



International Journal of Business Innovation and Research

ISSN online: 1751-0260 - ISSN print: 1751-0252

<https://www.inderscience.com/ijbir>

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DOI: [10.1504/IJBIR.2026.10078794](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBIR.2026.10078794)

Article History:

Received:	17 December 2025
Last revised:	30 April 2026
Accepted:	30 April 2026
Published online:	11 August 2026

Likes and subscriptions: a discursive analysis of the path from entrepreneurial motivation to leadership

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Abstract: This study examines the realism and coherence of entrepreneurship motivation and leadership-themed YouTube videos through a discursive analysis framework. Fourteen videos relevant to the Turkish context, accessed on 29 August 2025, were purposively selected based on keyword relevance, viewer engagement, creator prominence, and publication within the previous year. Thematic coding using MAXQDA 21 identified five themes: 1) success stories and challenges; 2) leadership and relationships; 3) strategic orientation and innovation; 4) execution and learning; 5) mindset and self-regulation. Findings indicate that individual success narratives are often generalised while contextual factors such as cultural, financial, familial, and psychological support are overlooked. Simplified motivational messages like 'take risks' or 'anyone can do it' may foster unrealistic confidence without measurable goals and planning. This may contribute to resource misallocation, psychological strain, burnout, and normalisation of failure. Entrepreneurship content should serve as a guiding framework rather than a prescriptive narrative.

Keywords: entrepreneurship; motivation; leadership; discourse analysis; YouTube.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Ceyhan, S., Bebitoğlu, M.E., Yozgat, U. and Tunaboğlu, Y.C. (2026) 'Likes and subscriptions: a discursive analysis of the path from entrepreneurial motivation to leadership', *Int. J. Business Innovation and Research*, Vol. 40, No. 11, pp.1–24.

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This paper is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled ‘Likes and subscriptions: a discursive analysis of the path from entrepreneurial motivation to leadership’ presented at 6th Leadership Academy and Management Congress, Silifke, Turkey, 3–5 October 2025.

1 Introduction

While the current era is frequently described as the ‘information age’, it is equally characterised as an ‘age of perception’ – a period in which mediated evaluations often shape individual and collective behaviour as much as tangible facts (Abdul-Ajid, 2024; Ashman et al., 2018; Olumekor et al., 2023). It is not yet possible to argue that perception has fully supplanted knowledge; however, Gregory (1997) contends that perception must be guided by knowledge-based hypotheses, emphasising that acting on perception in the absence of such grounding increases the likelihood of error and may lead to adverse consequences. Although contemporary discourse frequently refers to the present as the ‘information age’, it is more accurate to describe it as the ‘age of perception’ due to the dominance of power and interest relations embedded in media structures (Hasan and Revinzky, 2025; Aránega et al., 2023).

In this context, recent studies emphasise that digital platforms do not merely transmit information but actively shape perception through algorithmic curation mechanisms that prioritise visibility, engagement and emotional resonance. Such dynamics contribute to the selective amplification of certain narratives while marginalising others, thereby influencing how individuals interpret success, leadership and entrepreneurship (Bleier et al., 2024). The proliferation of short-form digital content has amplified narrative styles that privilege immediacy, relatability, and affective resonance over critical reflection and contextual nuance (Bebitoğlu, 2022; Gao and Tsai, 2024; Nunez et al., 2025). Aşkaroğlu (2024) conceptualises the ‘post-truth’ era directly as the ‘age of perception’. Whether defined as the information age or the age of perception, contemporary communication is increasingly mediated through digitalisation and digital platforms. As digital media can disseminate content to exponentially larger audiences in a matter of milliseconds, its short-term impact can be seen as substantially greater than that of traditional media. Digital media also have the characteristic of being ‘very powerful at first but only effective for a short time afterwards’. Digital environments initially capture users’ attention through novelty-driven engagement; however, this heightened cognitive focus tends to diminish over time due to attentional habituation and repeated exposure to similar stimuli (Atkinson, 2025). As users encounter increasingly standardised and

repetitive digital content, their responsiveness tends to decline, leading to shorter attention spans and more superficial processing of information (Mayer et al., 2024; Wei et al., 2024). In contemporary digital ecosystems, this pattern is further reinforced by platform architectures that continuously expose users to high-frequency and cognitively demanding stimuli, thereby contributing to attentional fragmentation and reduced capacity for sustained focus (Qin et al., 2024). Consequently, content that initially appears highly engaging may rapidly lose its impact, resulting in consumption patterns characterised by immediacy, rapid turnover, and diminished depth of cognitive engagement (Mayer et al., 2024; Qin et al., 2024). Today, news or events that seem to engulf the world or the society we live in are quickly forgotten or become commonplace and fall off the agenda. Due to this characteristic, it is important to remember that any message published on digital media can have positive impacts, but it can also have destructive consequences that can turn a person's life upside down. Another characteristic of this era is that it is the age of storytelling (Bebitoğlu, 2022).

