

# The Persuasive Pathos: Significance of Visual Rhetoric Design Approach in Consumers' Purchasing Decision

Safrina Muhammad Azmi<sup>1\*</sup>, Muhammad Fauzan Abu Bakar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Kampus Puncak Alam

<sup>2</sup>College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Sarawak

\*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9020075>

Received: 21 January 2025; Accepted: 29 January 2025; Published: 03 March 2025

## ABSTRACT

In today's fast-paced world of internet marketing, consumers have become more knowledgeable and skilled in comparing, searching, and evaluating information on websites and social media platforms. This has created a highly competitive environment for businesses to capture consumers' attention. As a result, marketers are challenged to develop creative and strategic approaches that convey impactful visual messages that influence customer purchasing decisions. The importance of visual rhetorical design in consumer purchasing decisions cannot be overlooked. This study aims to objectively evaluate the impact of visual rhetoric on consumer purchasing decisions. Using an analytic descriptive research method and surveying a convenience sample of 248 consumers, the data collected through face-to-face questionnaire-based surveys were statistically analysed. The study's results indicate that visual rhetoric is the most significant factor in consumer purchasing decisions. For any marketer, understanding the importance of visual design and its impact on consumer purchasing decisions can lead to a more effective and persuasive marketing strategy.

**Keywords:** Pathos; Visual rhetoric; Rhetoric design approach; Purchasing decision.

## INTRODUCTION

Whether it is a brand or a product, the goal of marketing communication is to stimulate consumers leading to influencing their purchasing decisions. Essentially, the objective of every marketing strategy is to meet and satisfy the needs and wants of their target consumers <sup>[1]</sup>. Therefore, knowing who the consumers are and understanding their behaviours are important because consumers respond to stimulations that influence their minds before making decisions. Many factors influence consumer buying behaviour as summarized, which are the cultural background of the consumer, the social background of the consumer, the personal or individual personality of the consumer, and the psychological aspect of the consumer <sup>[2,3]</sup>.

Visual rhetoric is a game-changer in marketing and advertising. By combining images, text, and design, visual rhetoric can be a powerful tool to convey meaning and influence behaviour across media platforms. By employing various persuasive techniques, visual rhetoric persuades the target audience to take action <sup>[4,5]</sup>. The impact is significant, shaping behaviours and influencing purchasing decisions. The secret to a successful marketing strategy is understanding the target audience's behaviours, which are influenced by various factors such as cultural and social backgrounds, personality, and psychological aspects <sup>[6,7]</sup>. The ability to use visual rhetoric effectively can be an essential tool for any brand looking to succeed in today's competitive market, allowing them to connect with their audience in a more meaningful and persuasive way, driving sales and building customer loyalty in the field of marketing and advertising <sup>[4,8]</sup>.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Consuming Purchasing Behaviour

Consumer purchasing behaviour can be classified into four distinct categories based on the type of products being considered. The first category, complex buying behaviour, arises when consumers need to acquire expensive or unique products <sup>[9]</sup>. These purchases involve a high level of financial or emotional investment, prompting consumers to conduct extensive research, compare alternatives, and deliberate thoroughly before making a decision <sup>[3,10]</sup>. The second category is dissonance-reducing buying behaviour, which occurs when consumers face limited choices due to product scarcity or minimal differences between alternatives <sup>[3]</sup>. Despite the high involvement, the focus shifts towards mitigating post-purchase regret by making the most satisfactory decision under the circumstances <sup>[11]</sup>.

The third category, habitual buying behaviour, relates to routine purchases of everyday items. For these low-value and low-risk products, consumers prioritize convenience and familiarity over extensive decision-making, often opting for the simplest or most readily available options <sup>[2,9]</sup>. For example, purchasing household staples typically involves minimal cognitive effort. Finally, variety-seeking behaviour is characterized by consumers who exhibit low involvement but frequently switch brands or products in pursuit of novelty or change <sup>[12]</sup>. This behaviour is common for low-cost items with numerous alternatives, where the associated risk is minimal, and brand loyalty plays a negligible role <sup>[13]</sup>.

Understanding these diverse purchasing behaviours is essential for marketers seeking to develop strategies that resonate with their target audiences. The consumer decision-making process typically begins with the recognition of a need or problem, which may not always be immediately apparent to the consumer <sup>[14]</sup>. This initial awareness often triggers a search for information, drawing from personal networks such as family, friends, and neighbours, as well as external sources like advertisements, social media, and product reviews. During the evaluation phase, consumers compare options based on various attributes before arriving at a final purchase decision. By aligning marketing strategies with the specific traits and motivations of different consumer segments, businesses can not only influence purchasing decisions but also enhance overall customer satisfaction and loyalty <sup>[15,16]</sup>.

