

Rhetorical Analysis: Competing Frames of Truth in the Digital Frontline

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In the twenty-first century, wars are fought not only with weapons but with words, images, and algorithms. Both Ilan Berman's "The Middle East as Informational Battlefield" and the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy's video panel "Contesting the Digital Space: The Role of Laws and Tech Policy in the MENA Region" explore how control of information defines modern conflict in the Middle East. Yet their rhetorical approaches reveal a clear divide between analysis and emotion. Placing these differences in early dialogue shows how each one's balance of ethos, pathos, and logos exposes the other's limits: Berman's structured logic makes TIMEP's emotional appeals more visible, while TIMEP's moral intensity highlights the distance in Berman's analytical tone (Berman 2025; TIMEP 2023).

The genre of strategic policy analysis is exemplified in Berman's article. As Senior Vice President of the American Foreign Policy Council, he writes from a position of institutional credibility, creating a strong ethos that grounds his argument in authority. His tone is measured and analytical, focusing on the geopolitical evolution of media influence. He starts by detailing the surge in information and connectivity throughout the Arab world and explains how state actors such as Russia, China, and Iran have leveraged digital platforms to contest Western dominance (Berman 2025).

His argumentation is organized by empirical evidence and logical reasoning. He references verifiable evidence—RT Arabic's audience reach and engagement, China's investments in multilingual media, and Iran's substantial propaganda spending—subsequently linking these facts to their implications for public opinion and diplomacy (Berman 2025). These findings substantiate his assertion that information warfare has attained equal significance to conventional combat. His pathos stems from urgency rather than emotion. His assertion that Israel's tactical combat achievements were eclipsed by significant informational failures raises concerns on the decline of Western dominance and the regional alliances reliant on it (Berman 2025). His target audience mostly comprises policymakers, academics, and readers in international relations.

The rhetorical balance of ethos, logos, and pathos gives Berman's piece strength and credibility. Even though his analysis reflects a Western policy bias, his reasoning remains transparent and verifiable. His conclusion that the United States and Israel must reinvest in public diplomacy follows logically from the data he presents, illustrating the integrity of his rhetorical structure (Berman 2025). This grounding in logos contrasts directly with the TIMEP panel's reliance on emotional identification.

The TIMEP panel approaches the same issue through a different rhetorical framework. The discussion, led by Executive Director Mai El-Sadany, emphasizes emotion, empathy, and collective moral concern rather than data or measurable outcomes. El-Sadany opens by acknowledging the painful moment for Palestinians and others in the region, which frames the conversation in shared human grief rather than analytical distance (TIMEP 2023). Panelist Mona Shtaya adds onto this tone with descriptions of online digital threats

and talking about a mass erasure of Palestinian voices on social media platforms. These statements appeal to compassion and justice but do not include verifiable evidence or quantitative support (TIMEP 2023).

The panel's reliance on pathos and collective ethos creates strong emotional identification but weakens its logos. The speakers position themselves as moral witnesses instead of analysts, appealing to empathy through personal experience. Yet without documented evidence, their claims remain unverifiable. The ethos of the discourse arises from moral authority rather than institutional or academic expertise, which emotionally engages the audience but lacks an empirical basis for assessing truth (TIMEP 2023). Set alongside Berman's methodical structure, the contrast illustrates two competing definitions of truth: evidence-based versus experience-based.

Such rhetoric is powerful precisely because it persuades through emotion rather than reason. However, this is also what makes it dangerous. By privileging empathy over verification, the panel risks reproducing the same information distortions it critiques. It encourages belief through identification rather than evidence, which can be easily weaponized within the very digital ecosystems the speakers condemn (TIMEP 2023). While Berman calls for strategic clarity, TIMEP relies on moral intensity, which may resonate broadly but does not reliably inform.

Both artifacts address the struggle for narrative dominance, yet they represent opposing rhetorical philosophies. Berman constructs an argument through structure, data, and professional authority. TIMEP constructs one through empathy, emotion, and shared moral outrage. Berman's integration of ethos, logos, and pathos renders his speech both credible and actionable. TIMEP's heavy reliance on pathos and ethos enables it to persuade but fails to provide substantiation (Berman 2025; TIMEP 2023).

The difference in media makes this separation more pronounced. Berman's work is concise and logically oriented. The TIMEP video enhances emotion through visuals and tone, creating immediacy at the expense of precision. It encourages identification rather than analysis. Berman's speech is designed to inform decision-makers, whereas TIMEP's strives to evoke emotion among activists.

Both artifacts operate within the same information war they describe, yet their rhetorical integrity diverges. Berman's use of all three appeals produces a balanced and verifiable argument that links emotion to evidence. TIMEP's panel, though compelling, blurs the line between advocacy and analysis. Its persuasive power stems from sincerity, not substantiation. In an era defined by viral misinformation, persuasion without verification is dangerous because it replaces truth with emotional consensus (Berman 2025; TIMEP 2023).

The comparison shows that credibility in digital conflict depends on evidence as much as empathy. Berman's rhetoric persuades through balance, while TIMEP's persuades through feeling. Yet only one approach can withstand scrutiny. When emotion outweighs fact, even advocacy risks becoming propaganda.