

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Audience's Mentality on Confidence towards Public Speakers during Political Campaigns

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ABSTRACT

While effective public speaking is a critical element in political campaigning, how audiences perceive speaker confidence, and how that perception is shaped by specific socio-cultural values, remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining how registered Filipino voters interpret the confidence and communication styles of political speakers, as well as identifying the specific words or messages that resonate most and influence voter perception. Using an exploratory qualitative design, the study involves one-on-one interviews with 25 registered Filipino voters from Northern Luzon, Western Visayas, and the Zamboanga Peninsula. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to uncover themes related to public perception of speaker confidence, the emotional and psychological undertones of speaker delivery, and the linguistic elements that make political messages impactful. The findings reveal that for Filipino voters, confidence is not a projection of dominance but is interpreted as a relational construct rooted in perceived authenticity, humility, and adaptability. Findings contribute to the fields of political communication, campaign strategy, and public speaking by offering insights into how culturally-specific values and perceived authenticity influence public trust, emotional connection, and electoral decision-making.

Keywords: Mentality; Public Speaker; Political Campaigns; Voters

1. Introduction

In the high-stakes arena of political campaigns, public speaking is more than a platform for policy

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articulation it is a performance that deeply influences public trust, emotional connection, and ultimately, voter decisions ^[1,2]. Political candidates are expected to deliver messages that not only inform but also inspire and persuade ^[3]. While much of the scholarly focus has revolved around rhetoric, persuasion, and media strategies, one critical dimension remains underexplored: how audiences perceive and interpret a speaker's confidence, and which specific verbal and non-verbal cues shape that interpretation within a specific socio-cultural context.

Existing literature on political communication tends to emphasize content, language strategies, and audience demographics, but there is a noticeable gap in understanding how Filipino voters interpret these non-verbal and psychological cues during political campaigns, and how specific language choices shape their impressions of a speaker's credibility, trustworthiness, and competence ^[4].

This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how registered Filipino voters perceive the confidence and communication styles of political speakers, and by identifying the words, phrases, or messages that resonate most with the electorate. It investigates not only what political figures say, but how the communication style and perceived authenticity behind their delivery affects audience reception and decision-making ^[5,6].

In the Philippine political landscape, campaign rallies and speeches remain a dominant method of engaging voters, especially in local contexts where personal connection and public charisma play a crucial role ^[7]. Filipino voters, diverse in background and priorities, often form judgments not only based on policy content but also on the emotional and psychological impression left by the speaker. The increasing visibility of candidates through both traditional and digital media platforms has made the perception of speaker confidence more influential than ever ^[8,9]. A speaker who appears secure, relatable, and sincere often garners greater public support even if their message content is similar to that of less confident peers ^[10].

This study centers on several core concepts: perceived speaker confidence (as interpreted by the audience), communication style (including tone, body language, and speech clarity), and message resonance (how particular words or phrases emotionally or cognitively impact listeners). The primary variables explored include voter perceptions of speaker confidence and communication behavior, and the specific language or message elements that influence voter impressions or decisions ^[11,12].

The findings aim to provide initial insights into the intersection of language use and voter psychology and to lay the groundwork for future, larger-scale research in this specific socio-cultural context ^[13].

2. Literature review

This review synthesizes key literature to build the framework for this study. It first discusses the role of public speaking in political communication, with a specific focus on the Philippine socio-cultural context. It then explores the components of perceived speaker confidence, the psychological factors influencing audience perception, and finally, the linguistic elements that create "sticky" or resonant political messaging. This synthesis establishes the foundation for investigating how Filipino voters interpret and are influenced by political communication.

2.1. Public speaking and political communication

Public speaking during political campaigns is a crucial means for candidates to connect with voters, demonstrate leadership, and establish credibility. Scholars note that effective political communication depends on the integration of verbal and nonverbal cues. Confident speakers, for example, tend to use rhetorical timing and vocal emphasis to make their message more persuasive ^[1]. However, in the Philippine setting, these technical skills are insufficient. Communicative success is also influenced by socio-cultural

expectations such as pakikisama (social harmony), humility, and respect qualities that contribute to perceived authenticity and relatability ^[14]. Public response to leadership during times of disruption is often shaped by how effectively and empathetically messages are delivered. Communicative strategies are thus central not just to leadership performance, but also to public trust.