Hofstetter and Gollnhofer (2024) suggest that platform architectures systematically incentivise content that is short, emotionally engaging, and easily consumable, often at the expense of analytical depth and contextual richness. This tendency contributes to the emergence of simplified and standardised narratives, particularly in domains such as entrepreneurship and leadership, where complex processes are frequently reduced to easily replicable formulas. Today, rather than reading extensively to think deeply and verify information, individuals mostly prefer to watch shared experiences related to the subject, listen to stories, and even fast-forward through short videos to reach conclusions quickly (Abiddin et al., 2024; Haliti Sylaj and Sadiku, 2024; Mona et al., 2026; Praswati et al., 2022). This trend is supported by the nature of digital media, which encourages instant and superficial consumption of information (Segers et al., 2025). Today, with attention spans averaging only 8 seconds, short videos are becoming even more effective, and content under 90 seconds generates twice as many views and interactions compared to longer videos (Dube, 2023). On the other hand, it is also known that platforms such as YouTube encourage content creators to make longer videos and place 'mid-roll' ads in their videos to earn more revenue (Fritz, 2025). Whether long or short, people are influenced by other people's stories. This influence is largely based on the 'I did it, so you can do it too' motivation (Lubis and Puspitasari, 2021). Content creators strategically balance authenticity and monetisation goals (Nistor et al., 2025). Influencers integrate products into personal and lifestyle narratives, creating hybrid storytelling forms (Huang, 2026). In addition, Liao and Chen (2024) indicate that content creators actively manage perceived authenticity to maintain audience trust while simultaneously pursuing monetisation objectives, resulting in hybrid narratives that combine personal experience with performative storytelling. Digital content is strategically designed to balance authenticity, experiential value and brand objectives (Kishor, 2026).

If it is something concrete, such as making a visually appealing cake, the process becomes easier; with careful attention, a person may even produce a cake that looks better than the one shown in the video. However, the environment is so virtual and postmodern that it is ultimately impossible to judge whether the cake is better, since it is not possible to taste the cake in the video. However, when it comes to issues such as career, education, and achieving success, the idea of external motivation phrased as 'I managed it, so you can manage too' becomes complicated. On the one hand, while this type of motivation-based content has benefits such as seeing, knowing, evaluating,

comparing, and looking at things from a different perspective, on the other hand, embarking on the task with mere courage without the necessary equipment or opportunities carries risks such as underestimating the task, raising expectations excessively, and ultimately becoming unhappy and suffering losses (Goncalves et al., 2025; Kolev, 2019). Recent empirical evidence also suggests that exposure to entrepreneurial narratives can significantly influence individuals' aspirations, self-efficacy, and behavioural intentions, particularly among individuals at early stages of their careers (Hamrick et al., 2025). Furthermore, leadership communication framed through motivational and visionary discourse has been shown to shape entrepreneurial orientation and strategic behaviour (Gänser-Stickler et al., 2025).

So, is everything said in the content produced by these successful people true, accurate, and applicable to everyone under all circumstances, and are there no other contributing factors that determine the outcome but are deemed inappropriate to include in that content due to concerns about viewership? Of course, it is not possible to answer all these questions positively; one must be sceptical. According to the contingency approach, each situation has its own unique conditions and solutions; in other words, there is no single correct answer. Therefore, it is not surprising that these videos, which are sometimes exaggerated, have negative aspects. For example, they can mislead young people, especially those at the beginning of their careers, causing them to lose sight of their goals or even become completely unhappy due to the excessive confidence they create. However, the concept of success promoted in these materials must also be discussed. What do we mean by the term 'success'? Are we referring to short-term, daily or periodic achievements that follow trends, or to long-term successes that are sustainable and self-perpetuating and lead to new developments? In this respect, recent literature highlights that success narratives disseminated through digital platforms often underrepresent structural and contextual variables such as socio-economic conditions, institutional environments, and access to resources, thereby promoting an overly individualistic understanding of achievement (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Rahman and Hossain, 2025).

Our study examines such content that creates strong motivation and its producers using the technique of discursive analysis. This examination reveals that the concept of success is not quite as successful as it is portrayed; it varies depending on the circumstances, the ecosystems of countries, the individual's psychology, and of course, their opportunities, demonstrating that there is no magic formula that can be applied to everyone.

In this respect, the aim of this study is to examine motivational content created by content creators and reaching individuals through social media platforms using discursive analysis techniques, in order to draw conclusions about how realistic and consistent they are. The research questions formulated based on these conclusions are as follows:

- RQ1 To what extent do videos on entrepreneurship and leadership produced by content creators on digital platforms reflect realistic and consistent narratives when examined through the lens of discourse analysis?
- RQ2 How do the narratives presented in videos on entrepreneurship and leadership produced by content creators on digital platforms explain the contextual determinants of success?

This study contributes to existing literature in various ways. The first of these offers a discourse-based perspective on entrepreneurship and leadership content circulating on digital platforms – an area that has primarily been examined through quantitative or descriptive approaches. Second, it critically evaluates common motivational narratives by highlighting the tension between individualised success stories and context-dependent realities. Third, it highlights the potential risks of motivational rhetoric that is disconnected from context, including inflated confidence, misallocation of resources and psychological strain. Finally, by treating this type of content as guiding frameworks rather than universally applicable formulas, it offers practical insights for content creators, viewers and platform stakeholders.

2 Literature review

Motivation is defined as an internal or external driving force that initiates behaviour and enables the individual to pursue a specific goal (Barati, 2024; Gao and Tsai, 2024; Murnieks et al., 2019). In social psychology, motivation is considered a concept that explains how individuals' responses and preferences change in different situations (Blaga, 2021) and how the intensity of these responses increases or decreases depending on certain factors (Bargh et al., 2010). Recent studies further conceptualise motivation as a socio-technical construct shaped not only by individual cognition but also by digital infrastructures, algorithmic visibility, and platform-based interaction mechanisms (Cotter, 2024; Duffy and Meisner, 2023). In this sense, motivation is increasingly embedded within environments where feedback systems such as views, likes, and recommendations continuously reinforce specific behavioural patterns (Metzler and Garcia, 2024).

