Analysing Aristotle's Persuasive Strategies in Malaysian YouTube Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

Advertisement functions as a medium used by companies to attract public attention to buy their products. Video advertisements serve as an effective channel for reaching broad audiences. The study determines Malaysian YouTube advertisements using Aristotle's persuasive strategies. Previous research has shown that advertisements regularly utilized ethos, pathos, logos to gain public attention. The data collected in this research was obtained from several company's respective YouTube channels. The selected videos were downloaded, transcribed and analysed using Aristotle's persuasive strategies. The findings reveal that all advertisements incorporate ethos, pathos, and logos according to their theme and target audience, and the message that they want to portray. Pathos emerged as the dominant appeal as it is designed to have emotional impact towards the audience particularly in festive-season advertisements. The findings are expected to be impactful to the educators and for media companies in producing more effective advertisements in the future.

Keywords: (persuasive strategies, ethos, pathos, logos, advertisement)

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a widely utilized medium by companies to create brand awareness to customers ensuring consumers realize the existence of the company and its products. The effectiveness of advertising depends on two important factors: 1) the reach of the commercial message and 2) the characteristics of the message such as providing new information, useful advice to individuals, the capacity to create curiosity about a brand or product, and the ability to generate enjoyment (Bronner and Neijens, 2006). In this digital era, advertisements are pervasive, displayed on highways, smartphones and across variety platforms. Persuasive strategies are commonly used in advertising to attract more consumers for company exposure as well as to encourage consumers to purchase products and services. These strategies often have effects on consumers emotions, rationale, and credibility which also known as ethos, pathos, logos. Ethos, an appeal to credibility, is to ensure consumers that the advertisement can be trusted and credibility is assured. Meanwhile, pathos, an emotional appeal, is to evoke emotional effects towards consumers. Lastly, logos is a logical appeal that uses logic and reason to attract the consumers (Dwiyanti, W. G., 2024). While advertisements rarely used all three strategies simultaneously, most employ at least two to attract consumers effectively.

Advertisements can be delivered through electronic media or written media such as newspapers, magazines and billboards. An advertisement must be sufficiently engaging to draw in encouraging product purchase. Companies must understand their target market to ensure that advertisements reach its intended audience. Therefore, this correspondence between persuasive strategies and audience targeting is significant in order to maximize the impact of advertising campaigns.

Problem Statement

This study aims to analyse Malaysian YouTube advertisements during festive holidays according to

Aristotle's persuasive techniques which are ethos, pathos, and logos. Despite the guidance provided by Aristotle, many advertisements struggled to apply Aristotle's persuasive strategies effectively especially in balancing the three approaches, leading to varied reactions among consumers. This creates confusion among the audiences, diminishing the targeted positive impact of advertising. Besides, Malaysia's diversity of generations, cultures and races, such as Malays (50%), Chinese (23%), Indians (7%), foreigners (8%) and other groups (12%) constitute additional challenges for advertisers in seeking wide-ranging audience (Ahmad Shahrul et al., 2023). Due to that, advertisers must design of a way to create advertisements that appeal to everyone. Hence, this study aims to analyse the use of Malaysian YouTube advertisements according to Aristotle's persuasive strategies contributing to a better understanding in order to create a better advertisement that is appealing to consumers.

Research questions:

1. What types of persuasion techniques are used in Malaysia YouTube advertisements?
2. What types of ways that persuasive techniques such as ethos, pathos, logos are being applied in the Malaysian YouTube advertisement?

LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Aristotle's persuasive strategies consist of several rhetorical tools namely ethos, pathos and logos that are designed to influence attitudes and responses without being obvious (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019). Ethos, regularly conveyed through verbal and non-verbal cues, functions as to reinforce credibility and trustworthiness, as depicted in advertisements emphasizing varied speakers and inclusive product use (Dwiyanti, 2024; Harisma et al., 2022). Pathos invokes to emotions such as fear, sadness or happiness, steering audience reactions through delivery, visuals and speech style, as shown in political discourse that shake feelings of love, friendship or fear (Prafitri & Nasir, 2023). Meanwhile, logos relies on reason, facts and clarity, which assisting consumers to understand products through logical explanation (Dwiyanti, 2024). Collectively, these rhetorical strategies create the basis of persuasive communication in advertising, enabling messages to connect with audiences by means of trust, emotional impact and logical reasoning.