2.2. Perceived confidence and voter psychology

Confidence is not an internal state this study measures, but rather a set of perceived behaviors that audiences interpret. These behaviors commonly include posture, tone, vocal control, and consistent eye contact. Lucas ^[15] highlights that these external behaviors signal authority and competence. Mehrabian's ^[16] communication model often misapplied but still influential suggests that tone and body language can significantly affect audience interpretation. While internal psychological factors like anxiety can affect performance ^[17], in political discourse, confidence is foremost a "strategic display" that shapes public image ^[18].

Ultimately, audience perception plays a central role in the effectiveness of political messaging. Voters often evaluate political candidates based on their nonverbal cues, emotional tone, and ability to project authenticity. McGraw et al. ^[19] found that voter preferences are shaped more by perceived integrity and relatability than by policy specifics. This is particularly relevant in the Filipino context, where emotional warmth and moral authority are particularly valued in public figures ^[20]. Westen ^[21] also argued that voters respond more strongly to emotional narratives than rational arguments, reinforcing the importance of delivery style. Motivational strategies, everyday language use, and storytelling ^[22] thus become critical tools for how messages are internalized and for shaping public engagement.

2.3. Resonant language: Words That Stick

Beyond delivery, specific language choices determine whether a message "sticks" with an audience. Resonant political language is often emotionally evocative and value-laden. Lakoff ^[23] asserted that metaphors and linguistic frames help shape how people understand political issues. Heath and Heath ^[24] introduced the idea of "stickiness" the use of simple, unexpected, and emotionally charged phrases that are easily remembered. In the Philippine political arena, for example, language that evokes national identity, faith, and collective struggle tends to leave a lasting impression on voters ^[25]. The strategic use of these rhetorical patterns, including humor and stereotypes, has a direct power to shape public attitudes and perceptions ^[26].

This literature review underscores the dynamic interplay between perceived speaker confidence, audience psychology, and the strategic use of language in political campaigns. It establishes that voters, particularly within the Philippine context, interpret a combination of non-verbal cues (delivery), perceived character (authenticity), and emotionally resonant language (word choice) to assess a candidate's credibility. Grounding this study in these interconnected frameworks enables a nuanced understanding of political communication.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory design aimed at understanding the perceptions of Filipino voters regarding language and communicative styles that resonate with them. The design is appropriate for capturing the subjective interpretations, lived experiences, and perceptions of voters as they assess the confidence and effectiveness of political speakers. Given the small sample size, the study is not intended to

be generalizable but rather to serve as an exploratory 'start-up' study. Its purpose is to develop a preliminary framework for understanding voter perception in this specific socio-cultural context.

3.2. Population and sampling

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 25 registered Filipino voters as participants. These individuals were chosen based on their eligibility to vote and their firsthand exposure to recent political campaigns. The sample size was deemed sufficient for an exploratory study to reach data saturation, enabling the extraction of diverse yet thematically coherent perspectives. Demographic balance in terms of age, gender, and geographic location was considered to ensure variation in political exposure and opinion.

The 25 participants included a balanced mix of genders and represented a wide range of age groups, including young voters (18-29), middle-aged voters (30-49), and senior voters (50+). To ensure a diversity of political exposure, participants were recruited from different geographic regions, specifically Northern Luzon, Western Visayas, and the Zamboanga Peninsula.

3.3. Instrument

The study utilized a researcher-developed interview protocol based on a literature-informed framework. Questions were designed to elicit reflective narratives, emotional reactions, and personal judgments about political speakers' performance and messaging. The instrumentation focused on two primary objectives: (1) voters' perceptions of speaker confidence and (2) the language that resonated most with them. **Table 1** presents the list of guide questions used by this research study.

Table 1. Interview guide questions.

