

# DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ETHOS-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC IDENTITY Investigative congressional hearings

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**Abstract** – The construction of ethos-based self-representation in public discourse is particularly evident when it comes to politicians and corporate leaders who, in their public prominent role, may need to convince their audience they behave and have behaved ethically. This seems to be even more evident in case of suspicion of wrongdoing, which is typically the reason why investigative congressional hearings are conducted. The hearings can give researchers the possibility to discover whom the Congress is listening to, who the players are and how they position themselves in a debate. However – to the author’s knowledge – the subject has not been of much scrutiny on the part of discourse scholars, an attitude somehow contrasting with lay public’s general interests and a missed opportunity to shed light on the actors and the issues. It is the scope of the present study to analyse discursive strategies aimed to construct ethos-based framework for public identity in the opening statements of investigative hearings. The strategies are expected to be displayed both by politicians facing a controversial topic and by highly influential company CEOs whose companies have been under public scrutiny for suspected unethical behaviour. The methodological framework adopted in the study makes synergic use of discourse analytical perspective combined with the traditional definition of text types by Egon Werlich, and especially argumentative type. It is believed that by discourse analysis readers can become aware of linguistic choices and the arguments that they imply – i.e. the way writers put forth a standpoint and defend it in opposition to its contrary. In this case, it is the witnesses’ portrait as ethical persona which is questioned and needs to be asserted.

**Keywords:** Congressional hearings; Discourse analysis; Genre analysis; Rhetorical moves; Ethos building.

## 1. Field of investigation and aim

### 1.1. Study aim and objectives

Public discourse may imply, among other things, the promotion of (self-)representation. Among public discourse community members, politicians and corporate leaders have a prominent role and need to “imbue their utterances with evidence, authority and truth” (Chilton 2004, p. 23), in other words they need to be – or at least sound – ethical, and this seems to be even more evident in case of suspicion of wrongdoing. In fact, public people seem to be constrained to present images of themselves that can be socially supported in the context of a given status hierarchy (Goffman 1956).

Investigative congressional hearings are aimed to conduct investigations over supposed misconduct on the part of public officials or private citizens. Hearings give researchers the possibility to discover whom the Congress is listening to and how the actors involved in a specific debate position themselves (Sevetson n.d). However – to the author’s knowledge – the subject has not been of much scrutiny on the part of discourse scholars, who seem to have missed the opportunity to investigate the field and gain a new perspective into the issues and the players.

It is the scope of the present study to analyse discursive strategies aimed to

construct ethos-based framework for public identity in the witness opening statement of selected investigative hearings, as for their very nature they seem to trigger a process of ethos building for self-defense. The strategies are expected to be displayed both by a politician facing a controversial topic – i.e. Clinton’s possible failures during the Benghazi crisis in 2012 – and by highly influential company CEOs whose companies have been under public scrutiny for suspected unethical behaviour since the beginning of the century.

In the present study the notion of ethos in the classical rhetorical sense of the word is used, i.e. the persuasive appeal (one of the three artistic proofs) based on the character or projected character of the speaker or writer.

## **1.2. Congressional hearings: context and institutional environment**

Congressional hearings are a traditional genre with a long history and specific procedural requirements and have other communicative purposes alongside their formal role as records of committees’ activity. Witnesses play a crucial role on the stage – if we want to use the same analogy Goffman (1956) used for the social-self as a performed character – and they use their opening statements to set out the motivation or motivations of their choices to justify their conduct – either political, managerial or personal choices – which may sometimes affect millions of people. The testimonies can display specific emotions and attitudes and can also be ways of preparing the ground for possible future requests. Originally addressed to a more restricted audience, these days hearings are widely reported on the front pages of the American press and increasingly accessed in their digital version. They have been broadcast in the last 50 years,<sup>1</sup> and some hearings have been glorified in movies and TV shows. Thus, they provide both witnesses and committees’ members with high profile moments where these people can use their argumentation to set out their ideology, enabling them to engage with an increasingly wide and varied audience.

Congressional hearings are often the most requested U.S. government documents in a library. Nevertheless, among the genres that have been traditionally of interest to political discourse analysts, political speeches, political interviews and policy document have received considerable attention (Chilton 2004; Fairclough 2006), while congressional hearings have not. They attracted scholars from various disciplines – mostly communications scholars (ex. Jones, Collins 2006; Harp *et al.* 2016) and political sciences scholars (ex. De Gregorio 1992; Diermeier, Feddersen 2000) or even insiders such as government librarians (ex. Sachs 2004; Severson n.d.) - much less discourse analysts.

