

## “Where It Says Donate, Okay, You Do It Right Now”. Exploring the Persuasive Strategies of Benny Hinn

**Abstract:** The present essay aims at unravelling the persuasive and influential strategies employed by the pastor and televangelist Benny Hinn to hinge on his followers to sustain his Ministry and TV format, streaming platforms and online avenues. After establishing a connection between deliberative rhetoric and televangelism and setting the context for Benny Hinn’s persona, the present study decodes the underlying patterns of his persuasive strategy using a hybrid methodology, which integrates the seminal research by Searle and Yule. The excerpts drawn from the *Benny Hinn Healing Services* aired in 2021 will be examined both quantitatively and qualitatively to underscore that audience persuasion transcends both mere logical argumentation and the speaker’s credibility and to dissect Hinn’s persuasive framework, probing how he interweaves logical coherence, *ethos* and emotionally resonant appeals to mobilize financial support.

Keywords: *pragmatics, rhetoric, televangelism, persuasion, Benny Hinn*

### 1. Persuasion and Televangelism

Persuasion has been widely studied since Aristotelian times, and it can be defined as “the process of inducing a *voluntary* change in someone’s attitudes, beliefs or behaviour through the transmission of a message”<sup>2</sup> or as “the addressing of arguments or appeals to a person in order to induce cooperation, submission, or agreement”.<sup>3</sup> In other words, *to persuade* means to convince the hearer(s) to behave in a certain way and it is often achieved with the help of pragmatic argumentation (for instance, through “the recommendation of an action on the basis of its positive consequences”).<sup>4</sup> Any means – non-verbal communication, music, art, language<sup>5</sup> – can help to persuade, albeit with a different grade of incisiveness.

A link between televangelism and persuasion was evidenced by Schmidt and Kess who, in their seminal work *Television Advertising and Televangelism. Discourse Analysis of Persuasive Language*, examined in detail previous theoretical studies, and analysed a selection of promotional segments from televangelists’ broadcasts, comparing them with advertising messages<sup>6</sup> and posing the basis of a methodology apt to study such discourse. They selected excerpts directed to the audience that “contained appeals for viewer response or promotion of the ministry or the program itself”, transcribed data from audio tape, and added punctuation with the help of intonation and verbal content; when unclear words were uttered, they included a phonetical transcription followed by a question mark. Non-verbal communication, instead, was excluded from their analysis. In short, the study explores persuasive language in

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<sup>2</sup> Rosemarie Schmidt and Joseph F. Kess, *Television Advertising and Televangelism: Discourse Analysis of Persuasive Language* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1986), 2. Emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> OED, “Persuasion, n.” *OED Online*, [www.oed.com](http://www.oed.com).

<sup>4</sup> Jos Hornikx, “A Review of Experimental Research on the Relative Persuasiveness of Anecdotal, Statistical, Causal, and Expert Evidence”, *Studies in Communication Sciences*, 5.1 (2005), 206.

<sup>5</sup> Schmidt and Kess, *Televangelism*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Schmidt and Kess, *Televangelism*, 4-5.

television advertising and televangelism, highlighting that both forms of communication use similar rhetorical techniques to influence their audiences. The scholars analyse the structure, style, and content of the language employed in such forms of communication to understand how they create emotional appeal, establish credibility, and encourage viewers to take specific actions (that is, buying a product or adopting religious beliefs). The analysis pinpoints the strategic use of language to engage viewers, build trust, and persuade them to act in accordance with the advertiser’s or televangelist’s goals. The selected excerpts focus on the linguistic features of advertising highlighted by Lakoff<sup>7</sup> and Geis,<sup>8</sup> that is, novel terms and expressions, frequent repetition of names,<sup>9</sup> mitigation of claims, saying indirect things, adjectivization processes and imperative structures as suggestions, which are strictly bound to speech acts.<sup>10</sup> The results of their enquiry evidenced several similarities between the persuasive strategies in advertising and televangelist broadcasts; indeed, indirect speech forms and vague language are present not only in claims and arguments but also in assurances, predictions and issuing of directives. Furthermore, the scholars found evidence of “Geis’ observation that product names often have more than a referring function and can themselves carry information that might aid in their promotion”.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the names of televangelists are frequently repeated, probably intentionally, as a drill.<sup>12</sup> Linguistic novelty, instead, is rarely present and “the literal strength of claims was also mitigated in televangelists’ speech through a variety of linguistic devices reminiscent of Geis’ original report, though the use of modal verbs for this purpose was not found in the data”.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Introducing Benny Hinn

Toufik Benedictus (“Benny”) Hinn is a world-famous religious leader who reaches a wide audience through books, television and online live sessions.<sup>14</sup> He is among the televangelists who have a “near-celebrity status”, and thus, have name akin to a brand, a persona that is constructed and shaped by his numerous media appearances and is perceived by the public as a “media commodity”.<sup>15</sup>

He was born in 1952 in Jaffa (Israel), where his family moved from Greece; afterwards, they moved to Canada, where he began to build his (controversial) career. With his wife, Suzanne Harthern, he started a family, and they now live near the “World Healing Center Church” and the television studio, “Benny Hinn Ministries”. The two “entities” together are a full-fledged corporation.<sup>16</sup> The ministry is active in the fight against famine and poverty, takes care of children’s education and owns a hospital in Calcutta and two children’s homes in Mexico and in the Philippines.<sup>17</sup>

Despite his commitment to the above-discussed causes, Benny Hinn has been harshly criticized in the last thirty years; for instance, in 1991, after he became famous thanks to his book *Good Morning*,

<sup>7</sup> Robin Tolmach Lakoff, “Persuasive Discourse and Ordinary Conversation, with Examples from Advertising”, in Deborah Tannen, ed., *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk* (Washington D.C.: Georgetown U.P., 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Michael L. Geis, *The Language of Television Advertising* (New York: Academic Press, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> In the case of televangelist broadcasts, the repeated names are the ones of people; instead, in advertising, product names are repeated (for further details, see Schmidt and Kess, *Televangelism*, 45).