### Pathos approach to visual rhetoric design

The Pathos approach to visual rhetoric design is rooted in the strategic use of emotional appeal to influence audience perception and behaviour. This approach leverages the intrinsic power of visuals to evoke feelings, memories, and associations that resonate with the audience on a personal level. By employing elements such as colour, imagery, typography, and composition, designers can craft messages that provoke emotional responses, fostering deeper connections between consumers and brands <sup>[5]</sup>.

The market is filled with various products, but what makes a product stand out? A product is anything that satisfies the consumer's wants and needs. It is a solution and a set of satisfactions. A product is not limited to a mere tangible good; it encompasses physical objects, services, places, and ideas <sup>[17]</sup>. The distinguishing features of a product are its brand name, physical features, styling, quality, and packaging. These features are carefully combined to indirectly stimulate the needs and wants of consumers. Therefore, this study is crucial in justifying the Pathos approach to visual rhetoric design as the most significant and effective method of persuading consumers to make purchasing decisions <sup>[18]</sup>.

In the context of marketing and advertising, Pathos plays a pivotal role in creating compelling narratives that influence purchasing decisions. For instance, warm colours such as red or yellow often evoke excitement or happiness, while cooler tones like blue may convey trust and stability. Imagery is equally significant; visuals depicting human emotions or relatable situations can elicit empathy, nostalgia, or aspiration. Typography, too, contributes to this emotional impact, with bold fonts evoking strength and authority, and softer, script-like fonts suggesting elegance or intimacy <sup>[19]</sup>.

The Mode of Persuasion, known as Logos, Pathos, and Ethos, was theorized by Aristotle to persuade consumers through various approaches. Logos utilizes facts, evidence, and rationale, Pathos evokes emotions, and Ethos convinces consumers through credibility and prominent characters. When designing a product's packaging, the mode of persuasion can be effectively implemented by understanding the product, the consumer's interests, and their influences on purchasing decisions. Packaging design is essential as it carries the brand's appearance and increases brand awareness among the targeted market. Moreover, packaging design has a strong influence on consumers' purchasing decisions<sup>[20,21]</sup>.

The effectiveness of the Pathos approach lies in its ability to tap into universal human emotions and cultural contexts. For example, a packaging design that integrates traditional patterns or motifs can evoke a sense of heritage and authenticity, appealing to consumers' pride in their cultural identity<sup>[22]</sup>. Similarly, a minimalist design can create a sense of sophistication and modernity, aligning with consumers' aspirations for an upscale lifestyle. Emotions and persuasion have been studied in psychology and advertising. This theory has been refined and developed over time to produce successful advertising that evokes emotions. Although Aristotle's mode of persuasion is not discussed in packaging design, it contributes to the impact of advertising. Marketers need to understand their target consumers and what influences them to buy a product. The study results can help designers propose better designs that combine the most appropriate persuasive approach for their target users<sup>[23]</sup>.

Consumers' emotions significantly influence purchasing and consumption decisions for a wide range of products. It is up to the marketers or art directors to identify the message strategies that they would like to implement to convey the message to their targeted audiences. Some researchers agree that emotions can be associated with consumers' experiences<sup>[24]</sup>. The discovery of metaphor elements in promotional communication also supports this notion. Metaphors, a subtopic in semiotic studies, show two unlike things that share qualities. These expressions of thought are powerful tools for describing issues, ideas, or people. Similar to rhetorical philosophy and the theory of causation, metaphors can persuade and emotionally influence consumers. For instance, studies have shown that nostalgia can positively connect consumers to brand attitudes and increase the likelihood of purchase. Such nostalgia effects create emotional bonds that brands can leverage to enhance consumer loyalty<sup>[25]</sup>.

Despite its effectiveness, the Pathos approach must be balanced with elements of Logos (logic) and Ethos (credibility) to achieve holistic communication. Emotional appeals that lack factual support or credible representation may be perceived as manipulative, potentially eroding trust in the brand. Researchers have highlighted the role of specific emotions in cognitive evaluations, reasoning, and shaping purchasing decisions. Emotional responses influence beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours, making them crucial components of effective advertising strategies. Therefore, integrating emotional resonance with logical clarity and ethical integrity ensures the message is both persuasive and trustworthy<sup>[22,26]</sup>.

In summary, the theory of Logos, Pathos, and Ethos by Aristotle functions to persuade consumers through different approaches. Designers can effectively harmonize these modes of persuasion in a product's packaging design by understanding the product and the interests of the consumers. The packaging design carries the brand's appearance and influences consumers' purchasing decisions. Emotions, metaphors, and nostalgia also play a crucial role in advertising and affect consumer buying behaviour. By skilfully incorporating elements that evoke feelings and associations, designers can create impactful visuals that not only capture attention but also build lasting emotional connections. When executed thoughtfully, this approach not only enhances brand loyalty but also fosters meaningful consumer engagement in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied in this study is designed to assist researchers in identifying the most effective method for obtaining all necessary information. This mixed-methods research approach combines both qualitative and quantitative data gathering techniques, providing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of packaging design factors.

