

A JOURNEY FROM PERSUASION TO DECISION OF GENERATION Z: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF RHETORIC EFFECT STRATEGIES IN ADVERTISEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the GenZ consumer behavior is necessary and challenging as a quarter of the Indian population is in this cohort of generation. On the other side, the rhetoric persuasion strategies are widely used, time-tested and utilized in communication-mix. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the influence of rhetoric persuasion strategies applied in advertisements on the purchase decision of GenZ consumers. To achieve its research objective, the multivariate statistical techniques have been used where the threshold model for consumers' purchase decision process in form of logistic regression has been applied to examine the influence of ethos, pathos and logos on the purchase decision of GenZ consumers in India. Results reveal that the application of ethos, pathos and logos strategies in advertisement positively influences the purchase decision of GenZ. This study also observed that the direction of impact remains same for both the genders of GenZ consumers. This study is first of its kind to examine the influence of rhetoric strategy in advertisement on GenZ consumers' purchase behavior especially in India. This study also argues the importance of persuasion techniques in the advertisement and opens a new horizon to explore more about rhetoric techniques application in advertisement to impress the consumers brand preference.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Generation Z, India, logistic Regression, Purchase Decision, Rhetoric Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

As one of the basic assignments of marketers is to explore and predict the consumers' purchase decision behavior based on parameters that can influence the purchasing decision. The decision-making style is referring to a mental course that describes how a consumer makes choices (Klein & Crandall, 2018). The majority of purchase decisions can be made beyond a threshold of stimulus elicits, below which no response has been observed from customers (Kau & Hill, 1972). In today's dynamic business environment, the influencers for the purchase decision are also changing continuously and for establishing a competitive advantage over competitors, every organization are looking forward to create a favorable brand image about their products or services in consumers' mind to influence their behavior (Hanaysha, 2018). Generally, the consumer purchase decision-making process consists of several stages that

consumers go through during the final purchase decision and understanding this whole process is not so easy because several tangible and intangible factors influence the consumer buying process. At the same time, consumers' utilization of resources like money, time and effort also differs from individual consumer to consumer (Prasad et al., 2019). Many studies reported various factors such as social media marketing, Corporate social responsibility, sales promotion, atmosphere, market place and perceived value of the product or services as major influencers of consumer purchase behavior (Duffett, 2015; Hosseini et al., 2014; Yunita & Ali, 2017). However, advertisement and persuasion strategies for media communication are the most important influencers for influencing consumer behavior and brand choice (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019).

The advertisement has distinctive features than other contemporary ways of human communication, as in advertisement viewers have to persuade pictures or video. The advertisement is considered as one of the most important methods of spreading information and creating preference of specific suppliers to the potential customers (Mondada, 2019). Moreover, it is a leading influencing act with different purposes such as social, psychological, cultural, political and commercial goals (Jalali Naini et al., 2012). According to hierarchy-of-effects model, advertising affect viewers leads to brand cognition, which then leads to influence their purchase intention (Niazi et al., 2012). Marketers utilized many theories and techniques to make their advertisement more effective to influence the consumer purchase decision in which one of the most effective techniques is the persuasive theory based on rhetoric principles (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019). Persuasion is a technique of social interaction to influence the attitudes of someone to do something in a free choice atmosphere (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019). Harrison, (2013) explained the four necessary stages of persuasive communication as '*establishing your credibility*', '*frame your goal in common ground with persuade*', '*reinforce your position*' and '*connect emotionally*' to design effective and integrated communication in business. Moreover, rhetoric is considered as persuasive communication and is seemed to convince using argument or reasoning. It deals with persuading and motivating an audience through conversation by oral or written (Mehawesh, 2013). Whereas appeals are symbolic and aim to emotion or audience's loyalties. The aesthetics are related to beauty and compelled to symbolic expression (Herrick, 2020). As researchers explained an impulse buying takes place when a powerful and persistent often sudden urge to buy a particular subject occurs and emotion plays a very important role to influence the impulse buying behavior of consumers which is generally defined as unintended and immediate purchase (Thürmer et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is evidenced a prevention-focused individual relies more on rational and logical arguments, whereas a promotion-focused individual relies more on emotion and intuitions (Das, 2015).