With thousands of hearings issued for more than 200 years, there can hardly be an untouched subject. House and Senate Rules require hearings be open to the public, as well as to radio, television, and still photography coverage, unless a committee votes to close a hearing for limited and specific reasons - for example, if it deals with information that could compromise national security. This fact has obvious consequences on audience in terms of its size and with regard to hearings’ potential influence on American society. Hearings’ target audience is huge, and all the actors involved are aware of this: the discursive construction of an ethos-based framework for public identity needs to be analysed considering this fact. To clarify this point, it may be worth quoting a much-followed recent hearing, that of Twitter’s CEO. The CEO, who was subjected to hours of questioning before the Senate Intelligence Committee regarding voter manipulation, propaganda and even efforts to incite violence on Twitter platform, opened his oral

<sup>1</sup> The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 permitted, for the first time, radio and television broadcast of House committee and subcommittee hearings (Our American Government 2003, p. 43).

testimony with these sobering words: “Thank you Mr Chairman, Vice Chairman, and the Committee, for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Twitter to the American people” (CGHR 115-460, p. 19). The target audience is here openly addressed and – from this point of view – the committee is sort of bypassed. James Porter notes that audience has been “an important concern of rhetoric since the fifth century B.C.E., and the injunction to ‘consider audience’ is one of the oldest and most common suggestions to writers and speakers” (Porter 1996, p. 42). At the same time the meanings of ‘audience’ tend to diverge in two general directions: “one toward actual people external to a text, the audience whom the writer must accommodate; the other toward the text itself and the audience implied there, a set of suggested or evoked attitudes, interests, reactions, [and] conditions of knowledge which may or may not fit with the qualities of actual readers or listeners” (Park 1982, p. 44). In the case of congressional hearings, the two audiences who are addressed simultaneously are committee members on Capitol Hill on the one side, and the lay public watching hearings on TV or via the Internet on the other side.

### **1.3. Investigative hearings**

Hearings are communicative events which occur in a very specific setting in terms of actors and locations, and they undergo a quite unique process of production and distribution. Investigative hearings share “a set of communicative purposes” (Swales 1990, p. 45) and an intended audience. According to contemporary genre theory, these are meaningful features when it comes to genre recognition, while the heterogeneity of discourses and topics does not seem to prevent neither members of the discourse community nor scholars from recognizing the genre.

There are four basic purposes for conducting hearings: confirm nominations, review current laws, consider new legislation, examine events or situations. Congressional committee hearings can be therefore broadly classified into four types: legislative, oversight, investigative, and confirmation (Sevetson n.d.). All hearings are prepared and conducted in a similar way but investigative hearings differ from legislative or oversight hearings – confirmation hearings are unique to the Senate – in that investigations usually involve allegations of wrongdoing by public officials acting in their official capacity, or by private citizens or entities whose activities may suggest the need for a legislative remedy (Heitshusen 2015, p. 2).

Official hearings, which are relatively easy documents to retrieve from the Government Printing Office ([www.govinfo.gov](http://www.govinfo.gov)), usually include written and oral statements of witnesses, transcripts of the verbal question-and-answer session between committee members and witnesses, reports, exhibits and other materials submitted for the record by witnesses, correspondence and other materials submitted by interested parties. Following House and Senate Rules (Sachs 2004; Carr 2006), a witness is required to file with the committee an advance copy of the written testimony and then to limit oral remarks to a brief summary of his or her statement. It is precisely this testimony that will be investigated in the present study, as a frozen moment of “the ongoing dynamic use of language in the speech community” (Chilton 2004, p. 81). The following question-and-answer part would have needed different analytical tools as it is radically different from a formal speech read aloud from a written text. In the opening statement, “written text is prior to the spoken one” (Chilton, Schaffner 2002, p. 7) and these statements do not have the spontaneity of spoken texts.

If we compare hearings to other – more unstable – political genres without a clear macrostructure (Gross, Stärke-Meyerring 1999), we realize that their long history as

standardized documents supports genre analysis. In fact, notwithstanding the consensus about a common sense that genre involves “conventional use of stable utterance groups which follow recognizable patterns that suit the accomplishment of certain social goals” (Cap, Okulska 2013, p. 11), some of the crucial, problematic questions that genre analysis may imply remain but can be more easily answered. For example, when it comes to genre constituting elements, congressional hearings clearly feature them, and this particular fact seems to be also true for the written witness testimony. In addition to its interesting generic structure, the witness testimony is also the expected privileged locus for promotion of self-representation. The ethos-based framework for public identity is primarily and intentionally outlined here, in this part of congressional hearings.