Objectives	Interview question
1. To explore how registered voters perceive the confidence and communication styles of public speakers during political campaigns.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you describe a confident political speaker based on the campaigns you have witnessed? 2. What communication styles or behaviors make a political speaker appear more convincing or trustworthy to you? 3. Can you recall a specific moment during a political campaign when a speaker's confidence stood out to you? What made it memorable?
2. To examine the specific words, phrases, or messages used by political speakers that resonate most with registered voters and influence their impressions or decisions.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What kinds of words or messages do you find most powerful or meaningful when listening to political speeches? 2. Can you share a phrase or statement from a political campaign that stayed with you? Why do you think it had such an impact? 3. How do the words or messages used by political speakers influence the way you view their character or platform?

3.4. Data gathering procedure

Data were collected through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, which allowed for both depth and flexibility in participant responses. The interview guide was designed to address two primary objectives: first, to explore how voters perceive confident communication during political speeches, and second, to identify the specific words, phrases, or themes that resonate most and influence voter perception or decision-making. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted either face-to-face or through secure online platforms, depending on participant availability and safety considerations. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.5. Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke [27]. This approach is not a rigid, linear method but an interpretive and flexible one, making it highly suitable for unpacking the nuanced and subjective reactions of audiences to political messaging. This method enabled inductive coding, iterative theme development, and reflexive engagement with the data.

The analysis began with familiarization through repeated reading of the interview transcripts, followed by the generation of initial codes that captured elements related to perceived speaker confidence, audience impressions, and resonant language. Themes were then identified and reviewed to reflect external audience perceptions, such as trustworthiness and clarity. The final step involved defining and naming the key themes in alignment with the study's research questions.

The reflexive approach was especially appropriate for this study, as it recognized the interpretive role of the researcher while emphasizing the participants' lived experiences and subjective meanings. This allowed for a detailed exploration of how outward expressions of confidence and specific language choices are received and interpreted by voters.

4. Results

Research Objectives 1. To explore how registered voters perceive the confidence and communication styles of public speakers during political campaigns.

Question No. 1. How would you describe a confident political speaker based on the campaigns you have witnessed?

1.1 *Clarity and Command of Message*

Participants associated confidence with a speaker's perceived mastery over their message. Ten (10) respondents noted that confident speakers speak clearly and directly, without stuttering or looking unsure. This mastery was often evidenced by not relying on notes; participants felt this signaled a genuine understanding of the platform and that they were hearing the speaker's "real thoughts, not something rehearsed".

"I noticed they often don't rely too much on notes they talk like they really know and believe in what they're saying."

"It shows they really understand their platform. I feel like I'm hearing their real thoughts, not something rehearsed."

1.2 *Composed Passion and Emotional Control*

Ten (10) respondents identified a speaker's ability to balance passion with self-control as a primary indicator of confidence. Participants distinguished this "composed passion" from mere dramatic performance, noting that a speaker who could convey deep care while remaining in control was perceived as more powerful and genuine.

"When someone speaks with strong emotion but stays composed, that's when I feel their confidence. I remember one candidate who didn't raise their voice but spoke with power every word seemed to land well. That left a strong impression on me."

"I think true confidence shows when a speaker can express emotion without being dramatic. Like, you can feel they care deeply, but they stay in control. That kind of calm energy makes their message even more powerful for me."

1.3 Linguistic Versatility and Adaptive Communication

Five (5) respondents expressed that confidence shows when the speaker can speak in both Filipino and English fluently, switching depending on who they're addressing. It makes them feel that the speakers are prepared and intelligent. Additionally, they shared that when a politician switches from English to Filipino naturally, it shows the politicians know who they're talking to. It's like the speakers reaching out to both educated professionals and ordinary citizens. That's real communication skill.

"Confidence shows when the speaker can speak in both Filipino and English fluently, switching depending on who they're addressing. It makes me feel that they are prepared and intelligent."

"It's like they're reaching out to both educated professionals and ordinary citizens. That's real communication skill."

Question No. 2. What communication styles or behaviors make a political speaker appear more convincing or trustworthy to you?

