



Research Article

Political Persona in the Privilege Speeches of Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago: A Rhetorical Analysis

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Abstract

This qualitative, corpus-assisted rhetorical study examined the rhetorical strategies employed by the late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago in her selected privilege speeches to determine how she reconstructed political credibility, shaped public discourse, and projected her public persona as the "Philippine Iron Lady." Guided by Aristotle's Rhetorical Theory and the rhetorical stylistics framework, the study analyzed a purposively selected corpus of ten privilege speeches comprising 63,259 running words, together with 1,500 publicly available netizens' comments from YouTube and Facebook. Corpus-assisted rhetorical analysis was used to identify and manually code recurring rhetorical units according to their dominant persuasive appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos) and stylistic devices, while Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis was employed to generate themes from both the speeches and audience responses. The findings revealed that ethos (51.61%) and logos (44.09%) predominated over pathos (4.30%), indicating that Santiago primarily relied on credibility and logical reasoning rather than emotional appeal to construct political authority. Audience reception further reflected themes of detrimental effects of corruption, equitable governance, civic engagement, effective leadership, and youth-led progress, demonstrating the continued resonance of her rhetoric in digitally mediated public discourse. The study contributes to rhetorical scholarship by integrating classical rhetorical theory, corpus-assisted discourse analysis, and audience reception within the context of Philippine political communication, offering a replicable framework for examining persuasive political discourse in contemporary digital environments.

Keywords: Political rhetoric, rhetorical analysis, political discourse, corpus-assisted discourse analysis, Philippines

1. Introduction

Political leaders worldwide depend on speeches to persuade, communicate ideologies, and influence societal values, as language serves as a vital tool for social interaction, relationship-building, and reflecting collective beliefs (Kashiha, 2022). This powerful use of language extends across various fields, where it plays a significant role in nation-building, fostering political independence, and shaping public opinion (Fedorchenko, 2024; Wright, 2000). In political discourse, language often carries implicit ideologies, revealing how leaders aim to guide public perspectives through subtle cues embedded within their words (Makki & Zappavigna, 2021).

Political speeches have long been recognized as powerful instruments for constructing political authority, shaping public opinion, and negotiating ideological positions, making rhetoric a central concern in political discourse studies (Abusalim et al., 2022). Existing scholarship has extensively examined political rhetoric in relation to persuasion, leadership, populism, and democratic communication, demonstrating how rhetorical choices influence public attitudes and political behavior (Lacatus & Meibauer, 2022). Recent studies have further shown that the proliferation of digital media has amplified the reach and consequences of political discourse, with rhetorical messages increasingly mediated, contested, and reinterpreted through online platforms, thereby intensifying political polarization and public engagement (Cinelli et al., 2021).

Within the Philippine context, studies on the speeches of the late Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago have primarily focused on her political legacy, leadership, and communication style, emphasizing her assertiveness, wit, and uncompromising stance against corruption (Arugay & Baquisal, 2022; Cruz, 2021). However, these studies remain largely descriptive, offering limited systematic examination of the rhetorical mechanisms through which her speeches construct credibility, project political authority, and shape audience interpretation. Moreover, little is known about how her rhetorical strategies correspond with public reception in digitally mediated environments. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative, corpus-based rhetorical analysis that integrates classical rhetorical theory with audience reception, thereby extending existing rhetorical scholarship by demonstrating how persuasive discourse operates simultaneously at the textual and interpretive levels within contemporary political communication.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on political discourse, important theoretical gaps remain in the rhetorical analysis of Philippine political communication. Existing studies have largely emphasized political messaging, leadership styles, or discourse content, with limited attention to how classical rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos) interact with rhetorical stylistics to construct political authority, credibility, and public persona. Likewise, the relationship between rhetorical construction and audience reception has received insufficient scholarly attention, particularly in digitally mediated spaces where

political discourse is actively interpreted and recontextualized by the public. This study focuses on examining the rhetorical strategies of late Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago, whose assertive style has left a strong impression on Filipino audiences, particularly in the polarized political landscape of the Philippines. This study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on late Santiago's ability to communicate controversial topics and mobilize support, especially in a region where local politics intersect with national ideologies (Tan, 2023). Given the urgency of addressing these issues across multiple levels, investigating late Santiago's rhetorical strategies is crucial to understanding their impact on political engagement and public discourse (Hall et al., 2023; Reyes et al., 2021).

