

## Eye'll persuade you: exploring the use of eye contact among Filipino college student in persuasion

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**Abstract** - Our eyes have the ability to communicate what we are feeling and how we perceive a situation. This paper assesses the importance of eye contact in persuasion to first-year college students in a qualitative manner. Making eye contact assists students in concentrating on the conversation and reading facial expressions. This can help with comprehension. Improved understanding can also improve communication between two people (Eatough, 2021). The goal of this study is to learn about students' views toward making eye contact. By using qualitative method with the goal of deepening our understanding of a phenomenon through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis design. We interviewed 24 1st year students in person and via messenger. The responses of the participants underwent thematic approach of Braun and Clarke (2019). The results revealed that the majority of the participants agree that eye contact makes communication effective. The majority of students believe that eye contact is important in persuading people. They suppose that eye contact increases the credibility and confidence of the speaker. They also consider that eye contact results in effective persuasion. Thorough transcript condensing produced five unique themes: the impact of using eye contact in persuasive communication, the use of eye contact as a strategy for effective communication, eye contact increases the speaker's credibility in attracting the audience's attention, complications due to lack of eye contact, inefficiency of lack of eye contact. Various practical recommendations were further elaborated at the end of the study.

**Keywords:** eye contact, effective persuasion, improved understanding, first year college students

## INTRODUCTION

Eye contact is a key element of nonverbal communication that is recognized by many animal species in addition to people. As it provides us with signs to recognize when someone is speaking to us, it plays a crucial part in social interactions. It can also communicate environmental information (Hinzman et al, 2014). A tried-and-true strategy for getting the audience's attention is to make eye contact with them. During a conversation, it conveys that you are nice and interested in what the other person has to say when you look them in the eye. Direct eye contact, however, is frowned upon or regarded as hostile in other cultures. If you want to communicate more effectively, it's essential that the other person can understand the information you're expressing through eye contact. It is critical to recognize the difference between eye contact and gazing. Maintaining eye contact shows that you are confident, at ease, and interested in what the other person has to say. Gazing is considered impolite and may even be menacing. The ability to distinguish between staring and eye contact is a sophisticated talent that can improve your ability to communicate with others (Fritscher, 2017).

It is a nonverbal type of communication used by humans that is believed to have a significant impact on communication influence over social behavior. Communication is essential for human society to convey its thoughts, needs, and interaction, and as a result, communication plays a crucial role in our daily lives. Conversations do not rely only on sounds and voice, but also on information being communicated nonverbally. Utilizing non-Verbal cues Up to 90% of all communication is done through verbal cues (Naeem, 2011). This form of nonverbal communication is used by people to convey a wide range of emotions. We can tell where others are looking pretty fast because we have whiter around our irises than other primates. As a result, we can determine where someone is looking even while their head is stationary. Making eye contact is essential for efficient communication as a result (Eatough, 2021). Making eye contact with the other person while speaking has long been seen to operate as a sort of linking cohesive glue. If it's missing, it can be a sign of social dysfunction (Denworth, 2021). Additionally, it could make what you say appear awful. When you don't make eye contact with someone, they are less likely to listen and understand what you are saying, which increases the likelihood of miscommunications (Shafir, 2021).

One of the most critical elements of communication is frequently regarded as eye contact. According to Shafir (2021), making excessive or insufficient eye contact might insult someone or cause them discomfort. It can also go against unwritten social conventions and rules. It can be beneficial to learn the rules of eye contact, but there is also a need to train your eyes to look for social clues and signs. You may improve your ability to relate to, connect with, and communicate with others by using your eyes. Making eye contact is a crucial communication skill that can be applied to convey empathy, care for others, control emotions, or just to improve conversation. Staring conveys anger,

lack of eye contact and blinking are seen as signs of submissiveness, persons of high status are observed more when speaking than when listening, and it is related with credibility and dominance. Eye contact enhances credibility and dominance, opens and closes communication, and increases both.

