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Author Name(s): Hanip Pujiati, Muhammad Rizki Perdana, Ade Hilman Maulana, Lesmana Dwi Putra Yunas, Aldian Yusup
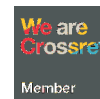
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Article

Persuasive language strategies in public service advertisements: a pragmatic perspective

Hanip Pujiati[1*)], Muhammad Rizki Perdana[2], Ade Hilman Maulana[3], Lesmana Dwi Putra Yunas[3], Aldian Yusup[4]

[1] Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia
[2] IKMI College of Informatics and Computer Management, Cirebon, Indonesia
[3] Universitas Islam Negeri Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, Indonesia
[4] Institut Prima Bangsa, Kedawung, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Public service advertisements (PSAs) play an important role in conveying social messages to shape people's behavior positively. However, the effectiveness of these messages is highly dependent on the persuasive language strategies used. This study aims to analyze persuasive language strategies in public service advertisements from a pragmatic perspective, focusing on the use of metaphors, repetitions, imperatives, and language styles that are appropriate to the social and cultural context. The method used is an explanatory literature study, which collects and analyzes data from various journal articles, books, and related research reports. Data were collected through documentation studies, then analyzed using a qualitative content analysis approach to identify patterns and main themes in persuasive language strategies. The results of the study indicate that the use of metaphors and repetitions consistently increases the emotional appeal and memory of the audience, while the use of imperatives and framing helps strengthen the urgency of the message. This pragmatic approach allows advertisements to adapt messages to the social and cultural values of the community, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of communication. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how language strategies can influence audience perceptions and behavior in the context of public service advertisements, as well as the importance of considering cultural context in designing effective messages.

Corresponding Author:

Hanip Pujiati,
Universitas Negeri Jakarta
Email: hanifpujiati@yahoo.com

Introduction

The background of public service advertisements (PSAs) as a mass communication medium has long been recognized as an effective tool for conveying social messages to the public (Martins, 2024; Susanti, 2018). This advertisement aims to change people's behavior by using strong persuasive language strategies to achieve certain social goals (Arman et al., 2023). Persuasive language in this context often focuses on a pragmatic approach to strengthen the appeal of the message and shape positive perceptions of the topic raised (Hagijanto, 2006). In this study, language not only functions as a communication tool, but also as a strategy designed to directly influence and shape audience behavior (Bell, 1984; Webster, 2018; Wuryaningrum, 2024).

Public service advertisements (PSAs) are a form of mass communication that aims to convey social messages to the public at large (Nwokeocha, 2023). PSAs are usually produced by governments, non-profit organizations, or community organizations to encourage changes in attitudes, behavior, and social awareness (Paek et al., 2011). For example, research conducted by Saelan (2025) highlights the role of videographers in the production of public service announcements for Creativepedia Indonesia, which aims to convey educational and social messages to the wider community through digital media (Saelan, 2025). Meanwhile, another study by Purnamasari et al. (2025) shows the importance of designing public service announcements in increasing public understanding of autism through videos designed to strengthen social support (Purnamasari et al., 2025). In addition, research by Anggapuspa and Aryanto (2025) emphasizes the importance of public service announcements in raising awareness of the dangers of drugs among the younger generation, using the 5W1H data analysis technique to design effective messages (Anggapuspa et al., 2025). This type of advertisement functions not only to disseminate information, but also to influence people's behavior towards a more positive lifestyle, as discussed in research on health literacy by Solihah (2025) which emphasizes the role of the media in conveying health messages to patients (Solihah, 2025). Thus, public service advertisements play an important role in shaping public opinion and driving social change.

Along with the development of digital technology, public service advertisements are now increasingly utilizing digital media to reach a wider audience with more creative strategies (Afandy et al., 2024; Dickey & Lewis, 2011). For example, research by Komala (2022) shows that the use of persuasive language in public service advertisements can strengthen public awareness of critical issues, such as health and the environment (Komala, 2022). In addition, a pragmatic approach in advertising language is also considered more effective in influencing the audience, because it is able to adjust the message according to the dynamic social context (Savitri & Rahmawati, 2023). This approach includes the use of metaphors, repetition, and language styles that are in accordance with the cultural norms of society.

