, виконує подвійну комунікативну функцію: він не лише подає фактичну інформацію, засновану на експертному знанні, а й водночас формує оцінні орієнтації та судження читачів, уникаючи при цьому прямої рекомендації. Дослідження зосереджене на науковій проблемі функціонування переконування в професійному журналістському дискурсі за умов, коли явне оцінювання могло б підірвати довіру до тексту, його об'єктивність і жанрову легітимність.

Теоретичним підґрунтям роботи є класична риторика, насамперед аристотелівське розуміння переконування як взаємодії етосу, логосу, пафосу та кайросу (ситуативної доречності), у поєднанні з сучасними підходами дискурс-аналізу до вивчення оцінності та позиціонування мовця. Журналістські автомобільні рецензії розглядаються як оцінні тексти переконувального характеру, в яких вплив на читача здійснюється не через директивні настанови, а через дискурсивне узгодження аргументації, експертної позиції та контексту. Емпіричний матеріал охоплює рецензії на автомобілі різних ринкових сегментів, від електромобілів і сімейних моделей до автомобілів класу люкс і спортивних моделей. Така різноманітність забезпечує можливість комплексного аналізу персуазивних стратегій у межах жанру за збереження його дискурсивної цілісності.

Переконування у журналістських автомобільних рецензіях формується через стійкі мовні патерни, зокрема оцінну лексику, структуроване порівняння, аргументацію, геджування, метафоричне осмислення, наратив дос-

віду та орієнтовані на читача маркери позиції. У сукупності ці засоби впливають на інтерпретацію тексту читачем, знижують рівень невизначеності та конструюють образ професійної авторитетності автора. Показано, що риторичні апеляції зазвичай не функціонують ізольовано: переконування виникає внаслідок їхньої узгодженої взаємодії та контекстуального вживання. Логічна аргументація підкріплюється достовірністю досвіду, емоційна експресія обмежується нормами журналістської етики, а контекстуальне фреймування співвідносить оцінювання з ширшими технологічними, культурними та ринковими процесами.

Наукова новизна статті полягає в осмисленні переконування як форми раціонального й етично обмеженого узгодження в межах журналістського дискурсу. Поєднання класичної риторичної теорії з сучасним лінгвістичним аналізом дає змогу розширити уявлення про імпліцитне переконування за межі рекламного й політичного мовлення та запропонувати відтворювану методологічну модель аналізу оцінного дискурсу в професійних медійних практиках.

Ключові слова: медіадискурс, інтерпретація тексту, журналістська автомобільна рецензія, риторика, оцінна мова, прагматика, персуазивність, маркер позиції.

Introduction. In contemporary media environments characterized by informational abundance and intensified market competition, evaluative journalistic discourse has acquired heightened persuasive significance. Among such genres, journalistic automotive reviews occupy a particularly influential position, functioning as key mediators between complex technological products and non-specialist audiences. While ostensibly informational in purpose, these texts play a decisive role in shaping readers' attitudes, expectations, and evaluative orientations toward vehicles, brands, and broader mobility practices. The growing centrality of automobiles in debates surrounding sustainability, electrification, consumer identity, and technological innovation further underscores the topical relevance of automotive reviews as a site of linguistic and rhetorical inquiry.

Existing studies of persuasive discourse have traditionally focused on advertising, political communication, or overtly promotional genres, often marginalizing forms of influence that operate under the guise of neutrality, expertise, and critical judgment. Automotive reviews challenge such categorical distinctions: they are institutionally framed as independent, expert-driven evaluations, yet they simultaneously engage in subtle attitudinal guidance through language, framing, and evaluative structure. This dual communicative status raises an important theoretical problem for discourse analysis, namely, how persuasion is achieved and legitimated in genres where overt advocacy would undermine credibility and genre integrity.

