

Crafting Persuasive Language Strategies: An Analysis of Malaysian Cosmetic Brands' TikTok Marketing

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Abstract

In a competitive marketplace, effective persuasion sets a brand apart. Companies that can persuade customers effectively tend to outperform their competitors by capturing a larger share of the market. This study delves into the application of the Elaboration-Likelihood Model on TikTok, a dual-process theory elucidating cognitive processes during persuasion, encompassing central and peripheral processing routes. The aims of this study are to investigate how the Elaboration-Likelihood Model is incorporated in sellers' TikTok videos,

and the types of language of persuasion used. A qualitative descriptive method was employed to analyse three TikTok videos from three selected TikTok seller accounts. A documentary technique will be used to collect data for the study, and a content analysis method will be carried out for the data analysis. Findings show that there are 17 types of language of persuasion employed throughout the sample, with Simple Solutions having the highest frequency, employed by all the TikTok posts. The implications of this study are twofold. Firstly, it will illuminate the profound influence of persuasion techniques on message reception, thereby aiding digital marketers in comprehending their audience's cognitive processes and facilitating the utilization of the most effective strategies. Secondly, it will contribute to the academic field of linguistics by expanding knowledge in the realm of persuasion and negotiation. Additionally, it will foster media literacy within society, empowering individuals to make informed decisions.

Keywords: Persuasion techniques, Language of persuasion, Elaboration-Likelihood Model, Tik Tok, Advertising

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Persuasion strategies are important in many commercial sectors because they efficiently persuade potential customers to perform specified actions, such as purchasing, subscribing to services, or supporting a brand (Fisher, 2014). These tactics use communication strategies to elicit a positive response from the target audience. This use goes beyond advertising and product sales pitches, where these methods are used to appeal to the audience's needs and attract their attention, eventually kindling their interest (Fisher, 2014). Furthermore, these tactics can be used to improve a company's reputation, such as by using customer testimonials or reviews, which develop trust among prospective customers and encourage them to participate with the brand in business operations.

Persuasion is a technique intrinsic to our daily lives and occurs naturally without us realising, and can be used in different areas, including business, sales and even personal relationships. To ensure successful persuasion, there needs to be effective communication of the message we intend to share and influence their decision-making towards our favour. In doing so, it is important to understand the theories of people's thinking processes, which helps us strategise the techniques for us to use. One of the information processing theories related to persuasion is the Elaboration Likelihood-Model (ELM) introduced by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo (1986), a dual-process theory involving the central processing route and the peripheral processing route (Kitchen, et al., 2014). This model explains the formation of attitudes when presented by persuasive arguments and that information is processed on a certain level depending on the content. One type of persuasion techniques, language in persuasion, is the different literary devices used in delivering persuasive arguments (Bhatia, 2019).

TikTok is a rapidly growing social media app recognised for its brief, catchy content (Montenegro, 2021). With the rise of TikTok, marketers have discovered a new way to sell

their products. Marketing items via digital channels, including social media, has been common for some time (Fisher, 2014), and TikTok is no exception. It is crucial to highlight, however, that each social media site has its own distinct nature and demographic traits. The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of the Elaboration Likelihood Model and persuasive language in TikTok videos generated by Malaysian cosmetic businesses.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Persuasion is one of the most fundamental elements of communication, especially when being in sectors that require influencing others, namely business and sales sectors. However, not everyone is equipped with the knowledge of effective persuasion and are aware of the thinking processes that are involved in the act of persuasion (Chun-Der et al., 2020). This of course, also applies to brands looking to market their products in social media, especially on TikTok. Although TikTok is also a form of social media, it is different from the other social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter and it has its own nature and demographic. Therefore, the brands' marketing teams need to use effective strategies and apply the appropriate persuasive techniques for TikTok users, and not just jump into promoting their brand without knowledge of persuasion (Guarda et al., 2021).

Language is one of the most powerful tools in persuasion as it evokes emotions from the audience (Bhatia, 2019), and it could be used to sway the feelings of the people we intend to influence and in business settings, can get them to be persuaded to purchase our products. However, when language is not effectively utilized, it can lead to more than just unsuccessful persuasion and disinterest in the offer. It may also provoke negative reactions and even result in outright rejection. This is because emotions and language are very closely related to each other and the affecting of one will lead to the other also being affected (Gadzhiyeva & Sager, 2017). As emotion is one of the integral parts of people's decision making, it is crucial for persuaders to master the application of effective linguistic devices in persuasion. Besides language, the nonverbal communication aspect of persuasion such as body language and visual imagery is also critical in ensuring successful persuasion (Joo et al., 2014). This is because, the visuals presented to the audience, especially through a social media application like TikTok where the videos are the main mode of communication, are the first thing that grabs the attention of the viewers. Yet, a lot of brands do not know how to utilise this and fail to use visuals effectively. As a result, the viewers are not interested in the products marketed and walk away from the posts.