Furthermore, persuasive language strategies are often influenced by the cultural and social context in which the advertisement is delivered (Sulastri, 2023). For example, the pragmatic approach in public service advertisements in Indonesia tends to use collective and emotional values to build stronger relationships with its audience (Dibya, 2013). This approach is different from the strategies used in commercial advertisements which focus more on economic gain (Hoon et al., 2023). Thus, understanding persuasive language strategies from a pragmatic perspective is important to increase the effectiveness of social messages in public service advertisements.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of developing a more effective communication model in conveying social messages in an increasingly complex and dynamic society. In this context, persuasive language strategies not only function to convey messages, but also to create long-term impacts on people's social behavior. Therefore, this study aims to understand how persuasive language strategies can be implemented pragmatically in public service advertisements to achieve broader social goals.

Previous studies have discussed the effectiveness of persuasive language in various communication contexts, including commercial and political advertisements (Rohmadi, 2013). However, studies that specifically examine persuasive language strategies in public service advertisements with a pragmatic approach are still relatively few. Research by Susanti (2018) and Sulastri (2023), for example, focuses more on the visual and communication design aspects without highlighting much on the pragmatic aspects underlying language strategies in public service advertisements. Therefore, this study is expected to fill this research gap by examining language strategies from a pragmatic perspective in more depth.

The purpose of this study is to analyze persuasive language strategies used in public service advertisements from a pragmatic perspective. This study will identify various persuasive techniques used to shape audience perceptions and behavior, and examine the influence of cultural and social contexts on the effectiveness of these language strategies.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with an explanatory literature study type of research. This approach was chosen because the main purpose of this study is to understand and explain the persuasive language strategies used in public service advertisements from a pragmatic perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative explanatory research focuses on an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied through the collection and analysis of secondary data, which generally come from various relevant literature sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). By using this approach, researchers try to explore the broader meaning and context of the use of persuasive language in public service advertisements (Miles et al., 2020).

The data sources in this study come from various relevant literature, including journal articles, books, dissertations, and research reports that discuss language strategies, pragmatics, and public service advertisements published in the last five years. The main data analyzed were public service advertisement texts that used persuasive language strategies, with a focus on sentence structure, word choice, and pragmatic context used to shape audience perceptions. In addition, this study also used secondary data in the form of basic theories on pragmatics and persuasive communication strategies taken from classical and contemporary literature (Leech, 2016; Yule, 1996).

The data collection technique was carried out by means of documentation study, namely by identifying, collecting, and analyzing various documents relevant to the research topic (Bowen, 2009). Documentation study is considered appropriate for this study because it allows researchers to assess and understand the context and language structure used in various types of public service advertisements (Tisdell et al., 2025). In addition, this technique also helps researchers to evaluate how persuasive messages are designed to achieve certain communication goals (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The data analysis method used is qualitative content analysis, which involves the process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting the meaning of the collected texts (Krippendorff, 2018). This approach allows researchers to identify patterns, themes, and language strategies used in public service advertisements more systematically. In addition, pragmatic analysis is also carried out to understand how the meaning and context of language are used to shape audience perceptions (Levinson, 2011). Thus, this study focuses not only on linguistic aspects, but also on pragmatic dimensions that influence the effectiveness of communication in public service advertisements.

Results and Discussion

Result

In this literature review study, a large number of articles discussing persuasive language strategies in public service advertisements (Public Service Advertisements) using a pragmatic approach were screened and selected. The selection results showed 10 articles that were considered the most relevant and comprehensive in discussing the pragmatic aspects of persuasive language, the techniques used, the influence of socio-cultural contexts, and the effectiveness of the message. The following articles serve as the theoretical basis and data analysis in this study.