Conversely, when considering the modern implications of the relationship between success and motivation, personal success stories shared on social media may portray success as a 'personalised' virtue by obscuring the contextual factors (e.g., family background, social capital, cultural capital) that influence it (Abdul-Ajid, 2024; Ashman et al., 2018; Audretsch and Lehmann, 2023; Burgess and Green, 2018). In contemporary digital ecosystems, this selective framing of achievement reinforces a narrative in which individual determination is emphasised at the expense of structural, cultural, and socio-economic variables, creating a potentially misleading hierarchy between personal effort and contextual opportunity. Such narratives often normalise the idea that success is universally attainable if one merely 'tries hard enough', thereby downplaying the uneven distribution of resources, mentorship, and environmental support that fundamentally shape motivational trajectories. In line with this perspective, recent research highlights that digital platform environments tend to amplify individualistic success narratives while systematically underrepresenting structural constraints, thereby reinforcing simplified causal interpretations of achievement (Bleier et al., 2024; Hofstetter and Gollnhofer, 2024). In their study, which was conducted to ascertain the relationship between motivation to lead and entrepreneurial intention among young aspiring entrepreneurs, Guevara-Otero et al. (2026) indicated that individual entrepreneurial orientation fully mediates the influence of motivation to lead on entrepreneurial intention. Furthermore, individual differences among young aspiring entrepreneurs were found to be highly relevant.

In management literature, the concept of motivation was initially addressed within the framework of rational-based classical approaches aimed at increasing productivity and performance. In later periods, influenced by the human relations approach, it gained greater importance and became positioned as an element that must be continuously maintained. Following the Industrial Revolution, increased production and industrialisation movements led to motivation gaining more prominence in management literature over the years. Yet, contemporary organisational research increasingly highlights that intrinsic motivators – such as meaning, autonomy and psychological safety – may be equally, if not more, influential than financial rewards, especially in knowledge-intensive environments. This perspective is particularly relevant to digital content ecosystems, where creators often navigate blurred boundaries between passion-driven creativity and revenue-driven production pressures.

Also, entrepreneurial leadership and innovation-oriented environments play a significant role in shaping motivational outcomes, particularly under conditions of uncertainty and rapid change (Yang and Entebang, 2024).

Today, monetary incentives are not limited to the traditional work environments found within employer-employee relationships. For example, YouTube creators often shape their content strategies according to platform incentives, which show that commercial strategies (monetisation, networking) may underline motivational discourses (Rieder et al., 2023; Bleier et al., 2024; Olumekor et al., 2023; Aránega et al., 2023). This dynamic illustrates a shift in how motivation is externally engineered: platform algorithms reward specific emotional tones, narrative styles, and high-engagement content, prompting creators to adopt formulaic rhetorical strategies that reinforce quick, high-arousal motivational cues. In addition, recent research suggests that content creators actively manage perceived authenticity to sustain audience trust while simultaneously pursuing monetisation goals, resulting in hybrid motivational discourses that combine personal experience with performative storytelling (Liao and Chen, 2024).

Another important topic in the field of management is developing the ability to set appropriate and consistent goals. Regarding our study, while short motivational videos today generate ‘instant high motivation’ in viewers, the same content may have limited or temporary effects on users’ self-regulation and realistic goal-setting skills (Murnieks et al., 2020). Therefore, the discrepancy between momentary emotional elevation and long-term behavioural regulation remains a key issue in the consumption of digital motivational content, raising the question of whether such materials support sustainable goal pursuit or merely provide transient psychological stimulation.

Similarly, entrepreneurial motivation focuses on explaining which factors drive entrepreneurs to initiate, grow, and terminate their ventures and how these factors shape their decision-making processes (Goncalves et al., 2025; Obschonka et al., 2016; Murnieks et al., 2019). Although role model stories can inspire individuals to become entrepreneurs and take the first steps towards setting up a business, this effect does not guarantee sustainable strategic execution when the context is ignored (Burgess and Green, 2018; Fellnhöfer and Puumalainen, 2017). According to the model developed by Naffziger et al. (1994), the main factors influencing entrepreneurial motivation are the entrepreneur’s personal characteristics, the social environment in which they are embedded, the environmental conditions in which the venture operates, and the nature of the business idea. These determinants interact dynamically, often in unpredictable ways, illustrating that entrepreneurial behaviour is rarely the product of a single motivational force but rather the accumulation of layered contextual influences – many of which are

eclipsed in social media narratives that prioritise individual heroism (Kolev, 2019; Praswati et al., 2022). Hamrick et al. (2025) indicate that exposure to entrepreneurial narratives can influence individuals' entrepreneurial intentions and self-efficacy, particularly in digitally mediated environments where such narratives are repeatedly reinforced.

We believe that these sources of motivation have the potential to shape not only entrepreneurs' decisions regarding their ventures but also fundamental leadership functions such as defining the entrepreneurial vision, guiding the team and strategic planning. Studies have revealed various insights into the relationship between personality and leadership. Andersen (2006) found a weak correlation, while Zhang et al. (2009) suggested that leadership may be influenced by the environmental conditions in which the leader was raised. Furthermore, Bertoldi et al. (2018) revealed that changes in the environment may impact leadership behaviours.