## 2. Methodological framework and research questions

### 2.1. Method

The methodological framework adopted for the present study makes synergic use of discourse analytical perspective combined with the traditional definition of text types by Werlich (1976), and especially argumentative type. It is believed that by discourse analysis readers can become aware of linguistic choices and the arguments that they imply (Charteris-Black 2013) – i.e. the way the writer puts forth a standpoint and defend it in opposition to its contrary (Werlich 1976) or at least to a different opinion (van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004). In this case it is the witnesses’ portrait as ethical personas – i.e. the (ethical) image that witnesses want to present to the public – which is questioned and needs to be asserted.

Like other discourse analytic enquires, this research focused on a relatively small set of texts, and the methodology has been selected opportunistically in the light of the textual features evident on close reading (Lischinsky 2011, p. 155). A purely automated approach may have missed relevant discursive patterns which draw heavily on context and require labour intensive manual annotation and analysis (Bednarek 2009), although reliance on computer queries was made occasionally to confirm the results of qualitative analysis (*Wordsmith Tools 6.0*, Scott 2012).

The corpus selected for the study is composed of ten testimonies authored by politicians and corporate leaders, in consideration both of their prominent role among public discourse community members and their position in relation to controversial situations. The discursive strategies aimed at persuading the audience of their good faith and ethical behaviour are expected to be displayed both by politicians facing contentious topic – as it is the case with Clinton’s much criticized leadership during the Benghazi crisis – and by influential company C-level executives, whose companies have been criticized for possible unethical behaviour.

### 2.2. Research questions

The research questions addressed in this study can be outlined as follows:

- RQ 1: How is the witness’s ethos-based framework for public identity discursively constructed in his or her opening statement?
- RQ 2: Can we identify discursive recurrences?
- RQ 3: Are these recurrences linguistically connoted?

The proposed theoretical hypothesis is that there are discursive recurrences in the construction of ethos-based, trustworthy public image and these recurrences are connotated also at a micro-textual level. From a methodological point of view, Swales's definition of rhetorical moves (Swales 2004) has been used and coherent communicative moves' function has been investigated.

### 3. Moves identification

#### 3.1. *Macro-textual level*

An initial move in witness testimony has been identified and it is characterized by formulaic expressions employed to greet and thank committee's members. This move has the pragmatic effect of conveying an idea of collaboration, which is an intrinsically ethical idea and – as underlined by Charteris-Black (2004, p. 245) – it is functional to establish consensus.

From the very beginning, the witness's ethos-oriented public persona is portrayed relying on this collaborative image and this feature is absent only in one testimony in the selected corpus, i.e. Mr. Zuckerberg's testimony. Here below the textual outcomes of this move are displayed.

ex. 1a) Good afternoon, Chairman Chaffetz and Ranking Member Cummings and members of the committee. I'm Heather Bresch, the CEO of Mylan, and I appreciate the chance to be with you today (CGHR 9-135, p. 17).

ex. 2a) Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I thank you and the ranking member and members of the committee, both of longstanding tenure and brand new members. And I appreciate your patience for me to be able to come to fulfil my commitment to you (CGHR 113-11, p.6).

ex. 3a) Thank you. I appreciate that (CGHR 113-90, p. 35).

ex. 4a) Thank you, Chairman Burr, Vice Chairman Warner and the committee for the opportunity—for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Twitter to the American people. I look forward to our conversation about the work we're doing to help protect the integrity of U.S. elections and elections around the world (CGHR 115-460, p. 19).

ex. 5a) Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, good morning. (CGHR CGHR- 109-135, p. 37)

ex. 6a) Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here today (CGHR- 109-135, p. 56).

ex. 7a) Chairman Waxman, Subcommittee Chairman Stupak, Chairman Emeritus, Ranking Members Barton and Burgess, other members of the committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning (CGHR 111-122, p. 60).

ex. 8a) Thank you. Chairman Burr, Vice Chairman Warner, and members of this select committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today (CGHR 115-460, p. 6).

ex. 9a) I am here today to do my best to help answer the legitimate questions on everyone's mind regarding what happened at Enron (CGHR 107-1141, p. 18).

After greetings and thanks, witnesses may introduce themselves and the role they have in their company or organization, though sometimes they do not need to do so, as it is the case with Hillary Clinton and Mark Zuckerberg.