The research collected and analyzed in this study reveals that the use of persuasive language strategies in public service advertisements (PSAs) does not only depend on linguistic elements alone, but is also greatly influenced by the pragmatic context which includes communication objectives, socio-cultural contexts, and audience reactions and interpretations. A study conducted by N. Rudenko (2017) emphasized that the pragmatic aspect in English public service advertisements shows how the chosen language elements not only convey messages literally, but also build implied meanings and encourage audiences to act according to social expectations. This study underlies the importance of pragmatic analysis to better understand how language in PSAs functions as an effective persuasive tool (Rudenko, 2017).

Furthermore, I. Fairuza and M. Dariya (2019) explore various persuasive techniques used in PSAs, including the use of rhetorical strategies such as rhetorical questions, repetition, and metaphors designed to influence audience perceptions.

Table 1. Bibliography data

Article Title	Author	Main Focus
Pragmatic aspect of English public service advertising	N. Rudenko	Pragmatic analysis of English public service advertisements
The role of persuasive techniques in public service advertisement	I. Fairuza, M. Dariya	Persuasive techniques in PSA, focus on language and rhetorical strategies
Persuasive strategies in the language of insurance advertising in the print media	I.A. Adeyinka	Persuasive language strategies in print media, pragmatic approach
Pragmatism of public service advertisements: Pragmatic analysis appealing and warning traffic police	A.S. Roza	Pragmatic analysis of traffic warning advertisements
A case study of public social advertisements translation: Pragmatics approach	M.R. Nababan et al.	Case study of social advertisement translation, pragmatic analysis
Effectiveness of advertising slogans: Pragma-communicative and manipulative techniques	S. Makhliyo	Effectiveness of advertising slogans with a pragmatic approach
Persuasive communication and advertising efficacy for public health policy: A critical approach	V. Coppola, O. Camus	Efficacy of persuasive communication in public health policy
Words that work: A thematic study of persuasive language in online advertisements	A.F. Harahap, R.V. Losi, M. Elviani	Thematic study of persuasive language in online advertisements
Persuasive techniques in advertising	I.V. Smirnova	Persuasive techniques in commercial and public service advertisements
Advertising language: A pragmatic approach to advertisements in Britain and Japan	K. Tanaka	Pragmatic approach in advertising language in cross-cultural contexts

This study highlights that these techniques have pragmatic power because they do not only rely on denotative meanings, but also rely on the audience's social and cultural contexts to enhance persuasiveness. Thus, this study makes an important contribution to understanding how persuasive techniques can be tailored to reach different audiences effectively (Fairuza & Dariya, 2019).

In the context of print media, I.A. Adeyinka (2012) conducted a study on persuasive language strategies in insurance advertisements. Although the focus was on print media, the relevant findings can be applied to PSAs, especially regarding how language is chosen and processed pragmatically to build credibility and create a strong effect on the audience. This study shows that the use of various strategies such as implicatures, imperative speech acts, and verbal politeness can help bridge the gap between the message conveyed and the audience's emotional and rational acceptance (Adeyinka, 2012).

A more specific pragmatic analysis of public service advertisements on traffic safety was conducted by A.S. Roza (2021). This study explains how warning messages in traffic advertisements use various pragmatic strategies to warn and change driver behavior, such as the use of direct commands combined with implicatures that raise awareness of the risk of accidents. This study reinforces the understanding that in sensitive contexts, such as safety, the use of appropriate and contextual language is critical to message effectiveness (Roza, 2021).

A case study of social advertising translation by M.R. Nababan et al. (2020) highlights the pragmatic challenges in translating PSA messages to maintain persuasive power and cultural appropriateness. This study underlines the importance of understanding the pragmatic aspects of the source and target languages so that messages are not only translated literally but also contextually and communicatively, maintaining the effectiveness of the advertisement in different cultural contexts (Nababan et al., 2020).

In the field of advertising slogan effectiveness, S. Makhliyo (2025) uses a pragmatic-communicative and manipulative approach to evaluate how slogans can increase audience appeal and drive action. This study shows that well-designed slogans using pragmatic techniques such as politeness, repetition, and reinforcement of implicit meaning can produce greater persuasive effects, especially in the context of public services that emphasize social and moral values (Makhliyo, 2025).