Leadership, as a complementary construct, has undergone significant transformation in recent years. Contemporary studies emphasise the growing importance of leadership approaches in fostering innovation, organisational adaptability and performance. For instance, organisational culture and decision-making processes have been shown to significantly influence innovative capability and organisational performance (Kiziloglu and Yamin, 2024). Similarly, recent studies highlight the role of emerging organisational factors such as intellectual capital and technological adoption in enhancing competitiveness and innovation outcomes (Azadi et al., 2024; Balaji et al., 2024). In parallel, leadership-oriented perspectives in the broader literature indicate that transformational and authentic leadership styles contribute to innovation and resilience by strengthening employee engagement, trust, and adaptive capacity in dynamic environments (Al-Shaikh, 2024).

The YouTube discourses on leadership we examined in our study highlight motivational rhetoric while potentially neglecting the social and environmental determinants of actual leadership processes, which may carry the risk of misinterpreting the motivation-leadership relationship (Murnieks et al., 2020; Van Dijk, 2015). Consequently, leadership – much like entrepreneurship – cannot be divorced from the broader ecosystem in which it is enacted, and any digital narrative that isolates leadership from its structural, relational, and cultural foundations risks oversimplifying one of the most complex constructs in organisational theory. In this context, it is thought that the elements shaping entrepreneurial motivation and the behaviours exhibited in line with this motivation may converge with the elements determining leadership behaviours. Thus, understanding motivation and leadership as interconnected and co-evolving constructs offers a more comprehensive analytical framework for interpreting contemporary digital discourses.

3 Methodology

This research aims to explain a specific event or phenomenon in terms of its purpose and scope. It has been conducted using qualitative research design. The objective is to provide a general overview of the event or phenomenon in question (Armstrong, 1970) and to examine content of various lengths produced on YouTube about entrepreneurial motivation from a descriptive perspective. For this purpose, a discursive analysis

approach was adopted as a research method. Discourse analysis is an analytical technique used within the framework of cultural and social research that constructs meaning through verbal expressions. The discourse analysed within this framework includes rhetorical strategies (such as persuasive language patterns and motivational framing), subject positions constructed for the audience (e.g., positioning the audience as either a potential success story or a failed individual), and generalising claims that simplify complex contextual determinants (e.g., the claim that success is universally attainable regardless of socio-economic conditions). To ensure analytical accuracy, these items were systematically analysed using a thematic coding process supported by MAXQDA 21 software, and the discourse segments were classified under predefined and data-driven codes corresponding to these dimensions. In this way, the meaning and depth of the subject examined within the scope of the study can be identified, thereby enabling it to serve as a guided reference for future research. From this perspective, each discourse within a given context seeks to construct contextual models through the meaning representations stored in the recipient's mind (Van Dijk, 2015). An iterative approach was followed during the coding process; the initial codes, developed based on the literature, were refined through repeated readings of the dataset, thereby revealing dominant discourse patterns and thematic structures. In line with this approach, short- and long-form motivational entrepreneurship-related discourses produced on YouTube were accepted as data. Since the research sample consisted of secondary data obtained from YouTube and presented publicly available information, an ethics committee report was not required.

3.1 Data collection method

The data examined within the scope of the study was accessed via the YouTube platform on 29.08.2025. The YouTube video platform was preferred for data collection for two main reasons. First, due to its large user base and wide variety of content types, the platform provides the necessary diversity of data for research purposes (Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Burgess and Green, 2018; Snelson, 2011). Second, the platform is among the most widely used social media channels in the world. The following keywords were entered into the search engine:

- 1 entrepreneurship
- 2 motivation
- 3 entrepreneurial motivation
- 4 being a leader, and relevant searches were conducted.

During the search process, several criteria were taken into consideration. The first criterion was the relevance level of the short- or long-form video to the research topic. Within the scope of these keywords, many short and long-form videos were found to be either irrelevant or of low relevance. The second criterion was the number of views, which is closely associated with the level of impact and audience interest. For instance, some videos receive fewer views due to their long duration, whereas shorter videos tend to achieve higher viewing rates.

Therefore, although many videos contain the relevant keywords, it can be stated that the number of videos with high view counts is relatively limited. The third criterion was that the content creators were preferably well-known influencers and socially recognised figures. The rationale for this criterion is the assumption that such individuals are likely to have a higher level of influence and persuasive power. The fourth criterion was that the videos had been uploaded within the previous twelve months. The main reason for this preference is that current content more accurately reflects audience interest and interaction levels on social media platforms. Attention was also paid to the cultural context of the videos accessed, and foreign-language content was excluded from the analysis. As a result of the study, after removing duplicate videos, a total of 14 videos were deemed suitable for the research scope and included in the analysis. A summary of this process is presented in Table 1.

3.2 Data analysis

The exploratory nature of the research and the high level of meaning depth and content density of the excerpts obtained from the dataset led to the choice of thematic analysis as the method for this study. In other words, thematic analysis was applied to extract meaningful patterns from qualitative data to examine the discursive forms of the concepts of motivation and leadership. Before the videos obtained within the scope of the research were evaluated, the opinions of four academics expert in this field were sought to ensure validity and reliability; the videos were examined in terms of scope and content. Following this review, it was determined that the videos were suitable for analysis. Additionally, Miles and Huberman's (1994) validity and reliability approach was used. According to the relevant method, the reliability of the study was found to be 93% using the formula $[\text{Reliability} = 14 / (14 + 1) = 0.93]$.

