

Use of Logos, Pathos, Ethos for Persuasion in Cancer Pamphlets

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Abstract

In view of the lack of findings on persuasive strategies used in health risk messages, the study examined the use of logos, pathos, and ethos for persuasion in cancer pamphlets. Using Aristotle's (1954) rhetorical appeals, qualitative content analysis was conducted for 10 cancer pamphlets disseminated in Malaysia. The analysis revealed an over-reliance on logos (96.73%) while pathos and ethos are rarely used. The pamphlets offer dense information on the location of the cancer, symptoms, incidence, risk factors, preventive measures, early detection, and treatment. Pathos appears in the form of a call to save their lives from the killer on six of the cancer pamphlets but there is lack of information on disease severity. The near absence of the emotional appeal may lessen urgency of cancer screening. The ethos appeal lies in the name of the government agency, lending authority to the pamphlet. The paper offers suggestions on how emotional and ethical appeals can be incorporated in cancer risk messages to increase persuasiveness.

Keywords: Logos; pathos; ethos; rhetorical appeal; persuasion; cancer; health risk messages

Introduction

Researchers have investigated how persuasive strategies are used in advertisements to persuade potential customers to buy products and services (Ab Rashid et al., 2016; Emanuel, Rodrigues, & Martins, 2015; Nair & Ndubisi, 2015) and also in e-business website designs (Winn, 2000) and found that the most frequently used persuasive appeal is pathos (emotional appeal). For example, Nigerian scam messages appealed to pity and tapped into human desires and needs to deceive recipients (Naksawat, Akkakoson, & Loi, 2016). The other two rhetorical appeals are logos (logical appeal) and ethos (appeal to credibility) (Aristotle, 1954). All three rhetorical appeals are used by presidential candidates to persuade their electorate to vote for them (Androniciuc, 2016; Mori, 2016; Mshvenieradze, 2013).

Although the use of rhetorical appeals has been extensively studied in advertisements and political speeches, few studies have been conducted on the use of persuasive strategies in health risk messages. Health risk messages persuade the public to adopt preventive and cure measures to protect themselves against diseases. In the United States, Chen et al. (2015) found that disease versus human agency assignment ("Cancer developed in me" versus "I developed cancer" respectively) do not affect perceived severity of colon cancer. However, messages highlighting human agency leads to higher perceived susceptibility to colon cancer. When temporal agency is attributed to humans ("I am approaching death") rather than to death ("Death is approaching me"), the cancer risk message was more persuasive but only when the story was told in a first-person viewpoint. Chen et al. (2015) concluded that all eight versions of the magazine articles on colon cancer did not undermine the participants' perceptions of self- and response-efficacy and were very persuasive in heightening participants' intention to make lifestyle changes to prevent cancer. Chen et al.'s (2015) results contradicted findings on threat posed by bacteria (Bell et al., 2014a), viruses (McGlone et al., 2013), and radon gas (Bell et al., 2014b), showing that people respond differently to cancer risk messages. Cancer risk messages