1.3 Review of Literature

1.3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study suggests that the persuasion techniques, be it language of persuasion or nonverbal communication in persuasion, when implemented in the TikTok posts, will trigger the either the Central or Peripheral processing routes from the Elaboration-Likelihood Model, which will then impact the engagement of the TikTok posts, specifically the number of followers and viewers. When persuasion techniques are used, activating both the Central and Peripheral processing routes of the viewer, positive engagement

will be seen.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) is a dual-process theory of persuasion that describes how people form and change their attitudes depending on the information given to them. The model suggests that there are two processing routes to persuasion: a central route and a peripheral route (Shahab, 2021). When the person has a high level of motivation and ability to process information, which means they have a higher elaboration-likelihood, they would process the information through the central route, and their attitudes are changed through a thoughtful and deliberate consideration of the arguments and evidence presented. The person would put in more cognitive effort to elaborate the information presented towards them (Chen et al., 2020). Contrastingly, when the person lacks motivation and ability to process information deeply, it is more likely that extraneous factors such as the source's credibility, physical appearance or emotions triggered by the message would be the elements that change their attitudes (Tyng et al., 2014). In this case, they would process the information through the peripheral route and less cognitive effort would be invested in the elaboration process. In their studies, Chang et al. (2020), Shahab (2021) and Chen et al. (2020) explained that the Elaboration-Likelihood Model contends that the compatibility of a communication with the recipient's motivation and cognitive capacity determines the effectiveness of persuasive messages.

According to Larson (2009) and Bhatia (2019) the term "language of persuasion" refers to the use of linguistic strategies to persuade or influence an audience to accept a specific viewpoint or idea. It encompasses the use of words, tone, and wording to elicit a response or receive support by appealing to emotions, logic, and personal values. There are a variety of linguistic devices that can be used in persuasive language which include association, bandwagon, beautiful people, bribery, celebrities, experts, explicit claims, fear, humour, intensity, maybe, plain folks, repetition, testimonials, warm and fuzzy, the big lie, charisma, euphemism, extrapolation, flattery, glittering generalities, name-calling, new, nostalgia, rhetorical questions, scientific evidence, simple solution, slippery slope, symbols, ad hominem, analogy, card stacking, cause vs correlation, denial, diversion, group dynamics, majority belief, scapegoating, straw man and timing, (Larson, 2009) which will be explained below. The language of persuasion allows people to effectively communicate their ideas and influence the thoughts, beliefs and decision-making of others. The ability to utilise persuasive language can be an important skill for success in a variety of areas of life, including marketing, politics, and public speaking. Table 1 displays language of persuasion techniques as describe by Larson (2009).

Table 1. Language of Persuasion Techniques

Language of Persuasion	Description
Association	Links the product or idea with something the audience desires (fun, wealth, beauty, etc.)

Bandwagon	By showing that everyone is doing it or has it
Beautiful People	The use of attractive people such as celebrities or models
Bribery	Offering something else in return
Celebrities	Testimonial or endorsement made by famous people
Experts	Testimonial made by people who are well-versed in the field
Explicit Claims	The direct statement of product information (ingredients, benefits, etc.)
Fear	Uses something the audience dislikes to provide a solution in return
Humour	Grabs attention and people would associate the product with a good feeling
Intensity	Uses intensifiers such as superlatives, comparatives and hyperbole to bring hype
Maybe	Exaggeration followed by weasel words such as maybe, may, might, etc.
Plain Folks	By providing relatability
Repetitions	Reinforce the message delivered
Testimonials	Act as a third party providing feedback
Warm and Fuzzy	Uses sentimental images
The Big Lie	Telling a lie with confidence
Charisma	Showing confidence, boldness and firmness
Euphemism	Pacifying the message and making it more palatable
Extrapolation	Drawing a big conclusion from small conclusions
Flattery	Praising the audience
Glittering Generalities	Uses emotionally-appealing phrases
Name-calling	Links people or ideas to something negative
New	Uses new products or ideas
Nostalgia	Associates products to good times in the past
Rhetorical Questions	Questions meant to make audience agree with the persuader

Scientific Evidence	Uses scientific data to prove something
Simple Solution	Providing one simple solution to complexities
Slippery Slope	Predicts a negative outcome from small conclusions
Symbols	Links certain symbols to certain concepts
Ad Hominem	Attacking the person relying the message
Analogy	Compares situations with one another
Card Stacking	Selects pieces of information favourable to the persuader to paint a desired picture
Cause vs. Correlation	Confusing correlation with cause
Denial	Disagrees with something controversial
Diversion	Raising a separate issue to distract audience from the rising issue
Group Dynamics	Using fear of feeling out into persuading the audience to join in
Majority Belief	Uses the notion that if majority agrees with something, then that is what is correct
Scapegoating	Blames the problem onto one party
Straw Man	Creates illogical ideas and presents it as the opponent's ideas
Timing	Persuading the audience at a timed occasion