<sup>10</sup> Schmidt and Kess, *Televangelism*, 39-61.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>12</sup> Peculiarities of advertising that have not been found in televangelists’ discourse are “1. [t]he terms introducing or announcing used to attract viewer attention; 2. the use of count nouns as mass nouns; 3. rhetorical questions; 4. elliptical comparatives; 5. odd uses of the definite article; 6. pragmatic anomaly”. Schmidt and Kess, *Televangelism*, 64.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>14</sup> The presence of an audience implies the possibility of interaction, and thus, of persuasion. Martin Adam, “Persuasion in Religious Discourse: Enhancing Credibility in Sermon Titles and Openings”, *Discourse and Interaction*, 10.2 (2017), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Bryan and Albakry, “Personalization in Online Sermons”, 700.

<sup>16</sup> About mega-churches functioning as corporations, see Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Benny Hinn Ministries, “About us”, bennyhinn.org.

*Holy Spirit*, which had sold over five hundred thousand copies, *Christianity Today* (1991) propagated that scholars and apologetic ministers, among them professor of theology J. Rodman Williams, raised serious questions about his doctrines, leading him to retract his early statements.<sup>18</sup> Further strong critiques came from Fisher and Goedelman, who published a collection of articles titled *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn* (1996), which provides the reader with extensive documentation aimed at highlighting the bizarre teachings and contradictory spiritual experiences of the purported healer.<sup>19</sup>

Due to the various critiques received and some criminal allegations of fraud and misuse of donations,<sup>20</sup> in 2019 Hinn decided to “amend” his prosperity gospel<sup>21</sup> theory, declaring it to be offensive to God, and he stated that he did not want to ask *to seed*, that is “to give”, (certain amounts of) money anymore. However, as the corpus on which the present study focuses demonstrates, he changed his *modus operandi* only partially: a specific amount of money is not requested anymore, but offerings are still elicited.

### 3. The Corpus

The present essay analyses 5 excerpts from the *Miracle Healing Service with Pastor Benny Hinn*:

1. *Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H090721), 9<sup>th</sup> July 2021, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).
2. *Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H230721), 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2021, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).
3. *Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H011021), 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).
4. *Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H221021), 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2021, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).
5. *Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H191121), 19<sup>th</sup> November 2021, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

During the program, which airs on many platforms (among them, YouTube and Facebook), the Pastor guarantees “anointed worship, ministry and miracles”.<sup>22</sup> People can either participate in-person, buying

<sup>18</sup> Hinn responded to the allegations that his wrong statements were caused by “a lack of formal Bible training”; for example, the preacher affirmed that the Holy Spirit was formed by nine entities. *Christianity Today*, “Benny Hinn: Best-selling author admits Mistakes, Vows Changes”, *Christianity Today*, 35.12 (1991), 44.

<sup>19</sup> G. Richard Fisher and M. Kurt Goedelman, *The Confusing World of Benny Hinn* (n.p.: Personal Freedom Press, 1996). Critics also came from the Methodist Church of Fiji, the Italian Evangelical Alliance and journalists. See, among others, Alleanza Evangelica Italiana, “Comunicato dell’Alleanza Evangelica Italiana” (2006), [www.alleanzaevangelica.org](http://www.alleanzaevangelica.org); Sola Odunfa, “Pastor Hinn in Nigerian Money Row”, *BBC News* (2005), [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk); *Religious News Blog*, “Methodist Wary of Hinn”, *Religious News Blog*, 2006, [www.religionnewsblog.com](http://www.religionnewsblog.com).

<sup>20</sup> In 2007, the Pastor and other US televangelists were investigated by the Senate Finance Committee for misuse of donations. On that occasion, Hinn placed “a ‘curse’ from God against anyone ‘who [dared] to speak a word about [his] ministry’”. The investigation was concluded with no penalties for the Pastors who did not cooperate and “no definitive findings of wrongdoing”. In 2017, instead, the investigators of IRS reached Hinn’s headquarters in Grapevine (Texas) and sequestered around a hundred boxes of documents in order to investigate tax evasion and fraud against the government, but charges have never been filed. See Julieta Chiquillo, “IRS Investigators search televangelist Benny Hinn’s offices in Grapevine”, *The Dallas Morning News* (2017), [www.dallasnews.com](http://www.dallasnews.com); William Crawley, “The heresy of ‘televangelists’”, *BBC News* (2007), [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk); Vicky Baker, “The preachers getting rich from poor Americans”, *BBC News* (2019), [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com); Benny Hinn Ministries, “Join Pastor Benny Hinn for a Miracle Healing Service in-person”, [www.bennyhinn.org](http://www.bennyhinn.org); United State Senate Committee on Finance, “Letter to Pastor Benedictus Hinn”, *United State Senate Committee on Finance* (2007), [www.finance.senate.gov](http://www.finance.senate.gov); Rachel Zoll, “Televangelists Escape Penalty in Senate Inquiry”, *NBC News* (2011), [www.nbcnews.com](http://www.nbcnews.com).