The present study aims to fill the gap in addressing this issue and contribute to the discussion on current literature of eye contact in persuasion. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions. (a) What is the relevance of eye contact in convincing the listeners? (b) How can eye contact help in conveying messages?

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research is exploratory in nature, it seeks to better our comprehension of a phenomenon. It takes context into account as an essential component of the research and is inductive, reflexive, and adaptive. The importance of comprehending people, context, and interactors cannot be overstated (Shomron, 2022). Using non-numerical data including text, audio, and visual records, qualitative research aims to comprehend concepts, experiences, and views. The emphasis is on language, behaviors, and social structures (Frost, 1997; Bondy & Frost, 2001). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a well-known qualitative method for investigating people's lived experiences. In order to comprehend the lived experience. It is concerned with individuals' specific experiences and the meaning-making that occurs in reaction to those experiences (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). The aim of IPA is to provide information about how people interpret a particular phenomenon (Voice Docs). As the present study aims at understanding the use of eye contact of the speaker with the audience in persuasion, interpretative phenomenological design was used. The interview form, which is based on the topics specified in the research, has been thoroughly tested utilizing various data sources obtained through observations and document analysis.

Three factors were examined when determining the research approach and design. These are (i) twenty-four (24) first-year Filipino college students who were expected to participate in the research and were asked about the research questions, (ii) to express the opinions of these students on the basis of their experiences about the subject will perform the purpose, through the qualitative research method, (iii) that students who participate in the research process can respond to all questions by basing on their perceptions and based on these three factors, it decided to conduct the research using a qualitative research approach and an interpretative phenomenological (IPA) design.

### **Setting and Participants**

A total of 24 participants were gathered and interviewed face to face with the use of audio recording. Participants were asked an open-ended question with a corresponding question to ensure that the data gathered will be sufficient to

satisfy and answer the research questions. Their responses about their opinion on the significance of eye contact in convincing the listener were used to answer research question 1. Before conducting the interview, the participants were asked for permission and then later were given a consent form. Purposive-convenience sampling was employed since the study was conducted in consideration of the availability of the participants. Only those who are available to be interviewed face to face and at their own convenience were considered to participate. The following criteria were used in choosing the participants: (1) they must be within the scope of Eastern Visayas; and (2) they must be first-year Filipino college students and (3) they have voluntarily participated in the conduct of the study.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In data gathering, they were given a consent form to fill out. Every participant will be informed that the information they provided will only be used for research purposes and that their identities will be private and confidential. After interviewing the participants, the researchers then transcribed the audio recordings used in data gathering which included organizing and compiling the raw answers from the questionnaires. To avoid any misunderstandings, the information that was taken down by the interviewer or researcher will be decrypted and coded in a methodical manner throughout its whole. The researchers then employed coding to categorize the significance of each response that will match to and address a specific study question.

Moreover, the material collected from the interviews was thoroughly transcribed and assessed, followed by further analysis utilizing the thematic approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). It is a technique for detecting, evaluating, and reporting data patterns (themes). It organizes and characterizes your data set in (rich) detail (Boyatzis, 2000; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Additionally, the researchers started by transcribing the data, which included arranging and assembling the raw questionnaire responses. To avoid misunderstandings, the information quickly taken down by the interviewer or researcher will be decrypted and coded in a methodological manner throughout its entirety. The researchers then used coding to classify the significance of each response that corresponded to and addressed a specific study topic. The researchers used the manual coding for qualitative research by Saldana (2011/2016) as a guide in making the codes, categories and themes. The following processes are involved, Saldana (2011/2016) categorizes coding into two stages: first cycle coding and second cycle coding. The first cycle coding methods are codes that are originally assigned to data units. Which is a grounded theory approach to data's initial key stage. In general, Second Cycle coding methods operate with the generated First Cycle codes. In the present study, the first cycle is process coding used in initial codifying. In the second cycle Eclectic coding and Axial coding were used for the final codifying.