The literature has strong evidence to support the application of rhetoric strategy in advertisement to influence the consumer purchase decision. Moreover, advertising is considered as the largest, pervasive and successful rhetorical enterprise and the rhetoric strategies like *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* are very commonly utilized by marketers to influence adolescent consumers (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2004). Except these three, narration, description, analysis and comparison are a few more common rhetorical strategies applied by marketers to communicate with their consumers depending on promotion strategies (Anderson, 2016). According to Simon (2020) the rhetoric strategies are based on three main principles: '*ethos*' aimed to the moral ethics and appeal to authority; '*pathos*' relates to emotional appeals and '*logos*' pertaining to logical appeal. Many times, it might be difficult to clearly draw a boundary between these *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* as in the process of persuasive interaction these overlap each other. It means

the advertisement could share information with support from authority and build a rational argument at the same time (Romanova & Smirnova, 2019). Although the advertising literacy in Generation Z (GenZ) is at a very low level, the role of advertising should not be underestimated in the age of consumerism (Middleton & Turnbull, 2021). Especially for GenZ of society who are growingly confronted with advertisements on different media such as television, mobile internet, social media, print media etc. (Hajduova, 2021). Here, advertising literacy means the attitudinal and knowledge dimension to understand the advertising message (Beuckels et al., 2017). The GenZ cohort is the born between 1997 and 2012, have been used internet all their life and they are very much comfortable with Information and communication technology (ICT) and social media. According to the generational cohort theory, each generation cohort shares homogeneous attitudes, values, and beliefs because of encountering common major events during their growth (White, 2017). The marketers are relying on this theory to clearly delineate the homogeneous subsets of the consumers (Dharmesti et al., 2019). What makes this GenZ different from their formers is higher literacy, highly emotional and more adoptable towards changes happening around them (Chaturvedi et al., 2020). The GenZ people are emotionally driven and use rhetorical for making decisions. This generation is more tech-savvy and ambitious than others. Moreover, they also have the power of digital technologies and social media. As well their patterns of purchase and decision-making are somehow different from their former generation (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). Therefore, it is important to examine or study their behavior towards the communication mix (Shin & Lee, 2021).

In this modern era, many researchers are criticizing the importance of advertisement in consumer behavior as they realize the adolescents are not much impacted by messages conveyed by the promotional technique of advertisement because this generation is born in the era of remote television, internet, smartphones and digital media (Singh & Dangmei, 2016) where viewers have options to switch the channel or skip the advertisement. Generally, these rhetoric strategies are applied in advertisements to build good rapport of the company and to increase brand awareness rather than to increase sales or uses of respective products and services. consequently, the impact of rhetoric strategies on the behavior of GenZ consumers has to be examined to understand the purchase decision process of this adolescent generation (Junaid & Neethulal, 2019). The credibility of a text as rhetorical can be leveraged when a reference to a person of authority like a celebrity or a well-known figure because of the art of rhetoric may be just as relevant and influential (Burke, 2008).

In India, almost a quarter of global population are residing, of which 30 percent belong to the GenZ cohort (almost 25 percent stand for millennials). It is the largest generation segment in the history of India and their 'Do-it yourself' attitude shapes them more vibrate from their previous generation cohort (Hameed & Mathur, 2020). Moreover, they have experienced a lot of political, technological, social and economic changes in their brief lifetime in India. Therefore, the consumption pattern, as well as consumer loyalty towards any brand, have to examine (Singh & Dangmei, 2016). In this study, the authors try to understand the impact of rhetoric strategies such as '*ethos, pathos and logos*' of persuasive theory on the purchase decision process of GenZ of India as well as the rhetorical support decisions to act and shape consumers' (actors') reasoning and judgment.

Research Methodology

In order to achieve the research objective that is to understand the influence of rhetoric strategies on the purchase decision-making process of GenZ in India, it is necessary to examine

the influence of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* applied advertisement on the purchase decision process of GenZ consumers. The authors expect a positive and significant impact of ethos, pathos and logos variables (Independent variables) on the purchase decision of GenZ consumers (Dependent variables) in India. This leads the authors to propose the following hypotheses.