Theoretical Background. The Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is a systematic and analytical treatise on the nature and practice of persuasion. Aristotle defines rhetoric as the capacity to discern the available means of persuasion in any given situation, thereby presenting it not as mere ornamentation or manipulation, but as a rational and ethically grounded discipline closely aligned with logic, psychology, and civic life. The work outlines three primary modes of persuasion such

as *ethos* (the character and credibility of the speaker), *pathos* (appeals to the emotions of the audience), and *logos* (logical argumentation) and situates them within three rhetorical genres: deliberative, judicial, and epideictic discourse. The philosopher devotes sustained attention to issues of style, arrangement, and appropriateness, emphasizing the importance of fitting language and argument to audience, context, and occasion. Taken as a whole, the *Rhetoric* offers a comprehensive theory of persuasive communication grounded in practical judgment, ethical responsibility, and sensitivity to situational factors such as timing and propriety [1, 2, 3].

In their study *Kairos in Aristotle's Rhetoric*, Kinneavy and Eskin [4] note that although rhetorical scholars increasingly recognize the significance of *kairos*, understood as right timing and appropriate measure, Aristotle's treatment of the concept has been largely neglected or undervalued, particularly in comparison with Plato's more explicit discussion in the *Phaedrus*. They attribute this neglect partly to flawed reference tools and partly to a restrictive focus on the lexical term *kairos* rather than on its broader conceptual manifestations. To address these limitations, Kinneavy and Eskin undertake a systematic examination of Aristotle's explicit references to *kairos* in the *Rhetoric*, demonstrating its centrality to his rhetorical theory, especially in relation to emotional appeal, stylistic propriety, and argumentative practice. They argue that Aristotle's most consequential engagement with *kairos* appears indirectly in his definition of rhetoric and in his discussions of equity in both the *Rhetoric* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which together constitute some of the most influential ancient treatments of the concept.

Drawing on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Claudia Carbonell [5] reconceptualizes persuasion as a form of practical judgment rather than a technique of verbal influence. She argues that Aristotle's close association of rhetoric with dialectic situates rhetorical reasoning within domains characterized by evaluative choice,

probabilistic reasoning, and contextual constraint. In such settings, rationality is not grounded in demonstrative proof but in the capacity to orient audiences toward credible and reasonable judgments through the coordinated use of argument, character, and situational relevance. This interpretation is particularly pertinent to contemporary evaluative genres, where persuasion operates implicitly and must remain compatible with professional norms of objectivity and expertise. It provides a theoretical basis for analyzing how non-prescriptive discourse achieves influence by aligning logical reasoning, ethical authority, and contextual framing, allowing practical truth to emerge as a function of situated evaluation rather than overt recommendation.

Unresolved Problems and Research Tasks.

Despite growing scholarly interest in evaluative and persuasive discourse, a number of theoretically and methodologically significant problems remain unresolved, particularly in relation to professional journalistic genres that operate under strong norms of objectivity and independence. While persuasion has been extensively examined in advertising, political communication, and promotional media, considerably less attention has been paid to genres in which influence must remain implicit in order to preserve credibility and genre legitimacy. As a result, the linguistic mechanisms through which persuasion is achieved without overt recommendation are still insufficiently theorized.

The **purpose of this study** is to analyse the linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms through which implicit persuasion operates in contemporary journalistic automotive reviews and to demonstrate how evaluative judgment in this genre functions as discursive alignment rather than explicit evaluative endorsement.

The **objectives of the study** are: 1) to conceptualize journalistic automotive reviews as implicitly persuasive evaluative texts; 2) to apply Aristotle's rhetorical categories (ethos, logos, pathos, and kairos) through their linguistic realizations in journalistic discourse; 3) to identify recurrent evaluative and stance-taking patterns that contribute to persuasive meaning.

Results and discussions. Journalistic automotive reviews are framed as evaluative texts in which persuasion is implicitly embedded. Although their overt communicative purpose is informational reporting specifications, test results, and driving impressions they subtly guide readers' attitudes through rhetorical framing, strategic concession, and evaluative lexis. Persuasion is achieved implicitly, under the guise of expertise rather than explicit recommendation.