Survey research is the chosen method as it can gather first-hand data from a large population regarding sociological and psychological variables. Quantitative research, on the other hand, is the most appropriate method for measuring independent variables using nominal scales and ordinal scales, utilizing statistical methods to interpret results.

Personal interviews are the most valuable method for gathering qualitative data, and they will be conducted among government agencies to gather information on procedures and processes involving SMEs. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathering is often referred to as mixed-methods research, which will enable researchers to develop a packaging design that improves design elements and enhances competitiveness while building a brand entity.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of packaging design factors, which could potentially contribute to the advancement of SMEs in the market. Therefore, the mixed-methods research approach employed in this study is essential for researchers to identify the most suitable packaging design method that meets the needs of SMEs.

## **HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT**

The purpose of the study is to examine the packaging design components of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) food products in influencing consumers' purchasing behaviour, which lead towards brand equity.

The main objective is to seek visual rhetoric approach within the design elements in packaging design. The design elements that will be discussed are images, the brand name, colours, typography, symbols; Halal certified logo, nutrition information, the package itself, and the value-added on the packaging. All these design elements are important in designing a competent packaging design. Nevertheless, the importance of understanding consumers in their purchasing behaviour cannot be neglected since the level of acceptance on each consumer and their interest are varies. Thus, by understanding their interest and level of acceptance may produce more applicable design especially to the targeted group. How does the visual rhetorical approach within the design elements in packaging design influence consumer purchasing behaviour?

Consumers can be identified through this process. They are divided into three (3) groups, which are Logos, Pathos, and Ethos. These categories will signify the key elements that strengthen brand trust<sup>H1</sup>, it will also promote brand self-awareness<sup>H2</sup>; indicate the strength to sustain the brand image<sup>H3</sup> and the importance of brand experiences<sup>H4</sup>.

Starting from the process of developing the literature review and based on findings that were gathered from the primary data collection, this research has been conducted its investigation by distributing the questionnaires to the targeted group of respondents. Samples were collected to evaluate the data using an analytical technique by using software named Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). This software is widely used by researchers for statistical analysis. The results from the questionnaires that are gathered will be discussed in Chapter Four. Later, after the statistical result is produced, to evaluate the results from the questionnaires, a visual analysis is conducted. In this process, packaging design by the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) will be used in visual comparison and descriptions.

For this research, a stratified random sampling procedure will be implemented. The stratified random sample is a selection of respondents to represent the total population accurately. Stratified random sampling was conducted due to different social classes of people, from different races which are Malay, Chinese, Indian, Bumiputra, and others. Even though the respondents are selected randomly to avoid bias, dividing the samples is done using quota sampling which is a form of nonprobability sampling. Respondents are divided into proportionate groups from the total population.

There are two processes that can be used to measure the effect of data accuracy. The first is the margin of error. Margins of error range from 1 percent to 5 percent, and positive and negative deviations which can

control the survey results. The second is the level of confidence. It represents how often the actual percentage of the population that will choose an answer lies within the margin of error.

Referring to the sample size calculator as shown above, to represent the total of more than 1,000,000 population, it requires at least 384 samples. To achieve the total of sample, with an estimated response rate of 50 percent, the total distribution will be 768 set of questionnaires. There were 2,500 set of questionnaires have been distributed in Petaling Jaya, Shah Alam, and Subang Jaya.

The research and the team were at the food and beverage sections to randomly approach the respondents. Each survey took only 5 to 10 minutes per respondent. The reason for being in the area was to approach the respondents (consumers) during their selection or viewing before purchasing. Saturday and Sunday were chosen because these are the days that people mostly do their shopping. The surveys were also randomly conducted during peak hours from 11.00 am to 2.00 pm only.

To achieve satisfactory survey results and ensure that the questionnaires are returned at the same time, the researcher and her team conduct the survey by helping respondents to fill out the questionnaires. The researcher will ask questions and provide a choice of answers directly. It is also to facilitate the respondents where they are among the visitors who are shopping. In addition, it provides an opportunity for the researcher and her team to explain any uncertainty in the questions and answers. Some had to be translated and explain in Bahasa Malaysia to increase the level of understanding of the respondents.

In this research, it will study the correlation the independent variables (visual rhetoric approach) and the mediator (packaging design) within the design elements. It also will explore the dependent variables (consumers' purchasing behaviour) and to seek how it correlated with the independent variables (visual rhetoric approach). Furthermore, it will analyse the mediation process that results from independent variables and how it affects dependent variables. This can be further explained in Chapter Four.

## FINDINGS

Most design components that influenced the packaging design was using the Pathos approach. In testing the hypothesis, hypotheses 1,2, 3 and 4 were accepted. Visual rhetoric approach using Pathos have its significance in influencing brand trust, brand awareness, brand image, and brand experiences contributing towards consumers' purchasing behaviours.