2.1 Active listening / Respectful interaction

Ten (10) respondents expressed that a speaker who listens first before speaking, and doesn't interrupt people, earns their respect. It shows the speakers are not just performing, but actually care about the people's concerns. Additionally, they mentioned that they can tell someone is a real leader when the speakers truly listen to questions or complaints and respond clearly, not with vague answers. Voters consistently value political speakers who exhibit listening behaviors such as waiting their turn, responding thoughtfully, and acknowledging diverse perspectives. These behaviors convey humility, empathy, and sincerity traits that distinguish genuinely trustworthy leaders from those who merely perform for applause.

"A speaker who listens first before speaking, and doesn't interrupt people, earns my respect. It shows they are not just performing, but actually care about the people's concerns."

"I can tell someone is a real leader when they truly listen to questions or complaints and respond clearly, not with vague answers."

2.2 Honesty and humility

Ten (10) respondents expressed that a trustworthy speaker is someone who admits when he or she doesn't know something instead of faking an answer. That humility is rare, and it shows strength, not weakness. Additionally, they mentioned that when a politician admits they still need to study or clarify something, they trust them more. This was a consistent theme: voters respond positively to humility in public speaking, particularly when candidates openly admit their knowledge limits. This rare act of vulnerability is interpreted not as incompetence, but as a sign of honesty, maturity, and accountability.

"A trustworthy speaker is someone who admits when they don't know something instead of faking an answer. That humility is rare, and it shows strength, not weakness."

"When a politician admits they still need to study or clarify something, I trust them more. It means they're not pretending to know everything."

2.3 Clarity and simplicity / Accessibility of language

Five (5) respondents mentioned that when the speaker's words are simple and direct, it's easier to understand. Not full of jargon. That's when they see that the speakers genuinely care about ordinary people. Additionally, they mentioned that they prefer candidates who don't speak too technically. Voters consistently favor political speakers who use plain, relatable language over those who rely on jargon or overly formal terms. Simplicity is seen not as a lack of intellect, but as a deliberate choice to connect with the masses, especially marginalized or less-educated groups.

"When their words are simple and direct, it's easier to understand. Not full of jargon. That's when I see that they genuinely care about ordinary people."

"I prefer candidates who don't speak too technically. Those who talk like they're having a conversation with people, not delivering a lecture."

Question No. 3. Can you recall a specific moment during a political campaign when a speaker's confidence stood out to you? What made it memorable?

3.1 Authenticity in adverse situations

The most memorable displays of confidence were not found in controlled, staged rallies, but in moments of unscripted crisis. Ten (10) participants consistently interpreted a speaker's willingness to be physically present in an adverse situation (like a 'flood-stricken area' or a 'typhoon-hit town') as the ultimate proof of authenticity. This suggests that for these voters, 'real' confidence is tested not by a perfect speech, but by a leader's unscripted empathy and presence in an uncontrolled environment.

"I remember one candidate visiting a flood-stricken area. He spoke without a microphone, standing on a truck, soaking wet."

"He didn't make grand promises he just listened and responded with empathy. That made him stand out."

3.2 Adaptability and presence of mind

Ten (10) participants interpreted a speaker's ability to handle unexpected technical failures as a key sign of confidence. When faced with a 'power out' or 'tech issue,' speakers who responded with calm humor and adaptability were seen as 'real and unshaken.' This reframing of a problem as an opportunity demonstrated a presence of mind that voters found more impressive than a flawless, rehearsed speech.

"There was a rally where the power went out. The speaker continued his message without hesitation, using a megaphone."

"There was a tech issue during a livestreamed event, and instead of acting frustrated, the candidate smiled and said, 'Let's go old school.'"

3.3 Vulnerability and honesty as confidence

Five (5) participants frequently defined confidence not as infallibility, but as the courage to be vulnerable. Admitting 'past mistakes' or a 'wrong decision' was seen as 'bold' and a sign of strength, not weakness. This suggests that for these voters, true confidence includes accountability and a willingness to be honest, which stands in stark contrast to the defensive posturing they may expect from politicians.

