

Aristotelian Fallacies and Strategies in Advertisement: A Media Discourse Analytical Study

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the power embedded in the use of language in print media which, though without logic, is still powerful. For this purpose, some advertisements from the print media are selected and analysed through three Aristotelian fallacies namely fallacy of authority, the fallacy of majority and appeal to authority along with three strategies of logos, pathos, and ethos as given by Aristotle. The analysis of data shows that language has a power of its own which is not always logical but people make use of such power to become influential. Fallacies and the strategies behind the use of language act as tools to practice this kind of power. In the selected advertisement discourse, these fallacies and strategies are used to convince people and market the products, often by erroneous arguments. Encouraging positive trends in the rate of literacy, prevailing scientific approach and introducing the subject of 'logic' right from the school can counter such fallacies in the language. The teaching of logic and rhetoric can encourage students to question and reason the arguments presented to them in everyday text and talk. The inclusion of such subjects can be empowering for the students to counter the illogicality and falsehood in the use of language so they cannot be subjugated by fallacies in the language.

Introduction

Advertisement has become an essential part of our day-to-day existence. Be it the print media or the electronic one, not a single day passes when we are not bombarded by advertisements of some kind. Whether we like it or not but it stays which shows that advertisements have some kind of attractive power to grab the attention of the consumers, in particular as well as the audience, in the general. This power lies in the different constituents of these ads, the language, colour schemes, themes, actors, music and the overall presentation. Among all these power-driving elements, language is the most vital one as it helps the advertisement to

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say it all in just a few seconds. The language of the advertisement is an invisible voice that influences people's minds. Advertisements are all around us on TV, in newspapers, on billboards, in magazines even on the walls of our streets. Media and advertisements are essential for the growth of each other. They are interdependent as media gets largely funded by the sale of advertisement while potential customers are reached by advertisers through media.¹

In today's world, the advertisement is just not an integral part of business and a strategic tool² but it has become a whole science as all parts of it can be analysed and evaluated by people of different fields like the linguist, psychologists, sociologist etc. Analysis of language of advertisements is a field of linguistics where the functioning of language is analysed in this particular discourse. Present study has focused advertisements appearing in the print media of Pakistan. The analysis has been conducted through an analytical and theoretical framework furnished by Aristotle.

Research question

The study is planned to answer the following research question:

How are argumentation and persuasion done through Aristotelian fallacies and strategies as reflected in the language of the advertisement?

Literature review

Language is just not a system of signs and symbols common to a community but it is a carrier of huge power within itself.³ Language performs various functions such as to order, request, apologize, argue, advise, persuade, explain, question, answer, and to clarify.⁴ This study tends to analyse the instances when the use of language is not logical but still holds the power of convincing people and getting the desired responses. Such use of language is seen more when the target audience is large and there is a need to convince them. Strategically manipulated language in such instances becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the

¹ P. De Pelsmacker, *The Use of English in Advertising on Television and in the Print Media across Flanders: A Comparison between Lowbrow and Highbrow Formats*, Faculteit Letteren & Wijsbegeerte, 2015.

² L. Percy & R. Rosenbaum-Elliott, *Strategic Advertising Management* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³ G. Monteiro, *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

⁴ I.M. Copi & C. Cohen, *Introduction to Logic*, 12th ed. (N.J.: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005).

user. Media discourses especially advertisements provide some of the best examples of such strategic function performed by the language. Ads and commercials as instances of media discourses ‘typically consists of the following elements, in different combinations as headlines, illustrations (picture and music), body copy, slogan, product name, and standing details’.⁵

The present study lies within the field of logic and rhetoric, which are sub-fields of linguistics. The focus of the analysis is the use of argumentation and persuasion in the language of the selected advertisements. It is important to mention here that in logic and rhetoric, argumentation does not imply a conflict of ideas, contradiction or a dispute within a conversation or a discourse in the form of discussion between two people or groups but it refers to reasoning that may help in problem solving. The argument is taken here as a way of convincing the listeners or the readers. Argumentation is an important element of logic and rhetoric. The premise of this paper is that reasoning and argumentation are not always and necessarily logical.⁶ According to Walton,⁷ argumentation has two parts, the premise and the conclusion. A proposition forms the premise, which makes the basis of an argument. This proposition can be in the form of simple statement indicating a request, suggestion or a complain. On the other hand a conclusion is the statement that justifies the premise. For a logical argument the premise should match the conclusion and those should follow each other. The argument can be factual or moral.⁸ In short, illogicality is the result of error in the reasoning.