### Reliability and Validity Test

Table I Reliability and Validity Test

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.939	.941	20

A good reliability results indicate internal validity of the test and measurement obtained is relevant to prevail. The alpha coefficient has relatively highly internal consistency.

### Respondents

Sample size calculator computes the minimum number of necessary samples as to meet the desired statistical constraint. The calculator indicates that the total of more than 1,000,000 population needed at least 385 samples. To reach that total sample, with an estimated response rate of 50 percent, the total distribution will be 768. There were 2,500 questionnaires to be distributed which is in Petaling Jaya, Shah Alam and Subang Jaya. (<https://www.calculator.net>, retrieved on 10 November 2021).



However, there were initially 248 respondents who were recruited among those visited hypermarket for groceries on weekends. Most of the respondents were female, 191 (77 percent) and 57 (23 percent) were male respondents. Through phenomenological observations, for a certain period of time, at random, women whether working or not who were often seen buying household necessities resulted in more female respondents than men. Most of the respondents were 30 - 39 years old, 164 (66.1 percent). The others were 40 – 49 years old, 46 (18.5 percent), and below 29 years old, 33 (13.3 percent). Few were more than 50 years old 5 (2 percent). Majority of the respondents were Malay, 191 (77 percent), followed by Chinese, a total of 50 (20.2 percent). On the other hand, few of the respondents were Indian, 7 (2.8 percent).

### The cause of not intend to purchase

At the outset, respondent gave feedback on causes for not intend to purchase the local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) food products. There were six responses rated, which are doubted – impractical – not attractive – unpersuasive – no values – disassociation. Doubted, 66 (26.6 percent) and not attractive, 65 (26.2 percent) were rated almost equalled, while no values, 44 (17.7 percent) and unpersuasive, 38 (15.3 percent) were rated in the following after. Some rated as disassociation, 22 (12.9 percent), and few rated as impractical, 3 (1.2 perfect). Table II shows:

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics Of The Cause For Not Intend To Purchase The Local Small And Medium Enterprises (Smes) Food Product

Cause	n	%		n	%
Doubted	66	26.6	Logos	69	27.8
Impractical	3	1.2			
Not attractive	65	26.2	Pathos	103	41.5
Unpersuasive	38	15.3			
No values	44	17.7	Ethos	76	30.6
Disassociation	32	12.9			
TOTAL	248	100		248	100

Referring to the table above, these percentage can be characterized into 3 mode of persuasion. Pathos involves emotion elements in its approach (41.5 percent) explains mostly the cause of not intend to buy the local Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) food products. It was considered as the least cause for the consumers not to purchase the products. In addition, there are no values displayed by the products and disassociation with the need of the consumers making them have no intention to purchase the products. This puts as the second approach, Ethos (30.6 percent). Even so, being doubted with the product does explain the cause of not purchasing the products. This implies in a logical reason, which is a Logos (27.8 percent).

### Consumers' Preferences

Subsequently, the respondents were asked on the preferences on what could be made for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) food products to meet their expectation even better. Table III shows the respondents' suggestions for improvement for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) food products to meet consumers' needs. There are five ratings that were used to identify what are the improvements suggested by the respondents. Highest rating was a quality product, 99 (39.9 percent), followed by an attractive packaging design, 70 (28.2 percent), and a consistent sales and promotions, 41 (16.5 percent). The lowest were persuasive advertisements, 20 (8.1 percent), and improved package materials, 18 (7.3 percent). For the category, quality of the product is Logos, 88 (39.9 percent). Pathos was 108 (43.6 percent), and Ethos was 41 (16.5 percent).

Table 3 :- Descriptive Statistics Of The Respondents' Suggestions For Improvements That Could Be Made For Small And Medium Enterprises (Smes) Food Products To Meet Consumer's Needs Even Better.

Description	n	%	Category	n	%
A quality product	88	39.9	Logos	88	39.9
Improved package's materials	18	7.3	Pathos	108	43.6
Attractive packaging design	70	28.2	Pathos		
Persuasive advertisement	20	8.1	Pathos		
Consistent of sales and promotions	41	16.5	Ethos	41	16.5
TOTAL	248	100		248	100

Subconsciously, the respondents' suggestions were in Aristotle's approach, whereby it deals with emotions. Emotion can be considered as a strong tool in influencing them in their purchasing. Package's materials, packaging design, and persuasive advertisements that were suggested by the consumers should be taken concerned by the products to be improved as to meet their needs even better. The logical logos, which is a quality product still be the second importance in their suggestion that could meet their need, followed by an appealing Ethos.

### Influence of Decision Making

There are seven influences of the respondents' decision in purchasing the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) food products (Table IV). The highest rating was on the persuasive advertisement, 40 (16.1 percent), and a long-trusted brand, 64 (25.8 percent), followed by the product's quality, 40 (16.1 percent). Others influenced were imported brand, 28 (11.3 percent), lower price, 24 (9.7 percent), attractive package design, 14 (5.6 percent), and certified with halal logo, 13 (5.2 percent). For the category, Ethos scored the highest, 129 (52 percent), followed by Logos, 80 (31 percent), and Pathos, 42 (16.8 percent).