Persuasion in Media

Previous studies have broadly adopted Aristotle's persuasive strategies in examining multifaceted media such as advertisements, sermons and political speeches (Ahmad Shahrul et al., 2023; Silva et al., 2021; Romanova & Smirnova, 2019; Prafitri & Nasir, 2023; Munazil & Rababah, 2022; Dwiyanti, 2024). Social media platforms, especially YouTube, have evolved as leading sites for advertising owing to their functional features (Agrawal & Trivedi, 2020; Osman et al., 2022). Besides, researches depict that companies like McDonald's and Foodpanda utilize ethos by integrating local culture, music and celebrities to constitute credibility (Ahmad Shahrul et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Romanova and Smirnova (2019) emphasize the prevalence of pathos in advertising through appeals to emotion and personal involvement. Similarly, Munazil and Rababah (2022) reveal that certain sermons utilize logos by delivering evidence and rational support, highlighting the fundamental role of persuasive strategies in influencing audience responses in different settings.

Cultural and Linguistics Influences in Persuasion

Both cultural and linguistic factors serve a significant role in persuasive advertising, designing strategies among companies and platforms. According to Morady and Esmaeilpour (2023), the use of language must be purposeful and systematic. This can be seen in Starbuck's advertisement through the expression of pronouns and celebration of customer occasions, which, in contrast to Burger King that employs rhetorical questions to gain engagement (Losi et al., 2022). Apart from that, cultural references also assist in obtaining persuasive power, for instance, McDonald's uses old songs to spark nostalgia (Ahmad Shahrul et al., 2023),

other brands like Coca-Cola, Oreo and Pepsi engage with Brazilian consumers via promotional characters, offers and nutritional claims (Silva et al., 2021; Santana et al., 2020). Featuring celebrities and cartoon figures is another alternative to enhance attractiveness particularly in energy drink advertisements (Bleakley et al., 2022). This can be seen in social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram in Brazil where the platforms are mostly dominated by athletes and artists for endorsement (Prastio et al., 2021). Mokshin (2021) also claimed that, persuasion can also be seen in culturally themed ads such as Saito tea in which the advertisement employs Asian music together with traditional clothing to enhance credibility. Hence, culture and language play a significant role in advertising, mainly to influence how consumers respond across distinct context.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs qualitative content analysis as it has systematic reduction of content, analyzed with special attention to the context in which it was created, to identify themes and extract meaningful interpretations of the data (Roller, 2019).

Sampling

This research investigates Malaysian YouTube advertisements, focusing on interactions between characters during festive seasons. Three advertisements were selected representing Malaysia's core celebrations that are celebrated in Malaysia, which are Hari Raya Aidilfitri, Chinese New Year, and Deepavali. These festive advertisements were chosen because they reflect distinct cultural groups providing insight into how advertisements integrated messages, including visual and emotional appeals. Aristotle's persuasive strategies, ethos, pathos and logos were applied as to identify how the advertisements engage with variety of audiences in Malaysia.

Research Instrument

Aristotle's persuasive strategies were adapted to the analysis of the selected advertisements. The video advertisements analysed are "TNB Raya 2021 Hikmah Raya Aida" from Tenaga Nasional Berhad's official YouTube channel (TenagaOfficial), "RHB Chinese New Year 2025 / Wealth" from RHB Group's official channel and "TNB Deepavali 2018" from TenagaOfficial. All advertisements were selected based on online availability and under five minutes length. As according to Manasrah et al. (2021), longer videos are less entertaining compared to shorter ones. The time range of the selected videos were from 2018 to 2025 presenting a temporal span for investigating persuasive strategies across different festive contexts.

Data Procedure

The data collection procedure began with the selection of advertisements on YouTube. Every advertisement video was viewed several times in order to achieve a detailed understanding of its content and message. The videos were then transcribed through Podcastle and the transcripts were thoroughly reviewed against the original advertisement with the aim of identifying grammatical inconsistencies or errors. This validation process was conducted until no further errors found.