<sup>21</sup> Prosperity gospel, in general, sees faith as a force that activates spiritual energy, transforming spoken words into reality. It links faith directly to tangible outcomes, particularly in terms of *wealth* and *health*: financial prosperity and physical well-being are seen as indicators of a person’s spiritual success, making material reality a measure of the strength of their faith. The movement also emphasizes that true faith is marked by victory, with believers convinced that no cultural, political, or social obstacles can prevent them from achieving success in life. Overall, faith is expected to produce visible, measurable results that reflect a successful life. Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford U.P., 2013), 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Benny Hinn Healing Service*, 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRECV2rnjTE>.

a ticket, or online, for free.<sup>23</sup> During his live sessions, the Pastor prays in various languages and discusses current events and, only at (or towards) the end of each broadcast, a banner appears and Hinn directly asks for donations, as it will be highlighted in section 5. However, other forms of request are embedded in YouTube, which is one of his main distribution channels. Indeed, the platform provides its users with a lateral live chat, where people can not only comment but also donate. Furthermore, in the description of the videos, other useful information to donate are provided: “To give, please visit: [www.BennyHinn.org/donate/](http://www.BennyHinn.org/donate/) To give through PayPal: <https://www.paypal.me/BennyHinnMinist.../> Or Text: BHM to 45777” (H050322).

The excerpts drawn from the programs listed above were transcribed and punctuation was added, following the guidelines by Schmidt and Kess. It was also taken into account that, on YouTube, the input of the user can be either be explicit or implicit: indeed, the platform allows the user to choose what to watch, however, an algorithm is also suggesting videos according to one’s researches on the website (*i.e.*, preferences).<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, it should be taken into account that “[o]nline users do not merely consume content; they shape posted content, recommending ‘viral’ video clips that result in millions of ‘hits.’ Call-and-response preaching that used to garner a hearty ‘Amen!’ from certain traditions now results in plentiful comments on social media and the chat section of a livestreamed video, even from more reserved factions”.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, interaction among the viewers can take place in the comments.<sup>26</sup>

Since the *Healing Services* vary in duration, it was not possible to select excerpts of the same number of tokens.<sup>27</sup> It should also be noticed that the anecdotes preceding the banner about donating had a role in the strategy of the Pastor. Indeed, implicit or explicit claims about future events are essential when analysing pragmatic argumentation. According to Hoeken,<sup>28</sup> it is possible to distinguish between three types of persuading evidence: anecdotal, statistical, and causal evidence. Despite being the statistical evidence the most persuading type,<sup>29</sup> Hinn systematically introduces the request using anecdotes,<sup>30</sup> which specifically concern a certain person or group of people (*e.g.*, in H090721 he recounts anecdotes about the late Oral Roberts<sup>31</sup>, and in H011021 about wealthy people).

<sup>23</sup> During the Covid19 pandemic, the healing service took place online as did the healings themselves. Hinn showed the ability to cure people through Zoom and other online platforms, laying his hands on the displays. However, such events usually take place in person in his television studio; he is also used to recalling healings of the past.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Pihlaja, “Language, Religion and the Digital World”, in Stephen Pihlaja and Helen Ringrow, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2024), 131.

<sup>25</sup> Clint D. Bryan, “Pandemic Sermon Rhetoric and Evangelism”, in Pihlaja and Ringrow, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Religion*, 196.

<sup>26</sup> Clint Bryan and Mohammed Albakry, “‘To Be Real Honest, I’m Just like You’: Analyzing the Discourse of Personalization in Online Sermons”, *Text & Talk*, 36.6 (2016), 683-703.

<sup>27</sup> Despite their length varying from 62 to 156 tokens, their function and positioning within the *Healing Services* is identical.

<sup>28</sup> Hans Hoeken, “Anecdotal, statistical, and causal evidence: Their perceived and actual persuasiveness”, *Argumentation*, 15 (2001), 425-437.

<sup>29</sup> Hornikx adds a fourth type of evidence to the categorization (*i.e.*, expert evidence) and agrees that statistical evidence is more persuasive than the anecdotal one, which is the least persuasive type. Hornikx, “A Review of Experimental Research on the Relative Persuasiveness of Anecdotal, Statistical, Causal, and Expert Evidence”, 205-216.

<sup>30</sup> As studies in cognitive psychology have demonstrated, anecdotes have a relevant impact on judgements and decisions. See, among others, Hornikx, “A Review of Experimental Research on the Relative Persuasiveness of Anecdotal, Statistical, Causal, and Expert Evidence”, 206; Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, “Subjective probability: a judgment of representativeness”, *Cognitive Psychology* 3 (1972), 430-454; Richard E. Nisbett and Eugene Borgida, eds., “Attribution and the Psychology of Prediction”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32 (1975), 932-943.

<sup>31</sup> Oral Roberts (1918-2009) was an American Pentecostal evangelist, renowned for his influential televised faith-healing ministry, the so-called “prosperity gospel”: Roberts affirmed that God desires believers to experience “temporal happiness and security” and rewards their faithfulness, shown through generous tithing and donations, with financial prosperity and other blessings. Roberts not only shaped the landscape of religious broadcasting but also mentored a generation of ministers, among them Benny Hinn. Melissa Petruzzello, “Oral Roberts”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 21 Jun. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Oral-Roberts>. Accessed 22 August 2024.

