

# Evaluation of Rhetorical Triangle in Reinforcing Brand Reputation in Business

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## **Abstract**

This study entitled, "Evaluation of Rhetorical Triangle in Reinforcing Brand Reputation in Business" explored organisations' attempt to utilize abstract theoretical model of Rhetorical triangle to provide industry solution to promoting brand reputation. Relying on this model and using exploratory research method, this study established that rhetorical appeals comprising ethos, pathos, and logos, has been in used in advertising to persuade audiences effectively and has influenced the reinforcement of brand image by creating brand awareness and positioning same in the minds of the target audience. It also found out that the theory has been successfully applied in organizations and businesses in presenting company's products and services to beat the challenges of modern market place. This is even as businesses strive to build and maintain a positive brand reputation to gain customers' confidence and loyalty. The paper concluded that rhetorical triangle can be deceptively used to mislead the public. It therefore recommended, among others, that businesses should use appropriate and effective appeal within the communication framework of rhetorical triangle and in the context of the market to shape effective public perception and promoting positive brand reputation for businesses and their products.

**Keywords:** Rhetorical Triangle, Brand Reputation, Theory and Persuasion.

## **Introduction**

In modern times, the world is governed by various human and business interests that are growing every day and as a result a significant amount of money is spent on

meeting those desires. At the centre of the attempt to fulfill those desires by businesses are various communication appeals designed to meet this expectation. This presupposes that human society is governed by a myriad of problems that communication is needed to solve using various appeals.

Several attempts have been undertaken by scholars to appraise the understanding of these communication appeals. One of these attempts was the application of rhetorical triangle propounded by Aristotle. By our examination of some of the literature available, it was indicated that the phrase: rhetorical triangle was a fusion of rhetoric and triangle to denote a grouping of three ways in which a speaker or writer can appeal to the audience. This means that "a speaker's ability to persuade an audience, according to Aristotle, is hinged on how well s/he appeals to that audience in three different areas of communication strategies known as logos, ethos, and pathos" (<https://www.isu.edu> 2023). According to Lutzke and Hengeler (2009, p. 2) the rhetorical triangle is located within a circle of rhetorical situation. In a rhetorical situation there are five elements which are the rhetor (speaker), audience, message, purpose and context. When considering, for example, which of the rhetorical appeal to a brand, the rhetor must consider how best to convey the intended message to the particular audience receiving it.

Brand reputation is about the perception of the publics concerning a brand. In communication, particularly of the public relations or advertising nature, there is no general message or product for everyone, there is no general public for every message (Ajala 2007). This study therefore, defines publics as the prospective customers, stakeholders, existing customers, loyal customers or any person who interacts with the brand. These publics' perception of a brand ultimately is her reputation. Therefore, reputation is about the sum total of experiences a public garnered from interacting with a brand.

The question to ask is how would the publics interact with a brand to build reputation? This is also the cardinal area of interest in this paper which assumes that

brand interaction can only take place where there is brand contact. Incidentally, by buying the product, using it, recommending it to someone or as a supplier, brand contact is established. Through such contact reputation can be formed. Where this reputation is positive, it build customers' confidence and loyalty to the brand (<https://www.waltersand.com2023>).

It is in this context that this paper seeks to evaluate the application of rhetorical triangle by businesses in reinforcing brand reputation.

### Statement of the Problem

Modern market areas are saturated with products and services that are similar and are competing for same market share. The market today is so sophisticated that it feels it has the responsibility to question both the seller and his/her product and service. Not only that, it wants to also interpret the story the products owners tell about their product in ways that is consistent with their values and culture. With this scenario it means that business owners need to be creative and show special ability to be able to convince this market. This paper therefore, seeks to assess if rhetorical triangle can indeed influence the reinforcement of brand reputation in businesses.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Determine the influence of rhetorical triangle in reinforcing brand reputation in businesses.
- ii. Find out the effectiveness of rhetorical triangle in brand reputation in businesses.