Formulaic expressions also close the testimony and have a similar pragmatic effect. They underline the witness's good disposition and willingness to collaborate. In Goffmanian terms, they constitute the "front", the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally employed by the individual during his or her performance. The examples here below are taken from all the ten testimonies included in the corpus under investigation.

ex. 1b) Thank you (CGHR 9-135, p. 18).

ex. 2b) And I will be very happy to answer your questions (CGHR 113-11, p. 10).

ex. 3b) We will be happy to answer your questions. Thank you (CGHR 113-90, p. 38).

ex. 4b) I treasure that and will do everything in my power to protect it from harm. Thank you (CGHR 115-460, p. 20).

ex. 5b) [...] we will participate and cooperate with you in an open and honest fashion. Thank you Mr. Chairman (CGHR 109-135, 2006, p. 38).

ex. 6b) Thank you (CGHR 109-135, p. 57).

ex.7b) Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today, and I'm happy to answer any questions (CGHR 111-122, p. 62).

ex. 8b) We agree, and we will work with all of you to meet this challenge. Thank you (CGHR 115-460, p. 8).

ex. 9b) I'm prepared to answer your questions to the best of my abilities (CGHR 107-1141, p. 19).

ex. 10b) Thank you for having me here today, and I'm ready to take your questions (CGHR 115-114, p. 9).

With regard to the linguistic realization of the two identified moves, it needs to be noted that these two framing, peripheral parts rely on multi word expressions, more specifically routine formulas (Müller *et al.* 2015, p. 280), which are syntactically and semantically idiosyncratic in nature. Moreover, they act as a single unit at this level of linguistic analysis and are very short, usually consisting of a couple of lines. It is between these two framing moves that the witness testimony's core is developed, and some steps proved to be recurrent and typified. Their coherent communicative function, according to Swales's definition (2004, pp. 228-9), can help us in identifying them as rhetorical moves.

The "looking back" move<sup>2</sup> is made up by descriptions and stories which are not – in Werlich's terms – expository or narrative text types. Instead they are argumentative since they can be regarded as replies to the strong criticism organizations or single people are facing. In other words, stories and descriptions argue in defence of the witness's/or the organization's behaviour and good faith and they aim to portray an ethos-based public

<sup>2</sup> The same denomination Bhatia (2008, p. 170) used for move 1 when he analysed CEOs' letters is used here. Notwithstanding the coincidence of the names, Bhatia's move has a different communicative purpose from the "looking back" move identified in this study as the move in CEOs' letters focuses on the overview of the company review period.

image and/or tell the audience a story which supports this image. Sometimes these parts are introduced by a declaration of intents, which highlights the argumentative text typology: “I want to talk about how we got here” (CGHR 115-114, p. 8), “Let me begin with a recap” (CGHR 107-1141, p. 18), “I want to make just a few points” (CGHR 113-11, p. 6), “I would like to share with you a little information” (CGHR 9-135, p. 17), “But I wanted to start by explaining how seriously we take these issues and talk about some of the steps we’re taking” (CGHR 115-460, p. 6), “First, I want to step back and share our view of Twitter’s role in the world (CGHR 115-460, p. 19). Some of these stories start *in medias res* (see examples 4c and 5c below), all of them are aimed to present an impartial narrator who describes facts – frequently referring to dates – which support his or her standpoint, i.e. his or her ethically flawless behaviour.

ex. 1c) Before Mylan acquired the company that owned EpiPen in 2007, fewer than 1 million of the 43 million people at risk had access to an epinephrine auto-injector. At the same time, it was estimated that anaphylaxis was causing 1,500 deaths annually [...]. We now reach 80 percent more patients (CGHR- 9-135, p. 17).

ex. 2c) First, let’s start on the night of September 11 itself and those difficult early days. [...] The very next morning I told the American people, and I quote, “Heavily armed militants assaulted our compound” (CGHR 113-11, p.7).

ex. 3c) Apple is a bit larger today than the company created by Steve Jobs in his parents’ garage 40 years ago. But that same entrepreneurial spirit drives everything that we do. You can tell the story of Apple’s success in just one word: “innovation” (CGHR 113-90, p. 36).

ex. 4c) I assumed this role on July 1 and I immediately began to visit our facilities, meet our employees and learn about our current operations. On August 6 I received word of severe corrosion in our o four transit lines in Alaska. The decision was made to shut down protection to avert any possibility of an oil spill and to prevent damage to the environment. We then conducted extensive testing of the transit lines on the western side of the field, assured ourselves they were fit for service and maintained production of about 200,000 barrels a day (CGHR- 109-135, p. 37).

ex. 5c) On August 6, the pigging data that we received was very unexpected. We encountered a 23-barrel leak from a pipeline. Something was happening to our flow lines which we didn’t understand and we took the only action we believed we could to prevent the potential of a major spill in shutting down Prudhoe Bay until we could confirm the integrity of the remaining lines. Over the next five days we brought in hundreds of people to complete inspections (CGHR 109-135, p. 56).

ex. 6c) I started Facebook when I was in college. We’ve come a long way since then. We now serve more than 2 billion people around the world. And, every day, people use our services to stay connected with the people that matter to them most (CGHR 115-114, p. 8).

