



USE OF RHETORIC IN MULTI-LEVEL MARKETING

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze how identification worked as a key to persuasion among agents in Frontrow Enterprise, an MLM company. Specifically, it sought to find the prevalent source of identification, identification strategy used by the Frontrow agents in their speeches, and their level of persuasion. This study employed descriptive-qualitative design which utilized critical analysis using the Theory of Identification and Consubstantiality. Results show that the highest frequency source of identification found in the speeches is the idealistic identification and the highest frequency identification strategy is the common ground. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that persuasion is manifested using shared interest, attitude, perceptions, values, beliefs, and ideas through establishing common grounds with the audience.

KEYWORDS: Multi-level Marketing, Identification and Consubstantiality, Level of Persuasion, Agents' Speeches, Sources of Identification, Identification Strategies

INTRODUCTION

The use of strategies and techniques among Multi-level Marketing (MLM) companies in convincing individuals to join their network has been an intriguing topic among several researchers (Stocker, 2019; Rashid *et al.*, 2016; Yunus *et al.*, 2016; Legara *et al.* among others). In the Philippines, there are over a hundred active MLM companies which even operate internationally whose products are mostly related to beauty and health (Andallo, 2016) – one of these is the *Frontrow Enterprise*. And, this company has been growing rapidly, such that it continues to recruit additional marketers or agents to become part of their network.

However, only few studies are conducted related to MLM, and these researches only focused on analyzing factors that affect individuals to buy possibilities and become one of them (Ramiscal, 2006; Rashid, 2016), while others only investigated on the downsides and exploitative nature of these MLM companies (Stocker, 2019). Moreover, these studies only explored the texts gathered from the websites of

the top MLM companies operating internationally. This is why this study was conducted in order to examine how these MLM agents do their convincing power through the use of rhetoric which could be reasons why many people tend to join and become distributors.

In this regard, it is just noteworthy to have examined how these companies reached the level of success through establishing the identification process and identification strategies of the agents as a way of persuasion.

Moreover, this study is peculiar from the past studies as it made use of Burke's theory in the world of MLM in general and in *Frontrow Enterprise* in particular through the New Rhetoric approach. Furthermore, this study may not just give insights related to language and public speaking studies but also in the field of marketing.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Generally, this study aimed to analyze the identification, strategies, and level of persuasion of *Frontrow Enterprise* agents.



Specifically, this study aimed to (1) identify the prevalent source of identification found in the speeches of the main speakers and the testimonies in each session, (2) ascertain the prevalent identification strategy found in the speeches of the main speaker and the testimonies in each session, and (3) determine the level of persuasion of the MLM agents.

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative-quantitative study as it dealt with the examination of the sources of identification and the use of strategies, as well as the measurement of the level of persuasion among the *Frontrow Enterprise* agents. This company was chosen due to its prominence among MLM companies especially in the Philippines.

Data collection was conducted during the five orientation sessions of the company having different speakers of various assigned topics towards interested individuals. A total of 11 speeches were collected with an average duration of 20 minutes. After having the consent form approved, speeches were recorded, transcribed, and translated to English since some of the utterances are expressed in vernacular. Then, the instrument proposed by Burke (1969) was used to determine the prevalent source of identification and strategy used by the agents. Afterwards, three inter-raters were asked to check the analysis of the speeches.

Also, a survey was conducted among the audience to identify the level of persuasion which was done through an evaluation form adopted from the study of Lee (2013), which was then analyzed and interpreted through the help of a statistician. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage counting were utilized, as well as the use of *Mann-Whitney U Test* to answer the problems of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Prevalent Source of Identification

Table 1 reveals that the *idealistic* type of identification is the most frequent as to the source of identification. This means that the agents tried to convince their audience to join their company through getting on the same ideas, perception, experiences, values, interests, and attitudes with their audience. Because they wanted to build common reality perceptions with their audience especially on the financial aspect of life – how it would change their lives and the lives of their loved ones – they tend to establish common grounds especially on how they want their audience to see themselves based on how the agents structured and filled their speeches with words that would truly captivate the decision of the listening individuals.

Table 1. Sources of Identification

Sources of Identification	f	%
Materialistic	25	10
Idealistic	205	83
Formal	14	6
Identification through Mystification	1	1
TOTAL	245	100

The common ideas expressed are either pointing to the positive or negative side of life. These ideas include taking good care of the body, maintaining good health, unique principles that would help a person succeed financially, possible steps to achieve success in life, as well as unhelpful mindsets of people, weak decisions in life, and reasons for people's unproductivity.

This outcome is in congruence with the study of Rashid *et al.* (2016) whose findings show that the speaker's choice of words construct the identification process manifested in the speeches. In this way, the ideas about products, quality, world, and health

function are the common rhetorical content used by MLM companies to persuade people. Moreover, Cesario and Higgins (2008), in their study, emphasized that when the source of the message is consistent in feeding motivations to the recipient, there will be high probability that the recipient will experience a regulatory fit and eventually, feel right.

B. Prevalent Identification Strategy

Another concern of the study is the prevalent identification strategy used by the agents along with the dominant source of identification.

**Table 2. Identification Strategies**

Identification Strategies	f	%
Common Ground	168	68
Antithesis	2	1
Unconscious	76	31
TOTAL	245	100

Table 2 presents that the most frequent identification strategy is the common ground. This means that the speakers of MLM *Frontrow Enterprise* stood and built connections with their audience through identifying common goals and situations. In other words, these speakers were putting themselves in the situation of the audience in order to agree with them, in this way, solving strong disagreement between people. For instance, they pointed out common challenges faced by individuals who have the same goal of wanting a better life.

This result correlates with the study of Attwater (2012) which also reveals that the use of

common ground strategy was frequent when doing the persuasion because this strategy attempts to bridge the gap across divisions of traditions and ideologies. Also, speakers in this manner could enter into the goals or situations of their listeners (Weigand, 2008) which is a big influence for persuasion to have a positive effect.

C. Level of Persuasion of the Speakers

The final objective of the study is to examine the level of persuasion brought by the speakers of the said MLM Company.

Table 3. Overall Level of Persuasion

Overall Satisfactory Rating	Level	Interpretation
Strongly Agree	High	Persuasive

Table 3 presents that the overall level of persuasion of the speakers is *high*, which is interpreted as *persuasive*. With this, the prevalent source of identification and strategy used by the speakers helped them to become persuasive towards their audience which entailed that the audience were satisfied with the speeches and that they had come to a point of deciding to join the company.

This result is supported by the theory of Burke (1969) which states that whenever someone is trying to persuade another, identification is formed. Also, Quigley (2013) found the same results in that speakers identify with their audience through providing a rich source of content creating commonalities with which persuasion may truly be evident. Various strategies are used just to persuade the audience, and thus, persuasion is built upon the kind of source and strategy being used.

Also, the identification with the audience helped the speakers achieve their primary goal of getting positive decisions from their audience to join and avail of their products and services. The same idea is true to the results presented by Igartua (2010) which indicated that the kind of identification used by the speakers helped achieve their purpose of making the audience believe and be convinced.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the use of *idealistic identification* in persuasive speeches along with the use of *common ground* strategy can make persuasion to occur and thus, making it effective and productive.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results and conclusion drawn in the study, it is recommended that other theories be applied in tracing the specific ways of persuasion in speeches. Also, it is suggested that another data collection method through interviews may also be done to verify the data gathered through a written questionnaire. Further, the level of persuasion may also be given a premium through the inclusion of figures indicating the number of participants who had eventually joined the *MLM Company* after the orientation.

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