### Review of the Concepts

Rhetoric is defined as a form of communication that creatively asserts a point of view, imaginatively expresses important ideas, and helps readers remember key points and attempt to shift readers' perspectives (Wynn & Amy 2021). In trying to understand the definition above, it is important to assess the phrase "to shift readers' perspectives" This phrase tries to demonstrate that speakers used rhetorical devices such as anecdote and clichés to

achieve the desired communication goal which is to persuade readers to shift somewhat to the writer's line of argument. Rhetorical triangles are public speaking devices, according to Aristotle, in a form of triangle with logos at the apex while ethos and pathos located at the left and right side bases of the triangle which are used to influence listeners in a public sphere. The public sphere here refers to the market place, the social arena and online trade sites where sales professionals or marketers use rhetorical triangle to reach out to their prospects.

Interestingly, rhetorical triangle harps on three key sources of communication appeals which are logos, ethos and pathos (Aristotle). From the argument put forward by scholars, logos is that branch of communication that appeals to human reasoning which relies on concise, credible and logical thought or expression. Ethos appeals to the character and credibility of the writer or speaker and his/her connectedness to the brand. Meanwhile, pathos appeals to emotion, sympathy, beliefs and values of the audience. The argument of Aristotle is that if these three appeals are present in brand communication, there is high tendencies to convince and persuade the readers or listeners to accept the message. Where this happens and is supported with product quality, a brand has greater possibility to achieve repeat purchase and grow to reputable brand (<https://www.monash.edu>2023).

Additionally, brand reputation is about the practice of monitoring and shaping public perception of an organization or individual on a brand. It involves developing a positive image, addressing negative perceptions and maintaining credibility and trust with stakeholders. This statement forms the crux of argument in further discussion in this paper.

### Literature Review

The rhetorical triangle is a communication model that has been in use since the time of Aristotle. The model is based on the premise that effective communication requires a combination of ethos, pathos, and logos.

These three elements are used to establish credibility, appeal to emotions, and provide logical arguments. The purpose of communication dating to ancient days was initially thought to be a means of expression among members of a community and to socialize. According to Gambo in Okoro (2013) communication is mainly related to public presentation, argumentation, rhetoric, credibility and ethics. It is like in most fields of social sciences, viewed as a part of socialisation process that target people, organizations and groups (emphasis added). This demonstrates the reason why human beings including all of living beings have been communicating right from creation (Okoro 2013).

Effective communication is the bed rock that anchored the understanding of rhetoric. Hence, Okonkwo in Okoro (2013) asserts that "life begins with communication and ends when communication ceases" Rhetoricians believe however, that rhetoric is an elevated form of communication used to persuade individuals and communities and can be made in text, images, video or other types of the media (<https://www.uis.edu>2023).

What however, stands rhetoric out is its purpose which logos, ethos and pathos can all contribute to (University of Illinois 2023). For example, if the purpose of rhetoric is to inform, analyse, evaluate or to convince, rhetorical triangle can help achieve just that. It further posits that, rhetoric is concerned with persuasive techniques and encompasses not only speeches and written works but also images and film. This finding is important to this paper for the obvious reason that records in ancient Persia indicated that aristocratic authority aided by the power of rhetoric encouraged men to embark on a new farming method to increase food sufficiency through persuasive writing on stone tablets (Ogande, 2015). The purpose for relying on rhetoric in this case was to persuade and mobilize men to imbibe the new farming techniques introduced then as panacea to address the constraint placed by the type of the economy in ancient Persia.

Black in Ajala (2007) attested that the power of rhetoric failed during the American

Revolution when a small group of advocates for the abolition of slavery like Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson used their voice and pen to make a profound effect on the public opinion of their time. These men circulated pamphlets, wrote in the press, lectured and spread their ideas of revolt by word of mouth that finally led to the abolition of slavery.

It is important to note that the application of the rhetorical triangle may vary depending on the purpose. In the case of this paper, it looks at how brands such as company name, product, words, symbols or other identities of organisations can be differentiated and reinforced in the minds of product users or company stakeholders. Therefore, one aspect of rhetorical analysis used by organisations is through advertising which is considered a powerful communication channel and a vital marketing tool that helps to sell goods and services (Ogilvy1989).

