

Persuasive Communication Strategies for Book Marketing

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Abstract

Sales letters or direct mails have been an integral component of business communication under the umbrella of direct marketing, sent to targeted prospective customers based on market surveys. This article attempts to analyze sales letters from one publishing company with regards to its marketing and promotion strategies based on two objectives: to examine the generic structure of these letters in comparison with established structure and to investigate the discursive practices in book publishing and marketing based on the contents of the letters. Results show that while the generic structure is generally similar to existing literature of sales letters, there is a significant difference in the strategies used to realize persuasive communication in the letters from the present corpus. The article also reveals the element of interdiscursivity employed as a persuasive strategy in the letters.

Keywords

Genre Analysis, Sales Letters, Book Marketing, Persuasive Strategies, Interdiscursivity

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1. Introduction

Sales letters or direct mails have been an integral component of business communication under the umbrella of direct marketing alongside personal selling, catalogue marketing, telephone marketing, direct-response television marketing and online marketing. Sales letters are unsolicited correspondence sent to targeted prospective customers based on a highly selective mailing list to persuade them to buy a product or service. There is a significant difference between a sales letter and an advertisement. A sales letter is a personal letter to a customer promoting a product and persuading him/her to make a purchase while an advertisement is a paid non-personal communication from an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade or influence an audience [1]. Thus a sales letter is used when the situation calls for direct, one-to-one communication as it allows personalized approach and flexibility.

The advantages of using sales letters include the availability of format and space “to tell a complete story” about the product being promoted as opposed to the constraint of space in an advertisement. Because it is a personalized letter, it can engage the attention of the receiver. The letter is sent to a receiver from an established database enabling the writer to include the receiver’s personal details and characteristics. Most importantly, the use of sales letters allows a company to reach potential customers who are inaccessible by other media. Of course the medium is not without its disadvantages. Among them is that many people view sales letters as junk mail and simply discard them. There is also the high cost of postage and of maintaining the database as well as the low response rate – between 2 – 5 percent [1]. Despite all these setbacks, this medium is still highly preferred by companies making it the largest direct marketing medium [2].

At the time when online marketing supersedes other forms of direct marketing, it can be confidently stated that sales letters

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still have a significant role to play in marketing products and services. This is evident in recent linguistic and cultural research of sales letters, for example [3]; [4] where up-to-date authentic data were obtained for analysis of the genre. The popularity and the relevance of this genre to garner sales in certain sectors are also evident in the many websites advertising the services for copywriting effective sales letters. Some websites even offer templates. An example is [5] who provides a 12-step template for writing results-oriented sales letters with a careful, methodical series of copywriting tactics.

As sales letters are part of integrated marketing and advertising strategies known as marketing communications mix [2] (p. 370), they fall under the category of promotional genres. Genres encompass social processes which reflect the discursive practices of the discourse community prompting research into those practices to understand the writing conventions and subsequently establishing the generic structure of sales letters [6]; [4]. The convention of writing sales letters as a promotional genre has attracted applied linguists as early as the nineties and the literature over two decades is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of generic structure of sales letters over two decades.

Bhatia, 1993	Zhu, 2000	Vergaro, 2004	Cheung, 2009	Zhu & Hildebrandt, 2012	Kristina, Hashima & Hariharan, 2017
	Headline			Headline	
	Salutation	Opening salutation		Salutation	
Establishing credentials	Establishing credentials	Introduce the product/offer/service	Setting the scene	Establishing credentials	Introducing the offer
Introducing the offer	Offering product	Establish credentials	Establishing credentials	Introducing products	Preclosing
Offering incentives	Offering incentives	Enhance the offer	Introducing the offer	Offering incentives	Eliciting interest
Enclosing documents	Soliciting response	Solicit, invite further communication, contacts	Building goodwill	Soliciting response	Soliciting response
Soliciting response	Closing move	End politely	Offering incentives	Good wishes	Ending politely
Using pressure tactic	Postscript	Closing salutation	Using pressure tactics	Postscript	
Ending politely			Triggering action		
			Soliciting action		
			Reinforcing the offer		
			Building rapport		