Data Analysis

The data was tabulated according to persuasive appeal using a table adapted from Ahmad Sharul et al. (2023). The table encompasses three distinct categories: 1) type of appeal, 2) its defining criteria and 3) evidence taken from the chosen YouTube advertisements. This process assisted in displaying clearer interpretation of the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

TNB Raya 2021 Hikmah Raya Aida

Persuasive appeal	Criteria	Evidence
Ethos	• Credible and trustworthy statement	• Aida stated "Ada hikmah di sebalik setiap ujian." (4:17) • At the end of the video, the message portrayed "Masa bersama lebih bermakna, eratkan keluarga di mana jua anda berada". (4:20)
Pathos	• The use of music background • The use of tone of voice • The use of facial expressions	• The use of 90s inspired music to create nostalgia feelings towards the audience (2:22 - 3:01) • The character, Aida, portrays a pensive expression on her face thinking of her situation that she's in the video (3:05) • Hari Raya songs started to play in the background of the video (3:21).
Logos	• Clarity of statement	• Her mother stated "Aida, kamu tahu tak masa yang kamu luangkan sama kami tu dah cukup dah buat mak." (4:00-4:04)

Table 1: Data taken from TNB Raya 2021 Hikmah Raya Aida

The advertisement shows Aida, a pastry entrepreneur who struggles for her business during the Covid-19 pandemic. Feeling hopeless that her mother encourages her to rekindle with family through Hari Raya preparations. The advertisement incorporated Aristotle's persuasive techniques by employing ethos through Aida's statement which delivered credibility, pathos, via nostalgic and festive Hari Raya songs that elicited emotional connection and logos through her mother's reminder, promoting the main message of the advertisement that is, family matters more than business.

RHB Chinese New Year 2025 / Wealth

Persuasive appeal	Criteria	Evidence
Ethos	• Credible and trustworthy statement • Personal appeal	• At the end of the advertisement, it stated "Tan Swee Ban sacrificed his job, his house and even his health to run Peace & Harmony Home, a not-for-profit nursing centre that cares for the sick and neglected elderly." (4:26)
Pathos	• The use of music background • The settings in the advertisement	• The music in the background plays traditional Chinese music that usually plays during Chinese New Year. (0:10) • The video shows the son trying to entertain her sick mother by saying that he got a job as a superhero in a hospital. (0:26) • The clip shows the son struggles in life taking various low paying jobs in many places. (0:42-0:56) • This part shows that the son cares for other people as he stated "Uncle, don't be scared, I'll be here with you everyday" shows that he cares about other people's wellbeing. (1:19) • This part shows the son comforting an elderly

		patient that fails to reach out to his son leaving him feeling frustrated. (2:02-2:09) • Her mom stated to her son "You must remember, from now on, you're not only my son. You're also the son of the elderly people" stated that she trusts her son to take care of the elderly people. (2:28-2:36) • The clip shows the environment during Chinese New Year celebrated at the house for elderly people celebrated my all races showcasing unity in the elderly home.(4:39-4:43)
Logos	• Clarity of statement	• The mother says to the son "A person's wealth isn't measured by how beautiful or big their house is, but by how big their heart is" (4:00-4:10) • The video shows "Progress blossoms when our legacy defines our wealth" (4:45).

Table 2: Data taken from RHB Chinese New Year 2025 / Wealth

This advertisement conveys about Mr. Tan who takes care of his sick mother and neglected elderly by building a foster home. It utilized ethos by emphasizing his real-life sacrifices portrayed credibility and moral authority, pathos via emotional representations of his struggles and the excitement of celebrating Chinese New Year with the elderly and lastly, the depiction of logos through his mother's reminder that true wealth lies in compassion.

TNB Deepavali 2018

Persuasive appeal	Criteria	Evidence
Ethos	• Credible and trustworthy statement • Personal appeal	• The clip stated "My first Deepavali with the in-laws, hope it goes well" stating that he hopes to be accepted by the in-law's family. (0:12-3:38) • At the end of the video, a statement appears "Brighten up the celebrations with the gift of family". (3:31)
Logos	• The use of music background • Interaction between characters	• The music in the background is the traditional Indian music that gives the audience a sense of the festive season which is Deepavali. (0:15). • The video portrays his grandparents' in-laws cooking Muruku, a traditional Indian snack, inside a house decorated for Deepavali. (1:10) • The video shows his brother-in-law sneaking up to his room while sleeping. When he wakes up, his brother-in-law tries to escape by acting like Michael Jackson, doing the signature "Moonwalk" on his way out of the room. (2:28) • Their in-law's family gathered around the main character to show their love for him and accepted him as their own family. (3:15)
Pathos	• Sequential video's arrangement	• Overall, the arrangement of the video showcases the weird but charming behaviours portrayed to the main character. Even when the main character finds them odd, he still accepts them with an open heart. (0:00-3:38)

Table 3: Data taken from TNB Deepavali 2018

The advertisement told about a newly married man who celebrates Deepavali at his in-law's home which their behaviour confuses him until he realizes that the family was trying to select gifts that suit him, making him feel welcomed. The employment of ethos was seen via the closing statement "Brighten up the

celebrations with the gift of family," highlighted credibility through family bonding, pathos, by creating nostalgia through traditional Indian music and logos via the plot development that depicts his acceptance which reaffirming family unity and belonging.