Moreover, Tapan, Panda, and Mishra (2013) argued that emotional appeal can be the most common and effective rhetorical appeal used in advertising. Advertisers can determine whether logos, ethos or pathos appeal is most convincing to the audience. In other words, should detailed logical facts (logos), personal credibility (ethos) or emotional impact (pathos) better accomplish or support an advertising idea? Srivastava (2023) opines that by showing advertisements frequently on television, internet, bulletin, billboard and radio using various appeals makes the brand deep rooted in the minds of public. This perhaps explains why even non-business organizations such as government, non-governmental organizations, universities and public service agencies use advertising to promote their services.

Sloane, (2001) contend that in advertising, persuasion has been immense ongoing mysteries of rhetoric which is expected to establish connectivity between communicators and receivers. These receivers as consumers are geographically scattered in different locations but the advertisement goes there through different

mass media to persuade them using the best communication appeal possible.

According to Ashley (2016), advertisers who want to persuade their customers to buy their product applies the Aristotle's rhetorical triangle. In the same vein Talaue (2020) posit that advertisement using pathos will attempt to evoke an emotional response in the consumer either positively such as in happiness: for example, tv commercial showing people enjoying drinking Pepsi or negatively such as pain: a person having back problems after buying the "wrong" mattress. He also emphasized that Pathos can also include emotions such as fear and guilt: for instance, images of a starving child persuading good spirited individuals to donate and contribute to charity; A popular television commercials in the international media now of images of children and women in need from war-torn Ukraine. Again advertising using logos appeal will provide evidence and statistics to audience that need to fully understand what the product does. Such as image of an expert or a dentist explaining the composition or ingredients and their usefulness to prospective customers or users of a toothpaste. The logos of this advertisement will be the "straight facts" about the product

## Theoretical Framework

### Theory of Rhetorical Triangle

Aristotle was an ancient Greek philosopher who lived from 384 to 322 B.C.E. Among many of Aristotle's writings, he developed a theory he called "rhetoric." Rhetoric, according to Aristotle, is the art of speaking persuasively. Today, we use the term to refer to all forms of persuasive communication, including written, spoken, and visual. The rhetorical triangle has three components of appeal that form the tripod or corners from which it derived its name (rhetorical triangle).

The three corners of Aristotle's rhetorical triangle are ethos, pathos, and logos. These appeals described the strategies that a writer or speaker uses to persuade audience. By investigating the influence of Aristotle's rhetorical triangle from this perspective, it is relevance to this study to establish the

connection of the triangle to advertising and ultimately to brand reinforcement. For example, *pathos* Latin word for emotion is the fastest way to get audience's attention (<http://worldofwork-io/2019/03monroes-motivated-sequence>). People tend to have fast emotional responses than rational thought. However, over-use of *pathos* can result to audience feeling emotionally manipulated or angry. The reason is because customers are intelligent and are always looking for facts to support whatever emotional claims advertising offers so they can trust the product.

This is why *logos* belong to the pack where facts come in. Audience sometimes question the validity of claims made in the advertisement if it is not supported with science, statistics and expert perspective. Again over reliance on logic makes the argument dry and boring, hence, it needs to balance with *ethos*. *Ethos* is what businesses do to prove to their audience that they can be trusted, that they are credible sources of information just like seen in expert endorsement of Pepsodent and Colgate toothpastes on tv commercials. It's also what businesses do to assure their audience that they are good people who want to do the right thing as shown in celebrity endorsement in their commercials. As stated, advertisers achieve *ethos* through the use of expert sources that provide reliable and appropriate advertising message (Talaue, 2020).

The catchy tagline of Pepsodent is: "you will wonder where the yellow went when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent." This slogan shows that the brand is focused on promoting good oral health and also leverage on the power of celebrity endorsement to build trust with consumers (Karthikeyan, 2023). This sums up businesses' attempt to apply theory of rhetorical triangle in providing industry solution to business problem.

**Effectiveness of rhetorical triangle in reinforcing brand reputation in businesses** According to O'Regan (2019), there are two basic models that explain how people process information - thinking and feeling models. Thinking approaches of

advertisements allow consumers to use logic and reason to buy the product based on features or solving a problem. Feeling approaches use emotion to capture consumer behaviour. Feeling approach creates emotion such as humour, fear and love that will lead a consumer to buy a product. This approach is usually referred to as *pathos*.