A critical approach to persuasive communication in public health policy by V. Coppola and O. Camus (2009) adds the dimension that the effectiveness of public service advertising is also determined by how well the message is delivered within the framework of relevant public policy and how the message is perceived by the public. This study emphasizes the importance of integrating pragmatic language strategies with social and policy contexts to achieve optimal communication outcomes (Coppola & Camus, 2009).

A thematic study by A.F. Harahap, R.V. Losi, and M. Elviani (2025) on persuasive language in online advertising provides an overview of how the development of technology and digital media changes the pattern of persuasive language use. This study emphasizes that the pragmatic approach remains relevant in the digital context, where the interaction between the audience and the message presenter is more dynamic and complex, so that language strategies must be adjusted to the characteristics of the media and the targeted audience (Harahap et al., 2025).

I.V. Smirnova (2019) in her research describes various persuasive techniques used in commercial and public service advertising, showing how linguistic and pragmatic approaches synergize to form messages that are not only informative but also able to motivate changes in audience attitudes and behavior. This study reinforces the importance of pragmatic analysis to identify appropriate and effective language strategies in various advertising contexts (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019).

Finally, K. Tanaka s (2005) work offers a cross-cultural view of language use in English and Japanese advertising using a pragmatic approach. This study reveals how differences in cultural values and communication norms influence the choice of persuasive strategies in public service announcements. This study provides important insights into how messages can be pragmatically tailored to achieve maximum resonance across culturally diverse audiences (Tanaka, 2005).

Overall, this series of studies provides a strong foundation for understanding how persuasive language strategies in public service announcements are optimized through pragmatic analysis. From these studies, it is clear that the success of a PSA depends heavily on the ability to integrate literal and implicit meanings, adapt the message to the socio-cultural context, and use pragmatic techniques such as speech acts, implicatures, and politeness theory. Overall, these studies enrich the academic and practical understanding of the role of language in effective persuasive communication in public service contexts.

Identification of Persuasive Language Strategies in Public Service Announcements (PSA)

Persuasive language strategies in public service advertising are designed to effectively influence the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the audience. These strategies often utilize pragmatic elements such as context, communication goals, and the social relationships between the sender and receiver. Here are the main strategies commonly used:

Directives (Commands and Instructions)

A language strategy that directly instructs the audience to take or avoid an action. This style is usually strong, clear, and unambiguous, with the goal of creating an immediate response.

The anti-smoking campaign "STOP Smoking Now" uses imperative language to emphasize the urgency of quitting smoking. These ads often include images of damaged lungs or statistics about smoking-related deaths to reinforce the message.

Imagine walking through a crowded train station. On the wall, you see a poster with an image of a black, damaged lung, accompanied by large text: "STOP Smoking Now. Save Your Lungs, Save Your Life." This poster uses directive language to encourage behavior change, supported by images that emphasize the real consequences of smoking.

In this context, the use of "STOP" is a clear and strong directive speech act, reflecting the communicator's intention to encourage the cessation of a harmful behavior. By adding the word "Now," the message reinforces the urgency, placing the audience in a situation where a decision must be made immediately.

Appeals to Emotion (Emotional Appeals)

This strategy taps into the audience s emotions to create a deeper, more lasting response. Advertisements often use images, music, and narratives that evoke feelings such as empathy, fear, hope, or love.

Traffic safety campaigns, such as Drive Safe Someone is Waiting for You at Home, often use an emotional approach by showing anxious families or photos of children waiting for their parents to return.

A father rushing home from work sees a roadside billboard that reads, Drive Safe Someone is Waiting for You at Home. Next to the text is a picture of a young child with hopeful eyes looking at the front door of their house. This message goes straight to the heart of drivers, reminding them of their responsibilities to their loved ones.