Based only on the contents of the letters i.e. excluding the salutation and the closing, [7] identified seven rhetorical moves, [8] identified four while [9] identified six. However, [4] identified ten moves which show detailed sections of the sales letters while [3] identified similar six moves. More than twenty years since [7], [10] identified only four moves. In retrospect, the generic structure of sales letters has not changed much over the last two decades with four obligatory moves in the contents of sales letters. They are *Establishing credentials*; *Introducing the offer*; *Offering incentives*; and *Soliciting response*.

As with any generic structure there are certainly differences in how the moves are phrased and how they are sequenced in the structure (refer to Table 1). The differences are probably due to the varied products and services on offer in the letters analyzed. The seven moves identified by [7] are based on a letter from a bank to a company promoting a training program. The moves identified by [9] and [4] are based on

letters from different organizations to ensure a variety in letter writing style. These letters promoted a wide range of products. Sales letters have also been analyzed for the cultural aspects they hold, for example the difference between English and Chinese sales letters [8], between English and Italian sales letters [9] and between English and Thai [11].

1.1. Discursive Practices

Sales letters or direct mails are most often written by copywriters in the marketing department of a company. For copywriting purposes, [1] cited the hints provided by an internationally respected direct-response copywriter. When writing sales letters, knowledge in the generic structure of sales letters presented by applied linguists guides writers *how* to write, while knowledge from the hints [1] (p. 409) and the steps [5] presented by the practitioners contributes to *what* to write. This is highly complementary as demonstrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of practitioners' hints and steps with applied linguist' moves.

Wells et al. (2003)	Frey (2009)	Cheung (2009)
First, to grab attention or generate curiosity, use pictures and headlines that tout the product's benefits. Second, use a personalised salutation.	1. Get attention	
Third, the best way to begin a letter is with a brief yet compelling or surprising statement.	2. Identify the problem 3. Provide the solution 4. Present your credentials	1. Setting the scene 2. Establishing credentials 4. Building goodwill
Fourth, make the offer as early in the body of the letter as possible.	5. Make your offer 6. Show the benefits	3. Introducing the offer
Fifth, the letter should use testimonials or other particulars that clearly describe benefits to the customer.	7. Give social proof 8. Inject scarcity 9. Give a guarantee	5. Offering incentives
Finally, the closing of the letter should include a repetition of the offer, additional incentives, and a clear action.	10. Call to action 11. Give a warning 12. Close with a reminder	6. Using pressure tactics 7. Triggering action 8. Soliciting action 9. Reinforcing the offer 10. Building rapport

The hints, steps and moves are almost similar but the sequence of occurrence differs with a high probability according to the style the letters are written. The glaring difference can be seen in the style the steps and moves are phrased. For example, because [5] aims towards results-oriented sales letters, his steps are constructed with emotion-laden action verb phrases (e.g. "Present your credentials" instead of "Establishing credentials"). When these phrases are translated into copywriting strategies, they become persuasive communication.

1.2. Persuasive Communication

It is common for readers to build resistance when they are able to detect persuasion in a text [12] the same way customers or the public in general always have some kind of resistance to any kind of persuasive marketing. This happens for various reasons: to save money, to ensure the quality of the product, etc. Yet companies need to garner sales and for that reason, a sales letter should first of all address the receiver's resistance to buying while persuading him/her to make a purchase [5]; [13]. The ability to persuade is crucial if the writer of a text is to achieve his objectives. At the same time it is necessary to understand the cognitive processes involved when the readers interpret persuasive messages [14] and the psychology of consumer behavior [13]. This is because persuasion involves a conscious effort at influencing the thoughts and actions of a reader [15] (p. 5).

Linguistically, there are strategies that work for persuasive communication while others don't and writers need to recognize these. Based on a statistical analysis of the results of an experiment with the use of coherence markers, [12] were able to demonstrate that texts with objective markers are more persuasive than those with subjective markers. The resistance occurred because readers were reportedly able to detect the persuasive intention in texts with subjective markers. This reduction in persuasiveness in a similar context

was reported by [16].