Persuasion: Reception and Responsibility (Larson, 2009)

1.3.2 Previous Studies

The study of persuasion in marketing has been done in the past. These studies stand as reference for the researcher to help in the analysis of the study. One of them is *Language of Persuasion in Online Marketing of Cosmetic Products: A Glance of Netnography in Pragmatics* by Septianasri et al., (2021). This study focused on examining how cosmetics marketers in social commerce utilise speech acts and persuasion to influence online shoppers, while using Searle's speech acts taxonomy as reference. Employing a descriptive research method, netnography with a pragmatic approach was utilised to address the research questions. Data was gathered from Facebook and Instagram through manual netnography and then compiled into an excel corpus. The data were subsequently analysed using the taxonomy of speech acts and persuasion categories. The findings revealed that directive speech acts were the dominant form of persuasion in online marketing of cosmetic products. Nevertheless, online cosmetic sellers employed a variety of speech acts and persuasion strategies to effectively promote their products.

Millambo et al., (2022) investigated the use of language in digital marketing, specifically on Facebook. This study highlighted how globalisation has driven content marketing as a strategic tool to persuade customers through persuasive language, which influences their consumer behaviour. However, the study reveals that the healthcare sector, particularly Facebook, fails to effectively utilise language that aligns with their marketing objectives. The study analyses the language use in healthcare content marketing on Facebook and its influence on consumers using the Language Expectancy Theory (LET). The data analysis involves qualitative categorisation of language themes and feedback from Facebook users, and the findings indicate that language usage significantly impacts people's action-taking. The study recommends marketers employ persuasive language when communicating with customers and use feedback to improve content.

Although both studies share a similarity in their area of study, which is the usage of persuasion techniques in digital marketing, they are also different from each other. The study by Septianasri et al., (2021) looked at language of persuasion as Speech Acts, with Searle's speech acts taxonomy as a part of the theoretical framework. The study also looks at Facebook and Instagram as the digital marketing platforms studied. On the other hand, the study by Millambo et al., (2022) analyses the use of persuasive language only on Facebook and relies on the Language Expectancy Theory to draw their conclusions. These past research do not cover TikTok as a platform, and do not explain in-depth the role of the Elaboration-Likelihood Model

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

- What are the types of language of persuasion used in TikTok posts?
- How are the different types of strategies applied in the TikTok posts by different TikTok sellers?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed the content analysis method. This method enables the researcher to examine words and images in accordance with their area of study and draw conclusions based on their findings (Crossman, 2020). This method is the most suitable for analysing the persuasion techniques incorporated in the TikTok posts made by the selected Malaysian cosmetic brands as it requires the researcher to watch the TikTok videos, read the text in the video or the caption, study the visuals and audio, and analyse the information taken (MacQueen et al., 2011).

2.2 Setting and Sample

The research was carried out solely on the social media platform TikTok, with a focus on Malaysian TikTok brand accounts and ignoring those from other countries. This method ensured that the research findings contextually relevant to Malaysia. The sample included the three most popular TikTok posts from the three most prominent Malaysian cosmetic brands

on TikTok. This sample size was deemed optimum since it allowed for technique comparisons, highlighting both differences and similarities. The sample size chosen also accurately matched the level of audience interest in the brand and its products.

The selected sample was drawn from the following Malaysian cosmetic brand TikTok accounts: Alha Alfa Cosmetics (@alhalfacosmetics) with 647.3k followers, featuring TikTok videos with 8.9 million, 4.0 million, and 3.2 million views. Skintific (@skintific.my) with 424.6k followers, showcasing TikTok videos with 3.3 million, 2.6 million, and 1.7 million views. AINAA Beauty (@ainaabeautyofficial) with 292.8k followers, presenting TikTok videos with 6.5 million, 4.4 million, and 2.8 million views.

2.3 Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this completed study was the three most-watched TikTok videos shared by the three most prominent Malaysian cosmetic businesses. The research concentrated on evaluating the language used in these videos, which included both spoken dialogue from individuals featured in the content and any text presented inside the videos. This assessment was carried out using Larson's (2009) Language of Persuasion Techniques framework. Furthermore, the study investigated several persuasive strategies used in TikTok posts using the dual processing theory of the Elaboration-Likelihood Model. The amount of audience involvement created by these TikTok posts was used to assess the effectiveness of these strategies.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection for this study was based on the instrument, which consisted of the three most-viewed TikTok videos posted by the three most-followed Malaysian cosmetic brands. These videos were collected and analysed as part of the research. The primary focus of data collection was on the language used within these videos, encompassing both spoken dialogue by individuals featured in the content and any text that appeared within the videos themselves. This data collection process involved transcribing and documenting the spoken words, as well as capturing any textual content presented on screen.