This statement is not just information; it carries a deeper meaning. By using an emotional approach, this ad expands the context from physical safety to emotional and moral connection, strengthening its impact on the audience.

Rhetorical Questions (Rhetorical Questions)

Rhetorical questions are used to encourage reflection without expecting a direct answer, often used to challenge beliefs or provoke critical thinking.

An environmental advertisement with the text, "What kind of world do you want to leave for your children?" aims to make the audience think about the impact of their behavior on future generations.

A young mother waiting at a bus stop sees a poster with a picture of a damaged planet Earth and large text that reads, "What kind of world do you want to leave for your children?" This message provokes deep reflection, reminding them that today's decisions will impact their children's future.

This question implicitly challenges the audience's assumptions and consumption habits, encouraging behavioral change without having to make a direct command, but still has high persuasive power.

Metaphor and Imagery

Metaphors and images are often used to strengthen mental associations and create a stronger emotional impact on the audience.

The anti-drug campaign with the slogan "Drugs are a Trap" often features images of hands trapped in a net or chain, showing the shackling effects of addiction.

In one city center, a large billboard features an image of a teenager with chains wrapped around his hands and the text that reads, "Drugs are a Trap Break Free Before It's Too Late." This imagery visualizes the feeling of being trapped that addicts often experience, reinforcing the message of the dangers of drugs.

The metaphor of "trap" depicts the effects of drugs as something that limits a person's freedom, strengthening the meaning emotionally and conceptually, making it easier for the audience to remember and understand the message.

Repetition and Slogans

Repetition is used to reinforce memory and cement a message in the minds of the audience. Classic slogans like Reduce, Reuse, Recycle in environmental campaigns use repetition to reinforce the message of sustainability. In schools, students see green posters with a picture of the earth and the

text,   Reduce, Reuse, Recycle   in every corner of the room. This message becomes part of their mindset, reinforcing environmentally friendly behavior. Repetition of these three words is simple yet very effective in creating a pattern of behavior, reinforcing the message through rhythm and consistency.

The Influence of Cultural and Social Context on Persuasive Language Strategies

The effectiveness of messages in public service advertisements is greatly influenced by the cultural and social context of the target community. This is important because messages that do not conform to local cultural values or social norms are often less effective or can even cause resistance. Some important aspects that influence this effectiveness include cultural values, social and religious norms, and language and communication style.

Cultural Values

Cultural values play a significant role in determining how persuasive messages are received by a society. Some cultures have collectivistic tendencies, while others are more individualistic. For example, Asian societies such as Indonesia, Japan, and Korea tend to place a higher value on social harmony, cooperation, and community well-being, compared to Western societies that focus more on individual freedom and personal autonomy.

Environmental campaigns in Indonesia often use slogans such as "Kita Jaga Alam, Alam Jaga Kita" which emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, reflecting the strong philosophy of mutual cooperation and balance in nature in Indonesian culture.

In an Indonesian village close to a tropical forest, people gathered at the village hall to watch a traditional arts performance that was in conjunction with a forest conservation campaign. In the middle of the performance, a large screen appeared displaying the message, "Kita Jaga Alam, Alam Jaga Kita." Images of green forests and clear rivers accompanied the text, reminding them that their survival depends on the preservation of the natural world around them. Communities with strong ties to their ancestral lands were more receptive to this message, as it was in line with the values of mutual cooperation and environmental awareness that had been passed down from generation to generation.

This strategy is effective because it uses local cultural values as the basis for the message, strengthening emotional bonds and social responsibility in protecting nature, while reducing resistance to conservation messages.

Social Norms and Religion

Social and religious norms are often strong factors in determining individual behavior. Public service announcements that are in line with religious values and social norms are more likely to be accepted and followed by the public. References to moral and spiritual values are often used to reinforce messages.

Anti-drug campaigns in countries with Muslim populations often use religious values to reinforce messages, such as using verses from the Quran or hadith that prohibit dangerous behavior.