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What types of persuasion techniques are used in Malaysia YouTube advertisements?

The types of Aristotle's persuasive techniques employed by Malaysian YouTube advertisements are ethos, pathos and logos, with pathos appearing as the most dominant. Among festive-themed advertisements like Hari Raya, Chinese New Year and Deepavali, emotional approach is seen regularly emphasized in grabbing audience attention and engagement. Meanwhile, ethos and logos tend to appear less frequently, depicting supporting techniques rather than the main ones. Therefore, the types of persuasion techniques utilized are mainly emotional, reinforced by credibility and rational clarity.

Research Question 2: What types of ways that persuasive techniques such as ethos, pathos, logos are being applied in the Malaysian YouTube advertisement?

The employment of these techniques differs between advertisements, representing cultural and narrative contexts. Real-life stories of sacrifices, wisdom words and moral authority that built trust can be observed through ethos. While pathos is demonstrated via nostalgic music, festive rituals and emotional approaches that connect with audiences' experiences. Lastly, logos were found in rational statements about family values, compassion and legacy which enhanced the emotional appeal by offering clarity. Hence, ethos, pathos and logos are applied through festive storytelling that highlights cultural belonging and family unity, with pathos or emotional appeal as the leading technique, backed by ethos or credibility and logos or rational clarity, rather than direct product promotion.

Implications

The findings will benefit companies that may use this research as a way to better understand how to improve advertisements. Some companies struggle to make advertisements to attract customers. Educators can also benefit by using the findings as a learning material. The research can be a guide to educators as the research analyzes advertisements based on ethos, pathos and logos as well as for reference to a research study. Advertisers can also benefit from this research by employing this research as a material to study on the usage of Aristotle's persuasive strategies and later applying it. Meanwhile, the general public who have interest towards persuasive strategies on advertising can use the research to learn more on how the strategies work.

LIMITATIONS

This study is limited to three festive advertisements from Malaysia, namely Hari Raya, Chinese New Year and Deepavali. The advertisements were selected from YouTube and reflect specific advertising contexts and periods. Hence, the findings reflect the strategies employed in the selected festive-season campaigns and may not represent approaches adopted by different companies, channels or advertising campaigns across other periods and contexts. Furthermore, as this study solely focused on YouTube, the findings do not encompass advertisements distributed through other media such as television and TikTok. The study employed a qualitative content analysis approach according to Aristotle's rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos and logos. The analysis focused on interpreting the presence and functions of these appeals, rather than examining their frequency or statistical distribution. Finally, the identification and classification of rhetorical appeals were based on the researchers' interpretations of the advertisements' textual and visual content. While the analysis was guided by the theoretical framework of ethos, pathos and logos, different interpretations may emerge when the same advertising materials are examined from other analytical perspectives.

RECOMMENDATION

Several recommendations can be made for future research. Firstly, future researchers should add more advertisements to the research. There were only three advertisements in this research. While the number of advertisements is sufficient to be analysed for this research, increasing the number of advertisements could improve the quality of the findings by providing more material for analysis and discussion. Next, future researchers should add more varieties of advertisements to the research. This research only focused on the festive seasons in Malaysia which were Hari Raya, Chinese New Year, and Deepavali. By adding more celebrations such as Merdeka and Hari Gawai or focusing on other aspects, the findings could be different and the analysis will feature more variations. The research could also analyse other appeals such as ethos and logos more effectively, since pathos was used the most in this research. Besides, researchers may include media in their research. All advertisements used in this research were from YouTube only. Other media such as television and TikTok are suggested to increase the variety of media and expand the dataset for analysis in future research.

In addition, future researchers may explore a more detailed methodological framework by including explicit coding categories, representative examples of rhetorical appeals and coding tables that record the relationship between advertisements, rhetorical strategies, supporting evidence and interpretations. Researchers may also include frequency or distribution data to support qualitative findings and present a clearer basis for identifying dominant rhetorical appeals. Finally, future studies could further assess whether the rhetorical patterns examined in festive advertisements are similarly recognised in other advertising contexts including expand the practical implications of rhetorical analysis for educators and advertising practitioners.

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