H₁: The application of *Ethos* strategy in advertisements has a significant impact on the purchase decision-making process of Indian GenZ consumers.

H₂: The application of *Pathos* strategy in advertisements has a significant impact on the purchase decision-making process of Indian GenZ consumers.

H₃: The application of *Logos* strategy in advertisements has a significant impact on the purchase decision-making process of Indian GenZ consumers.

To evaluate the proposed hypotheses, authors must conceptualize the whole research process. The conceptual framework for the present study is designed based on the above mentioned three hypotheses, that is shown in figure 1.

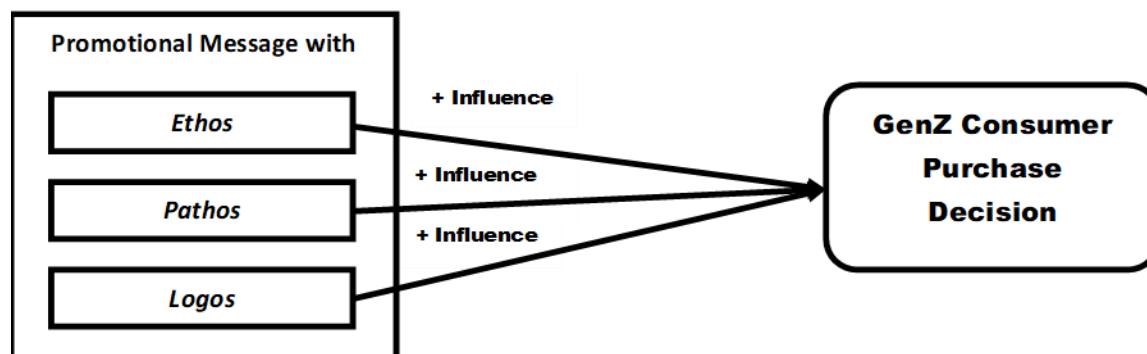


FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE INFLUENCE OF RHETORIC STRATEGIES ON YOUNG CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISION

In the present study, the threshold theory of the purchase decision-making process proposed by Kau & Hill, (1972) in consumer behavior science is applied in form of logistic regression (LR). According to this theory, a consumer must reach a certain reaction threshold before deciding to avail a product or service and the impact of independent variables in deciding to purchase or not have to be identified by applying logistic regression (Guerini et al., 2020). The logistic regression (LR) statistic is widely used in consumer behavior science research to estimate the relationship between independent and dependent variables where the former is nonmetric in nature (measured in nominal and ordinal scales). The nonmetric dependent variables are ubiquitous in marketing literature because it is observed that consumers cannot represent their responses on a continuous scale accurately. Whereas, categorical scales elicit a binary response of consumer decisions in a better way (Doyle, 1977).

In the present study, the decision of purchase is considered as a function of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* and it is captured mathematically as follow:

$$\text{The decision of purchase } (D_p) = f(\text{Rhetoric Strategy}) \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Or, } D_p = f(\text{ethos, pathos and logos}) \quad (2)$$

As per the literature, the logistic estimator takes the logistic cumulative distribution function to calculate the probability of something happening or not (Greene, 2008). Therefore, the logistic purchase decision model for this study is captured as

$$\text{Log} \frac{p_D}{1-p_D} = \alpha + \beta_i X_i + \infty_i Y_i + \delta_i Z_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (3)$$

Where, $\log \frac{p_D}{1-p_D}$ is the log-odds in favor to purchase decision and X_i is the combined effects of all *ethos* variables, Y_i is the combined effects of all *pathos* variables and so on, that influence GenZ consumers' decision to purchase and ranges from $X_1 \dots X_5$; $Y_1 \dots Y_5$ and so on as defined in table-1.