Additionally, the Elaboration-Likelihood Model's dual processing theory was employed to scrutinize various persuasive techniques utilized in these TikTok posts. The data collection process involved identifying and categorizing these techniques within each video, based on established criteria derived from the model. To measure the effectiveness of these persuasive techniques, data was collected on audience engagement metrics, including likes, comments, shares, and views for each TikTok post. This data was gathered from the platform's analytics and engagement tracking tools, providing quantitative insights into the impact of the persuasive strategies employed in the videos.

2.5 Data Analysis

While watching the TikTok videos, transcripts of each video were created to facilitate the examination of language elements of persuasion. The text content displayed within these TikTok videos was also meticulously documented. To ensure a systematic and structured

analysis, a table categorizing each persuasion technique identified during the examination was generated in Microsoft Word. This table helped organise and streamline the analysis process. In addition, both the similarities and differences among the persuasive techniques employed in the videos were noted. The frequency of each technique within the videos was also recorded to gain insights into their prevalence and impact.

Table 2. Types of Language of Persuasion

Language of Persuasion	Elaboration-Likelihood Model	Extract
Testimonial	Central Route	SO2

Table 3. Classification of Language of Persuasion Techniques by Brand

Language of Persuasion	ELM	AAC/01	AAC/02	AAC/03	SO/02	SO/02	SO/03	AB/01	AB/02	AB/03
Simple Solutions	Central Route									

Description:

AAC/01 = Name of Cosmetic Brand/Order in Most Liked TikTok Video by the Brand

Name of Cosmetic Brands:

AAC = Alha Alfa Cosmetics

AB = AINAA Beauty

SO = Skintific Official

Order in Most Liked TikTok by the Brand

01 = Most Liked

02 = Second Most Liked

03 = Third Most Liked

Colour Code

Red = Text on Video

Orange = Audio

Yellow = Caption

Table 2 classifies the types of language of persuasion found across the sample, where the techniques are listed together with the corresponding Elaboration-Likelihood Model processing route, and the examples are extracted.

Table 3 categorises the techniques used by each brand, where the frequency of each technique is recorded according to each individual TikTok post, under each brand.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Types of Language of Persuasion

The study found 17 different types of language of persuasion used by Malaysian cosmetic brands on their TikTok posts, which included Simple Solutions, Testimonial, Beautiful People, Explicit Claims, Intensity, Experts, Denial, Repetition, Charisma, Extrapolation, Plain Folks, Fear, Warm and Fuzzy, Scapegoating, Group Dynamics, Association and Celebrity from the list of Language of Persuasion types from Larson (2009). This answers the first RQ, which was about the types of language of persuasion used in the TikTok posts by Malaysian cosmetic brands. This shows that the Malaysian cosmetic brands Alha Alfa Cosmetics, AINAA Beauty, and Skintific Official, all implemented strategies that stimulate the customer's motivation to process information regarding their products.

3.2 Language of Persuasion Corresponding to the Central Route of Processing

3.2.1 Simple Solutions

Example 1 (SO/02):

“Clay mask ni boleh kecutkan jerawat dalam masa 12 jam!

Ia juga membersihkan pori, sel liang dalam, dan

soothekan skin yang tengah breakout.”

Translation: This clay mask can shrink pimples in 12 hours! It can also clear pores, and soothe skin that is breaking out.

The extract above is a snippet in an audio from Skintific Official's second most liked TikTok, which featured a woman trying out the Anti Pores & Acne Clay Mask. The clips from the video alternated between shots of the product and the woman. In the beginning of the video, the woman called out to those currently experiencing breakouts. Throughout the video, the woman introduced the product, and explained the functions.

According to (Septianasri, L. et al., 2021) a Simple Solution is when the persuader provides one solution that could solve a problem, or many problems at the same time. The language of persuasion in the extract above is identified as a Simple Solution as the woman named multiple skin problems (pimples, pores, and skin that is breaking out), and promoted the Skintific Anti Pores & Acne Clay Mask as one product that can solve all the problems. The sentence insinuates that by using only one product, various skin problems can disappear at the same time.

This technique simulates the Central Route, as it requires a higher level of cognitive processing, when the viewers receive the message that the product is a solution for their problems. They would then need to weigh in whether they wish to purchase the product.

3.2.2 Plain Folks

Example 1 (AAC/01):

“Jadi, korang supportlah peniaga-peniaga kecil ni,
supaya kita dapat duduk selevel dengan artis.
Peniaga kecil ni lah yang perlukan bantuan-”

Translation: So, please support us small businesses, so that we can be at the same level as celebrities. It's us small businesses that need help.

The example above is an audio that is included in the most liked TikTok post by Alha Alfa Cosmetics. It is an existing audio uploaded by another TikTok user. The video shows a speed up clip of Datuk Abdul Al Halim Mohd Al Fadzil, more known as Alha Alfa, baking a cake with a Spongebob design, which is not like the usual posts that feature his products or makeup services.