### **Ethical Consideration**

The consent form gives potential research subjects enough written information to make an educated decision about whether to participate in a research study based on a description of the intended research and the nature of their engagement. The easiest way to ensure confidentiality is to obtain (or, if data has already been gathered, utilize) anonymous data. Anonymous data is data that is not connected to information that may be used to identify an individual. Anonymity and secrecy are essential because they protect the privacy of those who freely choose to participate in research. It also helps to build trust between study participants and researchers. It reduces the person's anxiety and helps to protect the participant's dignity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Perspectives on the usefulness of eye contact in persuasive communication**

Hand gestures, body motions, and, most significantly, eye contact serve as tools in nonverbal persuasive communication, according to responses from semi-structured interviews. As stated by first-year students, eye contact is "one way of communicating with the audience." They thought that eye contact was one of the requirements for effective persuasion. Furthermore, certain participants, however, stated that certain people do not believe in eye contact since they have their own points of view. In presenting the findings related to research question no. 1, three (3) themes were formed to understand how eye contact is relevant in convincing the audience. And here are the following: (1) the impact of using eye contact in persuasive communication (2) use of eye contact as a strategy for effective communication and lastly, (3) eye contact increases the speaker's credibility by attracting the audience's attention.

#### *(1). The impact of using eye contact in persuasive communication*

The participants defined how important eye contact is for effective communication from their own personal perspectives. According to the respondents, eye contact has a big role in persuasive communication. By using nonverbal cues, it helps the speaker persuade the listeners that what they are witnessing is true. This viewpoint is supported by the following statement.

My answer is yes, eye contact is a significant factor for effective persuasion one of the first reason is because iton eye contact usa hiya nga nonverbal cues when you try to persuade someone with your arguments having the capacity to look at someone directly is possessing the a conviction that you want to impress other people so mayda ka impression nga what you are saying or trying to tell them is true or sincere and with that mayda ka convincing factor nga mayda. iton eye contact at the same time it lets you appear as if you are confident or that you are really confident so with eye contact other people tends to believe you more and also at the same time has the greater percentage or the greater chance nga they really side with you or believe you or else kind of consider your argument. (PC17)

(My answer is yes, eye contact is a significant factor for effective persuasion one of the first reason is because eye contact is nonverbal cues when you try to persuade someone with your arguments having the capacity to look at someone directly is possessing the conviction that you want to impress other people so you have the impression that what you are

saying or trying to tell them is true or sincere and with that you have a convincing factor. Eye contact at the same time lets you appear as if you are confident or that you are confident. So, with eye contact other people tend to believe you more and also at the same time have the greater percentage or greater chance that they will side with you or believe you or at least consider your argument).

Furthermore, participants stated that confidence begins with eye contact. Because eye contact communicates confidence, self-esteem, and self-confidence. This viewpoint is supported by the following statement.

Having eye contact means you have confidence. When the person knows that you're confident in what you're saying, they will be persuaded or convinced. Also having eye contact means that you're telling them facts, because of that you'll be able to persuade whom you're talking to. [PC25]

In conclusion, eye contact is essential for clear communication since it serves as a nonverbal indication for presenters to convince listeners that their points are valid. It is important for effective persuasion because it communicates conviction and confidence, which makes it simpler for listeners to accept and think about what is being said. Speakers may make a strong impact on listeners and decision-makers by making eye contact, which increases their chances of being heard and taken into account. Eye contact is a significant nonverbal social cue since it conveys assurance, self-worth, and assertiveness (Umoh, 2017).

## *(2). Use of eye contact as a strategy for effective communication*

Participants shared eye contact as a useful tool for effective communication. Participants believe that eye contact is the key to nonverbal communication, but it must be associated with right information, because convincing someone is about more than just how confident or neat you present yourself to them, but also about making them understand and feel about what you are saying. This viewpoint is supported by the following statements.