Variable range	Name of variables	Description of the variables	Source of Items
X_1	<i>Ethos</i>	The information given in the advertisement are trustworthy for me	(Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019; Jin & Ryu, 2018; Wells, 1964)
X_2		There is something special about product that makes it different from the others	
X_3		This ad information is credible for me, as the doctor recommends it.	
X_4		I can believe the information given in this advertisement.	
X_5		I would like to recommend this product to my friends also.	
Y_1	<i>Pathos</i>	I felt as though I was right there in the situation and experiencing the same thing	Dwivedi et al., 2018; Edell & Burke, 1987; Martins et al., 2019
Y_2		This ad has great interest for me	
Y_3		This ad affects my feelings	
Y_4		This ad touches me emotionally	
Y_5		This ad is very appealing to me	
Z_1	<i>Logos</i>	This advertisement is very informative for me.	Dwivedi et al., 2021; Meire et al., 2019; Puto & Wells, 1984
Z_2		This advertisement represents features of the product that is very meaningful to me	
Z_3		I can now accurately compare this product with other brands based on the quality of the feature.	
Z_4		There is something special about this product that makes it different from the other brands.	
Z_5		I could really relate to this commercial ad.	
Source: Authors' creation			

Questionnaire Development

Due to the lack of pre-existing literature on GenZ consumers' purchasing behavior and persuasion factors impacting it in India, a quantitative research approach is designed because this study is providing an exploratory viewpoints of GenZ and identifies the influence of rhetoric strategies applied in advertisements by different companies (Priporas et al., 2017). A structured questionnaire is instrumented to collect the responses of adolescent respondents, which consist of twenty-seven close-ended questions and three different video advertisements related to the three different rhetoric methods of persuasion (*ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*). For each rhetoric technique (*ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*), the authors have chosen five items (Independent variables) from the pieces of literature (Bruner et al., 2005). The content validity and construct reliability of the questionnaire is already tested in the literature (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2018;

Dwivedi et al., 2021; Edell & Burke, 1987; Puto & Wells, 1984). Before attaching these video advertisements with main questionnaires, the content relevancy and validity of applications of rhetoric techniques in these advertisements are judged by five marketing experts who have more than ten years of experience in the media and advertisement industry. For this process, two for each kind of rhetoric techniques video advertisements were sent to five marketing experts and authors asked them to explore the rhetoric technique applied in that advertisement. The whole process was a blind one. Once after getting the expert's confirmation, the authors have used three video advertisements out of six for the final survey process. The main questionnaire has been divided into four major subsections; the first one aims to collect the demographic information of respondents. From the second subsection of the questionnaire, the respondents have to watch an advertisement and then can mark their response based on that in Likert scale questions. Subsequently, the same kind of design is considered in the next two subsections.

Data Collection Process

Since the respondents are selected based on their age (belongs to GenZ), a non-probability purposive sampling method is utilized in the present study (Priporas et al., 2017). Initially, more than 750 responses have been collected during the tenure of 3 months but finally, only 695 responses have been considered for data analysis and further study because of incomplete response submission by 55 adolescent respondents. The size of the sample is considered sufficient for the purpose of the present quantitative research study as it is larger than recommended sample size to draw meaningful evidence regarding any underlying consumer behavioral patterns when the population size is more than millions (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The data has been collected in online mode with the help of online forms. The respondents are majorly studying in two different Universities in India; one of these universities is located in Karnataka state and the other in the state of Gujarat of India. These two states are considered the most developed states of India as they contribute more than 10 percent (5 percent each) of the entire national GDP of the country (Parida et al., 2021). Moreover, Karnataka is known as the most technologically advanced state whereas Gujarat is known as a manufacturing and business hub of India. These two reasons influence the researchers to focus on these two states for their survey process. In addition, Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka state is also a very well-known city for higher education in India, therefore, many higher education aspirants from other regions of the country migrant here for quality higher education.

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive statistics of respondents reveal that in India, the majority of GenZ population is still pursuing their education in different colleges/universities as 96 percent of respondents are pursuing their UG (undergraduate) and PG (postgraduate) degree level courses in universities. Moreover, only after crossing the age of 26, they start focusing on doing some kind of job or business. In addition, these kinds of patterns are same for both the genders as in the present sample both the genders are equally distributed.

Respondents	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	348	50

Female	344	49.6
Transgender	3	0.4
Age Group		
Below 18 years	148	21
Between 18 to 26 years	511	74
Between 26 to 30 years	36	5
Level of study		
UG level	577	83
PG level	88	13
Study Completed	30	4
Source: Authors' Calculation		

Methods of Analysis

To realize the research objective of the present study and to examine the formulated hypothesizes, the analysis of the present study is explained in three subsections.