When analysing the data obtained in the study, the videos were first saved in an Excel file; during this process, criteria such as video abbreviation (e.g., V1), keyword, numbering, link, title, duration, filter and publication date were considered.

This process has enabled videos to be encoded, viewed, and analysed within a specific system. Secondly, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage thematic analysis approach was adopted. During the initial phase of familiarisation with the data, all videos were carefully watched by the researcher and transcripts were prepared. These transcripts were then transferred to the MAXQDA 21 programme.

In the second stage, initial codes were created; transcripts were examined line by line, and statements related to motivation, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial motivation, and leadership were extracted (coded). In the third stage, codes were combined to form subthemes. In the fourth stage, the sub-themes were reviewed and reorganised. In the fifth stage, the sub-themes were grouped under the main themes of success story and its challenges, leadership and relationship dynamics, strategic orientation and innovation, and mindset and self-regulation, in accordance with the conceptual framework. Reporting has been completed in the final stage. Finally, the COREQ checklist was reviewed to verify the study's suitability for a qualitative research design. The review showed that the study met all 32 criteria (Tong et al., 2007).

Table 1 Long or short YouTube videos covered by research (data as of August 29, 2025)

Keywords	No.	Access link	Title	Duration	Number of views	Publishing date	Number of likes
Motivation	V1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2UjrSL5rCwQ	If you want to become an entrepreneur, watch this video!*	4.57	26.364	27 Oct. 2024	1,000
Motivation	V2	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9Uc6sleHc	The biggest obstacle standing in the way of your dreams! – The motivational speech you need	5.50	73.000	11 May 2025	3,200
Motivation	V3	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKxGifv8y3U	Watch this every day and change your life! – One of the most inspiring motivational speeches	8.47	187.636	1 Sept. 2024	5,300
Motivation	V4	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/EDuDLiDTUg	Stories of the individuals featured	0.46	520.269	31 Jan. 2025	15,000
Entrepreneurship	V5	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/UGeY2XumtDc	Sixteen-year-old entrepreneur Mehmet Ensar Çalişan: “I founded my own technology company at the age of 15”	0.54	21.039.902	11 Feb. 2025	454,000
Entrepreneurship	V6	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/92tPWRRGjY8	How was Finansbank founded? An inspiring entrepreneurial story*	0.56	614.166	11 Feb. 2025	18,000
Entrepreneurship	V7	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/GlrTabH8FHQ	True wealth lies in mindset, not in display #entrepreneurship #success	0.58	1.202.657	14 Feb. 2025	13,000
Entrepreneurship	V8	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Kdr8AvKDXsw	How he avoided bankruptcy at the last moment? #entrepreneurship*	0.56	537.975	2 May 2025	20,000
Entrepreneurial motivation	V9	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/g8gSb0wgxql	A life journey from the lowest point to the peak... #motivation*	1.20	4.805.980	14 May 2025	158,000
Entrepreneurial motivation	V10	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/iMMD0mRH8g	#motivation #youtubeshorts #entrepreneurship #discover #dream*	0.37	143.000	13 Nov. 2024	1,500
Entrepreneurial motivation	V11	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/hNTFMWljc7E	#motivation #youtubeshorts #entrepreneurship #discover #dream #turgaytanulku #money*	0.56	52.844	11 Sep. 2024	1,000
Becoming a leader	V12	https://www.youtube.com/shorts/sXCzuHkyDcQ	What competencies are required to become and remain a leader? *	1.38	856	15 May 2025	1
Becoming a leader	V13	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vYbXivdZM	These five minutes will shape your entire future: watch to become the leader of your life	5.18	18.743	13 April 2025	1,000
Becoming a leader	V14	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4IYh45Lxjs	If you want to be a leader, watch this: how to become a courageous and decisive leader	6.23	20.000	9 Feb. 2025	894

Note: *In accordance with Turkish Law No. 6698 on the Protection of Personal Data (GDPR), all information that could identify individuals or institutions has been removed from the text.

4 Findings

In presenting the research findings, the main themes, categories, and citations (codes) obtained from short and long-form YouTube videos were taken into consideration. At the end of this process, each video content has been analysed, and relevant sections have been cited (coded). Accordingly, the number of citations (code) indicating how many citations were made from each video is shown in Table 2. According to the findings presented in Table 2, a total of 46 citations were obtained from 14 videos. This result indicates that an average of 3.28 citations (codes) were obtained from each video.

Table 2 Number of citations (codes) for videos

<i>Number</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Citations (codes) number</i>
V1	If you want to become an entrepreneur, watch this video!*	10
V2	The biggest obstacle standing in the way of your dreams! – the motivational speech you need	4
V3	Watch this every day and change your life! – One of the most inspiring motivational speeches	6
V4	Stories of the individuals featured*	1
V5	Sixteen-year-old entrepreneur Mehmet Ensar Çalışan: “I founded my own technology company at the age of 15”	2
V6	How was Finansbank founded? An inspiring entrepreneurial story*	1
V7	True wealth lies in mindset, not in display #entrepreneurship #success	1
V8	How he avoided bankruptcy at the last moment? #entrepreneurship*	2
V9	A life journey from the lowest point to the peak... #motivation*	2
V10	#motivation #youtubeshorts #entrepreneurship #discover #dream*	2
V11	#motivation #youtubeshorts #entrepreneurship #discover #dream #turgaytanulku #money #youtubeshorts*	2
V12	What competencies are required to become and remain a leader?*	1
V13	These five minutes will shape your entire future: watch to become the leader of your life	6
V14	If you want to be a leader, watch this: how to become a courageous and decisive leader	6

Note: *In accordance with Turkish Law No. 6698 on the Protection of Personal Data (GDPR), all information that could identify individuals or institutions has been removed from the text.