Taking this as a starting point, an effective copywriter needs to put the sales letter in the context of situation i.e. marketing the product with appropriate strategies in order to eliminate or at least lessen resistance. This calls for the art of persuasion, a topic according to [17] which continues to have immense relevance in all human interaction. Their definition of persuasion captures the attempt in this article to investigate the language for persuasive communication in sales letters:

Persuasion is defined as those linguistic choices that aim at changing or affecting the behavior of others or strengthening the existing beliefs and behaviors of those who already agree, the beliefs and behaviors of persuaders included ...[17] (p. 5)

Persuasion is rhetoric and rhetoric has very often been discussed from the perspectives of Aristotelian types of appeal: logos, ethos and pathos. Logos refers to the logical appeal in the persuasion technique which uses reasoning and logic to persuade and convince the readers. This is usually done by injecting facts and figures. Ethos, the ethical appeal is when the writer makes use of his/her credibility, character and confidence to persuade while pathos is when the writer appeals to the emotion of the readers by using emotion-laden words and phrases. These three types of appeals are referred to as rhetorical devices and can be found in persuasive texts [18]. However, the three types of appeal may or may not occur together in persuasive texts.

1.3. Sales Letters for Book Marketing

Among products sold to members of the public, books seem to be one of the more challenging items to market and sell. No doubt books of the different genres can conveniently be displayed in bookshops and galleries where members of the public can just walk in, notice, scan, decide and purchase the

books but this strategy may not be able to garner the volume of sales as successfully as other media. Further, the advent of technology has reportedly affected the sales of physical books [19]. Although most publishers have capitalized on the marketing tools afforded by the internet by engaging online marketing of physical books, the emergence of eBook since 2002 has adversely affected the sales of physical books. A tremendous leap in the sales of eBooks was reported in the US from less than USD 50 million in 2007 to close to USD 1 billion in 2012 [20]. However, there are some advantages in physical books which are lacking in eBooks [20] and publishers are taking advantage of this fact. To realize this, the publishers need to have a thorough understanding of their current and potential customers and the formidable interplay between psychological understanding and marketing practices [13].

There are certain genres of books which are still popular in physical form and publishers have taken this opportunity to strategize for sale volume. This is exactly what The Reader's Digest Association Inc. (RD) has done - making use of direct mail marketing to promote their publications. Reader's Digest is an American general interest family magazine founded by DeWitt Wallace and Lila Bell Wallace in 1922. The magazine started gaining popularity very fast because of the Wallaces' correct assessment of what the potential mass-market audience wanted to read. The magazine started spreading to other countries and these countries gained the rights to their own edition, giving birth to Reader's Digest Asia, among them. Forty years later, the magazine has been and is still read in most countries around the globe with a total international circulation of 23 million copies. RD also publishes books of various genres but mostly for family and health and has also been known to use sweepstakes (contests) as a marketing strategy to promote its publications. In this article, the acronym RDAs will be used for Reader's Digest Asia.

Not considering actual RDAs' direct marketing procedures, following is an account of how RDAs operates based on one customer's experience. When an individual registers for a subscription for RD magazines and makes payment, she/he starts receiving contest invitations with the arrival of the magazine each month. When a customer shows interest by responding to the invitations, a sequence of sales promotion letters follow. Interestingly these letters are signed by heads of different departments in RDAs but with the same purpose of promoting books, CDs or other products from partner manufacturers. Although categorized in the same genre, sales letters from RDAs appear to differ from the direct and straightforward letters as those in the corpus analyzed in the earlier mentioned studies.

1.4. Significance of Research

This article attempts to analyze sales letters from RDAs with two objectives: to examine the generic structure of these letters in comparison with established structure and to investigate the discursive practices in book publishing and marketing in order to identify the persuasive strategies. Therefore the investigation is guided by two research questions:

- a) Are the generic structure and the communicative purpose of sales letters from RDAs similar with those established in earlier research?
- b) What are the persuasive devices used in sales letters from RDAs?