The present essay will demonstrate that the Pastor, towards the end of his broadcasts, tries to convince his proselytes to “sow their seed”, leveraging on wealth accumulation, a typical desire in the capitalist society. He uses a specific strategy, based on emotional appeals (*i.e.*, anecdotes) and the direct and indirect reiteration of the request, realized through the usage of directives and of representatives with the value of directives. Such anecdotes are clearly linked to testimonies, a very common communicative type in faith contexts.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4. Methodology

The methodological framework designed to analyse the persuasive strategies of Benny Hinn draws on the theories by Searle<sup>33</sup> and Yule.<sup>34</sup> More specifically, the illocutionary acts will be catalogued according to Searle’s model:<sup>35</sup> 1) representatives, which constitute a description the world; 2) directives, aimed at requesting something or giving an order; 3) commissives, used by the speaker to commit to some future action; 4) expressives, useful to express the speaker’s feelings and opinions; 5) declaratives, aimed at changing the external situation/world through language. Then, it will be determined whether speech acts are direct or indirect: a direct speech act is present “[w]hen there is a direct relationship between a structure and a function”; on the contrary, when the relationship is indirect, for instance when a declarative is used to make a request, the speech act is indirect.<sup>36</sup> In the present analysis, the first type will be indicated with “D:” followed by the type of direct speech act (*e.g.*, D: Directive) ; instead, when an indirect speech act is present, both the form of the act and its illocutionary force will be indicated (for example, a declarative used to make a request will be tagged as follows: D: Declarative / I: Directive).

#### 5. Patterns in the *Benny Hinn Healing Service(s)*

*Benny Hinn Healing Services* are characterized by widespread anecdotes and a request for money, which is always realized through the usage of the same linguistic means. The present section will highlight such features in the broadcasts object of the present qualitative study, showing a stable pattern.<sup>37</sup> More specifically, the anecdotes will be summarized and each request for money will be analysed within a table.

During the first *Healing Service* object of study, H090721, Benny Hinn makes his onlookers aware that, according to his experience, giving corresponds to receiving. More specifically, he recounted that once Oral Roberts told him that, to receive money, he just needed to write on an envelope that he was in

<sup>32</sup> Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1969). John R. Searle, “A Classification of Illocutionary Acts”, *Language in Society*, 5.1 (1976), 1-23. See also J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1962).

<sup>34</sup> George Yule, *Pragmatics* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1996).

<sup>35</sup> Searle, “A Classification of Illocutionary Acts”, 10-13.

<sup>36</sup> Yule, *Pragmatics*, 54-55.

<sup>37</sup> Such patterns were observed across all *Benny Hinn Healing Services* from 2021 and 2022 available on YouTube, which include the ones object of the present study and the following ones:

*Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H230421), 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

*Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H280521), 28<sup>th</sup> May 2021, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

*Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H180621), 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

*Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H130821), 13<sup>th</sup> August 2021, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

*Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H311221), 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

*Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H250222), 25<sup>th</sup> February 2022, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

*Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H050322), 5<sup>th</sup> March 2022, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

*Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H180322), 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

*Benny Hinn Healing Service* (H190822), 19<sup>th</sup> August 2022, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com).

debt because he bought a house and, in that way, the Lord would have got him out of debt; Roberts also suggested him to ask his church to do the same. Then, Hinn claims to have been given thirty thousand USD, which he used to help children in Matamoros (Mexico). Then, he affirms that the same person who donated to him the alluring sum, awarded him three hundred thousand USD, the exact amount of money he needed to pay for his home; he adds that such events do occur very often in his life and he prays and hopes that they could happen to his proselytes, too.

Later, he recounts another anecdote: God told him to give sixty thousand USD, the offerings he got in a day, to a person; after obeying God, he felt really bad but just a week later a person gave him one tenth of the money they got from the selling of a six million USD property since God told them to do so. The Pastor, then, affirms that “if it doesn’t hurt, it doesn’t work” and proceeds to tell another episode. He needed fifty thousand USD to buy a property, he went to the hospital to pray for a man who had a kidney illness and, later, he was brought that sum in his church. At this point of the broadcast, Hinn makes a direct request for money, lists the people from all over the world who were supposedly healed thanks to his service, lets the offering bucket pass and holds the communion.

Request	Analysis
[...] <b>You just go right around that platform</b> what it says Benny Hinn Ministries and so on, where it says donate, <i>okay</i> (my italics),	[D: Directive]
<b>you do it right now;</b>	[D: Directive]
<b>you can go to bennyhinn.org,</b>	Possibility <sup>38</sup> 1: [D: Representative / I: Directive]
<b>you can text it bhm 45777,</b>	Possibility 2: [D: Representative / I: Directive]
so simple, so simple and <b>watch what God will do with you.</b>	[D: Directive]
And, <b>I want you to do something:</b>	[D: Directive]
<b>I want you to wave it to the Lord now;</b>	[D: Directive]
<b>maybe you can't do it with your whatever</b>	[D: Representative]
but <b>take that credit card and just wave it to God</b>	[D: Directive]
<b>or wave something,</b> maybe your hand in your homes,	[D: Directive]
<b>give him a wave offering.</b>	[D: Directive]
<b>It works in Israel,</b>	[D: Representative]
<b>when the Jews sow they always wave,</b>	[D: Representative]
<b>they wave their gift.</b> I don't know why but I think it's biblical... all right,	[D: Representative]
<b>what's going on there, Cherry? They're coming, huh?</b>	[Wh- question] [Rhetorical question D: Representative / I: Directive]
<b>Yes, they are. Huh, yes. [...]</b>	[D: Representative]

Table 1. Analysis of the request part of H090721

The above-quoted excerpt, formed by one hundred thirty-eight tokens, contains nine directives, five representatives and three representatives functioning as directives. In it, Benny Hinn orders his proselytes to donate; his persuasive request begins with two directives (“you just go around that platform”,

<sup>38</sup> With “possibility”, I am here referring to the possibility of donation.