This average is based on the depth of meaning and content intensity of the concepts of motivation and leadership rather than numerical density. Furthermore, these results were shared with three academics who are experts in the field to obtain their opinions on validity and reliability. Within this framework, under the heading ‘the path from motivation to leadership’, six main themes, 11 categories, and 46 quotation codes were identified. Findings related to citations are presented in Table 2, while findings related to main themes and subthemes are presented in Table 3. Creative coding was performed

using the main theme, categories, and quotation codes created within the scope of the research. The visual representation of the creative coding tree is shown in Figure 1. In addition to these descriptive findings, it was observed that the density of quotations was not evenly distributed across the videos, with some content offering conceptually richer and more analysable narratives. In particular, the V1, V3, V13, and V14 videos stand out as the primary sources for meaning generation, demonstrating that longer, structured narratives produce deeper discursive patterns compared to short or fragmented content. This finding demonstrates that the codes indicate not only quantitative but also qualitative differences.

Within the scope of the study, the first main theme identified was ‘the success story and its challenges’. Upon closer examination of this theme, it becomes evident that the narratives normalise struggle as a natural – and even necessary – component of success. Failure is framed not as an exception but as a prerequisite for success; this, in turn, reinforces a resilience-focused ideology of success. This also signals a shift from outcome-oriented definitions of success toward process-oriented interpretations. The theme ‘the success story and its challenges’ was structured under a single category titled ‘perceptions of success and challenges’. Within this category, four quotation codes were generated:

- 1 burden of success
- 2 fear of failure
- 3 loss of expectations
- 4 invisible success.

The common emphasis across these codes is that success is not perceived merely as a positive achievement for individuals, but rather as a multidimensional experiential domain that also entails various costs, anxieties and invisible burdens. An example video quote related to the topic is as follows:

“Ragy Jackson made two thousand six hundred hits throughout his career. This makes him the player with the most hits in baseball history. But no one hears the hits! They only remember the numbers.” – V3

Another quote related to the topic is as follows:

“If you want something, it means that there are very strong underlying negatives to it. So, you have experienced failure.” – V2

The second main theme developed within the scope of the research is leadership and relationship dynamics. This main theme is divided into three categories:

- 1 courage and responsibility
- 2 trust, communication and transparency
- 3 leadership styles.

Upon closer examination, this theme reveals that leadership is conceived not as a hierarchical or position-based structure, but rather as a relational and emotionally intertwined one. The recurring emphasis on sincerity, courage, and transparency demonstrates that digital storytelling is redefining leadership as an emotional and trust-based process. This situation signals a shift from traditional authority-based

leadership models toward a more people-centred and interactive paradigm. An example video quote related to the topic is as follows:

“If you are a courageous and determined leader, you must have the courage to remain true to yourself even in crowds.” – V14

The second category is trust communication and transparency. The common emphasis of the codes included in this category:

- 1 emotional bonding
- 2 power to promise
- 3 team spirit, and full disclosure is that trust in leadership relationships is built through transparent communication, keeping promises, strengthening team spirit, and a culture of open sharing.

The sample video excerpt included in this section is as follows:

“Being together, being one with the customer, being one with your team and teammates.” – V14

The final category in this main theme is leadership styles. This category includes:

- 1 resilient leadership
- 2 action leadership
- 3 consistency in leadership
- 4 mentoring leadership
- 5 pioneering leadership codes is that the different forms of leadership essentially combine the principles of consistency, guidance, pioneering, and resilience to play a guiding and transformative role at both the individual and organisational levels.

An example video clip from this context is as follows:

“Being together, being one with the customer, being one with your team and teammates.” – V14

Examples related to the subject matter are as follows:

“Heroes and leaders are resilient, empathetic, understand the other side, and are kind-hearted. At the same time, these leaders are determined, creative, and fight for justice and equality.” – V14

“Leadership is not something that comes with a title. Leadership is something that comes with action.” – V13

The third main theme developed within the scope of the research is strategic management and leadership. This main theme is divided into three categories:

- 1 risk taking and opportunity
- 2 strategy and positioning
- 3 innovation and transformation.

Table 3 Main themes, categories, and quote codes created within the scope of the research

<i>Main theme</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>	<i>Quote (code) headings</i>
Success story and its challenges	Perception of success and challenges	Burden of success
		Fear of failure
		Loss of expectation
		Invisible success
Leadership and relationship dynamics	Encouragement and responsibility	Courageous determination
		Courageous sincerity
		Courageous responsibility
		Emotional bonding
	Trust, communication and transparency	Power to promise
		Team spirit
		Full disclosure
		Resilient leadership
	Leadership styles	Action leadership
		Consistency in leadership
		Mentoring leadership
		Pioneering leadership
Strategic orientation and innovation	Risk taking and opportunity	Seizing the opportunity
		Risk taking
		You should take risks
		Passionate risk
	Strategy and positioning	Lucky path
		Proper placement
		Counter value
		Sense of money
	Innovation and transformation	Strategy
		Timing
		Transformation
		Out of the box
Execution and learning cycle	Determination, effort and resilience	Creative process
		Determined experience
		Test of resilience
		Difficulties
	Experience and minor gains	Effort
		Achievement trial
		Initial success
		Baby steps