Although some research has been conducted on sales letters from the genre perspective, none thus far has dealt with sales and marketing of books. Thus this article will contribute to this knowledge as well as contribute to writing techniques for marketing purposes.

2. Method

2.1. Data Collection

The data consist of sales letters sent by a publishing company, Readers Digest Asia (RDAs) to one reader in a span of five years (2008 – 2012). There are different types of letters signed by different people, mostly heads of the different departments in RDAs. Most of the letters are not dated and some were repeatedly sent over the five years. Therefore, the letters were selected at random and categorized according to the main contents of the letters. Initial results show that the letters fall under a number of categories such as thank you or appreciation, loyalty recognition, privileged subscriber, contest eligibility, potential winner and winner's privilege, with some overlapping information.

For the purpose of analysis and discussion in this article, only three categories were included in the corpus and the selection was based on specific phrases in the opening move as clear distinction of the category. The three categories are loyalty recognition (LR), contest eligibility (CE) and potential winner (PW). As this article attempts to analyze the texts in the letters, longer letters consisting of two pages and more were selected. A total of 30 letters were selected, 10 for each category. The details on the number of paragraphs and the coding are provided in Appendix A.

2.2. Data Analysis

The sales letters were examined based on structural analysis [7] to identify the generic construct using [4]'s structure of

sales letters as the basis (refer to Table 1). [4]'s structure was selected because it had been validated by five specialist informants from the discourse community (p. 36) and because it is very close to the steps put forward by a practitioner [5] from the discourse community of copywriters of sales letters (refer to Table 2). As the communicative purposes of sales letters have been established in earlier studies, this article also examined the contents of sales letters from RDAs to confirm these purposes.

Sales letters are viewed as rhetorical as they include phrases which are persuasive in marketing terms but can be 'too good to be true' to lay people. The contents of the letters were further examined to identify the persuasive strategies used to market the products based on Aristotle's rhetorical theory of logos, ethos and pathos. [18] exemplified the benefit of employing rhetorical analysis to examine certain texts especially those with persuasive overtones [21] as it "offers a more finely grained or explanatorily thicker description of the various positions and discourses held by the writers of the texts" [17] (p. 92). Therefore this article examined the rhetorical devices used in the letters to persuade potential customers: to examine the logos i.e. the logical appeal based on reasoning; ethos i.e. the ethical appeal referring to the credibility of the sender; and the pathos i.e. the emotional appeal by using emotion-laden words. At the same time, the analysis investigated the use of interdiscursivity [22] in the letters in an attempt to identify the strategies behind sales letters [23].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Generic Structure

Letters from RDAs are generally very long, consisting of between 11 to 17 paragraphs (Appendix A) although there are short letters as well. The length may lead to discard as the receiver may categorize the letters as junk mails. RDAs seems to believe using long sales letters as a good strategy as most of the letters are long. When constructing long sales letters, copywriters plan for effectiveness right from the start [24]. The main headline area with the pre-head, the main heading and the sub-head should be able to grab the attention of the receiver instantly. This strategy should follow through throughout the letters. Thus, the length does not matter.

As sales letters are part of marketing strategies, they fall under the category of promotional genres and any genre according to [21] is a product "of an understanding or a prior knowledge of disciplinary or institutional conventions, which are responsible for regulating generic constructs, giving them an identity and internal ordering". The result of a structural analysis reveals that sales letters from RDAs are essentially

similar with other sales letters. The generic structure consists of 12 rhetorical moves which are described in Table 3 and further explained and discussed below.

Table 3. Generic structure and description of moves in RDAs sales letters.