This dual function is evident in both positive and ambivalent verdicts. For instance, the Infiniti QX80 review concludes:

Infiniti really nailed the QX80's fundamentals, but it's still missing some sizzle to really make it stand out from the crowd [6].

Here, praise "nailed the QX80's fundamentals" is immediately tempered by limitation "missing some sizzle", positioning the reader as a rational arbiter of trade offs rather than a target of promotion.

In automotive reviews, Aristotle's four interrelated dimensions (ethos, logos, pathos, kairos) rarely operate in isolation. Quantitative performance data (logos) is frequently supported by experiential narration (pathos), legitimized by professional expertise (ethos), and situated within broader market or regulatory contexts (kairos).

Business oriented persuasion principles such as confidence, clarity, and lexical precision are embedded within journalistic discourse but strongly constrained by genre norms. Reviewers do not encourage purchase directly; instead, they allow persuasion to emerge through reasoned judgment.

This restraint is evident even in highly enthusiastic texts. The Ferrari 12Cilindri Spider is described in overtly affective terms:

This is a car for driving. This is a car for the heart [7].

Yet such declarations are embedded within experiential narrative and technical explanation, maintaining journalistic legitimacy while permitting emotional appeal.

Logos is realized through numerical data, structured comparison, and probabilistic framing. In automotive discourse, reviewers repeatedly contrast official figures with lived experience [8, 9, 10]. This contrast foregrounds epistemic caution and enhances trust.

Similarly, in the Ferrari 360 CS vs Porsche 911 GT3 comparison, logos takes the form of exhaustive performance benchmarking. Yet even here, the reviewer concedes the limits of quantification:

The Challenge Stradale used its high-tech high-buck composite units to great effect for a 60-to-0 stopping distance of 107 feet, with the 100-to-0 stop taking 298. But numbers can't convey the feeling of these binders [11].

Logos thus establishes credibility while simultaneously making space for emotional persuasion. Negative logos plays a comparable role in the Geely Starray EM i review:

"Long journeys in hilly terrain in the Geely Starray EM-i would be tiring and noisy [12].

Here, conditional phrasing and experiential grounding invite rational inference rather than emotional reaction.

Kairos is crucial in aligning vehicle evaluation with contemporary conditions. In performance discourse, the Alfa Romeo Giulia Quadrifoglio is framed as a response to emissions driven homogenization:

Some may balk at the price, but the Quadrifoglio has a purity many of its rivals have lost [13].

Similarly, the Ferrari 12Cilindri Spider is positioned against electrification and turbocharging:

I practically hate myself for saying this, but I must: They just don't make them like this anymore, and I mean that literally. There are only six V12 cars on the market today, and just two are naturally aspirated [7].

Such framing activates cognitive dissonance in readers who value heritage and analogue engagement, resolving it by positioning the reviewed car as a rare refuge.

In pragmatic segments, kairos operates differently. *The Infiniti QX80* review situates the vehicle within an intensely competitive luxury SUV market dominated by the Escalade, explicitly addressing concerns about relevance, differentiation, and value.

Infiniti stuck the landing with its redesigned QX80, but is that enough to stand out in the ruthless, premium segment? [6].

Infiniti used to push that distinction much more aggressively, but when your primary adversary is the Cadillac Escalade, being truck-like isn't exactly a liability [6].

Ethos is constructed through professional experience, technical fluency, and reflexive self positioning. Reviewers frequently foreground their own testing conditions or skepticism, as in the Mercedes Benz GLS Off Road review:

And yet we couldn't shake our doubts. Given its luxury positioning and its size, the GLS isn't a poster child for off-roading, and the grounds of an assembly plant in Alabama aren't exactly Moab or the Rubicon. How much could we possibly experience? [14].