I think eye contact is a very effective instrument. For example, if you're in a battle eye contact plays as your sword or weapon. If you're good in eye contact and you're persuading someone it seems so easy to persuade or convince them aside from your information because eye contact makes you more confident. [PC 24]

Effective persuasion also requires a clear and compelling message, strong evidence to support your argument, and an understanding of your audience's needs and concerns. Eye contact can be a powerful tool in your persuasive arsenal, but it should be used in conjunction with other strategies to maximize your impact. [PC 38]

In these two responses, the participants have expressed their opinions on eye contact as a technique for persuasion that makes it simple to persuade people without giving them facts. Strong justification, persuading evidence, and knowledge of the needs and wants of the intended audience are all necessary. Effective persuasion needs both strong supporting arguments and familiarity with the needs and issues of the target audience. To get the most impact, combine eye contact with additional strategies.

I would indeed agree that eye contact is a great instrument in persuasion. I think most of

us have heard this statement that when we are being honest and sincere, we can look directly in a person's eyes, without any doubt. [PC 46]

In order to grab your target audience's attention, using eye contact as a tool of persuasion is quite helpful. And based on my research, a key component of nonverbal communication is the use of the eyes. They convey a wide spectrum of feelings that words can't always express. Everything cannot always be explained or understood by explanation; occasionally, the look in someone else's eyes can convey our intentions. [PC]

Furthermore, according to respondents, eye contact is crucial for persuasive communication because it creates a bond with the listener. They think that those who are true and honest may grab someone's attention by looking into their eyes. Making eye contact is essential in nonverbal communication because it may indicate a variety of emotions that words cannot. Someone else's eyes may sometimes reveal intentions, making them a useful tool for nonverbal communication.

(3). *Eye contact increases the speaker's credibility in attracting the audience's attention*  
Credibility is necessary for a persuasive speech and speaker since it helps them build trust with the audience and produce a greater response to the action advocated in the speech. By creating credibility, the audience will realize that the speaker has integrity and competency, that she is relationally sensitive, that she has good judgment, and that she is more pleasant, making them more trusting and eager to form a connection with the speaker (Bukowski, 2019). This viewpoint is supported by the following statements.

Yes, eye contact is a significant factor for persuasion in a way that through eye contact, you tend to capture the interest and audience which is a factor for persuasion. Having eye contact with them means you're true to your words and that it persuades them. (PC11)

Yes, making eye contact has a significance for persuasion. Maintaining eye contact during a conversation shows interest, assurance, and sincerity. It establishes a relationship between the speaker and the audience, fostering trust and engagement. (PC19)

Eye contact really matters. It does not only catch the audience's interest, but it helps in making the delivered speech look more convincing/factual/believable. [PC44]

Furthermore, according to these four responses, the participants believed that eye contact is quite important. It not only attracts the audience's attention, but it also helps to make the delivered speech appear more credible.

#### B. Disclosed opinions on speakers lacking eye contact.

The participants furthermore shared their opinions towards the speaker who lacks eye contact when persuading or telling something. There were 3 major themes that emerged based on their responses: (1) Complications due to lack of eye contact, (2) Inefficiency of lack of eye contact, (3) Lessen the credibility of the speaker.

(1). *Complications due to lack of eye contact*

The participants shared their personal views as they also had been an audience on the effects of the speakers lacking eye contact in persuading and making them believe their speech. They confessed during the interview that a speaker who does not make eye contact appears to be boring and dull. Thus, it has led the audience to be uninterested in what the speaker is implying or trying to tell. Making it also for the speaker to have difficulty in connecting and earning the trust of his audience. The following responses highlighted these insights.

If you're lacking eye contact, your audience sometimes doesn't trust what you're saying. And they won't pay attention to what you're saying. [PC 1]

Lack of eye contact affects persuasion. It renders insincerity and an awkward atmosphere that could make the context boring and the audiences uninterested. [PC 15]

It appears insincere when there is no eye contact. Listeners are quickly distracted, and do not pay attention to what the speaker is saying. [PC 17].

It can be deduced from the responses that lack of eye contact of the speaker makes the audience or the listeners be bored and uninterested in listening to what the speaker is talking about or trying to persuade. Establishing trust with the audience begins with eye contact. Persuasion is heavily reliant on the eyes. As a result, when a speaker fails to make eye contact with their audience, the listener may become disinterested in and bored with the speaker (Nelson, 2022).