- i. Examine the impact of *ethos* strategy in advertisements on the purchase decision-making process of GenZ consumers.
- ii. Examine the impact of *pathos* strategy in advertisements on the purchase decision-making process of GenZ consumers.
- iii. Examine the impact of *logos* strategy in advertisements on the purchase decision-making process of GenZ consumers.

Analysis to examine the impact of *ethos* strategies on purchase decision of GenZ consumers.

In the present study, to examine the impact of *ethos* strategies on the purchase decision of GenZ consumers, the logistic regression technique is applied because the dependent variable is binary in nature (I will purchase or not). The goodness of the fit index has been observed by consideration of the Nagelkerke R^2 and the Hosmer & Lemeshow test (Field, 2009). Both the statistics are found statistically satisfactory for an exploratory study, as the details are given in Table 3. The logistic regression model with selection by a forward stepwise method has identified four *ethos* variables' odds ratio out of five variables is greater than 1(one) which is considered as statistically significant to influence the purchase decision making process by GenZ consumers (Field, 2009).

	Nagelkerke R ²	Hosmer and Lemeshow Test	p-value
Value	0.331	580.328	0.000
Variables	Description of variables		Odds Ratio
X1	The information given in the advertisement are trustworthy for me		1.554
X2	There is something special about product that makes it different from the others		0.621
X3	This ad information is credible for me, as the doctor recommends it.		1.277
X4	I can believe the information given in this advertisement.		1.100
X5	I would like to recommend this product to my friends also.		1.049
Source: Authors' calculation			

Analysis to examine the impact of *pathos* strategies on purchase decision of GenZ consumers. Similarly, to examine the impact of *pathos* strategies on the purchase decision of GenZ consumers, the logistic regression technique is applied where again the goodness of the fit index has been observed by considering the Nagelkerke R² and the Hosmer & Lemeshow test (Field, 2009) and both the statistics are found statistically satisfactory of which the details are given in table 4. In this logistic regression model again four *pathos* variables' odds-ratios out of five variables are greater than 1(one) which is considered as statistically significant to influence the purchase decision-making process by GenZ consumers (Field, 2009).

	Nagelkerke R ²	Hosmer and Lemeshow Test	p-value
Value	0.456	532.66	0.000
Variables	Description of variables		Odds Ratio
Y1	I felt as though I was right there in the situation and experiencing the same thing		1.127
Y2	This ad has great interest for me		1.163
Y3	This ad affects my feelings		1.079
Y4	This ad touches me emotionally		0.948
Y5	This ad is very appealing to me		1.275
Source: Authors' calculation			

Analysis to examine the impact of *logos* strategies on purchase decision of GenZ consumers.

The logistic regression (LR) technique has been applied to examine the impact of *logos* strategies on GenZ consumers' decision-making process. Here also, the prerequisite goodness of fit indexes are statistically satisfactory according to literature and three out of five independent variables odds-ratio are greater than 1(one) which is considered statistically significant to influence Millenium consumers' purchase decision-making process (Field, 2009). The details of the results have been shown in the table 5.

	Nagelkerke R ²	Hosmer and Lemeshow Test	p-value
Value	0.111	651.439	0.000
Variables	Description of variables		Odds Ratio
Z ₁	This advertisement is very informative for me.		1.217
Z ₂	This advertisement represents features of the product that is very meaningful to me		1.677
Z ₃	I can now accurately compare this product with other brands based on the quality of the feature.		1.812
Z ₄	There is something special about this product that makes it different from the other brands.		0.579
Z ₅	I could really relate to this commercial ad.		0.503
Source: Authors' calculation			

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Many researchers (Arnould et al., 2019; Milchman et al., 2020; Soto Vega & Chávez, 2018) have been criticizing the use of rhetoric models in advertisements to influence the purchase decision process of consumers, these researchers also question the relevance of the rhetoric model on the consumers' decision process, but in the present study, it has been observed that the *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* have a great influence on the GenZ consumers purchase decision process. As the results presented in the methodology section indicate that the four out of five *ethos* variables have an odds ratio greater than 1(one), which can be considered as 80 percent variables are showing the significant statistical influence of *ethos* on GenZ consumers purchase decision process (Field, 2009). Based on the above analysis, the first hypothesis of the current study can be accepted. These results are on a similar path to the arguments of Priporas et al. (2017) and Chaturvedi et al. (2020), in which the authors have explored the influence of rhetoric techniques on adolescent consumers' behavior in other countries contexts (Green Jr, 2004).