A fallacy is an erroneous or an incorrect reasoning.⁹ It is also called as a defect in the argument defines. In brief, fallacy is an incorrect reasoning in an argumentation. Fallacious argument or fallacy is a phenomenon that we encounter everyday in text and talk. Sometimes the illogicality is superficial that can be easily detected, at other times it needs a logical analysis as to what is being said and what is being meant. An exhaustive study on fallacies in language was done by Aristotle and was presented in his *treatise on logic* with no addition in the stock of fallacies till now.

⁵ I. Piller, ‘Advertising as a site of language contact’, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 23, p.172. doi: [10.1017/s0267190503000254](https://doi.org/10.1017/s0267190503000254)

⁶ F.H.V. Eemsseren, *Crucial Concepts in Argumentation Theory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2001).

⁷ D.N. Walton, *Appeal to Popular Opinion* (Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).

⁸ D.N. Walton, *Ethical Argumentation* (Md.: Lexington Books, 2003).

⁹ I.M. Copi and C. Cohen, *op.cit.*

Theoretical and analytical framework

The theoretical and analytical framework consists of Aristotelian fallacies that Aristotle mentioned in his book *treatise on logic*. In accordance with the deliberations of Aristotle in the above-referred book every fallacy has three basic characteristics:

1. An erroneous argument lies at the base of a fallacy.
2. Fallacy has a persuasive and a convincing power.
3. Fallacy can be created intentionally or unintentionally.

The commonest fallacies out of 194 total fallacies that are often manipulated by people to exercise power are mentioned below and the data for the present study has been analysed with these fallacies only, along with the working strategies behind them.

The fallacy of authority: When the people believe an argument just because the person with a recognizable authority gives it, a fallacy is formed which is termed as fallacy of authority.

Appeal to authority: When the claim is tried to be validated by referring to an authority instead of one's own logical argument, the fallacy is referred to as an appeal to authority also called as voice merging.

The fallacy of majority (appeal to popularity): When an argument or a claim is accepted for the mere reason of its popularity among the majority. The fallacy thus formed is called as the fallacy of majority or appeal to popularity. Such reasoning acts as an effective persuasive device.

The strategies behind the working of fallacies

Aristotle has referred to three common strategies that are used by people, organisations, and agencies to create fallacies and deceive others.

Logos: Humans have a capability of justifying their actions, no matter with rational or irrational human reasoning. People in order to justify their actions use logic and reason.¹⁰ Logos expresses reasoning or thought in language. It is the predominant persuasive and convincing appeal in argumentation. Through logos, we try to form an appeal to reason and intellect.

¹⁰ F.H.V. Eemeren, *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory: A Handbook of Historical Backgrounds and Contemporary Developments* Mahwah (N.J.: L. Erlbaum, 1996).

Ethos: Ethos is the trustworthiness or credibility of a speaker. This credibility depends on the perception of people about his character¹¹ because we believe in people who are known to be trustworthy. This trustworthiness and credibility either comes from our knowledge about the background, role, position and expertise of the speaker or by the exhibition of knowledge and skills in a field by the speaker himself.

Pathos: Pathos is the capacity of the language to evoke feelings in people. Pathos does not only refer to the feeling of pity but other kinds of feelings such as love, fear, joy, and guilt, too.

The language of advertisements

In the present capitalist society that we live in, advertising has become an unavoidable part of business. The ads are designed to catch the minds of the consumers and, therefore, the market. The target group is an important factor in the success of the advertisement so due attention is paid to their needs and inspiration along with their socio-economic, cultural and psychosocial set up. All ads have a proportion of information that carries argumentation and persuasion, which is found in the form of logos, ethos, and pathos. Advertisements give one of the best examples of strategic use of language for successful selling of the product. Different advertisements will be analyzed to show where and how such strategies work in this particular domain of business.

Analysis of advertisements

Five advertisements which off and on appear in the Pakistani print media have been selected through convenient random sampling for the present study. These are analyzed in the following in accordance with the theoretical and analytical framework deemed suitable for the study as mentioned earlier:

¹¹ S. Diestler, *Becoming a Critical Thinker: A User Friendly Manual*, 3rd ed. (N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2001).