This example is classified as Plain Folks as the video shows him as an ordinary person, and not as a celebrity, being a makeup artist and cosmetics brand founder, doing an activity that a normal person would. The audio also is from the perspective of small business owners, making the audience relate and feel closer to the brand Alha Alfa. Using Plain Folks means using regular people instead of celebrities or public figures as some people would believe them more, as it shows more authenticity from their claims (Septianasri et al., 2021). This technique uses the Central Route, where the audience weighs the relatability of the persuader in their process of decision making.

3.2.3 Testimonial

Example 1 (AB/02):

“baru 3 minggu dah ceni kalau 3 bulan agak agak ..”

Translation: For only 3 weeks, the results are already this good, just imagine if it was 3 months.

The data above shows a Testimonial from the young lady who is the subject of AINAA Beauty's second most liked TikTok. Testimonials are appealing to the audience, as they show a third party's opinion of the product and are not claims from the brand itself. The idea that the claim is most likely unbiased and is from genuine experience puts more trust in the customers towards the product. Testimonials prompt the viewers to use the information from the third party, and consider it before buying or purchasing, which uses the Central Route.

3.2.4 Explicit Claims

Example 1 (SO/01):

“No paraben

No alcohol”

“SKINTIFIC Mugwort Anti Pores & Acne Clay Mask”

The sample above, which is the text shown on the most liked TikTok video posted by Skintific Official, explicitly states the absence of said ingredients (Paraben and Alcohol) from the product and what the product is made of (Mugwort). This is described as Explicit Claims (Larson, 2009). The statement of what makes up the product, and assurance that there are no unwanted or possibly harmful ingredients will raise confidence in customers that the product is a good choice for them. As Explicit Claims clearly state the ingredients of the product, the audience will use their Central Route, consider if the ingredients are suitable for their needs.

3.2.5 Repetition

Example 1 (AAC/02):

“Banyak kali saya cakap, ni bukan lip matte,

bukan lip tint, bukan lipstick. Banyak kali saya cakap,

dan nama dia terang-terang lip booster, lip booster,

dia akan boost colour bibir korang. Ni, nampak ni? Ni?”

Translation: I said many times, this is not a lip matte, not a lip tint, not lipstick. I said it many times, and the name clearly says lip booster, this is a lip booster, lip booster, it will boost the colour of your lips. Here, look? Look?

“Ini bukan lip tint, yang kita nak nampak dia

memang obvious obvious sangat tu.”

Translation: This is not a lip tint, for us to see it obviously.

Repetition is where a message, be it words, image, or audio is repeated to ensure it will stick to the viewers (Septianasri, L. et al., 2021). Alha Alfa does this here by repeating the question many times to plant that thought in the viewers' minds.

In the above example, it is seen that in Alha Alfa Cosmetics' second most liked TikTok, where the founder himself becomes the main subject of the video in response to a claim made by a customer that his product does not provide what it is supposed to, he counters the claims. He uses Repetition by reiterating that his product is not a lip matte, lip tint or lipstick, which are naturally more pigmented, and is a lip booster. The repetitions are made so that potential customers do not put in unrealistic expectations and are aware of what the product does. Repetition uses the Central Route, where after they receive the message that is drilled to them,

the audience thinks if it is relevant information that could influence their decision.

3.2.6 Fear

Example 1 (AB/01):

“Dulu-dulu, Farah terjebak dengan produk merkuri, samalah macam Iqha.

Dulunya dia pakai 6 jenis produk merkuri.”

Translation: In the past, Farah was entangled in products with mercury, just like me. She used to use 6 different products with mercury.

Fear as a persuasive language is described as using something that the audience dislikes or fears to then promote a “solution” so that the audience will be rid of this fear (Larson, 2009). This is implemented in the above extract, which is from AINAA Beauty’s most liked TikTok video by introducing the subject of fear in this context, which is the fear of having a bad skin condition, experienced by Farah, the main subject of the video. It is also told to the audience that this subject of fear is caused by using products containing mercury.

Upon seeing the image of their fear, the audience would be stimulated to search for something that could prevent the fear from manifesting, which is offered by AINAA Beauty from their TikTok video. This uses the Central Route, where the audience uses higher cognitive effort to process their decision. The Central Route is prompted when presented with Fear, as the viewers would take in their fear, or their problem, process their feelings of wanting to get rid of them, and whether it is a strong enough reason for them to buy the product in the end.

3.2.7 Group Dynamics

Example 1 (AB/02):

“jgn tolak dia skrg. Kau tunggu nnti dia glowup □
menangis laki yg tinggal dia”

Translation: Don’t reject her now. Just wait for her glow up □ The guys who leave him will all cry.

This example from AINAA Beauty’s second most liked TikTok post showing the improvement of a customer from having severe acne to a significantly better face is a comment in which the video is made in response to. This comment warns men to not reject her, presumably because of her skin condition, as they will regret it when her skin condition improves, and she becomes prettier.