"One candidate was asked about corruption during a live interview, and instead of dodging it, he admitted past mistakes and explained what he learned."

"He explained what went wrong and how he changed his process since then. That honesty made him stand out for me."

Research Objectives 2. To examine the specific words, phrases, or messages used by political speakers that resonate most with registered voters and influence their impressions or decisions.

Question No. 1. What kinds of words or messages do you find most powerful or meaningful when listening to political speeches?

Hope and Reform-Oriented Messaging

Ten (10) participants responded strongly to abstract, value-laden words centered on hope and reform, such as 'pag-asa' (hope) and 'pagbabago' (change). However, this effect was conditional. Respondents stressed that these words were only "powerful" when perceived as sincere and "paired with realistic plans". This suggests that for these voters, the delivery of the word (the non-verbal cues signaling sincerity) is as important as the word itself in building trust and inspiring optimism.

"Words like 'pagbabago' (change) and 'tunay na serbisyo' (genuine service) are powerful for me especially when said with sincerity. It gives hope that things can improve."

"When I hear the word 'pag-asa' (hope) in speeches, it moves me. Especially when paired with realistic plans. I want to believe that something better is possible."

1.2 Character Traits and Leadership Values

Five (5) respondents were highly attentive to language that described a candidate's personal character and values, such as 'kakayahan' (ability), 'tapang' (courage), and 'integridad' (integrity). The phrase 'Matapang na may malasakit' (Courageous with compassion) was cited as particularly powerful. This finding suggests that voters are not just evaluating policy, but are actively seeking a specific leadership archetype: one that balances perceived strength with tangible empathy.

"When I hear words like 'kakayahan,' 'tapang,' and 'integridad,' it catches my attention. I want a leader who shows strength but also honesty."

"'Matapang na may malasakit' is a powerful line I heard. It made me believe the candidate was not just tough, but also deeply caring."

1.3 Inclusivity and Pro-Poor Messaging

Ten (10) participants expressed that simple, inclusive, and "anti-elitist" language was highly resonant. Phrases like 'para sa masa' (for the masses) and 'walang maiiwan' (no one left behind) were seen as meaningful. This highlights a deep-seated voter desire for representation and a rejection of perceived political exclusion. By using this language, a speaker signals a grassroots connection and an anti-elitist position, which fosters a sense of trust and belonging among ordinary citizens.

"Simple messages like 'para sa masa,' or 'walang maiiwan' are meaningful. I want leaders who focus on inclusion and remember ordinary people."

"I remember hearing 'lahat tayo ay pantay-pantay' in a campaign speech. It made me feel that the leader truly believes in equality and fairness for everyone."

Question No. 2. Can you share a phrase or statement from a political campaign that stayed with you? Why do you think it had such an impact?

2.1 Authenticity and genuine service

Ten (10) respondents reflected how memorable phrases often created a direct linguistic contrast between "genuine service" ('Serbisyong totoo') and "mere performance" ('pang-pormahan', 'pa-arte'). This deliberate opposition taps into voter cynicism about "political theatrics" and a desire for authentic leadership. These phrases "stuck" because they validated the audience's suspicion of insincerity and elevated humility and a 'desire to serve' as a core, respected value.

"I remember a candidate who said, 'Serbisyong totoo, hindi pang-pormahan.' It impacted me because it called out fake promises and highlighted sincerity."

"I recall a candidate saying, 'Hindi kami nandito para magpa-arte, kundi para maglingkod.' That line stuck with me because it showed humility and a real desire to serve, not just to be seen."

2.2 Accountability and action over words

In a political landscape perceived as being full of "unmet promises," five (5) voters deeply valued language that prioritized "action" ('gawa') over "words" ('salita'). A phrase like "less promises, more commitment" was memorable because it directly addressed and attempted to subvert this expectation of disappointment. This shows that voters are drawn to messaging that acknowledges their past frustrations and frames the candidate as a practical problem-solver.

"A candidate said, 'Hindi sapat ang salita; gawa ang kailangan.' It stayed with me because actions matter more than promises."