“you do it right now”); such requests are separated by an “okay” that, combined with the use of the second-person pronoun, creates a sense of direct personal interaction with the audience, making them feel more like spontaneous conversations rather than prepared speeches.<sup>39</sup> Then, the possibilities of donation are described through two representatives (“you can go to bennyhinn.org”, “you can text it blm 45777”) conveying once again the same request (the indirect speech acts are thus directives). After highlighting the simplicity of the donation methods (“so simple, so simple”), the Pastor uses a directive, preceded by the conjunction “and”, to tell his onlookers that God will do something with them. The usage of the conjunction “and” is a precise stylistic choice that implies the need to donate in order to receive something from God. The believers are then asked to wave something. Such act is requested since it has a strong visual impact, encourages other people to give since it creates the impression of widespread support and involvement, building a sense of community. Hinn, then, using the metaphor of sowing, which is common in the prosperity gospel,<sup>40</sup> says that it works in Israel and that waving has a certain connection with the Bible, leveraging on the holiness of the gesture. Lastly, the Pastor interacts with Cherry (as the wh- question and the and sobriquet “Cherry” demonstrate) and, through a representative, he confirms that donations are arriving, implicitly soliciting more of them.

In the following excerpt, H230721, Hinn shows his desire to live like the early church, that is, to seek Jesus and not wealth. He also adds that “the wealthiest people on earth are poor because they are not walking with God”. As an example, he recounts to his onlookers that Evelyn Roberts (*i.e.*, Oral Robert’s wife)<sup>41</sup> once told him about a miser Californian woman who kissed the expensive statues she had bought and wanted to bring them with her in the afterlife. On the contrary, Evelyn and Oral Roberts should be taken as examples since they have always been great givers: indeed, Mr. Roberts gave Hinn cheques whenever they met. The Pastor also adds that God told a woman to give him five thousand USD monthly, which is important for him since he can support elderly Pastors. He adds that he is still fit and healthy, thus, he has no problem with travelling the world to sow for his future; however, retired preachers cannot do so anymore and need (his and his proselytes’) help.

At that point, he prays for people attending the service “that money will come to [them] supernaturally from sources [they’re] not expecting”. Furthermore, he expresses the desire to buy or build a big edifice in Orlando, to preach both on site and through online platforms. Indeed, he highlights that social media engagement is essential for his ministry since he wants to reach every “country” (among them Iran, India, Israel, Europe and Africa). Then, he tells the onlookers about some healings and about his wife, who has a medical condition (benign tumors).

Request	Analysis
[...] <b>you just sow</b>	[D: Representative / I: Directive]
<b>and God does the rest,</b>	[D: Representative / I: Directive]
<b>it's so simple,</b>	[D: Representative]
<b>so, let's do it now!</b>	[D: Directive]
You that are watching me online, <b>you can go right now to bennyhinn.org – our website –</b>	Possibility 1a [D: Representative / I: Directive]
<b>or simply on the platform that you're watching us on,</b>	Possibility 2a: [D: Representative / I: Directive]
<b>put it where it says “donate”,</b>	[D: Directive]
<b>and you can do it right there,</b>	Possibility 1b: [D: Representative / I: Directive]

Table 2. Analysis of the request part of H230721

<sup>39</sup> Bryan and Albakry, “‘To Be Real Honest, I’m Just like You’: Analyzing the Discourse of Personalization in Online Sermons”, 687.

<sup>40</sup> About its distribution, see Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*, 253.

<sup>41</sup> Petruzzello, “Oral Roberts”.

Despite the fact that H230721 contains less tokens (62) if compared to H090721 (138 tokens), the pattern is very similar. Indeed, it contains two directives, a representative and five representatives with the function of directives.

Hinn, through a representative (“you just sow and God does the rest”), tries to persuade his onlookers to donate (I: directive). The implicit request is reinforced by the presence of a metaphor [“sow (your seed)”] following the schema *source-path-goal*, which is “important for religious discourse”.<sup>42</sup> With such a metaphor, the Pastor is promising his devotees that they will receive something in return if they give; in other words, the donation would be a sort of spiritual financial investment.

Then, Hinn emphasizes the ease of giving and directly urges his audience to take action, using the inclusive “let’s” (“[l]et’s do it now!”) to foster a strong sense of community and in-group belonging.<sup>43</sup> Subsequently, similarly to the previous excerpt, the televangelist lists the possibilities of donation through a series of representatives, which reiterate, and thus reinforce, the request for money.

In H011021, instead, Hinn does not provide the viewers with any specific anecdote; however, he discusses the lives of wealthy people, claiming that “they are not blessed” and that “when the economy starts to struggle, down they go”. He affirms that humility and fear of the Lord are the keys to fighting the fear of diseases, death and poverty. He also says that according to *Proverbs 13* the wealth of the sinners will be given to people who believe in God. He adds that they give because they love God more than their life and want to serve him, not because they are greedy or selfish. Then, he makes his request explicit, prays and advertises his services and classes, highlighting the need to book via email.