In a large mosque in Jakarta, the Friday sermon this time had a specific theme about the dangers of drugs. At the end of the sermon, the imam reminded the congregation with a quote from the Quran, "And do not throw yourselves into destruction" (QS. Al-Baqarah: 195), while showing a short video about the bad effects of drugs on the mosque's large screen. This message was followed by the slogan, "Take care of yourself, maintain your faith, stay away from drugs." Among the congregation, a young father was reminded of his responsibility to protect his family from the dangers of drugs, feeling a deeper moral burden because the message was rooted in his faith.

The use of holy verses as part of a persuasive strategy strengthens the message by linking desired behavior to religious values, creating a stronger motivation to avoid drugs.

Language and Communication Style

A communication style that is in keeping with social norms is essential to ensure that the message is received without creating resistance. Language that is polite and respectful of local norms tends to be more acceptable, while language that is too direct or harsh may be considered inappropriate.

Traffic safety campaigns in Japan often use gentle yet powerful language, such as Please Drive Safely Your Family is Waiting for You compared to the more aggressive approach of Don t Be a Killer Drive Carefully that may be more common in some Western countries.

A driver in Tokyo sees a digital sign on the side of the road that reads, Please Drive Safely Your Family is Waiting for You. The image of a happy family waiting at home reinforces the message. This message not only provides a warning, but also reminds the driver of the value of family, which is highly valued in Japanese culture. This approach takes into account the norms of politeness and respect for family in Japanese culture, strengthening the effectiveness of the message without creating discomfort or resistance.

Overall, the effectiveness of persuasive language strategies in PSAs relies heavily on a deep understanding of the cultural and social context. A pragmatic approach helps identify the most appropriate strategies for different audiences, ensuring that the message is not only received but also implemented in real-world action. The use of strong metaphors, emotional language, and a contextual approach increases the likelihood that the PSA message will achieve its goals.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the importance of persuasive language strategies in public service advertisements (PSAs), specifically focusing on their role in shaping audience behavior through pragmatic techniques. The research confirms that language strategies, including metaphors, repetition, imperatives, and framing, are not only key to effectively conveying messages but also highly influenced by the social and cultural context in which the advertisements are placed. The findings suggest that these strategies enhance the emotional appeal and urgency of the message, which leads to greater audience engagement and recall.

From a pragmatic perspective, the use of culturally relevant metaphors and repetition significantly boosts the memorability of the messages. Moreover, the strategic use of imperatives helps instill a sense of urgency, which is essential in promoting immediate behavioral changes, such as in health or safety campaigns. The study also highlights the role of framing in structuring the message to align with societal norms and values, thereby improving its persuasiveness.

The study's core contribution lies in demonstrating how language in PSAs should be adapted to fit the cultural and social expectations of the target audience. It offers insights into how advertisers can craft messages that resonate more deeply with the audience by considering both linguistic and cultural factors. By integrating pragmatic analysis, advertisers can design more effective public service campaigns that align with the community's values and foster long-term behavioral change.

In pragmatic language teaching, particularly in advertising analysis, educators should emphasize the role of cultural context to help learners interpret messages accurately and understand their intended impact. Teachers should guide students in developing effective advertising messages by integrating pragmatic strategies with sociocultural awareness, ensuring that communication aligns with audience expectations and cultural norms. This study recommends that future PSAs leverage the power of pragmatic analysis to refine their language strategies, particularly by integrating social and cultural contexts to increase the message's effectiveness. Advertisers should focus on utilizing imperative language to prompt immediate action while ensuring that metaphors and repetitions strengthen message retention. Additionally, future research should explore the impact of these strategies across different cultures to further refine approaches to global and localized PSA campaigns. A mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis with audience response measurements, could provide valuable insights into the emotional and cognitive effects of various persuasive strategies on different demographic groups. Future studies should also assess the long-term impact of PSAs on audience behavior and consider the effectiveness of digital media in reaching younger audiences.

This research provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding the intersection of language, culture, and persuasion, and sets the stage for future studies to delve deeper into the pragmatic dimensions of public service communications.

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