The scenario of romantic advances being turned down just because of looks is very common and can be relatable to the audience of AINAA Beauty. The comment challenges the audience who relate to this problem by using Group Dynamics to not stay stuck with their problem as being people who keep being rejected due to their skin condition and use AINAA Beauty to raise their status to being the person people would regret rejecting or leaving.

This technique uses the Central Route, where the audience faces the feeling of not wanting to

feel left out from Group Dynamics and use that as a determining factor of whether they wish to purchase the products.

3.2.8 Scapegoating

Example 1 (AB/03):

“Bella cuba pakai produk merkuri, so bila pakai produk merkuri tu, muka jadi lawa lah, jadi takde jerawat langsung. Pakai produk merkuri tu, kita stop bila mengandung tu, naik sikit, sikit. Lepas tu hari-hari peeling, hari-hari mengelupas, dia nak cepat cantik.”

Translation: I tried using products with mercury, and when I used them, my face turned pretty, and there were no pimples at all. I used the products, and when I stopped when I was pregnant, the pimples started appearing, little by little. After that, my skin was peeling every day, it was flaking every day, for the skin to be fast.

The extract above is from the third most liked TikTok post by AINAA Beauty. Instead of the claim coming from the narrator or AINAA Beauty themselves, it is made by Bella, the main subject of the TikTok video. Bella is someone who the followers of AINAA Beauty urged the company to help and will be receiving treatment from AINAA Beauty and AINAA Clinic. Bella has been suffering from acne and has also explained how her skin condition started worsening after she stopped wearing products with mercury, such as peeling and flaking.

The audience, who probably relate to also having skin just like Farah, and who also use products with mercury, would finally find something to blame for their skin condition, and turn away from their previous products. They would opt for AINAA Beauty to solve their problem. Scapegoating prompts the viewers to use their Central Route, where they would identify the ‘culprit’ in these cases, and weigh whether it is enough reason to give in and buy the persuader’s products.

3.3 Language of Persuasion Corresponding to the Peripheral Route of Processing

3.3.1 Celebrity

Example 1 (AAC/02):

omg□□ tengok warna bibir sy tu!! makin terang kan!
tapi bukan pakai malam je tau! pakai macam korg pakai
sunscreen, utk melindungi bibir korg, supaya cukup “zat”nya ok!

Omg □□ look at the colour of my lips!! It’s bolder right? But, don’t just wear it at night, okay? Wear it just like you wear sunscreen, to protect your lips, so that it has enough “nutrients” okay!

This sample is from Alha Alfa Cosmetics’ second most popular TikTok video, where the founder himself, Alha Alfa, demonstrates how to use his product, the Alha Alfa Lip Booster.

Besides founding his own cosmetics brand, Alha Alfa is a famous makeup artist, even well before creating his brand. The sample acts as a form of testimonial, but it differs from other regular testimonials by using a celebrity or known figure to share his thoughts on the product.

The act of using Celebrities as a persuasive language is by having a famous person who is well-known and familiar to the audience to endorse or vouch for a product, which is effective as people in general pay attention to famous people (Larson, 2009). Since Alha Alfa is famous as someone who knows a lot about makeup, it makes his claims become even more reliable and credible, even though it is his own product, which would make it seem like it comes from a biased place. In comparison to other founders who are not celebrities, their claims would not sound as genuine. This technique uses the Peripheral Route, which uses less cognitive effort to process the message as the audience have the attractiveness or the statuses of the celebrities to affect their decision-making instead of the message delivered.

3.3.2 Charisma

Example 1 (AAC/02):

“Pakai satu layer, macam mana sis boleh cakap, colour dia tak obvious?”

I’m applying one layer, how could you say that the colour is not obvious?

“Ha kau, kau nak terang mana lagi ni?”

Look, how much bolder do you want?

The act of using Charisma in persuading an audience, is by appearing bold and confident in delivering the message (Larson, 2009). This strategy is found in the above excerpts from Alha Alfa Cosmetics’ second viewed TikTok post promoting the Alha Alfa Lip Booster. In the first sentence, Alha Alfa confidently rhetorically asks how the lady who tried the product could claim that the colour payoff is not obviously seen, while also showing that the colour does indeed show clearly. He does the same thing by rhetorically asking the audience how much bolder they want the colour to be.

The boldness shown by Alha Alfa shows his strong belief in his product, which results in making the audience convinced that the product indeed is great as he claims. Even though the audience might initially believe what the lady claims, the charisma shown by Alha Alfa can sway their stance on their matter. The persuader’s charisma stimulates the viewers’ Peripheral Route, as they are given the way the persuader carries himself or herself as a determining factor in their decision-making.

3.3.3 Warm and Fuzzy

Example 1 (AB/03):

“ “Nak malu apa? Dah biarlah, memang semua orang pun jerawat jugak.” Alhamdulillahlah dapat suami yang macam ni. Dapat anak-anak yang boleh terima mak dia.”