Sometimes the stories get more personal, as it is the case with Heather Bresch – Mylan’s highly criticized CEO: her intent is clearly to portray a positive self-image, one based on strong work ethic and professional achievements.

ex. 7c) I grew up in a small town in West Virginia in a close family with a strong work ethic. I joined Mylan in 1992 as an entry-level clerk performing basic administrative tasks in the basement of the company’s manufacturing facility and worked through 15 different roles in the company until I reached my current position. When I started with Mylan, our sales wer pproximately \$100 million with less than 500 employees, and today our sales are in excess of 11 billion with more than 40,000 employees, and 1 in 13 U.S. prescriptions is filled with one of Mylan’s medications (CGHR 9-135, p. 17)

Clinton, a very experienced orator indeed, explicitly tells her public it is a personal matter for her:

ex. 8c) For me, this is not just a matter of policy; it is personal, because I have had the great honour to lead the men and women of the State Department and USAID, nearly 70,000 serving here in Washington and at more than 275 posts around the world. They get up and go to work every day, often in difficult and dangerous circumstances, thousands of miles from home, because they believe the United States is the most extraordinary force for peace and progress the Earth has ever known (CGHR 113-11, p. 9).

Finally Dorsey, Twitter’s CEO, opts for a quite intimate tone:

ex. 9c) I am someone of very few words and typically pretty shy, but I realize how important it is to speak up now. If it’s OK with all of you I’d like to read you something I personally wrote as I considered these issues (CGHR 115-460, p. 19).

In the testimonies under investigation, the self-representation of an unbiased witness, who relies on solid facts and is committed to doing his or her best, is also carried out by another distinguishable move: the “multi-step description”, where future and/or already done steps to address specific issues are described. If we refer to Werlich’s text types, again these parts are not expository in nature. In fact, they are argumentative text types and they are aimed to portray a culturally appreciated proactive attitude – in British Petroleum president’s words: “we know we will be measured by what we do not what we say” – which supports the witness’s trustworthy public image. References to numbers, dates, and percentages typically detail the exposition of things done and future plans and are aimed to convey a fact-oriented witness’s image.

Witness	Bresh	Clinton	Cook	Dorsey	Malone	Marshall	Newman	Sandberg	Skilling	Zuckerberg
Numbers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Percentages		X	X	X				X		
Dates	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	

Table 1  
References to numbers, dates and percentages in the testimonies.

In the ten analysed hearings, only Apple, Twitter and Transocean do not resort to the “multi-step description” move. Here below a few excerpts from the testimonies are used to exemplify the move.

ex. 1d) Our program has four parts. We announced the first-ever generic of the EpiPen product, which will be priced at \$300. This unprecedented move is the fastest and most direct way to reduce the price for all patients. Second, we are creating a direct-ship option, allowing patients to purchase the generic product directly from Mylan. Third, we increased our EpiPen savings card for the brand product from 100 to 300. And fourth, we doubled our eligibility of patients receiving free pens from 48,600 to 97,200 for a family of four (CGHR 9-135, p. 18).

ex.2d) First, let’s start on the night of September 11 itself and those difficult early days.[...] Second, even as I took these steps, I quickly moved to appoint the Accountability Review Board [...] In addition to the immediate action we took, and the review board process, we are moving on a third front, addressing the broader strategic challenge in North Africa and the wider region (CGHR 113-11, p. 7).

ex.3d) So looking ahead, step one, we will pig and smart pig the 10 miles of remaining transit lines and we will implement routine pigging and smart pigging going forwards on all of our



transit lines. Two, we will determine the corrosion cause and modify our corrosion management system going forward. Three, we will include all of BP's operated transit lines, all 122 miles of those lines, in the DOT's PIM program, pipeline integrity management program. And fourth, we will replace 60 miles of transit lines at Prudhoe Bay. Fifth, we have already made organizational changes, added a technical director to define and establish operating standards and to verify that those standards are indeed being met by the business (CGHR- 109-135, p. 57).

ex. 4d) First, I have not lied to the Congress or anyone else about my recollection of events while I was at Enron. Second, I never duped Ken Lay. [...]. Third, I do not believe that my testimony is contradicted by or is materially different than the testimony of either Mr. McMahon or Mr. Mintz, for both of whom I have a tremendous amount of respect (CGHR 107-1141, p. 18).

ex. 5d) So here are a few things that we are doing to address this and to prevent it from happening again. First, we're getting to the bottom of exactly what Cambridge Analytica did, and telling everyone affected. [...] Second, to make sure no other app developers out there are misusing data, we're now investigating every single app that had access to a large amount of information in the past. [...] Third, to prevent this from ever happening again, going forward, we're making sure that developers can't access as much information now (CGHR 115-114, p. 9).