Table 4:- Descriptive Statistics Of The Respondents' Influence Of Decision In Purchasing Small And Medium Enterprises (Smes) Food Products

Description	n	%	Category	n	%
Lower price	24	9.7	Logos	80	31.0
Product's quality	40	16.1	Logos		
Certified with halal logo	13	5.2	Logos		
Important brand	28	11.3	Pathos	42	16.8
Attractive package design	14	5.5	Pathos		
Persuasive advertisement	65	26.2	Ethos	129	52.0
Long-trusted brand	64	25.8	Ethos		
TOTAL	248	100		248	100

The purchasing of the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) food products was highly influenced by the Ethos (52 percent). This approach is dealing with the products' appeal to the respondents. The reputation of the products also plays a role in influencing the purchasing decisions. The persuasive advertisement and a long-trusted brand could drive the consumers to repetitively purchase the products, which can be categorised as a Pathos. Both of those factors were rated the highest as compared to other approaches. As logos was rated into the second highest, surprisingly, a certified with the halal logo was rated as the least influence in these consumers' decisions in purchasing the products. Product quality and a lower price influenced their purchasing decision, as in the Logos, the logical.

## The Influence of Repetition of Purchasing

There are six influences that resulted in the respondents in the repetition of purchasing the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) food products (Table V). the highest rating was on the best quality offered, 113 (45.6 percent), followed by traditional practice, 67 (27 percent) and long trusted brand, 40 (16.1 percent). The least influenced were a reasonable price, 14 (5.6 percent), possession, 11 (4.4), and functional package as an added value, 3 (1.2 percent). For the category, Logos was highest, 130 (52.4 percent), followed by Pathos, 78 (31.4 percent), and Ethos, 40 (16.1 percent).

Table 5:- Descriptive Statistics Of The Respondents' Influence Of Repetition In Purchasing Small And Medium Enterprises (Smes) Food Products

Description	n	%	Category	n	%
Best quality offered	113	45.6	Logos	130	52.4
Reasonable price	14	5.6	Logos		
Functional package as added value	3	1.2	Logos		
Possession	11	4.4	Pathos	78	31.4
Traditional practice	67	27.0	Pathos		
Long-trusted brand	40	16.1	Ethos	40	16.1
TOTAL	248	100		248	100

The logical Logos, results in the highest influence on the consumers' repetitive purchasing. The best quality offered scored the highest in this approach, which implies that the consumers took concern on the logic and rationale of purchasing the products. Offering the best quality guaranteed the consumers repurchase intention and these satisfied consumers showed less affected on the price. This means they are willing to pay a higher price for a satisfying product. Emotionally, a traditional practice of the products also influenced the consumers in repeating the purchase, as this fell in the Pathos. Possession, on the other hand, is also one of the Pathos, was the least influenced after the functional package as added value, which was also logos.

## Factors Of Influencing the Purchasing Decision

The influence of buying Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) food products were influenced by eight factors (Table VI). Most of the respondents rated bold brand name, 97 (39.1 percent), and persuasive images, 81 (32.7 percent) as the highest influences. The nutrition info provided, 22 (8.9%), and the food product's quality, 22 (8.9 percent) were followed. Few rated colours as provoking their purchasing decisions, 12 (4.8 percent), symbols, 5 (2 percent), halal-certified logo, 5 (2 percent), and added values, 4 (1.6 percent) as other influences. For the category, highest was Pathos, 115 (46.4 percent), followed by Ethos, 111 (40.7 percent), and Logos, 32 (12.9 percent).

Table 6 :- Descriptive Statistics Of The Respondents' Influence Of Repetition In Purchasing Small And Medium Enterprises (Smes) Food Products

Description	n	%	Category	n	%
Halal certified logo	5	2.0	Logos	32	12.9
Symbols	5	2.0	Logos		
Product's quality	22	8.9	Logos		
Persuasive images	81	32.7	Pathos	115	46.4
Colour	12	4.8	Pathos		



Nutrition info provided	22	8.9	Pathos		
Added values	4	1.6	Ethos	111	40.7
Bold brand name	97	39.1	Ethos		
TOTAL	248	100		248	100

Each factor indicating the three modes of persuasion and Pathos was the highest approach in influencing the consumers to purchase the products. By visual elements that appeal to packaging design does prove to give an impact to the consumers purchasing influence. In the present study, persuasive images play a greater role in the Pathos. Ethos fell as second, which may be explained that some of the products have a bold brand name in the market that influenced the consumers to purchase them. Well-known brands and has been successfully in the market for a long time influenced these consumers to purchase the products. It was the greatest influence in the present study.

The design component is measured in this question. Thus, the design component using Pathos influences the consumers on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) food products.