To address these gaps, the present study adopts a corpus-assisted rhetorical approach that combines close qualitative interpretation with the systematic examination of recurring rhetorical patterns across authentic political texts. By integrating classical rhetorical theory, rhetorical stylistics, and audience reception within a corpus-based analytical framework, the study advances rhetorical scholarship by demonstrating how persuasive discourse can be examined simultaneously at the levels of textual construction, rhetorical strategy, and public interpretation, thereby extending the application of corpus-assisted rhetoric to the analysis of contemporary Philippine political discourse.

The study is theoretically grounded in Aristotle's classical rhetorical theory, which conceptualizes persuasion through the interdependent appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos (Poulakos, 1984), and in Corbett's (1984) and Connors' (1999) framework of rhetorical stylistics, which explains how stylistic devices function to strengthen persuasive discourse. Together, these complementary perspectives provide a comprehensive analytical lens for examining not only the persuasive appeals embedded within Santiago's speeches but also the stylistic mechanisms through which those appeals are linguistically realized. By integrating these classical rhetorical traditions with a corpus-assisted qualitative approach, the study extends their application to contemporary Philippine political discourse and explores how rhetorical construction corresponds with audience reception in digitally mediated public spaces.

Research Questions

1. What are the rhetorical devices of the late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago in her privilege speeches to rebuild credibility and influence public discourse?
2. What rhetorical strategies contribute to the construction of public persona for late Senator Santiago as "Philippine Iron Lady"?
3. How do the privilege speeches of the late Iron Lady of the Philippines reflect her personal and political views in relation to the sentiments expressed by the netizens?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative, corpus-assisted research design to examine the rhetorical strategies embedded in late Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago's privilege speeches. Anchored in qualitative inquiry, the study adopts an interpretive orientation suited for examining complex sociopolitical discourse. As noted by Creswell et al. (2007), qualitative research is particularly appropriate for exploring how meanings are constructed and interpreted within texts and social contexts. Similarly, Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasize the flexibility and rigor of qualitative approaches in analyzing layered meanings, making them well-suited for interrogating the nuances of political language. In this study, such an approach enabled an in-depth examination of rhetorical intent, discursive positioning, and meaning-making processes within the speeches.

Building on this qualitative foundation, the study is grounded in Aristotle's rhetorical theory (Poulakos, 1984) and Corbett's (1984) and Connors' (1999) framework of rhetorical stylistics, which together provide a comprehensive lens for examining persuasion in political discourse. Aristotle's rhetorical theory conceptualizes persuasion through the interrelated appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos, while Corbett and Connors explain how rhetorical figures and stylistic devices function to reinforce persuasive intent and shape audience interpretation. This integrated framework enabled the study to examine not only the persuasive appeals embedded in the privilege speeches but also the linguistic realization of these appeals through rhetorical devices such as allusion, parallelism, antithesis, metaphor, and other stylistic forms.

Complementing the interpretive analysis, the study utilized a manually compiled corpus consisting of ten purposively selected privilege speeches comprising a total of 63,259 running words. The corpus was compiled from publicly accessible Senate records and verified digital sources, after which each speech was transcribed and cross-checked for textual accuracy. Corpus cleaning involved removing non-speech elements, including procedural annotations, duplicated text, stage directions, and formatting inconsistencies, while preserving the linguistic integrity of the original speeches. Rather than employing corpus-processing software, the study adopted a corpus-assisted qualitative approach in which the corpus served as an organized textual database for systematic examination. Recurring rhetorical devices, Aristotelian appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos), and stylistic patterns were manually identified, coded, and frequency-tabulated across the corpus to establish distributional patterns that informed subsequent qualitative interpretation. As argued by McEnery and Hardie (2012), corpus linguistics facilitates the empirical examination of language by revealing recurring patterns that may not be immediately apparent through close reading alone. Integrating these traditions, the study aligns with corpus-assisted discourse analytical frameworks, wherein systematic textual

patterning informs, but does not determine, qualitative interpretation. Huang (2023) further contends that such integration enhances interpretive validity by grounding thematic and rhetorical insights in observable language use, thereby strengthening the analytical rigor of the study.

2.2 Data Sources

This study utilized two primary data sources: (1) transcriptions of selected privilege speeches delivered by late Senator Defensor-Santiago and (2) digital audience reactions, including netizen comments and sentiments collected from public platforms such as YouTube and Facebook. The speeches provided the core material for examining late Santiago's rhetorical strategies, while the online reactions offered insights into how her messages were received, interpreted, and recontextualized by the public.