Request	Analysis
[...] Praise you can sow your seed right now!	[D: Directive]
The information is on the screen for you,	[D: Representative]
for those watching us on our platforms <i>Benny Hinn Ministries</i> , you can sow right on the platform, you're watching me on,	Possibility 1: [D: Representative / I: Directive]
you can go to our website <i>Bennyhinn.org</i>	Possibility 2: [D: Representative / I: Directive]
or you can just simply text bhm 45777;	Possibility 3: [D: Representative / I: Directive]
you can just do it right now,	[D: Representative / I: Directive]
or just simply follow what it says on the screen.	[D: Directive]
God almighty will bless you as you sow your seed.	[D: Representative / I: Directive]
God almighty will never disappoint you,	[D: Representative]
he will open unto /?/ his good treasure;	[D: Declarative]
the Bible says “hallelujah” and, as you give and as you sow, I'm going to pray right now that god will bless you with the salvation of your loved ones too. [...]	[D: Representative / I: Directive]

Table 3. Analysis of the request part of H011021

H011021 consists of one hundred twenty-four tokens, containing a declarative, two directives, two representatives and six representatives with the function of directives. In the chosen excerpt, Hinn asks his devotees to praise the possibility of sowing their seed in that moment; thus, his (implicit) request is once again expressed through a metaphor, which serves as a clear example of foregrounding. Then, as in the previous excerpts, he lists the possibilities of donation through representatives, which have the function

<sup>42</sup> Peter Richardson, “Cognitive Metaphor and Religion”, in Stephen Pihlaja and Helen Ringrow, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2024), 407. See also George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>43</sup> About claiming in-group membership with hearer(s), see Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*, (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1987).

of directives (“you can sow right now on the platform you are watching me on”, “you can go to our website bennyhinn.org”, “you can text it bhm 45777”); indeed, he is once again repeating the request to give. Then, possibly due to the lack of anecdotes preceding the request, the Pastor tries to be more persuasive by emphasizing that God will offer them something in return. To achieve this, he uses two representatives with the function of directives (“God almighty will bless you as you sow your seed”, “as you give and as you sow”), assuming that his followers are donating, as confirmed by the conjunction “as”; such speech acts are divided by a representative (“God almighty will never disappoint you”) and a declarative (“he will open unto /?/ his good treasure”) aimed at highlighting the power of God, thus legitimizing the donation.

In the fourth excerpt object of study, H221021, Hinn prays that the Lord blesses his onlookers financially. He lists the three main fears (*i.e.*, death, disease and poverty) and focuses on today’s problem: “people seek money rather than the Lord”. According to Hinn, if people seek money, they will not receive blessings; on the contrary, if they seek the Lord, they will receive them. Thus, there is no need for a preacher to convince them “to sow seed” since they will spontaneously. Then, he recounts a blessing he received (he stuttered but God healed him) and an anecdote: once he noticed a property but he had no money; however, he decided to call its owner and told them that those forty acres were the place for a church. The seller got angry but a woman said that her late husband affirmed that it was the place for a church and then Hinn is asked fifty thousand USD for the property, which he did not have. Later, he went to the hospital to visit a person with problems with their kidney and, later, such person recovered and gave him that exact amount of money.

In another occasion, he was given one million USD to preach the gospel in Nigeria. However, the Pastor needed ten million USD to pay the TV bills. He prayed and invited Oral Roberts to the Healing Service, telling him about his financial problem. Roberts just said to the camera “Benny is in trouble, help him” and Hinn received the money he needed. Then, he tells his onlookers that sometimes small seeds are not sufficient and big seeds should be sowed, if a person has a big problem. Then, he directly asks for money, affirms that “big things don’t happen if you are scared” and advertises his next events.

Request	Analysis
[...] Well, <b>it's time to do it right now!</b>	[D: Representative / I: Directive]
<b>I'm to do it you here</b>	[D: Representative]
<b>you can also do it</b>	[D: Representative / I: Directive]
and you in your in your homes, all you have to do, <b>you know what I need.</b>	[D: Representative / I: Directive]
I've got to have that camera, darling. I need that camera, I need that camera, yeah! <b>You in your homes, now, watch me!</b>	[D: Directive]
<b>You can give on the platform you're watching me on,</b>	Possibility 1: [D: Representative / I: Directive]
<b>you can go to our website bennyhinn.org</b>	Possibility 2: [D: Representative / I: Directive]
or <b>you can text, you people can do the same here with the text because BHM 45777,</b>	Possibility 3: [D: Representative / I: Directive]
<b>it's much easier than the envelope you've got in your hand!</b>	[D: Representative / I: Directive]
Some of you here and in your homes <b>you can do the same thing</b>	[D: Representative / I: Directive]
and <b>I want you to tell the Lord:</b> “Lord here is my need, here is my need, I need this miracle today, Lord, in my finances and my business for my family and begin to praise him for [...]”	[D: Directive]

Table 4. Analysis of the request part of H221021

H221021 consists of a hundred fifty-six tokens and contains two directives, a representative and eight representatives functioning as directives. Even in this case, the strategy is analogous; Hinn — in a series of four representatives with the function of directives (“it’s time to do it right now!”, “I’m to do it you here”, “you can also do it”, “you know what I need”) — addresses the audience directly using the second person pronoun and creates suspense by not mentioning the donation; then, he orders the onlookers to watch him (D: directive), and, using representatives with the function of directives, he lists the possibilities of donation and highlights the ease with which one can donate (“[y]ou can give on the platform you’re watching me on”, “you can go to our website bennyhinn.org”, “you can text”, “you people can do the same here with the text”, “it’s much easier than the envelope you’ve got in your hand!”). Then, he concludes by giving instructions (D: directive) on how they should turn to God in order to obtain what they want; implicitly, as the use of the conjunction “and” suggests, the proselytes should seek divine intervention only after the donation.