Table 3 Main themes, categories, and quote codes created within the scope of the research (continued)

<i>Main theme</i>	<i>Subthemes</i>	<i>Quote (code) headings</i>
Mindset and self-regulation	Vision (goal/imagination)	Bold imagination
		Targeted imagination
	Self-efficacy and mindset	Winning mindset
		Self-sufficiency
		Continuous repetition
		Consistency
		Passionate life
		Mental control
		Mental liberation
		Self-confidence

The common emphasis of the codes in these categories referred to a Table 2 is that strategic management and leadership are fundamentally about seizing opportunities by taking bold risks despite uncertainties, creating competitive advantage through proper positioning and timing, and building sustainable success by breaking patterns with innovative and transformative approaches. Beyond the emphasis on risk-taking and opportunity, the findings suggest that these narratives often reduce complex strategic processes to the level of individual decisions or mindset-driven actions. This reductionist tendency leads to an overemphasis on personal agency while failing to adequately account for structural, economic and contextual constraints. Consequently, this discourse largely attributes success and strategic outcomes to individual factors. The examples found in this context are as follows:

“You have to take risks.” – V6

“Let me put it this way, making money is like a primary school student taking notes. We don’t earn money to spread it around. I don’t have a yacht. I’m not very interested in such things. I don’t have a summer house either...” – V7

“So do what you are passionate about. Take risks...” – V3

The fourth main theme developed within the scope of the research is the execution and learning cycle. This main theme is divided into two categories:

- 1 determination, effort and resilience
- 2 experiences and minor gains.

The common emphasis of the codes included in these categories at Table 2 is that the process of achieving success is experienced as a challenging but instructive process that requires determination, patience, continuous repetition, and progress in baby steps rather than immediate results. This experience demonstrates that the theme strongly emphasises ‘small steps’ as a universal path to success. However, the narratives rarely address situations where such incremental progress may prove insufficient due to external constraints. This points to a partial presentation of reality in which perseverance is highlighted, yet contextual barriers are discussed only to a limited extent. The examples found in this context are as follows:

“Even the most unsuccessful salesperson in the world has made at least one sale in their life. Even if it was just a technical one.” – V2

“As someone who started their first company at the age of twenty and has also gone bankrupt, I know how difficult it really is.” – V1

“If you ask God for patience, does God give your patience? Or does God give you problems to be patient with?” – V13

The final main theme developed within the scope of the research is mindset and self-regulation. This main theme is divided into two categories:

- 1 vision (goal/imagination)
- 2 self-efficacy and mindset.

The common emphasis of the codes formed through these categories (see Table 2) is that mindset and self-regulation play a decisive role in individuals' journey to success; when vision and dreams are combined with courage and passion, they provide a consistent, determined, and sustainable development process through self-confidence, mental liberation and self-sufficiency. In other words, this theme aligns closely with the popular self-help discourse, which positions psychological factors such as self-confidence, mental control, and vision as the key determinants of success. While this perspective empowers individuals, it also carries the risk of overlooking socio-economic and environmental factors. In this context, discourse constructs success as a phenomenon largely within the individual's internal control. The examples found in this context are as follows:

“Every minute, you will experience the actions of the winner along with the winner's mindset.” – V2

“The first slogan was the world's largest bookstore. They said you must have lost your mind...” – V1

When the findings are evaluated holistically, it becomes evident that the YouTube content examined produces a narrative structure that is largely consistent but partially idealised. Although the themes are internally consistent and mutually reinforcing, they tend to prioritise individual-level explanations and motivational framing over structural and contextual analyses. This situation demonstrates that while the content is powerful in terms of inspiring and fostering engagement, it is limited in its ability to reflect the full complexity of the realities of entrepreneurship and leadership.

5 Conclusions and discussion

This research focuses on the impact of videos on YouTube featuring entrepreneurial motivation and leadership discourse on their audience (Lubis and Puspitasari, 2021; Abdul-Ajid, 2024). It reveals how these effects jointly shape invisible burdens, strategic behaviours, and mental self-regulation (Ashman et al., 2018; Fitri and Dwita, 2024). In this context, the study offers an original contribution by critically highlighting the discrepancy between motivational discourse and contextual realities, and by integrating a discourse analysis approach with narratives of entrepreneurship and leadership in digital media environments. Unlike most existing studies, which focus primarily on the positive outcomes of motivational content, this research brings to light the underlying