"I remember someone saying, 'Hindi ko kayo pangangakuan, pero hindi ko rin kayo pababayaan.' That felt powerful because it was honest less promises, more commitment."

2.3 Unity and collective progress

In a climate perceived as divisive, ten (10) respondents stated that a call for unity ('Magkaisa tayo') were highly impactful. Phrases that "reminded people to focus on solutions, not division" resonated deeply. This language reframes the political goal as a shared, "collective effort" rather than a zero-sum game. It appeals to a desire for social harmony and reinforces the idea that national progress requires collaboration from all sectors of society.

"'Magkaisa tayo para sa kinabukasan.' This phrase gave me hope and a sense of collective effort."

"I heard a candidate say, 'Walang makakamit na pagbabago kung tayo-tayo mismo ang nag-aaway.' That struck me because it reminded people to focus on solutions, not division."

Question No. 3. How do the words or messages used by political speakers influence the way you view their character or platform?

3.1 Clarity and authenticity

This theme reveals that ten (10) respondents see a direct, causal link between how a person speaks and who they are. Simple, clear, jargon-free speech was interpreted as a reflection of an "honest and grounded" character. Conversely, complex or evasive language was seen as a sign of "playing games". This directly links a speaker's linguistic clarity to their perceived morality and trustworthiness. Voters see this accessible

language as a sign of respect for the audience, which in turn reinforces the candidate's image as an authentic and humble public servant, not an out-of-touch elitist.

"When a candidate speaks clearly and directly, without trying to impress, I see them as honest and grounded. Their words reflect who they are."

"I prefer candidates who explain things in a simple way, without sugarcoating. It shows they respect the people enough to be real and not play games."

3.2 Message consistency and credibility

Ten (10) respondents reported actively monitoring for "message consistency" throughout a campaign, using it as a key proxy for a candidate's character and integrity. A speaker who did not change their promises for different audiences was seen as "sincere" and "principled". Inconsistency, therefore, was not seen as adapting, but as a sign of moral flexibility and untrustworthiness. This finding suggests that in a low-trust political environment, voters use this consistency as a crucial heuristic to determine if a candidate is deliberate and trustworthy, or merely a "chameleon" telling people what they want to hear.

"When their message stays consistent from the start to the end of the campaign, I believe them more. I see that as a sign of character."

"I notice when candidates keep repeating the same vision and not changing their promises depending on who they're talking to. That's when I feel they're sincere."

3.3 Inclusivity and respect in language

A candidate's language about marginalized groups (farmers, the poor, women) was treated as a direct window into their "mindset" and true platform. Five (5) respondents drew a sharp line between "respect" and "pity". Respectful language signaled genuine understanding and empathy, while condescending language (even if well-intentioned) revealed a disconnect. This shows voters use these specific linguistic cues to gauge a candidate's true priorities and fitness to lead. The choice of words in this area is seen as a powerful, unfiltered signal of a candidate's core values and their capacity for genuine advocacy.

"The way they speak about poor people, women, and minorities tells me a lot about their platform. Words reflect their mindset."

"When a candidate mentions farmers, workers, or the poor with respect not pity I feel they actually understand real issues."

5. Discussion

This study explored how Filipino voters perceive political speakers' confidence and how particular linguistic choices resonate with them. The findings demonstrate that what audiences interpret as "confidence" is not an internal psychological condition but a relational construct an evaluation shaped by cultural expectations, linguistic familiarity, and social values. Confidence, from the audience's standpoint, is performed, recognized, and rewarded when it aligns with communal ideals of authenticity, humility, and empathy. In multilingual cultures like the Philippines, such as Mangad et al. ^[28] observe, politicians prioritize straightforward, locally grounded language to appeal emotionally and to demonstrate relatedness. This finding confirms that effective persuasion in political communication is fundamentally audience-centered, depending on how listeners perceive sincerity, care, and respect ^[29, 30].