MOVE	DESCRIPTION
Announcement	Announcing good news such as recognition, privileges and winning opportunities
Salutation	Addressing the receiver using a personalized approach
Setting the scene	Informing the receiver about the purpose of the letter with as much detail as possible
Establishing credentials	Providing details on the contest and the success of past winners
Introducing the offer	Informing the receiver about the offer
Enhancing the offer	Providing information on extra benefits on both the product on offer and the opportunity in the contest
Enclosing documents	Enclosing the relevant documents such as contest entry forms and product catalogues
Soliciting response	Inviting the receiver to response to the offer
Using pressure tactics	This is further to soliciting response to ensure action from the recipient
Ending politely	This move is to build rapport with the reader/recipient
Closing salutation	A common move in a letter but on a personal note
Postscript	This move is to reinforce the offer even further

The significant difference between letters for RDAs and letters in the earlier studies is observed in the contents and the linguistic choices used. In most sales letters, the first move *Headline* is usually used to inform the receiver about the product or products on offer but in letters from RDAs, the move is labelled as *Announcement* because it is realized more with announcing the winning opportunity to the receiver. The announcement is usually presented in the centre of the letter format rather than aligned left as shown in Examples (1) to (3) below. The *Announcement* is followed by a personalized salutation of "Dear (receiver's name)".

(1) *CONGRATULATIONS ARE IN ORDER FOR YOU (RECEIVER'S NAMES),*

Because you've earned your way into a special tier that only 1% of our customers belong to ... (LR7)

(2) *(Receiver's name)*

We request your consent to claim over RM500,000 in prize privileges in your name. Your prompt response is requested. Details below (CE1)

(3) *Attention, (Receiver's name):*

You are among the top-ranked West Malaysia residents selected to receive the opportunity to advance to the Final Stage ... (PW9)

The move *Setting the scene* is not found in the earlier studies reviewed except [4] but occurs consistently in letters from RDAs. *Setting the scene* can be realized by a number

of steps: Relating to a social issue; or culture; or the market situation; or the viewer; or the maker/character [4] (p. 36). This move in RDAs letters concurs with [4]’s where the writer puts “the sales proposition in context”, in this case, contest or winning opportunity, and makes “it sound logical and relevant” to the receiver (p. 37). This move correlates with [5]’s Step 1 *Get attention* where the announcement and the introduction paragraph set the scene to grab the receiver’s attention. This can be seen later in Examples (10) to (18) which are also used as the basis to categorize the letters.

Step 2 *Identify the problem* and Step 3 *Provide the solution* in [5] are not found in letters from RDAs as well as in other studies mentioned. The second move in all letters is *Establishing credentials*. While *Establishing credentials* in most sales letters provides positive information about the company offering the product in order to convince the receiver, this move in RDAs letters provides positive information about the contest and the possibility to win, very often citing past winners as a strategy to show credibility of the contests, as shown in Examples (4) to (6).

(4) *Your continued friendship over the last 5 years has truly caught our attention. ... and as a result, I want you to make sure you have the opportunity to win, and win big. (LR2)*

(7) *Enhancing the offer*

Para Realisations

4 *The countdown has begun. ...*

5 *But there’s more ... B. Soh, ... Not only is he excited about handing over a RM250,000 cheque to the next winner, but he’s thrilled about selecting two impressive gifts ...*

6 *I must tell you that you are the one and only person in Selangor who ... and I wouldn’t want you to miss out on this opportunity!*

7 *Now is also a good time to beat the crowds before the holiday season ... just sit in your armchair, and browse through your new Catalogue to select great gifts ...*

8 *Inside the best of the catalogue – made specially for our most valued customers – you’ll find the finest books, music and videos on offer, including bestsellers, timeless classics and more. ...*

9 *I’m sure you’ll also be pleased to know that our products are covered by our world famous Guarantee of Satisfaction. ...*

10 *As an additional privilege to thank you for making a selection, you could win a fabulous Peugeot 407 2.0 or*

Plus, if you send for 2 or more products, a RM15,000

11 *Thank You Bonus will automatically be added to the Customer Appreciation Prize if you are the winner. ...*

Move

Introducing the offer (1)

Enhancing the offer (1)

Introducing the offer (2)

Enhancing the offer (2)