Even H191121 is characterized by anecdotes: Hinn discusses the situation of David Yonggi Cho<sup>44</sup>, a Korean Pastor, head of one of the largest churches in the world. After the war, Korean people were poor but God told Yonggi Cho that he had to teach his people to give. He was hesitant since they were poor, but he did what God asked. People began to bring vegetables to the church, and when the famine arose, only those people’s farms were not affected. Thus, they began to sell their fruits and vegetables to the ones affected by famine and became millionaires.

Subsequently, Hinn recounts that on another occasion he went to Indonesia: the local Pastor, despite not asking for money and singing with a terrible voice, always received. Hinn was also particularly startled that the Pastor never mentioned the Bible, and asked him about the situation. His interlocutor affirmed that it was unnecessary since any person had to attend a two-year course to join the church, where they were taught the doctrine and to give. Furthermore, he added that the only paid staff was the non-Christian janitor and that everyone else was a volunteer since everyone was rich.

Hinn then affirms that he wants to air again on (national) networks since social media is not enough. However, to do that, he needs funds. He also adds that he has his local station in Orlando and that people can join him there if they do not like to follow him on social media. In addition, he highlights that he aired for free in Scandinavia and Italy, but in the US the situation is different; he does not want to “get in debt again”, thus he asks his onlookers for money and emphasizes the fact that he got a good price and thanked the Lord. Then, he directly requests money.

Request	Analysis
[...] <b>So, here you can give in your homes,</b>	<b>Possibility 1: [D: Representative / I: Directive]</b>
<b>you can you can send it online.</b>	<b>Possibility 2: [D: Representative / I: Directive]</b>
<b>Just send it online</b> , Pastor Benny, uh... sorry, let's write that on the platform for you almost at Pastorbenny at Bennyhinn.org but that's our email,	<b>[D: Directive]</b>
but, anyways, <b>you can give it on the platform you're watching us on,</b>	<b>Possibility 1: [D: Representative / I: Directive]</b>
or <b>just go to our website,</b>	<b>Possibility 2: [D: Representative / I: Directive]</b>
or <b>simply text</b>	<b>Possibility 3: [D: Representative / I: Directive]</b>
even some of you here, <b>can also text without having to give it with an envelope,</b>	<b>Possibility 3 (restated): [D: Representative / I: Directive]</b>
<b>you take your phone</b>	<b>[D: Directive]</b>
<b>and you text bhm 45777 bhm 45777 [...].</b>	<b>[D: Directive]</b>

Table 5. Analysis of the request part of H191121

<sup>44</sup> Hinn is referring to David Yonggi Cho (1936-2021), a Korean Christian evangelist who established the Yoido Full Gospel Church (YFGC) in Seoul in 1958. Kang Suk-Kyu, “David Yonggi Cho”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2 May. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/David-Yonggi-Cho>. Accessed 28 August 2024.

Thus, in H191121, which contains eighty-eight tokens (including three directives and six representatives functioning as directives), the same pattern found in the other excerpts under study can be traced. Firstly, Hinn highlights that it is possible to donate both in person and online: indeed, through two representatives with the function of directives, he asks everyone everywhere to donate (“[s]o, here you can give in your homes”, “you can you can send it online”); then, with the same type of speech act, he lists the possibilities of donation, repeating the third one twice. Finally, he concludes by asking directly to the onlookers to take their phone and text in order to donate.

## 6. Conclusive Remarks

The present essay sought to analyze the persuasive techniques employed by the renowned televangelist Benny Hinn to encourage donations from his proselytes on YouTube, a rather new media that created a space that believers are curious to inhabit.<sup>45</sup> The first section provided a definition of “persuasion” and “televangelism,” exploring their connection and presenting the state of the art. While the second section introduced Benny Hinn, the third detailed the process of building and transcribing the corpus. The fourth section outlined the methodological framework (Searle 1969; Yule 1996), leading to the qualitative analysis in the fifth. In the present section, the findings will be discussed and quantitatively analysed.

Benny Hinn – as most religious entities – relies on the collection of offerings for the survival of his Ministries. He and his team show donation methods in step with the times and apt for any believer: people can give in person, using an envelope, or they can send an SMS, donate on his website, on the platform they are watching Benny Hinn on or via PayPal. Thus, any proselyte – from the youngest to the oldest, from the digital native to the technology illiterate – can choose the method that better suits them.

The world-renowned preacher strategically employs anecdotes (often naming specific individuals)<sup>46</sup> just before making requests for donations, a tactic that holds significant value. These anecdotes are cunningly placed, forming a compelling narrative right before the call to action. Audiences are effectively swayed by the power of these examples, which often carry moral messages, a technique that was also praised by Aristotle in his *Rhetorica*. Hinn’s micro-narratives try to stand as evidence for “miracles”, demonstrating the existence of God, and thus, the need to donate (to his church) to receive divine intervention. Through a multitude of specific cases highlighted in various broadcasts, a rule is established:<sup>47</sup> it appears that there is a high probability, if not certainty, of financial gain after giving<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> About religious discourse and new media, see among others Bryan, “Pandemic Sermon Rhetoric and Evangelism”.