The first data source consisted of ten transcribed privilege speeches that served as the primary corpus for analysis. The speeches were selected through purposive sampling because they represent information-rich cases that exemplify the rhetorical style and political discourse of late Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago. The decision to include ten speeches was guided by the principle of information power (Malterud et al., 2016), wherein a relatively small but substantively rich corpus is considered sufficient when the study has a focused aim, a well-defined theoretical framework, and dense textual data. Rather than maximizing the number of speeches, the study prioritized rhetorical depth and analytical richness. To ensure the quality and appropriateness of the corpus, the inclusion criteria required that each speech (1) be officially delivered as a Senate privilege speech; (2) be publicly accessible through authenticated Senate records or other reliable digital repositories; (3) contain complete and verifiable transcripts; (4) address substantive national issues such as corruption, governance, justice, accountability, or institutional reform; and (5) demonstrate substantial rhetorical content suitable for analysis using Aristotle's rhetorical theory and Corbett and Connors' framework of rhetorical stylistics. Speeches that were incomplete, duplicated, ceremonial in nature, or lacking reliable transcripts were excluded from the corpus.

The second data source comprised 1,500 purposively sampled public comments posted in response to the selected privilege speeches on YouTube and Facebook, where the speeches were publicly accessible and actively discussed. Comments were collected from publicly available posts uploaded between the original publication of each speech and the completion of data collection, ensuring that audience responses reflected naturally occurring online discourse rather than researcher-elicited opinions. To ensure balanced representation, comments were sampled from both platforms based on their relevance to the content of each speech rather than on popularity or engagement metrics. These user-generated texts provided insights into how late Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago's rhetoric was received, interpreted, and recontextualized by online audiences. Inclusion criteria required that comments (1) be publicly accessible; (2) be written in English or Filipino; (3) contain substantive interpretive,

evaluative, or reactional content directly related to the speeches; and (4) originate from identifiable user accounts. Comments were excluded if they were off-topic, promotional, duplicated, spam-like, composed solely of emojis or non-linguistic symbols, or written in non-translatable or contextually ambiguous language. Duplicate comments were manually identified and removed during data screening. Accounts exhibiting characteristics of automated or inauthentic activity, such as repetitive posting, identical comment patterns, or obvious bot-like behavior, were likewise excluded through manual verification. Consistent with ethical guidelines for internet-mediated research, only publicly available comments were analyzed, no interaction with users was undertaken, and all identifying information, including usernames and profile details, was removed or anonymized to protect user privacy and confidentiality.

By integrating a corpus of transcribed political speeches with the digital responses they elicited—such as comments, reactions, and social media discourse—the study employed a triangulated and multimodal approach to understanding rhetorical effect. This methodological integration allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of how rhetorical strategies function not only in formal delivery but also in public interpretation and reception. It reinforced the qualitative findings by connecting speaker intent with audience feedback, capturing textual and contextual dimensions of political communication. As Morgan (2024) observes, triangulation enhances credibility by integrating multiple sources and perspectives.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using theoretical frameworks of Aristotle's rhetorical theory (Poulakos, 1984) and Corbett's (1984) and Connors' (1999) rhetorical stylistics. The researcher began by reading and re-reading the transcribed privilege speeches of late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago and the corresponding audience comments to develop a comprehensive understanding of how her rhetoric was constructed and received. Key rhetorical statements were identified, particularly those that demonstrated appeals to credibility, emotion, and logic, as well as distinctive stylistic markers such as sarcasm, irony, and repetition. These elements served as the foundation for thematic categorization and rhetorical interpretation. These statements were then organized into thematic clusters based on recurring rhetorical patterns. Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle served as a foundational framework for analyzing how late Santiago balanced ethos, pathos, and logos across different political contexts. Corbett's and Connors' framework supported the identification of stylistic devices, including parallelism, metaphor, and rhetorical questions, which were used to enhance the persuasive impact of her speeches. The themes that emerged from this analysis highlighted how late Santiago constructed her political identity, challenged institutional corruption, and projected authority through calculated rhetorical design. This process revealed how her speeches operated as strategic acts of persuasion shaped by classical rhetorical principles and personalized delivery (Gillings & Hardie, 2023; Ekström & Firmstone, 2022). The data management and analysis were conducted manually to preserve close and iterative engagement

with the texts, with transcriptions of the privilege speeches and selected digital comments systematically organized and coded without the use of qualitative analysis software. Guided by Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher first immersed in the corpus through repeated reading to gain familiarity with the textual data. Initial codes were then inductively generated by identifying recurrent rhetorical appeals, stylistic devices, persuasive expressions, and audience responses relevant to the study's objectives.