Consistent with the work of Goffman ^[5] and Campbell ^[29], persuasion is not the speaker's private psychological act but an interactive performance in which audiences actively interpret verbal and non-verbal cues to determine authenticity. Filipino voters' notions of "confidence" thus depend less on vocal dominance or charisma and more on observable relational behaviors clarity, composure, and responsiveness. When participants described confident speakers as those who "listen first," "speak clearly," and "remain composed under pressure," they echoed Atkinson's ^[1] and Fridkin et al.'s ^[18] claim that confidence is signaled externally through control, not internally through self-assurance. This supports a redefinition of political confidence as a socially inferred quality, rooted in audience judgment rather than self-perception.

Such audience-centered interpretation also parallels López-Moctezuma et al. ^[31], who found that deliberative political engagement allows voters to evaluate candidates' sincerity more critically and modify their choices accordingly. The Filipino voters in this study demonstrated a similar deliberative orientation: they rewarded communicative behaviors that invite participation, such as attentiveness and humility, rather than those that perform authority. In this sense, the Filipino electorate acts not as a passive recipient of campaign rhetoric but as an interpretive community that evaluates whether a speaker's style resonates with shared values and collective experience.

A defining pattern in the findings is the Filipino audience's valuation of authenticity over performance and humility as strength. Participants repeatedly interpreted honesty, composure, and emotional restraint as indicators of genuine leadership. This interpretation reflects deep-rooted cultural ideals *pakikisama* (social harmony), *pagpapakumbaba* (humility), and *malasakit* (compassion) that structure Filipino social life ^[14, 20]. In the Philippine political sphere, a speaker who embodies these traits projects not only competence but moral integrity, which audiences interpret as confidence with conscience.

Mangad et al. ^[28] confirm that politicians' use of local and emotionally familiar language demonstrates cultural sensitivity and builds trust among multilingual audiences. This aligns with participants' positive reactions to leaders who code-switch naturally between English and Filipino, signaling inclusivity and adaptability. In such performances, humility and linguistic accommodation serve as forms of cultural intelligence, enabling politicians to appear relatable without diminishing authority. Thus, perceived confidence emerges as a culturally embedded performance that fuses relational warmth with communicative adaptability a form of leadership that resonates deeply within the Filipino ethos of collectivism and respect.

While emotional appeal is an established element of political persuasion ^[21, 32], this study's findings reveal a nuanced voter sensibility that distinguishes authentic emotion from strategic emotionality. Serazio ^[33] notes that modern campaign strategy often bypasses rational deliberation, using emotionally charged yet carefully staged messages to appear genuine. Filipino voters, however, were shown to be discerning of such manipulation; they valued emotional composure over theatrics and responded more positively to understated sincerity. The most memorable political moments cited by participants were spontaneous, unscripted acts such as speaking calmly during a power outage or expressing empathy in a disaster area demonstrating that authentic presence under adversity carries more persuasive power than rehearsed charisma.

This preference underscores that Filipino audiences resist overly manufactured emotional displays, interpreting them as disingenuous. Such discernment highlights a unique communicative expectation: emotional authenticity must be balanced with cultural decorum (*hiya*) and self-control. Emotional excess, rather than signaling passion, risks violating norms of propriety and humility. Thus, confidence in Filipino political rhetoric is best understood as calm conviction, not theatrical energy a finding that reframes political persuasion as a culturally contingent performance of affective balance.

The study also found that voters equate linguistic clarity and simplicity with sincerity and respect. While much literature supports the persuasive power of plain speech ^[24, 23], Amsalem ^[34] complicates this assumption, showing that simplicity's effect on persuasion depends on audience and context. Filipino voters' preference for plain language is therefore not cognitive but cultural an expression of solidarity and accessibility rather than limited comprehension. Simple talk becomes powerful only when it communicates *pakikisama*, signaling that the speaker values connection over elitism. Conversely, complex or foreign-sounding jargon risks alienating voters by implying social distance or arrogance.

Moreover, linguistic accessibility is linked to social inclusion. Voters responded strongly to inclusive phrases such as *para sa masa* (for the people) and *walang maiwan* (no one left behind), which evoke empathy and belonging. These expressions resonate within the Filipino moral framework of *bayanihan* (collective unity) and *malasakit* (care for others). As López-Moctezuma et al. ^[31] suggest, when political discourse encourages mutual understanding, it enables citizens to connect personal experiences with public policy, fostering more programmatic and informed decision-making. Therefore, simplicity in Filipino political speech functions less as a stylistic tool and more as an ethical stance that positions the speaker as a servant of the people rather than an elite authority.