### Elements That Most May Affects Respondents' Attentions

The survey also asked respondents' opinions regarding the application of appropriate image on packaging design that makes Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) food products appear more effective in attracting attention and influencing consumer purchases. Table VII shows the evaluated answers. Most of the respondents agreed that using design elements that evoke sentiments as the highest score, which is also a Pathos category, 128 (51.6 percent), followed by using real images (Logos), 75 (30.2 percent). Some respondents agreed that using persuasive symbolic images with the same meanings (Ethos), 45 (18.1 percent).

Table 7 :- Descriptive Statistics Of The Appealing Images Of Small And Medium Enterprises (Smes) Food Products

Description	n	%	Category	n	%
Using real images	75	30.2	Logos	75	30.2
Using persuasive symbolic images with the same meanings	45	18.1	Ethos	45	18.1
Using elements that evoke sentiments	128	51.6	Pathos	128	51.6
TOTAL	248	100		248	100

Pathos shown the most influenced in making the products look appealing, which half of the respondents agreed that using design elements that evoke sentiments would be appealing in attracting attention and influence the consumers in purchasing decisions. Those design elements triggered the consumers' emotions, which may drive them to make a purchase. On the other hand, using real images as in the Logos was also influenced the consumers to purchase. And finally, the Ethos was less appealing in the products.

### The Power of Visual Elements on The Package

The extent to which the effectiveness of visual elements on packaging design in conveying the message effectively as well as representing the product. The opinions of the respondents are shown in Table IX. Respondents were required to answer Yes or No for this question. Majority of them answered Yes, 238 (96 percent) and only, 10 (4 percent) answered No (Table IX). For those who answered No, they were asked to skip the next three questions and proceed to the next section in the questionnaire. For those who choose 'Yes' answer, they may proceed to the next questions. Yes, is in the category of Pathos/Ethos, while No is in Logos category.

The highest score was the design evokes sentiments, 123 (51.7 percent), followed by the visuals create a reason to purchase, 60 (25.2 percent), and the images were used gives trustworthy, 44 (18.5 percent). The least was

the product design uses celebrity endorsements, 11 (4.6 percent). For the category, Pathos was the highest, 123 (51.7 percent), followed by Logos, 60 (25.2 percent), and Ethos, 55 (23.1 percent).

Table 8 :- Statistics Of Opinions Regarding The Visual Elements On The Package Helps To Convey Its Message Effectively To Represent Small And Medium Enterprises (Smes) Food Products

	N	%	Category	n	%
Yes	238	96	Pathos/Ethos	238	96
No	10	4.0	Logos	10	4.0
TOTAL	248	100		248	100

Table 9 :- Descriptive Statistics Of Reasons Agreeing To Visual Elements On The Packages Do Helps To Convey Its Message Effectively To Represent The Product

Description	n	%	Category	n	%
The visuals create reason to purchase the design evokes sentiments	60	25.2	Logos	60	25.2
			Pathos	123	51.7
The design really transmits what is the product all about	123	51.7	Logos		
The images were used gives trustworthiness	44	18.5	Ethos	55	23.1
The product design uses celebrity endorsements	11	4.6	Ethos		
TOTAL	238	100		238	100

The design evokes sentiments rated as the highest rate in the influence of the products to convey their messages effectively. In addition, the visuals created a reason to purchase, which refers to a logical approach, the Logos. The images used do gives worthiness representing the products, however, the least likely approach to convey the message was the used of celebrity to endorse the products. Ethos was the least helpful in conveying the products' messages because sometimes it depends on the endorsement that they used. The endorsed celebrity or spokesman does give an additional impact to the product.

### Graphic Elements That Attract Consumers

The first element that attracts respondents' attention was rated in Table X. The highest was the package, 56 (22.6 percent), followed by colour, 50 (21 percent) and graphic design, 48 (20.2 percent). The respondents were attracted to brand by 47 (19 percent) and the images were 40 (16.1 percent). The least attracted by was logo, 7 (2.9 percent). For the approach category, Pathos was the highest, 106 (43.6 percent), followed by ethos, 87 (35.1 percent) and logos, 55 (23.1 percent).

Table 9 :- Descriptive Statistics Of The First Element That Attracts Respondents' Attention

Description	n	%	Category	n	%
Logo	7	2.9	Logos	55	23.1
Graphic design	48	20.2	Logos		
Colours	50	21.0	Pathos	106	43.6
The package	56	22.6	Pathos		
Images	40	16.1	Ethos	87	35.1
Brand	47	19.0	Ethos		
TOTAL	238	100		238	100

Pathos attracted the respondents' attention when seeing the products. Colours and the package itself do attract the consumers.

The Ethos, which is image and brand attracted, was the second. The brand has the credibility in influencing the consumers in purchasing decisions since the brand itself has gained trust from the consumers. In addition, a good product image plays a role not only in getting the attention of the new potential consumers but also sustain the confidence levels of the existing loyal consumers.