These codes were systematically organized into a codebook containing operational definitions, coding criteria, and representative excerpts, providing consistency throughout the analytic process. Related codes were subsequently clustered into broader thematic categories and recursively reviewed, refined, merged, or separated until internally coherent and conceptually distinct themes were established. To enhance analytical rigor, the developing codes, thematic interpretations, and codebook were subjected to peer debriefing with experts in rhetoric and qualitative research, whose feedback informed the refinement of coding decisions and thematic boundaries.

In addition, the researcher-maintained reflexivity throughout the analysis by continually examining how theoretical assumptions and interpretive perspectives might influence coding and theme development. Triangulation was further achieved by aligning the identified rhetorical strategies with patterns observed in audience responses from digital commentaries, thereby ensuring coherence between rhetorical construction and public reception. As Feng et al. (2023) argue, integrating rhetorical analysis with audience feedback yields a more grounded understanding of how persuasive discourse operates in public contexts. Through this integrated analytical procedure, the study demonstrates how late Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago's rhetorical style mobilized language to assert political authority while resonating with a digitally engaged audience.

2.4 Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were observed. Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with the corpus, iterative coding, and triangulation between the privilege speeches and netizens' responses. Dependability was maintained by documenting the research procedures, coding process, and thematic development to provide a transparent audit trail. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive analysis and the systematic grounding of interpretations in textual evidence to minimize researcher bias. Finally, transferability was supported by providing rich descriptions of the research context, corpus characteristics, and analytical procedures, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to comparable rhetorical and political discourse contexts.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the conduct of the study. The privilege speeches and corresponding audience comments were obtained

exclusively from publicly accessible online platforms, and no direct interaction or intervention with users was undertaken. To protect the privacy of individuals, all usernames, profile identifiers, and other personally identifiable information were removed or anonymized prior to analysis, and excerpts from comments were presented solely for scholarly purposes without revealing users' identities. This approach adhered to established ethical principles for internet-mediated research by balancing the use of publicly available data with the protection of participant privacy and confidentiality.

3. Results

This section presents the findings derived from the analysis of the selected privilege speeches of late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago. The results are organized thematically, reflecting recurring rhetorical patterns and discursive strategies identified through reflexive thematic analysis. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of rhetorical components across the privilege speeches, showing that Ethos predominates at 51.61%, followed by Logos at 44.09%, while Pathos accounts for a minimal 4.30%, indicating a strong emphasis on credibility and logical argumentation over emotional appeal.

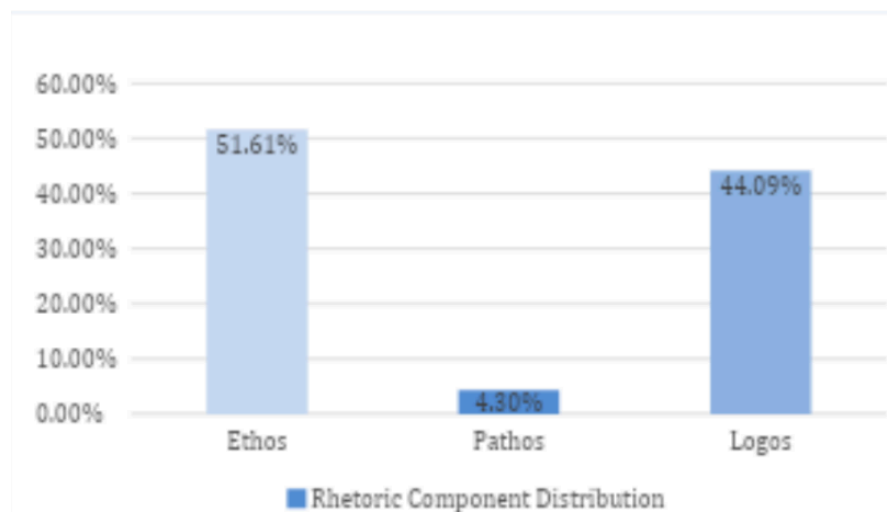


Figure 1. Rhetoric Component Distribution in the Selected Privilege Speeches of Late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago

The percentages presented in Figure 1 were derived from the frequency distribution of rhetorical units identified across the corpus. Each rhetorical unit, defined as a clause, phrase, or statement conveying a distinct persuasive function, was coded according to its dominant Aristotelian appeal—ethos, pathos, or logos. The aggregated frequencies were then converted into percentages to illustrate the overall distribution of rhetorical appeals in the selected privilege speeches.