From the examination of the role of persuasion in advertising, the fact remains that with good reputation a brand must keep moving forward. According to a study by Coombs and Holladay (2011) on reputation management they argued that reinforcing reputation requires wide stakeholder engagement. It is tied to holding a successful positioning to maintain the trust and direction of the brand (Srivastava 2023). Reinforcement is seen particularly to be at work when an established brand enters into new segment. In the Pepsodent toothpaste television campaign titled: "Pepsodent fights tooth decay," it was a combination of both *logos* and *ethos* as the campaign used both logic to collaborate with expert dentists to explain active ingredients in the toothpaste and their ability to fight against tooth decay and plague. there is also the need to have regular dental check up. This is achieved with the promise made around the brand that must be credible and extended to satisfy more needs and expand the range of core benefit offered.

In another campaign taken after the former entitled: "Protect your family's teeth with Pepsodent", the campaign deliberately targeted parents and emphasized on the need for starting good oral hygiene habits early. Due to the success of the campaign Pepsodent soon launched children's toothpaste and collaborate with expert pediatric dentists to promote the product hence reinforced into a new segment in line with the position of Srivastava (2023).

Moreover, advertising explores the art of influencing human behaviour to make certain purchase decisions (Dekrey, 2020). One of the views this paper holds on effective application of rhetorical triangle to reinforce brand as stated above is psychological approach of using emotion (World Supporter, 2014). A clear example of the

brand that has benefited from this campaign was NIVEA Cream that started off as a skin care for women but later expanded to men beauty care. The major attribute used in emotional appeal was pathos that relies on emotional statement captured in the campaign slogan of being "mild, gentle and caring" (<https://arpitsrivastava.com.2023>). In creating pathos to reinforce brand reputation of NIVEA in this case, the persuasive slogan forms the emotional context that created the persuasive aural that marketers used to appeal to values and beliefs of the viewers or readers through messages that they can relate or care about.

The study of Lee & Heere (2018) suggested that emotional advertising led to a higher attitude towards the advertisements, brand attitude, purchase intention, and merchandise consumption than both rational and combination advertising. According to Lee, Hosanagar, Kartik, & Harikesh (2017), directed informative content is associated with lower levels of engagement when included in messages in isolation, but higher engagement levels when provided in combination with brand personality and related attributes. Rahman & Pail (2019), concluded that most of the customers are influenced by both emotional and rational advertising appeals. Thus, children like adults are uniquely vulnerable to the visual images and effects of persuasive elements like logos, ethos and pathos attributed to in television advertising and other channels of communication.

The reason for persuasive intention of rhetoric to reinforce reputation is not far-fetched. Most economies of the world are capitalist in nature, businesses like manufacturers, movie producers, media industry and publishers must sell; even broadcasting has bills to pay, so also are other businesses that deal in other brands. But beyond this limit, they must perform ethically and responsibly (Baran 2013).

In a similar study on the evaluation of the role of MTN televised advertisements in Nigeria, the findings showed that the audience were exposed to advertisements of MTN on television, and that advertisements have great impact on potential customers, and hence television advertising greatly

improves the sales of MTN products.

The reason adduced for this success was not different from the previous study because persuasive messages were used to attract both existing and potential customers that reinforces the MTN brand reputation. What the advertisement showed was the image of a new baby born in Diaspora, the grandmother at home in Nigeria cannot see her grand-child except she subscribed to MTN data bundle. The commercial was an instant success due to the application of pathos as the grandmother was all smiles and overjoyed with the image of her grandchild conspicuously displayed on a computer screen because she subscribed to data bundle.

A study by the Zenbusiness (2021) showed how a business used empathy in its application of pathos which resulted to a huge success. It was Nike during the Covid-19 lockdown; the company came up with inspirational video advertisement with a slogan: "There is no stopping us" This advertisement focused on athletes' continuing their training at home despite the pandemic. This advertisement endeared Nike to athletes everywhere in the world and gradually led to part of the decision that enabled the commencement of Championship matches without spectators. It is the view of Decision Analyst's research (2023) therefore, that rhetorical triangle in advertising aid the power of brand reinforcement for businesses and failure to capitalize on this advantage is a common marketing mistake. This paper aligned with this position.