The linguistic patterns identified in this study also demonstrate how politicians construct trust through rhetorical framing. Umarova ^[35] notes that euphemism and dysphemism allow speakers to shape perception, maintain respectability, and emotionally move listeners. Filipino voters' sensitivity to expressions like “*Serbisyong totoo, hindi pang-pormahan*” (genuine service, not for show) exemplifies how such linguistic framing fosters credibility. These rhetorical contrasts between authenticity and performance validate voter cynicism toward “political theatrics” while affirming sincerity as a moral ideal. By favoring inclusive, plain, and emotionally restrained discourse, Filipino voters use language as a litmus test of integrity evaluating not just what is said but how it is said and how it feels.

Ultimately, the Filipino perception of a confident speaker reflects a culturally specific model of credibility: one that blends humility, clarity, and relational empathy. Confidence is not the projection of dominance but the demonstration of moral steadiness and collective respect. The audience's interpretive power what Campbell ^[29] calls the “ownership of persuasion” means that politicians must align their communicative performance with shared cultural scripts of decency and belonging. In contrast to Western notions of self-assertive charisma, the Filipino voter valorizes humility as a form of credibility and views linguistic familiarity as a moral bridge between leader and people.

Thus, confidence in the Philippine context emerges not as an internal psychological state but as a culturally and relationally constructed performance, sustained through sincerity, emotional balance, and linguistic accessibility. Filipino audiences, situated within a collectivist and high-context culture, read these communicative acts as reflections of character and communal values. The findings affirm that effective political persuasion in the Philippines is not merely rhetorical it is moral, relational, and profoundly cultural.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how Filipino voters perceive political speakers' confidence and the types of language that most effectively resonate with them. Moving beyond psychological assumptions about a speaker's internal state, the analysis reframed political confidence as a relational, audience-centered construct an impression co-created by speakers and listeners through language, demeanor, and shared cultural expectations. The findings demonstrate that Filipino audiences reward politicians who communicate with clarity, humility, and sincerity, viewing these as markers of strength rather than weakness. Confidence,

in this context, is not loudness or dominance but the capacity to project moral steadiness and relational empathy.

The results affirm that effective persuasion within the Philippine sociocultural context is both moral and linguistic. Voters interpret authenticity through communicative behaviors that align with cultural values such as social harmony, humility, and compassion. Filipino communication norms emphasize familiarity and emotional connection; accordingly, voters respond more favorably to politicians who use straightforward, inclusive, and multilingual expressions that reflect sensitivity to their audience's experiences. These language practices transform political rhetoric into a site of cultural negotiation where authenticity and respect determine credibility.

Moreover, the study challenges the common assumption that “plain speech” is universally persuasive. While participants valued clarity and accessibility, they did not equate simplicity with shallowness. Simplicity was persuasive only when it conveyed sincerity and social inclusion rather than cognitive ease. Filipino voters interpreted plain language as an ethical signal evidence that a leader sees them as equals, not as passive recipients of elite discourse. This finding underscores the role of language as a moral bridge between speaker and audience.

Ultimately, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of political communication as a culturally situated performance. In collectivist and high-context societies like the Philippines, political credibility arises from the balance between emotional authenticity and social propriety. The persuasive power of political speech lies not in rhetorical flourish but in the consistent enactment of respect, empathy, and humility. These qualities transform confidence from a personal attribute into a communal value an index of character recognized and affirmed by the public.

Future research may extend these insights by comparing audience perceptions across regions or linguistic groups in the Philippines or by examining how digital media environments reshape these cultural expectations of authenticity. For campaign practitioners, the implication is clear: to connect with Filipino voters, language must not only inform but also affirm shared values, demonstrating that effective leadership is grounded as much in cultural attunement as in rhetorical skill.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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