3.1 Rhetorical Strategies of Late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago in Rebuilding Credibility and Shaping Public Discourse

Shown in Table 1 are the components and rhetorical strategies identified in the privilege speeches of late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago. The analysis draws from exact quotations in the corpus, illustrating how she employed rhetorical techniques to reinforce her credibility, assert moral authority, and shape the direction of public discourse. By examining these strategies in context, the table highlights not only the linguistic choices she made but also the persuasive functions they served in strengthening her political identity and influence.

Table 1. Rhetorical Strategies of Late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago in Rebuilding Credibility and Shaping Public Discourse

Component s	Rhetorical Strategies	Exact Quotations
<i>Ethos</i>	<i>Allusion</i>	"Like Julius Caesar, they came, they saw, and they conquered the treasury."
		"Do a master's in Harvard? Do a doctorate in UST? Is that why you are so stupid?"
		"We must remember what Aristotle taught: law is reason, free from passion."
	<i>Parallelism</i>	"Government of the people, by the people, for the people."
		"A government that is fair, a government that is just, a government that serves."
		"We must fight corruption, we must uphold justice, we must protect the law."
<i>Pathos</i>	<i>Epistrophe</i>	"A government of the people, for the people, and by the people."
		"Justice is for the people, justice belongs to the people, justice serves the people."
		"They stole from the poor, they stole from the weak, they stole from the country."
	<i>Anaphora</i>	"We shall fight for justice. We shall fight for the truth. We shall fight for the Filipino people."
		"I will not stop. I will not quit. I will never surrender!"
		"You are the future. You are the hope. You are the ones who will bring change."
	<i>Hyperbole</i>	"The corruption in this country is so deep, it could fill the Pacific Ocean!"
		"I have told you a million times."
		"The corruption here is so vast, it could swallow an entire continent whole!"
	<i>Irony</i>	"Oh great, another brilliant idea from corrupt politicians!"
		"They claim to be honest, yet their bank accounts say otherwise!"
	<i>Metaphor</i>	"What a wonderful idea—punish the whistle-blower instead of the thief!"
		"Politics in this country is a circus, where clowns pretend to be leaders."
		"This government is a sinking ship, and we are all its passengers."

	<i>Simile</i>	"Corruption is a disease, and it is spreading like wildfire." "Her words struck like a lightning bolt."
		"The truth is as clear as the blue sky, yet they refuse to see it."
		"Our leaders cling to power like barnacles on a sinking ship."
<i>Logos</i>	<i>Antithesis</i>	"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." "They promise transparency, yet they hide their wealth."
		"If we choose silence, we choose oppression."
	<i>Chiasmus</i>	"Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." "The people should fear injustice, not the law." "It is not the leaders who own the people; it is the people who own the leaders."

3.2 Emerging Themes in the Privilege Speeches of Late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago Reflecting Her Personal and Political Views Through Netizens' Statements

Shown in Table 2, the key themes in late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago's privilege speeches reflect her steadfast commitment to ethical governance, social justice, and national development. These themes closely align with the prevailing concerns of Filipino netizens, reinforcing her reputation as a principled leader whose views resonated with public sentiment.

Table 2. Emerging Themes in the Privilege Speeches of Late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago Reflecting Her Personal and Political Views Through Netizens' Statements

Themes	Core Ideas on Netizens' Statements
<i>Detrimental Effects of Corruption</i>	Corruption weakens public trust in government (s_46) Corruption worsens poverty and inequality (s_149) Corruption slows down economic growth (s_75) Corruption undermines the rule of law (s_110) Corruption encourages political dynasties (s_16)
<i>Equitable Governance</i>	Equal justice for all, regardless of status (s_12) Fighting corruption to protect the rights of the poor (s_102) Right to quality education for every citizen (s_135) Prioritization of public welfare over political interest (s_41) Ending political dynasties to give equal opportunities (s_86)
<i>Civic Engagement</i>	Defending national sovereignty against foreign influence (s_11) Promoting Filipino identity and culture (s_64) Supporting local industries to strengthen economy (s_27)
<i>Effective Leadership</i>	Every citizen plays a role in nation-building (s_88) Choosing leaders based on merit, not popularity (s_31) Leadership is about service, not personal gain (s_92) True leadership means inspiring and empowering others (s_117) Leadership requires continuous learning and growth (s_161) Leaders must have moral integrity and accountability (s_140)
<i>Youth-Led Progress</i>	Youth being the key to the nation's progress (s_39) Education is the foundation of a strong nation (s_20) Youth upholding integrity and rejecting corruption (s_100)