“What for? Leave it, everyone gets pimples anyways.” Alhamdulillah for a husband like him. For children who can accept their mother.

The above sample is taken from the third most popular TikTok post by AINAA Beauty. The sample shows a quote shared by Bella, the subject of the video, from her husband when asked if he was ever embarrassed of her for having acne in which he answered that he would never be, as it is something normal. It is then followed by the narrator expressing how lucky Bella is to have a husband and children who are very accepting of her.

The language of persuasion incorporated in the TikTok video is Warm and Fuzzy which uses the imagery of a happy and loving family, which is Bella with her husband and children. Warm and Fuzzy uses sentimental images to evoke feelings of comfort or pleasure (Larson, 2009). This makes the audience associate the feeling of warmth seeing a loving support system with AINAA Beauty.

3.3.4 Association

Example 1 (AB/02):

“Kurang apa lagi? Dari depan (aku tampan),

dari samping (aku tampan), dari mana-mana aku tetap tampan, lagi-”

What else do I lack? From the front (I’m handsome), from the side (I’m handsome), from any angle I am still handsome, so

The above extract is from AINAA Beauty’s second most viewed TikTok post. The text is from the audio that is uploaded together with the TikTok. The lyrics express confidence in one’s looks, looking handsome, or attractive from all sides or angles. The video that is posted together with the audio shows the transformation of a young lady from having severe acne to a much-improved look.

Association is a persuasion technique that links the product, service, or brand to something that is already liked by the public (Larson, 2009). For example, Disney is associated with magic, and every time someone sees the name Disney, they would be reminded of magic. AINAA Beauty does this by associating the brand with beauty. This technique uses the Peripheral Route, as the viewers weigh their decision-making based on the association of the brand or the product with the sentiment.

3.3.5 Beautiful People

Example 1 (SO/01):

“No paraben

No alcohol

It feels plumpy and moist

Deeply cleanse pores

Soothe the skin

SKINTIFIC Mugwort Anti Pores & Acne Clay Mask”

The sample above from Skintific Official’s most viewed TikTok video, implements Beautiful People in their marketing. The text above is shown on the screen while a lady who is conventionally attractive, with fair and smooth skin, tries on the product. Beautiful People implies the idea that the audience will also look like the models using the product (Droulers & Adil, 2015).

This technique uses the Peripheral Route, which uses less cognitive effort to process the message as the audience uses the attractiveness of the models or the subject of the video as a scale to determine whether the product is worth buying.

3.4 The Different Types of Strategies Used by Each Brand

This section will answer the second RQ of this study by comparing the 17 different language of persuasion techniques used throughout the TikTok posts, and how it involves either the Central Route or the Peripheral Route from the Elaboration-Likelihood Model, influencing the audience engagement on the TikTok posts. Each TikTok video incorporates their own unique combination of persuasion techniques, where the videos strategically incorporate both Central and Peripheral processing routes to engage their audiences, leaning more towards central processing, with 12 out of 17 language of persuasion techniques being those that prompt the Central Route, and the remaining being the opposite.

Simple Solutions, the language of persuasion, which is the most frequently used, appeared six times out of the total of nine data, which means that only three TikTok posts did not implement the strategy. Simple Solutions is a technique that uses the Central Route, which means that viewers use less cognitive effort in the elaboration process. It is followed closely by Plain Folks, which appeared five times, which also relates to the Central Route under the Elaboration-Likelihood Model. Testimonial, Explicit Claims, Repetition, Scapegoating, Fear and Group Dynamics, all using the Central Route, which uses more thoughtful and deliberate consideration for decision-making, all occurred twice out of nine times. The least used techniques, making up only once out of nine times; Beautiful People, Celebrity, Charisma, Warm and Fuzzy, and Association use the Peripheral Route meanwhile Intensity, Experts, Denial and Extrapolation use the Central Route.

The multi-faceted approach of incorporating a combination of persuasion techniques that appeal to both the cognitive processes related to the Elaboration-Likelihood Model, enhancing the overall persuasive impact of the content. As a result, huge engagement is built from the interest and attention the viewers shared to the TikTok content.

3.4.1 Alha Alfa Cosmetics

As observed from the three most viewed TikTok posts from Alha Alfa Cosmetics, all of them employed persuasion techniques, both language of persuasion and nonverbal communication in persuasion. Among the language of persuasion techniques, repetition stood out the most as the technique with the highest frequency, employed in two out of three TikTok posts, while

the other strategies found; Simple Solutions, Plain Folks, Group Dynamics, Experts, Denial, Extrapolation, Celebrity, and Charisma showed no overlap, being utilised only once across the three posts.

In further analysis of the number of persuasion techniques used by each TikTok post, AAC/01 employed three language of persuasion strategies, AAC/02 utilised five and AAC/03 only one. It is integral to employ a combination of both verbal and nonverbal techniques in persuasion, that activates both the Central and Peripheral Route of processing according to the Elaboration-Likelihood Model in ensuring effective persuasion techniques.