commercialisation trends and elements of contextual neglect in these narratives. In line with the research aim of examining the authenticity and consistency of motivational content through a discourse analysis framework, the findings indicate that these narratives portray entrepreneurial success in a persuasive yet simplified manner. The analysis reveals that, although the content appears consistent within its own discursive structure, it does not adequately reflect the complexity of real-world conditions. In this regard, the study has fulfilled its primary objective by revealing how motivational discourse functions not only as a source of inspiration but also as a mechanism that selectively reconstructs reality. The findings obtained from the research support, from many different perspectives, show that popular videos cause emotional uplift. For example, the theme of 'leadership and relationship dynamics' constructed leadership as ethical resilience and action-orientedness with an emphasis on 'courageous determination', 'courageous sincerity' and 'courageous responsibility'. Or the 'strategic management and leadership' theme supported a strong entrepreneurial spirit along the axes of 'risk-taking and opportunity', 'strategy and positioning' and 'innovation and transformation'. When evaluated in terms of the extent to which these narratives are realistic and consistent, the findings indicate that the videos examined exhibit a high degree of internal consistency but offer only partial realism. The consistency observed across themes is largely discourse-based and emerges through the repetition of meaning patterns such as resilience, self-efficacy and risk-taking. However, these narratives fail to adequately account for contextual determinants of success, such as socio-economic conditions, cultural background and access to resources. Consequently, the study demonstrates that consistency in motivational discourse does not always correspond to contextual accuracy. However, the most important finding of the study is the fact that these videos may be profit-driven (Olumekor et al., 2023; Gao and Tsai, 2024; Aránega et al., 2023). Thus, it is important to keep in mind that the videos, which have hundreds of thousands of views and many likes, may have been published for commercial reasons (Goncalves et al., 2025; Nunez et al., 2025). This situation reinforces the argument that motivational content should be viewed not as impartial guidance, but as strategically crafted narratives embedded within digital economies. From a theoretical perspective, these findings contribute to the literature by challenging the assumption that motivational discourse is inherently beneficial and universal, and by positioning it as a context-dependent and commercially mediated construct. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that practitioners should subject motivational content to critical scrutiny and should not adopt generalised success narratives without aligning them with organisational realities, resources and constraints. The role of such concerns in the basis of many statements, such as 'winner's mentality', 'everyone else did it, why can't you?' and 'you have to take risks', is an undeniable fact. For example, the role of important determinants such as cultural, financial, and family support is ignored in statements such as 'If you want something, it means that there are very strong negative aspects behind it. In other words, you have experienced failure'. So, the common emphasis in the videos is, 'He did it, why can't you?' or 'He built it, he became a leader... Why can't you?' It can be said that such emphases lack many critical factors such as cultural, financial, familial, and psychological support. When these findings are considered together, it becomes clear that the study addresses its research problem by highlighting the systematic gap between individualised success narratives and context-dependent realities. This gap constitutes one of the study's key contributions, as it highlights the limitations of widely consumed motivational discourse and points to the need for a more nuanced and context-sensitive

interpretation of such content. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies on this topic address this gap in the field and provide guidance in the context of leadership motivation based on cultural, financial, familial and psychological foundations (Praswati et al., 2022; Blaga, 2021; Kolev, 2019; Obschonka et al., 2016; Abiddin et al., 2024; Ceyhan, 2026). Our recommendation for managers and entrepreneurs is to establish a context-sensitive application architecture by integrating motivational discourse with measurable goals, transparent team dynamics, risk-strategy alignment and incremental learning cycles. Such an approach has the potential to transform ‘dreams sold with likes and subscribers’ into actionable roadmaps fuelled by data and tested against the reality of the organisation.

6 Limitations and recommendations for future research

In this study, which focuses on entrepreneurship motivation and leadership topics on YouTube, there are some limitations that should be considered to contextualise the findings and guide future research. The first of these is that the research is based on a purposive sampling method consisting of fourteen videos accessed on a single video platform (YouTube) within a specific linguistic-cultural structure. Although this method focuses on depth of meaning and content, it has a limited level of impact in terms of the generalisability of the findings. Because the platform in question influences both which videos will be featured and the tone of conversation and message format users will encounter. Indeed, as emphasised by Bucher and Helmond (2018), algorithmic regulations and interface designs directly shape the boundaries of digital discourse by determining which content users see and which they do not. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies compare multiple platforms. Secondly, the fact that the data is based on both public and secondary data limits the intentions of video producers in the background. All of these are critical components in understanding the commercialisation of motivational discourse and its rhetorical framework. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies conduct in-depth interviews or focus on group studies with content creators. Thirdly, the thematic analysis conducted within the scope of the research may contain researcher subjectivity due to the nature of qualitative interpretation. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies conduct comparative coding processes using multiple coders and enhance objectivity through consensus analysis. Fifth, concepts such as entrepreneurship, motivation, and leadership are multidimensional concepts that can be shaped by individual, social, economic and cultural determinants. However, videos may be limited in revealing these determinants. Therefore, discursive studies cannot test the contextual structure of these variables. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies measure the effect of these determinants using quantitative methods such as surveys, experiments and structural equation modelling. Within these limitations, it is recommended that future research include TikTok, Instagram Reels, Facebook Watch, and long-form podcasts, thereby creating a digital ecosystem. This allows for testing the short- and long-term effects of motivational discourse on goal setting, emotional regulation, perceived self-efficacy and risk-taking behaviours. Furthermore, it is recommended that subsequent studies consider cross-cultural discourses and consider the audience’s family structure, financial health and social capital. In this regard, comprehensive datasets comparing different cultural,

socio-economic, and demographic groups can be created. In addition, it is recommended that future studies employ longitudinal research designs to examine the behavioural consequences of long-term exposure to motivational content and utilise experimental methods to identify causal relationships between motivational discourse and entrepreneurial behaviour.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all participants who took part in this study.

The concept and design of the study, material preparation, data collection and analysis, and the first draft titled ‘Dreams packaged with likes and subscriptions: a discourse analysis of the path from entrepreneurial motivation to leadership’ were prepared and approved equally by all four authors.

Declarations

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Data availability statement: The data presented in this study is available upon request from the corresponding author. Due to confidentiality restrictions, the data is not publicly available.

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