Young Filipinos using technology and innovation for
nation-building (s_123)

Youth being responsible voters and politically aware (s_59)

Overall, the findings from the qualitative, corpus-based analysis of the privilege speeches of late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago reveal a rhetorically dense discourse predominantly anchored in Ethos (51.61%) and Logos (44.09%), with minimal reliance on Pathos (4.30%), underscoring a strong emphasis on credibility and logical argumentation over emotional appeal. The rhetorical analysis highlights her strategic use of devices such as allusion, parallelism, and antithesis to construct authority, reinforce moral positioning, and shape public discourse. Thematically, the speeches converge on key sociopolitical concerns—corruption, equitable governance, civic engagement, effective leadership, and youth-led progress—which are further substantiated by corresponding patterns in netizens’ responses. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that her rhetorical style not only asserts political authority and ethical leadership but also resonates with public sentiment, effectively bridging institutional discourse and audience reception.

4. Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study. Through a close textual analysis of her ten privilege speeches, it was found that late Santiago consistently drew upon the three classical appeals—ethos, pathos, and logos—to assert her position, challenge political opponents, and project moral authority. This was derived through systematic corpus analysis using qualitative coding, frequency identification, and thematic clustering of rhetorical features such as appeals to character, emotional framing, and logical argumentation. The quantitative distribution of rhetorical strategies in late Santiago’s privilege speeches highlights the dominance of ethos and logos over pathos. Through a systematic content analysis of the ten selected speeches, each rhetorical appeal was identified, categorized, and tallied to determine the frequency of use. The results showed that ethos accounted for 51.61% of the rhetorical content, logos comprised 44.09%, while pathos made up only 4.30%. This distribution reflects late Santiago’s emphasis on building trust through credibility and logic, rather than through emotional appeal.

4.1 Rhetorical Strategies of Late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago in Rebuilding Credibility and Shaping Public Discourse

This result aligns with Poulakos’s (1984) and Talaue’s (2022) application of Aristotle’s Rhetorical Triangle, which emphasizes that effective persuasion is grounded in a speaker’s ability to present themselves as credible (ethos), appeal to the emotions of the audience (pathos), and offer logically coherent arguments (logos). Similar findings were echoed in Mangad et al. (2024), who analyzed late Santiago’s rhetorical persona as one shaped by legal credibility, public defiance, and intellectual sharpness. Ponton (2022) argued that political speeches are not only content-rich but are strategically constructed to project an authoritative public identity and strengthen persuasive appeal among audiences. The data

suggests that late Santiago's rhetorical strategy was anchored in a calculated use of these three appeals, with a pronounced emphasis on credibility and reasoning. Her use of classical allusions, structured language, sarcasm, and irony reinforced her intellectual and moral standing. This indicates that late Santiago viewed political speech not merely as a tool for expressing opinion, but as a performance of credibility and persuasion aimed at influencing both her legislative peers and the Filipino public. Her rhetorical approach helped her navigate political opposition, assert her reformist agenda, and establish herself as a respected voice in Philippine politics.

This result supports the theoretical framework based on Aristotle's rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos), which explains that successful persuasion depends on the balanced use of credibility, emotion, and logic in discourse (Mendes de Oliveira & de Souza, 2022). The dominance of ethos in late Santiago's speeches aligns with her identity as a former judge, legal scholar, and intellectual figure, who was known for emphasizing moral and legal authority in her public addresses. This is consistent with Raymundo and Eustaquio (2025), who found that ethos was the most frequently applied and influential persuasive strategy in Philippine political discourse. The data indicates that late Santiago's strategic communication was deeply rooted in presenting herself as a credible and rational public figure. Her frequent references to constitutional law, historical examples, and moral imperatives highlight a reliance on factual argumentation and ethical positioning. The minimal use of pathos suggests a rhetorical restraint, reinforcing the idea that her persuasive power stemmed not from dramatic sentiment but from the strength of her character and the logic of her arguments. This numerical breakdown strengthens the study's conclusion that late Santiago's rhetoric was intellectually persuasive and ethically grounded, key elements in her strategy to rebuild credibility and shape the national discourse.