### Discussion and Analysis

The study suggests that the rhetorical triangle is an effective communication model that can positively influence brand reputation in businesses. The study highlights the significance of persuasive communication in advertising to build and reinforce brand reputation. Several key points emerged from the literature review such as:

- i. Rhetorical triangle and brand reputation: The study emphasizes the importance of the rhetorical triangle, which includes logos (logical appeal), ethos (credibility and

trustworthiness), and pathos (emotional appeal), in shaping brand reinforcement. By employing these three communication appeals effectively, businesses can create a positive perception of their brands, thereby reinforcing brand reputation.

- ii. **Role of persuasion:** Persuasion is a crucial aspect of advertising and communication. By using rhetorical techniques, such as vivid examples, emotional appeal, and logical reasoning, marketers can influence the perceptions and attitudes of their target audiences, leading to strengthened brand reputation.
- iii. **Emotional appeal and brand recall:** The study highlights the role of emotional appeal (pathos) in reinforcing brand reputation. Emotional advertising can create a strong connection with the audience, leading to higher brand recall and loyalty. Emotional appeals tap into the beliefs and values of consumers, making the brand more relatable and memorable. Nike indeed created strong emotional connectedness with athletes in her campaign during corona virus by showing empathy with athletes during the lockdown. The video campaign "there is no stopping us" even as the situation looked so bleak with thousands of deaths on the streets and the hospitals was a master stroke to hold audience loyalty.
- iv. **Frequency and Consistency:** The study acknowledges the importance of frequency in advertising to reinforce brand reputation. Regularly showing advertisements across various media channels helps to keep the brand rooted in consumers' minds. Consistency in messaging and branding also contributes to building a strong brand identity and reputation.

Overall, the findings suggest that businesses can benefit significantly from incorporating the rhetorical triangle into their communication strategies. By using a

combination of logos, ethos, and pathos effectively, brands can persuade and influence their target audience, leading to a reinforced positive reputation. Additionally, employing other brand reinforcement strategies in conjunction with the rhetorical triangle can further enhance the overall brand perception and reputation in the competitive market.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored the influence of the rhetorical triangle in reinforcing brand reputation in businesses. The rhetorical triangle, consisting of logos, ethos, and pathos, has been a powerful communication tool since the time of Aristotle. It allows businesses to appeal to the rationality, credibility, and emotions of their audiences, thereby persuading and influencing them positively.

Brand reputation is crucial in modern markets, where competition is intense, and customers' demand transparency and authenticity. By understanding and applying the rhetorical triangle, businesses can effectively communicate their brand messages, build trust, and establish a positive perception among their target audiences. This positive reputation, in turn, leads to increased customer confidence, loyalty, and repeat purchases.

The study highlights that rhetorical techniques, such as vivid imagery, emotional appeals, and logical arguments, are commonly employed in advertising and other forms of communication to reinforce brand reputation. By using pathos to engage emotions, logos to provide logical arguments, and ethos to establish credibility, businesses can create a lasting impact on their audiences.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings in the research on evaluating the influence of the rhetorical triangle in reinforcing brand reputation, the following recommendations are made:

- i. **Utilize the Rhetorical Triangle in brand Communication:** Businesses should incorporate the three elements of the rhetorical triangle; logos, ethos, and pathos, in their

brand communication strategies. By appealing to rational reasoning, building credibility, and engaging emotions, brands can create persuasive messages that resonate with their target audience and reinforce their reputation.

- ii. Collaboration with Influencers and Advocates: Brands can collaborate with influencers and brand advocates who align with their values. Influencers can help spread positive brand messages to a broader audience, while brand advocates can create word-of-mouth marketing.

By implementing these recommendations, businesses can leverage the power of the rhetorical triangle to effectively communicate their brand messages, influence customer perceptions positively, and reinforce their brand reputation in the competitive market landscape.

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trustworthiness), and pathos (emotional appeal), in shaping brand reinforcement. By employing these three communication appeals effectively, businesses can create a positive perception of their brands, thereby reinforcing brand reputation.

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