Advertisement No1

نوری، ناری، آبی، خاکی، کالے، سفلی، علم رمل، علم العداد، علم جفر اور روحانیت کے علمبردار

المعروف
چنناوالی سرکار

روحانی عامل صوفی پیر زادہ کمال

برکام بذریعہ عملیات و تعویذات | روحانی و جسمانی علاج گاہ | وہ تمنا ہی کیا جو پوری نہ ہو

0305-5584979 | مشورہ مفت 24 گھنٹے

علم چلتا ہے اگر کوئی چلانے والا ہو

میرے علم کے علم پر علم یا اسکی کاٹ کرنے والے کو دس لاکھ نقد انعام دوںگا، کانہ ہونے کی صورت میں
دو لاکھ جرمانہ ادا کروںگا۔ میرا کیا عمل سات سمندر پار اثر رکھتا ہے جیسا چاہتے ہیں عمل کروائیں ہر
کام پڑھائی اور موکلات کے ذریعے کیا جاتا ہے ایک رات کے عمل سے فوری حل حاصل کریں ہر کام
ایک فون کال پر کیا جاتا ہے ایک فون کال آپ کی قسمت بدل سکتی ہے اپنے مسئلے کا حل معلوم کریں

0323-5348945 | راولپنڈی شہر

Analysis of the dvertisement

In this flyer come advertisement, the claimer is introduced by himself as a *rohane amil* (spiritual scholar) and tries to establish ethos by informing about his knowledge and expertise in the different supernatural domains of *nooree, naree, aabee, khakee, saflee, ilmuladad, ilm e roohaniyat*. Then further he challenges that he is ready to pay a compensation of Rs 2 lacs if he fails in his claims. He also asserts that his magical skills work at a wide range and are effective even across seven seas and that he is capable of solving all problems overnight. He claims that the solution of all problems lay just a phone call away, and that he has the power to change peoples' fate. He is trying to bring credibility and trustworthiness to his claims to trap the poor and the ignorant people of the society.

The advertiser makes use of fallacy of authority as he tries to bring authenticity and credibility by his claims of having a long experience in the field. He uses the strategy of ethos to authenticate his claims by providing information about his background, position, role and

expertise in the field. He is even ready to pay a fine if the magic does not work. He claims to have the power to change people's fate. He also challenges that no one can counter his magic and if someone does, he would give him some monetary reward of up to ten lacs. The advertiser also uses the strategy of pathos and emotionally plays upon the desires of the people while he mentions that a wish stays only a wish until it is granted and he is the person who can grant all kinds of wishes and fulfil their desires.

Advertisement No 2

عرصہ 70 سال سے عوام کی خدمت میں مصروف

شادی میں رکاوٹ ہو	محبت میں ناکامی ہو	سال بھوکا جھگڑا ہو	میاں بیوی کا	بچوں کے شتوں کی	کاروباری بندش ہو
اولاد کا نہ ہونا یا	پرانی سے پرانی بیماری ہو	انسانی چانس یا	دشمن سے چھٹکارہ	بیرون ملک سفر کی	بندش ہو

نوٹ ▶ استخارہ اور حساب مفت کیا جاتا ہے صرف ایک تو پڑھو ہر اور بیوی کوراہ راست پر لاسکتا ہے

ہر کام گارنٹی سے عوام کی خدمت میں مصروف	رازداری شرط ہے	بین القوامی شہرت یافتہ
ہر کام گارنٹی سے سوچے مت ابھی فون کیجئے اور کامیابی لیجئے	ہر ناممکن کو ممکن کرنا	

ہر کام مکمل گارنٹی اور رازداری کی مکمل گارنٹی حصول لوح سونا چاندی کی لوح تیار کی جاتی ہے کالے و سفلی ہری آبی خاکی علم کی کاٹ کے ماہر اور پلٹ کے ماہر عظیم فوری حل کے لئے ابھی رابطہ کریں اور خوشحال زندگی گزاریں اور اپنی دعاؤں میں یاد رکھیں استخارہ اور حساب مفت کیا جاتا ہے

صوفی پیرزادہ کمال راولپنڈی شہر
0323-5348945
0305-5584979

Analysis of the advertisement

The second flyer is an advertisement of a similar kind where the claimer uses the fallacy of authority and tries to make himself credible by referring to his 70 years of long experience in the field. He uses pathos by playing upon the needs of the masses and worries faced by the people that are so common in our society. He indicates thirteen commonest worries that people usually have specially in Pakistani context, like *shadee mein rukawat* (hurdles in marriage), *mohabat mein nakamee* (failure in love), *saas bahu ka jhagra* (problems with the mother in-law), *oulad ka na hona* (being issueless), *beronay mulk safar mein rokawat* (barriers in going abroad), (lottery), *poranee say poranee bemaree ka ilaj* (cure for chronic illnesses and diseases). It can be easily

observed that this man claims to have a magical solution for every and any problem, for all human ailments and predicaments. He also claims to have the power of inverting the magic done by some other person in a similar profession. He guarantees that with only a single visit the client would be free from all the worries. He assures the people a prosperous life. In this way, he makes himself credible and trustworthy to the common and ignorant people and makes use of ethos.