The least impact was Logos, where logical thinking involves. The logo was the least element that attracted the consumers to the products. Even though some products have their own product's logo, it did not appear to attract consumers. In the researcher's personal point of view, in any products or service, logo is the most important that carries the brand image and identity. Through logo also, the products are easily recognised and these days, we can see many fake food products imitates the goods, the overall design concept, and the logo as well. Thus, when the logo fails to attract the consumer's attention, it means the marketer and designer fail to understand what the product is all about which also overall fails to deliver its brand message efficiently. However, the answer also concluded that graphic design does attract some of them.

Design component is measured in this question. It was shown that Pathos attracts the consumers on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) food products.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Pathos approach to visual rhetoric design is a central paradigm in influencing consumer behaviour, particularly within the Malaysian socio-cultural context. Empathy, as an emotional driver, serves as a cornerstone in shaping societal responses and fostering progress. In this regard, Pathos leverages emotional resonance, crafting impactful designs that align with cultural and personal sensibilities to deliver powerful messages. This discussion evaluates Pathos as a primary rhetorical strategy while examining its integration with Logos and Ethos, the rise of digital consumers, and the evolving technological landscape.

In Malaysia, empathy is deeply embedded in the social fabric, influencing how audiences engage with visual messages. Campaigns that emphasize social unity, cultural preservation, or community welfare often achieve greater resonance due to their empathetic underpinnings. Pathos, as the dominant element, harnesses this cultural sensibility to evoke emotions that facilitate audience connection. For example, designs incorporating traditional Malay motifs or imagery reflecting collective well-being resonate profoundly, creating a shared emotional space with the audience. However, this does not preclude the necessity of integrating Logos (logical reasoning) and Ethos (credibility) as secondary yet essential components that amplify the core emotional appeal of Pathos-driven designs.

Each design should adopt a singular, focused rhetorical direction. This ensures coherence, where Pathos serves as the primary vehicle for emotional engagement, while Logos and Ethos function as supportive layers, providing factual context and enhancing trustworthiness. Such a structured approach avoids diluting the design's impact and ensures the message aligns with both emotional and rational audience expectations.

The Malaysian digital consumer landscape reflects generational and technological divides. Younger audiences are techno-literate, engaging with interactive platforms and immersive formats. However, older demographics often exhibit limited digital adoption, necessitating designs that bridge these gaps. Social proof, in the form of peer testimonials, reviews, and shared experiences, emerges as a critical mechanism to unify diverse consumer groups. Pathos-driven designs can leverage social proof to establish authenticity and encourage audience alignment with brand narratives. For instance, augmented reality (AR) features on product packaging can captivate younger audiences, offering interactive storytelling opportunities. Yet, these technologies must be accompanied by empathetic messaging to ensure inclusivity for older consumers who prioritize clarity and practicality. The integration of digital tools must therefore be aligned with demonstrated social acceptance and relevance, ensuring broad consumer buy-in across generational divides.

While Pathos remains a dominant rhetorical strategy, it cannot function in isolation. Logos provides a logical framework, presenting factual evidence, benefits, and solutions that support the emotional appeal. Ethos, meanwhile, establishes credibility through endorsements, certifications, and associations with reputable

institutions. In Malaysia, campaigns effectively combining these elements have shown increased audience trust and engagement. For example, eco-friendly product packaging certified by environmental organizations (Ethos) and supported by clear sustainability benefits (Logos) enhances the emotional narrative of environmental stewardship (Pathos).

Nonetheless, the hierarchical structure must remain intact, with Pathos as the primary focus. This prioritization ensures emotional coherence, particularly in contexts such as charity campaigns, cultural preservation efforts, or public health initiatives. Supporting elements must amplify rather than compete with the core emotional narrative, maintaining the design's integrity and effectiveness.

The proliferation of electronic Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM) has redefined consumer-brand interactions, enabling rapid dissemination of opinions and experiences through digital platforms. Unlike traditional WOM, e-WOM significantly extends reach, influencing consumer perceptions on a larger scale. Influencers, as prominent drivers of e-WOM, contribute to consumer decision-making by providing authentic demonstrations and evaluations. However, while influencers amplify message visibility, design itself must remain the foundation of communication, capable of resonating with audiences independently of external endorsements.

For instance, a Pathos-driven advertisement for a humanitarian campaign might evoke empathy for marginalized communities, supported by factual data (Logos) and credible endorsements (Ethos). While influencers can amplify the campaign's reach, its core impact derives from the emotional and informational strength of the design itself. This underscores the necessity for designs to function as standalone communicative tools, delivering intrinsic value irrespective of external validation.

Technological innovation continues to shape the scope and methodology of design. Emerging tools such as artificial intelligence (AI), virtual reality (VR), and personalized marketing provide new avenues for enhancing Pathos-driven narratives. AI, for instance, enables designers to analyse emotional triggers and craft highly targeted campaigns, while VR immerses consumers in compelling, multi-sensory brand experiences.