The fifth distinguishable move in the core part of witness testimony is the “apologetic” move. Although it was highly expected in corporate response to allegations of wrongdoing (Hearit 2006), it is not very frequent in the testimonies under investigation. Apologies appear in three out of ten testimonies - British Petroleum's, Facebook's and Enron's (see examples below) – and they play a crucial role in the construction of the witness's ethos-oriented public identity. In fact, apologies imply recognition of shared societal values and expectations which the apologiser somehow failed to meet.

ex. 1e) I deeply regret this situation occurring on my watch after five years. Everyone has talked about the importance of this. I regret it very deeply (CGHR 109-135, p. 57).

ex. 2e) As I did when I appeared before Congress, I want to apologize to all of those affected people for what Enron has come to symbolize (CGHR 107-1141, p. 19).

ex. 3e) We didn't take a broad enough view of our responsibility, and that was a big mistake. And it was my mistake. And I'm sorry. I started Facebook, I run it, and I'm responsible for what happens here (CGHR 115-114, p. 9).

Finally, the last move which can be identified in testimonies is the “looking forward” move, which occupies the final part in the body of the testimony and it is very common. No matter which topic is underlined – if tax reform or plans for further expanding access to affordable medicines – a positive tone prevails and the move, which is present in nine out of ten testimonies (with the exception of Enron), just precedes the formulaic closing.

ex. 1f) Going forward, we will continue our leadership in developing high-quality medicine and expanding access (CGHR 9-135, p. 18).

ex. 2f) [...] I am confident that with your help, we will continue to keep the United States safe, strong, and exceptional (CGHR 113-11, p. 10).

ex. 3f) We make this recommendation with our eyes wide open, fully recognizing that this would likely result in an increase in Apple's U.S. taxes. But we strongly believe that such comprehensive reform would be fair to all taxpayers, would keep America globally competitive, and would promote U.S. economic growth (CGHR 113-90, p. 38).

ex. 4f) I treasure that and will do everything in my power to protect it from harm (CGHR 115-460, p. 20).

ex. 5f) If the subcommittee would like, I would be happy to report back in 6months and periodically thereafter to indicate to you the progress that we are making, and we will participate and cooperate with you in an open and honest fashion (CGHR 109-135, p. 38).

ex. 6f) I am determined to do what we can to get production back safely, quickly and efficiently (CGHR 109-135, p. 57).

ex. 7f) But regardless of what the investigations uncover, ours is an industry that must put safety first. We must do so for the sake of our employees, for the sake of their families, and for the sake of people all over the world who use, enjoy, and rely on our oceans and waterways for their sustenance (CGHR 111-122, p. 62).

ex. 8f) Senators, let me be clear, we are more determined than our opponents and we will keep fighting. When bad actors try to use our site, we will block them. When content violates our policies, we will take it down. And when our opponents use new techniques, we will share them so we can strengthen our collective efforts. [...] we will work with all of you to meet this challenge (CGHR 115-460, p. 8).

ex. 9f) And I know that, when we address these challenges we'll look back and view helping people connect and giving more people a voice as a positive force in the world (CGHR 115-114, p. 9).

At a macro-textual level, the common communicative purpose of the six identified moves appears to be eminently persuasive: witnesses want to persuade their audience they – and the organizations they work for – behave and have behaved ethically and the audience can trust them as credible witnesses. Here it needs to be remembered that, essentially, ethos-oriented persuasion is the process in which public actors struggle to enforce their credibility (Ansolabehere *et al.* 1994) and all the witnesses of the hearings under investigation discursively engage in this struggle.

### 3.2. Micro textual level

If attention is shifted from macro to micro-textual level, lexicon seems to be the most evident tool for constructing ethos-framed public identity. On one hand each testimony highlights different ethos-evoking topics, e.g. environmental responsibility, attention to human rights, to privacy, to safety. On the other hand, there are some recurrent ethos-evoking lexical items. Based on this, testimonies were investigated to identify lexical commonalities and automatic computer query was involved, with quantitative analytical tools being used to confirm hypothesis formulated by means of qualitative investigation.