Similarly, the statistical results indicate that more than 50 percent of independent variables of *pathos* and *logos* are also having an odds ratio greater than 1(one) which can be considered as an indicator of a significant influence of *pathos* and *logos* strategies is exist on GenZ consumer purchase decisions. Based on these results, the authors can accept the remaining two hypotheses as well. Therefore, in the present study, it has been observed that the *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* (rhetoric models) have a significant influence on the purchase decision making process by GenZ in India. It means if a company utilizing these rhetoric strategies in the advertisement for their brands can positively influence the purchase decision of adolescent consumers in India, the flow of communication process is shown in figure 2.

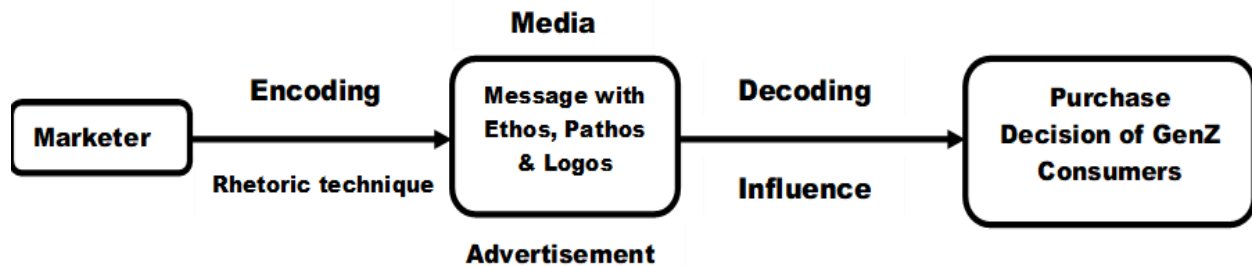


FIGURE 2
FLOW OF RHETORIC COMMUNICATION PROCESS

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Influencing the consumer behavior of GenZ is seems to be very challenging for marketers, as the behavior of this generation is different from their earlier generations. This cohort of generation is more knowledgeable as well as more sensitive towards society. However, they are strict about their personal opinion and less sincere towards saving money. The strategies adopted by marketers for selling a brand to generation X and Y might not be so effective for GenZ. Moreover, the GenZ as an audience of watching advertisements using rhetorical strategies, confer authority on a speaker and changes in justifications and diffusion for explaining institutionalization. Therefore, the area of consumer behavior of GenZ needs to be explored, the present study is a small contribution in the same direction as in this study authors attempt to understand the behavioral insights of adolescent consumers in India.

The present research has sought to provide a better understanding of GenZ purchase behavior that explores the new prospect of innovation in the promotion mix. The substantial evidences have been argued in this present study to confirm that the rhetoric strategies still have their own influence on consumer psychology and these strategies can influence or change the purchase decision of adolescent consumers as well. In conclusion, authors can add that though the marketing for GenZ is very challenging, but marketers are intentionally or unintentionally utilizing rhetoric techniques in promotional messages via different media to attract the consumers' choice towards their brand.

This area of the persuasive promotional plan has a further scope of research as the present study has certain limitations. Since this study has followed a non-probability purposive sampling method to collect the responses from GenZ consumers from two different universities in India. Hence, it has its limitations to make it generalized for the entire adolescent population. Further studies may include other states students also by increasing the sample size to evaluate better insights or to generalize the results. Moreover, it is evidenced in the literature that the *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos* co-exist and overlap in the course of persuasive communication; it is difficult to delineate the impact of a single one. In addition, future studies can explore the influences of social media and other components of communication mix on adolescent purchasing behavior.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest has been declared by the authors.

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