However, as technologies evolve, so too do consumer expectations. Generational shifts in design acceptance necessitate a flexible, adaptive approach. While younger audiences may gravitate towards cutting-edge technologies, older generations often value familiarity and clarity. Balancing these diverse preferences requires a nuanced understanding of demographic and cultural dynamics. For example, incorporating AI-generated insights into a culturally resonant design ensures that technological sophistication does not overshadow emotional relatability.

The Pathos approach to visual rhetoric design remains a powerful strategy for engaging audiences, particularly in Malaysia, where empathy functions as a cultural cornerstone. By strategically integrating Logos and Ethos as complementary elements, designers can enhance the credibility and rational appeal of Pathos-driven campaigns. This holistic approach ensures that emotional resonance is supported by logical clarity and ethical integrity, fostering trust and long-term engagement.

As digital consumers and e-WOM continue to reshape marketing dynamics, the importance of intrinsic design strength becomes increasingly apparent. The success of Pathos-based designs lies in their ability to connect on a deeply personal level, independent of external influences. Furthermore, as technologies advance, designers must remain agile, leveraging innovation to amplify emotional impact while adapting to generational and cultural shifts. Ultimately, the synergy of Pathos, Logos, and Ethos offers a comprehensive framework for creating impactful, culturally attuned, and emotionally resonant designs.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

It can be concluded that the outcome of the study has met its hypotheses which are:

H1: Visual rhetoric approach within the design elements in packaging design will strengthen brand trust

H2: Visual rhetoric approach within the design elements in packaging design will create a higher level of brand awareness

H3: Visual rhetoric approach within the design elements in packaging design will sustain the brand image

H4: Visual rhetoric approach within the design elements in packaging design will affect brand experience

From the proven report of this study, Hypothesis 1 can be concluded that visual rhetoric approach within the design elements in packaging design will be able to strengthen the brand trust between the brand and the consumers. By enhancing the elements using Pathos, it is believed that it will evoke strong belief and confident about the particular product among the consumers. However, it might not successfully attract their nontargeted consumers since every consumer are different. Somehow, the brand itself can also be believed to be hereditary or used by family members even without belief. This is because of their past experiences or their past family experience that connected to the sentiments that stimulate the sense of belongings towards the product.

From the outcome of the study also, Hypothesis 2 can be concluded that visual rhetoric approach within the design elements in packaging design will be capable to create a higher level of brand awareness. The Pathos plays an emotion strategy was it able to stimulate memories or anything that can be associate by the consumers. This emotion strategy also may attract the consumers' attention to be at least aware of the brand's existence. Element of Pathos used in packaging design is capable to create a higher level of awareness, especially to its most targeted audiences.

Through this process, Hypothesis 3 can be concluded that visual rhetoric approach within the design elements in the packaging design for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through the Pathos, will help to sustain the brand image of the particular brand or product. Brand image is a brand concept that consumers believe in, and Pathos plays its role in influencing consumers to believe what should be conveyed to consumers. The packaging design carries a strong image to maintain the brand image of the company. For example, the unique packaging design that has elements of Malay culture that represent the product as it is from the Malay society, original recipe, and it is believed to be Halal. The product carries an image that made especially Malay consumers believe in the image that the packaging design of the product carries.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 can be concluded that visual rhetoric approach within the design elements in packaging design, which is through Pathos that will affect the brand experiences.

In successful communication, it is believed that it should combine the three modes of persuasion founded by Aristotle. In a brief description of the brand, the brand is represented by the Logos where the brand must have a rational and clear explanation of what the brand means. Second is the brand image represented by Ethos because it is what the consumer sees from the representative or character or endorser and is seen as what is shown, which means image. This description is very similar to the brand image; brand image is the brand concept that consumers believe in. And last but not least is Pathos, which is a subjective phenomenon and perception formed through user interpretation, whether influenced by reason or emotion. The combined results of these three approaches will complement a brand.

This research is important to the knowledge of visual rhetoric because the power of visual rhetoric needs to be highlighted. Pathos is concluded to be the most persuasive because it brings emotional impact in the design approach that stimulates the consumer's purchase decision. Pathos is understood as brand identity where brand identity is the unique association between the brand and the consumer that a strong brand identity represents what the brand means and its promise to the consumer.

In summary, it can be concluded that when the packaging design for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) has improved, it gradually builds consumer confidence to buy products resulting in increased sales and benefits for Small and Medium Enterprises. (SME) business capital. With the proposed novel framework of this new product development process, it can be concluded that it will produce a cost-effective packaging design where



the packaging design itself is the anchor of the business to promote the product to the public as well as promote the brand as well. It can be concluded as cost-effective packaging because a good and attractive packaging design will reduce costs for marketing strategy plans and advertising costs, as it is independent as a 'stand-alone salesperson'.

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