The results revealed that lexical items referring to witnesses' commitment in solving problems and acting quickly and adequately occurred in the majority of the testimonies. The stem *commit*\* occupies a prominent position in terms of frequency and it appears in six out of ten testimonies: Clinton's, Cook's, Malone's, Marshall's, Newman's, Zuckerbeg'.

N.	Concordance lines
1	we need to make, but I am <i>committed</i> to getting this right.
2	exceptional men, and we are <i>committed</i> to doing everything
3	this town, we are deeply <i>committed</i> to our country's welfare
4	shut down. BP is fully <i>committed</i> to restoring production
5	buck stops with me, and I <i>commit</i> that I and my team will do
6	and nobody is more <i>committed</i> to getting this done
7	Carolina. Reflecting our <i>commitment</i> to the environment, the
8	integrity. I am personally <i>committed</i> to rebuilding the public
9	fast or easy. Today we're <i>committing</i> to the people and this

Table 2  
Concordance lines of the stem *commit*\*.

Aimed to evoke a similar – action-oriented persona – *determined* is also significantly present: Marshall (British Petroleum) is determined to make improvements and to do what they can to get production back safely, quickly and efficiently, Sandberg (Facebook) is determined to do everything they can to stop external interference in US political scene, Clinton is determined to leave the State Department and US safer and stronger, and to bring terrorists to justice.

N.	Concordance lines
1	on our systems and am <i>determined</i> to make improvements. We
2	regret it very deeply. I am <i>determined</i> to do what we can to get
3	getting this right. I am <i>determined</i> to leave the State Department
4	attacks in Benghazi and are <i>determined</i> to bring them to justice
5	confronted attacks from <i>determined</i> , well-funded opponents
6	Actions taken show how <i>determined</i> we are to do everything
7	me be clear, we are more <i>determined</i> than our opponents and

Table 3  
Concordance lines of *determined*.

In this ethos-evoking lexical scenario, also the verb *believe* needs to be considered as it conveys speakers' good faith and it is widely used, with the highest occurrence in Cook's and Marshall's testimonies.

N.	Concordance lines
1	America. Apple has always <i>believed</i> in the simple, not the
2	remains to be done. We did <i>believe</i> we had a very comprehensive
3	opening statements I <i>believe</i> that we may actually have
4	that matter to them most. I <i>believe</i> deeply in what we are
5	opinion. Third, I do not <i>believe</i> that my testimony is contradicted
6	on August 14th, I did not <i>believe</i> the company was in trouble
7	taxes. But we strongly <i>believe</i> that such comprehensive
8	circumstances—because they <i>believe</i> , as we believe, the Unite
9	we took the only action we <i>believed</i> we could to prevent the
10	Where next? What we <i>believe</i> so far is that the inspection
11	our country's welfare. We <i>believe</i> great public policy can
12	company of strong values. We <i>believe</i> our extraordinary success
13	because they believe, as we <i>believe</i> , the United States is the
14	of that clean up and we <i>believe</i> at this point there will
15	free, and open exchange. We <i>believe</i> people would learn faster
16	Twitter's role in the world. We <i>believe</i> many people use Twitter a

Table 4  
Concordance lines of *believe*.

The adjective *proud* also has a role when it comes to portray an ethos-oriented speaker. In half of the testimonies witnesses are proud of their actions and behaviours, thus implying they know the actions they are presenting are socially praised. Here below the concordance lines for the lexical item are displayed.

N.	Concordance lines
1	of the Subcommittee. I am <b>proud</b> to represent Apple be-fore
2	me, proud of Twitter, and <b>proud</b> of what made it all possible
3	it is now. I'm honored and <b>proud</b> to be the CEO of Mylan, an
4	emphatic, "Yes." We are <b>proud</b> to be an American company
5	American company and equally <b>proud</b> of our contributions to
6	velocity. We're extremely <b>proud</b> of helping to increase the
7	years, and I am incredibly <b>proud</b> of the contributions our
8	They're proud of me, <b>proud</b> of Twitter, and proud of what
9	than themselves. They're <b>proud</b> of me, proud of Twitter

Table 5  
Concordance lines of *proud*.

Finally, the stem *responsib\**, which is intrinsically linked to an ethos-evoking idea – i.e. that of taking responsibility or being responsible – is present in half of the testimonies and it is worth mentioning and displaying.