3.4.2 Skintific Official

It is found that from the three most viewed TikTok posts from Skintific Official, there were both language of persuasion and nonverbal communication in persuasion techniques present. The most prevalent language persuasion strategies found, each appearing twice out of three in total, were Simple Solutions and Explicit Claims. Plain Folks, Testimonials, Intensity, Experts, and Beautiful People, on the other hand, all appeared once across the three TikTok posts, respectively.

To analyse further the application of persuasion techniques in each TikTok post, there were three language of persuasion techniques present in SO/01, five in SO/02, and only one in SO/03. In the context of Skintific Official as a brand, it is found that the application of Simple Solution and Explicit Claims are crucial as effective persuasion techniques that allows both the Central and Peripheral Route of the viewers to be prompted and is what drives their positive engagement on TikTok.

3.4.3 AINAA Beauty

AINAA Beauty utilises a variety of language persuasion techniques. Simple Solution and Plain Folks were strategies that were identified as the most used, present in all three of the brands' most viewed TikTok posts within the sample, suggesting their success in raking in positive engagement for their content. Additionally, Scapegoating and Fear tactics were both present in two TikTok posts, implying effectiveness from their recurrent application. Other language persuasion techniques such as Testimonials, Group Dynamics, Warm and Fuzzy, and Association on the other hand, were found to be employed only once.

AB/01 showed four occurrences, meanwhile AB/02 and AB/03 both had five. In conclusion, the analysis highlighted the importance of Simple Solution, Plain Folks, Scapegoating, and Fear in the language of persuasion in promoting AINAA Beauty as a cosmetic brand on TikTok. The incorporation of diverse persuasive elements showcases the creators' unique strategies to influence their audiences effectively.

4. Conclusion

The objectives of the study are to study the language of persuasion used in TikTok posts and analyse the different strategies applied in TikTok posts by different TikTok sellers. Based on the analysis, it is found that Alha Alfa Cosmetics, AINAA Beauty, and Skintific Official have employed various persuasion techniques that evoke both the processing routes from the

Elaboration-Likelihood Model in their TikTok videos to increase engagement from viewers. There were 17 types of persuasive language across the sample, with Simple Solutions being the most frequently used technique, employed by all three brands. The other persuasion techniques included Testimonial, Beautiful People, Explicit Claims, Repetition, Experts, Denial, Intensity, Charisma, Extrapolation, Plain Folks, Fear, Warm and Fuzzy, Scapegoating, Group Dynamics, Association, and Celebrity.

The difference in the most used persuasion techniques reflects their strategy in pulling in customers. Alha Alfa Cosmetics' most used language of persuasion was Repetition, which repeats a certain message or image, demonstrating how they want to make their products easily remembered through the drilling of information. Skintific Official's most used techniques were Simple Solution and Explicit Claims, focusing on pushing their product as a solution to the audience's problems, while being a credible source. AINAA Beauty used Simple Solution and Plain Folks the most, focusing on the relatability of the brand to the audience, and also promoting the accessibility of their services.

It is also found that each TikTok post incorporated at least three language persuasion techniques. None of the TikTok posts were found with only one or without any application of persuasion techniques. This means, the TikTok posts, which garnered an average of 4.15 million views, incorporated at least a combination of five different persuasion techniques in ensuring positive engagement. It can be concluded that the application of persuasion techniques, involving both the Central and Peripheral Route of the Elaboration-Likelihood Model are important to drive engagement towards a brand.

This study does not only benefit digital marketers, the main sample of the study, but also those in the linguistic field and society. It provides proper understanding of their audience's cognitive processing which helps marketers determine the most effective persuasive techniques to employ, considering the products, brand image, and demographic characteristics. This leads to more impactful marketing efforts, with a deeper understanding of what works best for their target audience.

For those in the linguistics field, it will broaden the knowledge in communication, specifically persuasion and negotiation. They could compare the different types of strategies used by different brands that work best and use this study as a foundation for further research in persuasive communication in digital marketing and explore the topic even deeper, such as branching out to other social media platforms.

As TikTok continues to be a popular platform for brands to reach a wider audience, understanding the techniques used on the platform is crucial for society. Consumers can develop a critical mindset while engaging with marketing content. This empowers individuals to make informed decisions and resist manipulation, leading to a more discerning and media-literate society.

This research does have its limitations. Since it takes the form of a qualitative study, it is possible for there to be bias or human errors from the researcher as data is manually collected. Besides, since the sample size is small, researchers can expand their sample to include a larger number of brands, which could result in different findings with more persuasion

techniques used. Researchers can also branch out to study brands outside of the cosmetic industry to compare the preferred techniques across various industries on TikTok.

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Authors Contribution

All authors made equal and substantial contributions to the completion of the manuscript.

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