

Emotional Appeal Defined

Pathos represents an appeal to the audience's emotions. Pathos is a communication technique used most often in rhetoric (where it is considered one of the three modes of persuasion, alongside ethos and logos), and in literature, film, and other narrative art.

Emotional appeal can be accomplished in a multitude of ways:

- By a metaphor or storytelling, common as a hook
- By a general passion in the delivery
- By an overall emotion
- By the sympathies of the speech or writing as determined by the audience

The pathos of a speech or writing is only ultimately determined by the audience.

The Purpose of an Emotional Appeal

An emotional appeal is directed to sway an audience member's emotions and uses the manipulation of the recipient's emotions rather than valid logic to win an argument. An emotional appeal uses emotions as the basis of an argument's position without factual evidence that logically supports the major ideas endorsed by the presenter. In an emotional appeal, persuasive language is used to develop the foundation of an appeal to emotion-based arguments instead of facts. Therefore, the validity of the premises that establish such an argument does not prove to be verifiable.

Emotional appeal is a logical fallacy, whereby a debater attempts to win an argument by trying to get an emotional reaction from the opponent and audience. It is generally characterized by the use of loaded language and concepts (God, country, and apple pie being good concepts; drugs and crime being bad ones). In debating terms, emotional appeals are often effective as a rhetorical device, but are generally considered naive or dishonest as a logical argument, since they often appeal to the prejudices of listeners rather than offer a sober assessment of a situation.

Examples of Emotional Appeals

Children are more often than not trotted out as an appeal to emotion. From pictures of starving children to motivate people to give to charity to using them as any excuse to ban things that children shouldn't even be aware of (e.g., guns), they are repeatedly paraded in front of audiences to appeal to their emotional protective instincts, often overriding anyone's sense of rationality. "For the children" or "think of the children" as emotional appeals have been used with success in passing political motions such as Proposition 13 in California. As with children, cute animals override most people's logic. Even if the pictures of animal testing put out by PETA are 50 years out of date, they still provoke an emotional response rather than a reasoned one when trying to assess cruelty in animal testing.

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How Is Emotional Appeal Used to Persuade?

by George Boykin, Demand Media

The claim that emotions drive buying decisions while logic justifies buying decisions is hardly newsworthy. This approach to selling has been taught in sales-training seminars for decades. It is useful, however, to explore why people tend to buy with their hearts and rationalize with their heads. This will assist in a better understanding of how emotional appeal is used to persuade.

Persuasion Techniques

There are basically two ways to persuade: rational persuasion and emotional persuasion. Rational persuasion employs logical arguments and believable evidence. Rational persuasion requires that the target or audience make an active effort in receiving and evaluating the information. The conscious minds must be engaged and the audience must be sufficiently motivated to process the information. Emotional persuasion relies on the subconscious mind's "auto-pilot" to handle the chores of receiving, processing and evaluating information to make a decision. However, the subconscious mind is clueless about processing and evaluating information based on conscious thought. Consequently, emotions and instincts, which reside in the subconscious, kick in as the auto-pilot substitute for conscious thought. In other words, when decisions are made at the subconscious level, they are based on emotions and instincts, or "gut feeling."

Why Emotional Appeals Work

Thinking is a laborious task. Experts in neuroscience say that the mere act of thinking burns three times more calories than a less-challenging task like watching TV. The experts also note that the human brain runs on idle in a non-thinking state 95 percent of the time. Marketers clearly don't bet their budgets on consumers being asleep at the switch 95 percent of the time. The stats strongly suggest, however, that people are more susceptible to emotional appeals because their brains are in an idle, subliminal state most of the time.

Clutter Busting

The Advertising Education Foundation lends authority to the importance of emotional appeals by calling attention to the fact that the average person is exposed to more than 3,000 ads per day. It would be impossible to process the content of these ads with the conscious mind even if the brain was actively engaged 24/7. As such, AEF counsels that advertising appeals must transcend the rational -- for example "cleans your windows" -- just to bust out of the clutter. Moreover, AEF advises that effective emotional appeals should subliminally excite that singular thought, belief, hope, dream or expectation to get the target's attention. These are only a few of the emotional triggers that AEF believes will get a strong reaction from the target.

Catalog of Emotions

Triggers are attached to all positive and negative emotions that can be pulled in emotional appeals intended to persuade. Marketers and salespeople often use cognitive dissonance theory to persuade by creating emotional tension between conflicting positive and negative emotions, and then offering whatever they're selling as the solution to the dissonance. They also use cognitive consonance theory to align their "pitches" to be internally compatible with people's attitudes and beliefs. Although the range of human emotions is enormous, Aristotle settled on 14 prime positive and negative emotions 2,500 years ago that are manipulated to this day in appeals to persuade. Aristotle's 14 emotions are: anger, mildness, love, enmity, fear, confidence, shame, shamelessness, benevolence, pity, indignation, envy, emulation and contempt.

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