<sup>46</sup> As Adam highlights, persuasive power and reliability can be enhanced “by employing intertextual features as a means of supporting facts of different kinds, be it hard data (statistics) or other sources (quoting names, dates, newspaper/magazine citations, etc.) to provide a solid ground for the message and evidence of its credibility (it is true and it is known – here is the tangible proof); intertextual support of various sorts, appealing in the spirit of logos in particular. Regarding ethos, the intertextual aspect is rendered especially by personal stories [...]”. Thus, testimonial evidence (experience and eye-witness account) has a persuasive effect. Adam, “Sermon Titles and Openings”, 20-21.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Billig and Cristina Marinho, “Using examples to misrepresent the world”, in Jeanne Fahnestock and Randy Allen Harris, *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Persuasion*, (New York: Routledge, 2022), 113-114. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric. A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 557.

<sup>48</sup> About the desirability of consequences see Eveline T. Feteris, “Pragmatic Argumentation in a Legal Context” in Frans H. van Eemeren, eds., *Advances inPragma-Dialectics* (Amsterdam: Sic Sat: Vale Press, 2002). Hornikx, “A Review of Experimental Research on the Relative Persuasiveness of Anecdotal, Statistical, Causal, and Expert Evidence”, 206. Peter Jan Schellens, and Menno De Jong, “Argumentation Schemes in Persuasive Brochures”, *Argumentation* 18 (2004), 295-323.

Furthermore, Hinn continuously uses metaphorical language about botany [“sow (someone’s) seed”], which research has shown to have a persuasive effect. In fact, Ottati, Rhoads and Graesser<sup>49</sup> – among many – have demonstrated that metaphorical content seems to have the ability to increase or decrease the motivation of the hearer; if the hearer is interested in the topic, such as Hinn’s audience, they will be easily convinced; if they are not, their motivation will immediately decrease. Furthermore, the usage of the above-mentioned metaphor highlights the belonging to a specific discourse community, that is, the one of prosperity gospel. In addition, this type of figurative language enables the believer to contemplate highly abstract concepts, “often connected to the positing of invisible forces in a form that is more concrete, tangible, and easy to grasp and visualize”.<sup>50</sup>

The quantitative data showed evidence of insisting requests (79,3%), either direct (31% D: Directive) or indirect (48,3% D: Representative / I: Directive):

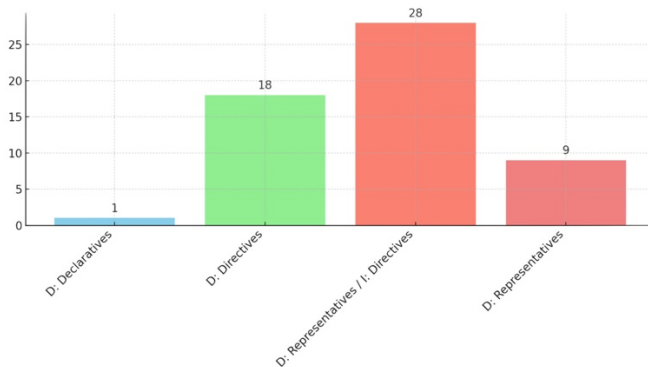


Figure 1. Quantitative data

By following a stable pattern constituted by anecdotes and the reiteration of the (in)direct request for money, mostly achieved through the usage of representatives with the function of directives, and considering the response of the audience,<sup>51</sup> Hinn’s pragmatic argumentation proves highly effective. Such a strategy recommends the action of giving on the basis of its positive consequences, that is, receiving, and shows the peculiarities of advertising evidenced by Schmidt and Kess (indirect speech forms, vague language and repetition of names carrying information that helps the promotion).<sup>52</sup>

In conclusion, the present essay, through a case study, investigated how donations can be solicited online:<sup>53</sup> More specifically, it focuses on the ways Benny Hinn persuades people to accept his request for money. Preachers, indeed, seek to capitalize on the ubiquity of online platforms like YouTube, and they manage to do that “by adapting the content, language, and delivery of their sermons for the unique discursive event of the [...] message”.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, Hinn’s speeches are staged, but their style makes them resemble spontaneous conversations rather than scripted speeches with occasional interactions.

<sup>49</sup> Victor Ottati et al., eds., “The Effect of Metaphor on Processing Style in a Persuasion Task: A Motivational Resonance Model”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77.4 (1999), 688–697.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Richardson, “Cognitive Metaphor and Religion” in Pihlaja and Ringrow, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Religion*, 408.

<sup>51</sup> Observing the YouTube chat, the presence of a great number of givers is apparent.

<sup>52</sup> Schmidt and Kess, *Televangelism*, 63–64.

<sup>53</sup> Religious podcasts and online sermon videos reach a wide audience and, nowadays, can be considered primary delivery systems. Bryan, “Pandemic Sermon Rhetoric and Evangelism”, 194.

<sup>54</sup> Bryan and Albakry, “Personalization in Online Sermons”, 685.

Further research on the same topic could focus either on 1) the type of anecdotes recounted by the Pastor, which often involve healings,<sup>55</sup> 2) on the moment when the perlocutionary act of the requests takes place, which can be observed thanks to the chat within the streaming platforms (YouTube, Facebook etc.)<sup>56</sup> or 3) on the non-verbal communication that accompanies the requests for money.

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<sup>55</sup> Indeed, not only does Hinn claim to be capable of healing people via screen, but he also reports in detail the people he healed in person and of the money he received after such events, which was not given to him by the healed person.

<sup>56</sup> For instance, thanks to the YouTube chat, it would be possible to define the exact moment when people donate: the words uttered by Hinn or his colleagues some instants before the donation could definitely play a role in their persuasion strategy.