In the context of automotive reviews persuasion and credibility are constructed through narrative and ethos. A common rhetorical strategy is when the reviewer initially expresses skepticism or raises potential shortcomings about a vehicle. When these doubts are later resolved through testing or experience, the reviewer's evaluation becomes more convincing. The narrative arc from doubt to confirmation signals honesty, critical judgment, and experiential authenticity, thereby strengthening the review's persuasive impact.

In heritage or legacy-oriented automotive narratives, such as reviews of classic cars, reissues, or historically significant models, ethos does not arise from direct comparison with contemporary competitors but from historical proximity and designer or manufacturer testimony. Authority is established through access to original designers, archival knowledge, or firsthand historical insight. This proximity to the vehicle's origins lends credibility and evaluative weight, allowing the reviewer to make persuasive claims even when modern benchmarks or direct comparisons are unavailable. Thus, automotive reviews rely on narrative structure and ethos whether through experiential testing or historical authority to legitimize judgment and enhance persuasive force.

Pathos is most salient in performance and luxury reviews. The Lamborghini Temerario becomes "*four wheeled theatre*," while the Ferrari 12Cilindri Spider is framed as a "*love letter to driving*" and even a "*spiritual retreat*." Metaphor, personification, and sensory imagery invite emotional identification and elevate driving from transport to experience.

Conversely, pathos functions defensively in negative or utilitarian reviews. In the Geely Staray EM-i, phrases such as "*inbuilt frustration*" and "*evil nanny*" actively discourage emotional attachment (English). In the Infiniti QX80 review, moderated language "*pleasant*," "*reserved*," "*lacking sizzle*" tempers enthusiasm without alienating the reader [6].

Across all cases, emotional language aligns reader attitude with reviewer stance, stabilizing the reviewer–reader–vehicle triad described by Balance Theory [15].

Throughout the analysed corpus of reviews, persuasiveness emerges as a multidimensional phenomenon:

Linguistic realisation of logos: data, benchmarking, hedging.

Linguistic realisation of ethos: expertise, testing authority ("*We drove...*"), historical testimony.

Linguistic realisation of pathos: imagery, metaphor, affect (Ferrari "*love letter*," Lamborghini "*theatre*").

Linguistic realisation of kairos: contextual framing (electrification, emissions pressure, interior).

This synthesis supports the conception of persuasiveness as alignment rather than manipulation.

Conclusions and Perspectives. The present study has demonstrated that journalistic automotive reviews constitute a coherent persuasive genre in which influence is achieved implicitly through rhetorical alignment rather than overt recommendation. The analysis shows that persuasiveness in this genre emerges from the systematic interaction of logical

reasoning, evaluative stance, professional credibility, emotional framing, and situational relevance. These components are not deployed independently but operate in coordinated patterns that guide readers toward particular judgments while preserving the genre's normative claims to objectivity, expertise, and critical distance.

The research establishes that Aristotle's rhetorical framework including ethos, logos, pathos, and kairos remains analytically productive for examining contemporary journalistic discourse, provided that these categories are operationalized through concrete linguistic realizations. In automotive reviews, logos is predominantly realized through structured comparison, numerical data, and hedging strategies; ethos through markers of expertise, experiential authority, and reflexive self-positioning; pathos through metaphor, imagery, and affective lexis;

and kairos through contextual framing related to technological change, market competition, and cultural values. Persuasion, therefore, functions not as manipulation but as a form of guided evaluative judgment grounded in shared assumptions and contextual appropriateness.

The discussion points to clear **prospects for further research**. Future studies could expand the corpus quantitatively and geographically to examine cross-linguistic and cross-cultural variation in evaluative persuasion. Corpus-based or computational approaches may complement qualitative findings by identifying frequency-based patterns of evaluative lexis and stance markers. Further investigation could also explore reader reception and cognitive processing of implicit persuasion, thereby linking linguistic analysis more closely with experimental and psychological research on attitude formation.

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