(2). *Inefficiency of lack of eye contact*

Participants interviewed express their opinion on the effect of inefficiency of lack of eye contact when persuading. Making eye contact with the audience has been an indicator of confidence and credibility. The lack of eye contact of the speaker is often associated with lying, untrustworthy, incredible, and unreliable to the audience, negatively affecting the credibility of the speaker. These can be observed and seen in the responses of the participants.

A lack of eye contact can have a negative impact on persuasion by reducing trust and credibility, creating a lack of connection, reducing engagement, and missing opportunities to assess reactions. [PC 8]

It affects persuasion negatively affecting the listener in a way that it could lessen her credibility as a confident speaker. [PC 9]

A lack of eye contact can diminish persuasion by creating a sense of disconnection, reducing trust, and potentially making the speaker appear less credible or engaged with the listener. [PC 16]

In these three responses from the participants, they have expressed their opinion on how they viewed the speaker who does not make enough eye contact when persuading. In looking, moving, and reacting it tells the audience if the speaker is being honest. When failed to do so, it may cause conflict, mistrust, and confusion (Jeanne Segal, 2023). And avoiding or lack of eye contact of the

speaker, appears to be unreliable or nervous (Sander, 2022). Thus, affecting their credibility as a speaker.

(3). *Lessen the credibility of the speaker*

The participants shared their personal views on the credibility of the speaker when they do not make eye contact with the audience while talking. Making eye contact has a big impact on the credibility of the speaker. A lack of eye contact affects the confidence of the speaker and the trust of the listeners. The following responses highlighted these insights.

When you're talking in front of the audience you must make eye contact with them so that you'll have a good communication, and you'll understand each other. [PC 19]

It's possible that they're lying and maybe they don't have the confidence to make eye contact with the audience. [PC 21]

I think they lack confidence, or they are uncomfortable making eye contact. [PC 22]

In these three responses from the participants, they share their point of view when the speaker doesn't make eye contact. Making eye contact can increase understanding because it encourages both parties to pay attention to the discourse and read facial expressions. And enhancing comprehension can greatly enhance communication between two parties (Rossiter, 2021). Therefore, maintaining eye contact is essential to building trust with your audience.

## CONCLUSION

Eye contact is vital in social interactions. It demonstrates that we are interested in, curious about, and paying attention to the people involved. The purpose of this study is to determine the importance of eye contact in persuading listeners and how eye contact might aid in message transmission. Our study design is qualitative. We select twenty-four (24) Filipino first-year students who are willing to participate, sign a permission form for their protection, and provide feedback on our study. Based on their responses, the Filipino first-year college students believed that eye contact was one of the requirements for effective persuasion. Furthermore, certain participants claimed that specific individuals are unwilling to engage in eye contact since they have their own perspectives.

In presenting the findings of our research study, themes were formed to understand how eye contact is relevant in convincing the audience, such as the impact of using eye contact in persuasive communication, the use of eye contact as a strategy for effective communication, and eventually the effect of eye contact on the speaker's credibility by attracting the audience's attention. Based on the participant's eye contact has a big impact on persuasion, especially when you are the speaker. You must know the strategies of effective communication with your listener to increase your credibility and get the audience's attention. On the other hand, the participants shared their opinions and views on the speaker, who lacked eye contact when persuading. Based on their responses, a speaker who does not make eye contact appears to be boring and dull. And they believe that the lack of eye contact by the speaker is often associated with lying, being

untrustworthy, incredible, and unreliable to the audience, negatively affecting the credibility of the speaker.

Although this study was only done on a small number of anonymous people, the findings will undoubtedly assist you in improving your abilities and skills, as well as gaining confidence, because we think that effective eye contact can only be acquired through practice. This signifies vitality and prolonged eye contact, which may help you grasp the benefits that you may receive if you employ effective eye contact tactics.

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