N.	Concordance lines
1	the board, we have a <b>responsibility</b> to not just give people
2	to remind they have a <b>responsibility</b> and a right to shut do
3	the end of the day, I am <b>responsible</b> for what happens here.
4	that includes the basic <b>responsibility</b> of protecting people's
5	safe and environmentally <b>responsible</b> way. Across BP, we have
6	and we take the full <b>responsibility</b> to fix it. We can't do
7	continue to take, full <b>responsibility</b> for my actions as a
8	priority and no greater <b>responsibility</b> . As I have said many
9	access brings increased <b>responsibilities</b> to the communities
10	Kentucky. In total, Apple is <b>responsible</b> for creating or support
11	you share my sense of <b>responsibility</b> and urgency. And while
12	broad enough view of our <b>responsibility</b> , and that was a big
13	broad enough view of our <b>responsibility</b> . It is not enough to
14	clearly how we view our <b>responsibility</b> with respect to taxes.
15	jobs. So it is our <b>responsibility</b> to make sure they have
16	said many times, I take <b>responsibility</b> , and nobody is more
17	secure. Now, taking <b>responsibility</b> meant moving quickly

Table 6  
Concordance lines for the stem *responsib\**.

At a micro-textual level, lexicon proved to be an evident tool for constructing ethos-framed public identity, in fact recurrent lexical items have been identified and automatic computer query confirmed their presence and distribution.

## 4. Conclusions

### 4.1. The ethos-based framework

Notwithstanding lexical recurrences and resort to the identified rhetorical moves, the ethos-based personae which are portrayed in the testimonies also show some differences. Some witnesses sound more defensive, some other are bold. This fact can be related to

witnesses' personalities as well as to the circumstances, for example to the perceived degree of threat or to the more or less genuine belief of being doing - or having done - the right thing. Enron's CEO proclaims his innocence and disappointment for being labelled as a criminal, Clinton never admits her failures and skilfully makes use of apologetic strategies (Giglioni 2017) such as indirect denial, diversification, bolstering and transcendence (Ware, Linkugel 1973), Apple's CEO sounds bold:

In addition to creating hundreds of thousands of American jobs and developing products that deeply enrich the lives of millions, Apple is a champion of human rights, education, and the environment. Our belief that innovation should serve humanity's deepest values and highest aspirations is not going to change. (CGHR 113-90, p. 35)

Differences may also be related to reasons for ethically framing one's public image. In fact, according to ethics scholars, there are three types of ethical frameworks: consequence-based or teleological, duty-based or deontological and virtue-based, which rely on character and does not imply a rule to follow but a perspective to adopt (Grimi 2019). And it is precisely this last type of framework witnesses seems to want to adopt in the testimonies under consideration: for Facebook's and Twitter's CEOs their companies have a social mission, for Mr. Cook, Apple is mainly the largest corporate income tax payer in America and created hundreds of thousands jobs, Enron's CEO declares to have been unjustly accused, British Petroleum top management admit failures and promise to repair, Mylan and Transocean CEOs underline they are self-made people and their dedication to the cause, Clinton is sure she and the State Department made their best. Most of the witnesses declare to be committed – and/or determined - to provide solutions to the issues for which they have been called to Capitol Hill.

#### **4.2. Research results and future directions**

The results partially corroborate the proposed theoretical hypothesis, but the sample size is an issue in terms of robustness and it will be widened in the next steps of the research project on congressional hearings the writer of this article is involved in. Temporal range needs to be extended over the sixteen years (2002-2018) considered in the present article, also in consideration of the fact that strategies for the construction of ethos-based self-representation may be displayed differently if topics and witnesses were not subjected to great public scrutiny and discussion, as instead it is the case for all the hearings selected and analysed in this study.

For what the research revealed up to now, the witness' trustworthy public identity in congressional hearings' opening statement appears to be discursively constructed. Six moves have been identified and they - also – contribute to the construction of an ethos-based framework for the speaker's identity: in the opening move and in the closing move it is the idea of a collaborative witness, in the looking back move stories and descriptions portray ethical values the witness and his or her organization somehow embody, in the multi-step description the writer's pro-active attitude in solving problems is depicted, in the apologetic move common moral standards are implied, and in the looking forward move the writer's commitment in doing all the best to face a controversial situation is the dominant idea. The moves are also connoted at a micro textual level and, for what concerns an ethos-based framework for public identity construction, they mainly rely on lexical items.

Next steps in the research may either confirm the list of items is exhaustive or underline the need to extend it and double-check it in the testimonies already analysed.

Future research will mainly focus on genre macro-structure as well as on moves' textual realization, including their distribution and grammatical-syntactic features. The underlying idea remains to shed more light on congressional hearings, a still quite disregarded genre for discourse analysts.

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