4.2 Emerging Themes in the Privilege Speeches of Late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago Reflecting Her Personal and Political Views Through Netizens' Statements

As presented in the previous chapter, the privilege speeches of late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago were analyzed to explore how her rhetorical strategies and political convictions were perceived and interpreted by the public, particularly through the sentiments expressed by netizens. The finding with the core idea that corruption weakens trust in governance supports the analysis of Balog (2019), who demonstrated that in late Santiago's privilege speeches she strategically employed rhetorical processes to attack credibility and expose systemic dishonesty, thereby heightening public awareness of corruption. Her assertive exposure of graft resonated because it was not only informative (logos) but also delivered with indignation and rhetorical flair. The core idea that corruption worsens poverty and inequality aligns with Alegado and Peñaranda (2023), who found that political satire in the Philippines serves as a critical mechanism — using humor and emotional appeal — to reveal social inequities and encourage public awareness of governmental wrongdoing. The core idea that corruption slows economic progress corresponds to Nakagawa's (2024) claim

that combining logical reasoning with relatable analogies is a powerful political strategy—something late Santiago mastered through rhetorical balance. The core idea that corruption undermines the rule of law also parallels the insights of Balog (2019), who emphasized that late Santiago's rhetorical power came from her ability to simplify abstract legal principles, using pointed language commentary to make legal dysfunction accessible and emotionally compelling. Lastly, the idea of corruption encouraging political dynasties is confirmed by Mendoza et al. (2023) who show that in many Philippine localities, dynastic rule is sustained by a combination of elite networks, weak institutions, and rhetorical justifications that reinforce entrenched power.

The finding with the core idea of equal justice regardless of status supports research showing that political figures construct credibility and moral authority (ethos) through appeals to justice, integrity, and professional legitimacy in their discourse (Budzynska et al., 2021). The core idea, which protects the poor through anti-corruption, resonated with netizens who viewed her as a model of intellect over image. Late Santiago reiterated that leadership is about service, not personal gain, drawing support from citizens who admired her modest lifestyle. She also conveyed that true leadership involves inspiring and empowering others, requires continuous learning, and must be guided by moral integrity and accountability. These points shaped an image of leadership rooted in excellence and public duty, not political theatrics.

The finding, which supports the core idea of choosing leaders by merit (Kalala et al., 2022), emphasizes ethos as a central persuasive tool in late Santiago's speeches. Her legal and academic background built credibility and served as an implicit critique of celebrity politics. The finding with the core idea leadership as public service also mirrors (Reyes, 2019), who documented late Santiago's unrelenting focus on fighting wrongdoing, strengthening her image as a servant-leader. The core idea of empowering others through leadership aligns with rhetorical theory, which emphasizes that persuasive discourse relies on the strategic use of logos to construct reasoned visions of social and institutional transformation (Ghimire, 2021). The notion that leadership requires continuous growth aligns with Corpuz and Tacderas (2024), who pointed out that late Santiago's speeches often included references to learning, progress, and self-discipline are key attributes of moral leadership. Finally, the idea that leaders must possess integrity and accountability aligns with research on political discourse, which shows that assertive and commissive speech acts are used to express moral obligation, demand reform, and strengthen perceived credibility in leadership communication (Lumintad & Caloc, 2026; Wang & Liu, 2021).

The core idea that youth are nation-builders is supported by Velasco et al. (2024), who highlighted the strong political engagement of Filipino youth, driven by their valuation of authenticity, intellect, and reform-oriented leadership. Late Santiago's speeches blended pathos and ethos, inspiring emotional connection while reinforcing her position as a mentor figure to the younger generation. The conviction that education serves as the bedrock of progress also resonates with research on Filipino youth political development, which shows that young people

are influenced by discourse that integrates civic awareness, critical reasoning, and engagement with social issues (Bautista, 2021; Dela Cruz et al., 2024; Obenza et al., 2024). This rhetorical balance of logical appeal and moral urgency reflects how her academic and political discourse aimed to instruct, persuade, and inspire audiences toward reform.

Similarly, the theme of using technology for nation-building reflects views such as those presented in Politics and ICT: The notion that effective political rhetoric must combine logical argumentation with contemporary relevance—incorporating digital technologies and ICT frameworks—is emphasized by Visvizi and Lytras (2019). Finally, the call for political awareness and active voting resonates with Lawas et al. (2025), whose analysis shows that late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago's language in both speeches and interviews exposes gender expectations and challenges traditional norms of authority. Her strategic use of ethos, logos, and pathos positions her as a figure who encourages broader civic engagement.