The advertiser offers free magical calculations before prescribing the actual solution. According to him just visiting him once can ensure happy relations in the family. Using fallacy of majority, he further informs that he is a man of international fame and has popularity in several countries.

The text of the flyer is full of pathos where the advertiser emotionally manipulates the needs and desires of the poor people. There are many people who fall pray to these spiritual healers. Unfortunately these ignorant people, due to lack of logical reasoning capabilities, end up paying a good sum from their meager savings to these business men in the form of false *peers*. Such places are seen to be overcrowded by the illiterates, poor and the downtrodden of the society who desperately try to find the solution of their problems in these bogus healers. These people work with their logos to justify their actions of having faith on these *amilbabas*.

Advertisement No 3

Natural Research Laboratories USA

innoveda

نچرل ریسرچ لیبارٹری USA لایا

چھوٹے قد والوں کیلئے بڑی خوشخبری

قیمت 15 دن Rs. 799/-

ایہ پیلس کی اصل تمہاری ہیڈنگ میں دستیاب

30 سال تک کے تمام خواتین و حضرات 30 دن کے استعمال سے قد میں 6 سے 8 انچ تک اضافہ کریں

0322-5011152 0344-5211143 0315-5008100

Analysis of the advertisement

This ad is taken from the *Jang*, Sunday magazine, a local newspaper. It claims to have brought good news. It announces that the product 'Pine height' has the miraculous characteristics of increasing the height of even a 30 years old adult by 6 to 8' inches in just 30 days. The product utilizes the strategy of pathos by arousing the fear of rejection by the society because of short height, which implicitly convey the message that short height is not admirable and acceptable in the society we live in. Two men can be seen in the picture, one tall and the other short. The short one does not only look impressed with the height of the other fellow but he is shown to be full of hopes to increase his height by using the advertised product. For authentication of the claims that are made in the ad, the seller uses the fallacy of 'appeal to authority' by informing the consumers that the product is manufactured in Innoveda, a natural research lab of the USA. Since the people of the third world country trust America for the quality products, therefore, the use of appeal to authority seems a good marketing strategy here. The strategy of ethos is also used because the name of the USA is enough to make people believe in the effectiveness of the product. This credibility comes from the common knowledge about the USA as a scientifically advanced country.

Advertisement No 4



Analysis of the advertisement

The advertisement is taken from *Jang* sunday magazine and the caption reads ‘medicam group ka aik or ezaz’ (another honour for medicam group), informing thereby that the group has won the award several times and they have won it yet again. This is not the first time they are wining an award. The picture shows a former Pakistan prime minister presenting an export trophy 2008 to the chairman of a commercial group. The prime minister is shown as endorsing the brand. His picture serves the purpose of brining in trustworthiness and in terms of the theoretical framework of this study, this part of the ad is an ‘appeal to authority’, that implies that the brand is being endorsed by a trustworthy man like the head of the country. The text in the ad shows that the product is of export quality and it is the first toothpaste of Pakistan, which is exported to two third part of the world. The statement provides the reasoning (logo) and, At the same time, the statistics of 2/3 is an ‘appeal to popularity’ or ‘fallacy of majority’ which implies that one should use the product being advertised for the reason that it is used by most of the people in the world.

Advertisement No 5

The advertisement collage includes the following text and graphics:

- Top Left:** Two men standing side-by-side. Text: "سینے! اس موٹاپے کو ابھی کنٹرول کریں" (Control this obesity now!).
- Top Right:** "Helle's VIP PACK FIVE STAR NUTRITION". Text: "صرف 120 روپوں میں 80 باؤڈر ڈن اور 110 گم ٹک کر کے۔" (Only 120 rupees for 80 powder dent and 110 gum sticks).
- Middle Left:** A woman in a purple dress. Text: "زیکوئی دوہلی، زیکوئی ورزش، زیکوئی سائیز انجینئرس" (Zicooi double, Zicooi sports, Zicooi sizes engineers).
- Middle Right:** A woman in a white dress. Text: "جی ہاں سبھی تو کمال ہے، برطانیہ کی جدید ترین انگریجیپ ٹیکنالوجی ان نوڈز کا جو آپ کو سے" (Yes, everyone is brilliant, the latest British technology in nodes that you).
- Bottom Left:** "www.bsc.com.pk" and "حسنت 23 سالہ سائنس ایجوکیشن" (Husnet 23 years of science education).
- Bottom Right:** A list of phone numbers: "5558014, 5581358, 5584035, 5514617, 55558".
- Bottom Center:** "2701756-0572900859-0322-5714928" and other numbers.
- Bottom Far Right:** "2113230-31, 0323-5227570" and other numbers.

Analysis of the advertisement

The ad provides a rich fallacious and strategic discourse. The selected advertisement is about a weight-reducing product. It starts with pathos by arousing the fear of rejection by the society on account of obesity that makes one unattractive. It starts with a direct address to the reader and says '*sunyee! Is motapay ko abhee control karein, esa na ho kay waqt aur khoobsurtee dono hath say nikal jaein* (listen! Control the obesity now. Do not let time and beauty slip off your hands). The ad makes certain claims about losing weight upto 80 pounds without causing any harm to the body without any side effects. The name of the product is 'Helles's VIP five star nutritional pack' and claims that the product is for 5-star people, with 5-star results. The term 5 star is repeatedly used which in terms of the framework is ethos, which is used to bring trustworthiness and credibility to the advertiser. The product tries to win its claims by using fallacy of appeal to popularity by showing computer-managed pictures of a number of people who have used this product and lost kgs of weight in days. Their pictures of before and after the use of the product are also given to win its claims. The 'before using' picture shows the man as obese and gloomy. The same man as shown in the next picture depicts happy faces on losing weight, becoming smarter, gaining confidence and, therefore, becoming more acceptable to the society. This is how through computer assisted photography pathos is used in the ad. It manipulates people's desire to look good, evokes the fear of appearing fat and ugly. The ad aims at convincing the people that they need to do something about the problem and then offering them a solution with the claim that their product has no side effects. The ad, making use of the strategy of logos, further informs and reasons that the product is not a medicine, but a nutrient, therefore, will not have any side effects and no exercise is needed. The nutritional supplement covers the whole diet with least calories and it is energizing for the whole day. The fallacy of authority is then applied by giving exact mathematical calculations that the product has the power to provide energy in 110 calories instead of 2500 calories.

To bring in authenticity to the claims some real names are mentioned below each picture who seem to share their experience who reduced kgs of weight with the help of this product. Giving names and showing people from the same society reflects the use of fallacy of popularity asserting that many people have already benefited from the product.

A logo on the left side shows the flag of Britain and its written 'British Slimming Centre' as if the real manufacturer is the slimming center that is located in Britain. The flag of the United Kingdom aids in

the claim that the product is a miraculous invention of Britain's latest microchip technology in food. Referring to Britain is appeal to authority as people who would not have the vaguest idea of what microchip technology is all about but would get influenced with the name of Britain and for those who cannot read properly, the flag of United Kingdom is also drawn. The flag logo is followed by a website address to bring in more authentication, but anyone who is a bit familiar with the internet can easily make out that the website address is of a Pakistani site that ends in .pk. The advertiser again uses ethos to increase the trustworthiness by informing that the British slimming center has an experience of 23 years of service.

Conclusion

Language carries an immense power in itself that is used by the people to become powerful and influence others. The language of advertisements that have been analysed in this work manifests the same. The use of language is replete with fallacies and strategies that are used as tools to practice power over people by controlling their minds and convincing them often with illogicality in the language. Thus commonly used strategies for this purpose are the fallacy of authority, majority, and appeal to authority, which are operationalised and reinforced by the use of strategies of logos, ethos and pathos. These fallacies and strategies are embedded in the text as well as in the images of advertisements, in this way people are often compelled to buy products that might not come up to their claims. People fall into the trap of fallacious persuasion of these advertisements because they fail to capture the erroneous arguments that are being forwarded through these ads. These fallacies and strategies can be countered by not only increasing the literacy in the country but also by introducing the subject of 'logic' right from the school. Students should be encouraged to question and reasons about the regular everyday text and talk. They ought to be engaged with the aptitude to discover the truth behind what is being told and taught to them. The critical reasoning skill empowers and enables them to counter the fallacies that are strategically created with the use of the language.