Although netizens' responses provide valuable insights into audience reception, they should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of rhetorical effectiveness. Online comments are inherently selective, self-generated, and potentially influenced by platform algorithms, visibility mechanisms, and user engagement patterns, which may not accurately represent the broader public. Accordingly, the audience responses in this study are interpreted as indicative of prevailing online perspectives rather than as generalizable measures of public opinion or persuasive impact.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study advances rhetorical scholarship by demonstrating the value of integrating Aristotle's rhetorical theory, Corbett and Connors' rhetorical stylistics, and corpus-assisted qualitative analysis in examining contemporary political discourse. Beyond identifying rhetorical appeals and stylistic devices, the study illustrates how persuasive strategies function collectively to construct political authority, negotiate public persona, and sustain ideological positioning within institutional discourse. Within the Philippine context, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of political communication by providing a systematic rhetorical account of the privilege speeches of late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago, thereby extending existing scholarship beyond descriptive analyses of her leadership and communication style. Methodologically, the study underscores the potential of corpus-assisted discourse analysis to complement close rhetorical interpretation through the systematic identification of recurring textual patterns while preserving contextual and interpretive depth. By bridging classical rhetorical theory, corpus-assisted analysis, and audience reception, the study offers a replicable analytical framework for investigating political discourse in digitally mediated environments and contributes to the broader development of rhetorical and discourse studies in both Philippine and international contexts.

6. Recommendations

At the national level, the Commission on Higher Education may consider integrating the insights of this study into the tertiary curriculum, particularly in programs related to language, communication, and political studies, by foregrounding the role of rhetorical competence in shaping critical, analytically grounded, and socially responsive graduates. Embedding corpus-assisted rhetorical analysis within course outcomes can strengthen students' ability to interrogate political discourse, evaluate credibility, and engage in evidence-based argumentation. In parallel, future research is encouraged to expand the scope of inquiry by examining diverse political corpora across institutions, genres, and historical periods, or by adopting alternative methodological approaches such as mixed methods, computational discourse analysis, or multimodal frameworks to further enrich understanding of rhetorical practice in evolving sociopolitical contexts. At the institutional level, higher education institutions (HEIs), alongside College Deans and Program Heads, are encouraged to contextualize these findings within their academic programs by integrating rhetoric and discourse analysis into course design, research initiatives, and faculty development. This may involve strengthening curricular offerings that emphasize critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, and political communication, as well as supporting student-led research that engages with authentic sociopolitical texts. Administratively, Deans and Program Heads may also promote interdisciplinary collaboration and research-driven instruction, ensuring that rhetorical literacy is not only taught as a theoretical construct but practiced as an essential skill for informed citizenship and professional engagement in a digitally mediated public sphere.

7. Limitations of the Study

This study provides substantive insights into the rhetorical strategies, discursive patterns, and audience reception of the privilege speeches of late Senator Miriam Defensor-Santiago; however, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis was limited to a purposively selected corpus of ten privilege speeches, reflecting the availability of complete and accessible transcripts. Consequently, the corpus may be subject to survivorship bias, as speeches that were unavailable, incomplete, or undocumented were necessarily excluded, potentially limiting the breadth of rhetorical representation. Second, although the analysis of 1,500 netizen comments provided valuable insights into audience reception, these comments represent self-selected online participation and may have been influenced by platform algorithms, content visibility, and engagement mechanisms, thereby limiting their representativeness of broader public opinion. Moreover, the comments capture audience reactions within a specific temporal context, and evolving political events or changing public attitudes may produce different patterns of interpretation over time. Third, as a qualitative, corpus-assisted rhetorical analysis, the study remains interpretive in nature, and despite systematic coding and reflexive thematic analysis, the findings may be influenced by researcher interpretation. Fourth, the reliance on

textual data excludes multimodal dimensions of political communication, such as vocal delivery, gesture, and visual framing, which may also shape rhetorical effectiveness. These limitations, however, do not diminish the study's contributions; rather, they underscore its contextual and exploratory nature. Future research may address these constraints by expanding the corpus, incorporating more diverse and longitudinal audience data, and integrating multimodal or mixed-methods approaches to strengthen the robustness and transferability of findings.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data availability statement (If Applicable):

The study does not have any supplementary materials and data availability statement.

Author Contributions:

This paper was collaboratively authored by two researchers, each contributing according to their expertise: Ms. Besinan led the development of the introduction, interpretation of results, and discussion of findings; Dr. Caloc was responsible for the comprehensive review, ensured the rigor of the study through validation of the methodology and results, and critical refinement of the manuscript.

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