Another common move in the corpus is *Enclosing documents* which also occurs twice accordingly with *Introducing the offer* and *Enhancing the offer*. For *Introducing the offer*, catalogues, various product flyers, order forms and self-adhesive stamps are enclosed while for *Enhancing the offer*, discount vouchers, free gift privilege certificates/vouchers are enclosed. For offering the opportunity to participate in the contests (CE) or opportunity to win the contests (PW),

(5) *A QUARTER OF A MILLION RINGGIT is our biggest prize in the RM750,000 Super Contest, (Receiver’s name). The opportunity to win it is only offered to friends like you. ... (CE6)*

(6) *Firstly, it was established, and is absolutely certain at this stage, that you are now as well placed as our most recent Grand Prize & Bonus winner, Miss XX ... twice the number of opportunities Miss XX had – for the chance to win ... (PW10).*

Introducing the offer in letters from RDAs is essentially similar to the move in other sales letters. However, the move occurs twice in one letter: i) offer for the opportunity to participate in the contest and ii) offer for the book. Accordingly, *Enhancing the offer* also occurs twice, enhancing both items introduced as the offers: i) extra opportunities to win the contest/cash prizes and ii) extra benefits for the book purchase e.g. Priority Handling Treatment. The way *Enhancing the offer* is realized exudes the persuasiveness of these letters (persuasive overtones) and very often in multiple paragraphs, each paragraph trying to convince the receiver about the huge opportunity of winning big if he/she acts accordingly. Example (7) below from PW2 shows how *Enhancing the Offer* is realized where the first offer is introduced and is enhanced in two paragraphs while the second offer is enhanced in four paragraphs.

various types of forms, certificates and even mock checks bearing the name of the receiver (as the potential winner) are enclosed. Quite often flyers of a car as part of the prize on offer with a mock key attached are part of the package. Thus, packages from RDAs are usually ‘fat’ with enclosures including payment slip and self-address reply envelopes.

Soliciting response is where the writer states what the receiver needs to do: “affix stamp(s) of your choice; select

the color of your car as the bonus prize; include the Qualification Voucher or enclose the Certificate of Excellence in your reply envelope". The final step can be embedded with *Using pressure tactics* as shown (in bold) in Example (8). RDAs uses deadlines as a strategy to pressure the receiver to act in return for more bonuses.

- (8) *Then return your entry claim thus completed in your reply envelope WITHIN 7 DAYS OF RECEIPT. (PW10)*
 Example (9) is another very common strategy for *Using pressure tactics*, usually following the deadlines mentioned above.

Example (9) is another very common strategy for *Using pressure tactics*, usually following the deadlines mentioned above.

- (9) *If you don't want to send for your copy of (title of the book) when entering the Super Contest, ... But remember, you'll miss out the special CUSTOMER APPRECIATION PRIZE AND BONUS opportunity worth up to RM140,000 ... (CE3)*

Finally *Postscript* is another common move in letters from RDAs. This move is in line with what [5] stresses where the postscript "is the third most read element" in a sales letter prompting some copywriters to use more than one postscript (P.P.S.). Postscripts are used to remind the receiver of the irresistible offers stated in the body of the letter. This can be later seen in Example (19).

With reference to the hints provided by [1] in Table 2, letters from RDAs adhere to the requirements of sales letters as proposed by the experts indicating that the letters comply with the discursive practices of the discourse community (of marketing). First, the attention grabber is in the form of announcements of winning cash prizes or winning opportunities. Second, the letters all use personalized salutation. Third, the letters all begin with a brief yet compelling statement such as those in Examples (4) to (6). Fourth, the offer is made as early as possible, usually in paragraph 4 of the letters as seen in Example (7) but as demonstrated in the same example letters from RDAs make the offer twice. Fifth is to include testimonials, benefits etc. and the letters certainly make full use of this strategy. Finally, in closing the letters, offers are repeated, additional benefits are highlighted and all actions that need to be taken are clearly called for.

3.2. Communicative Purposes

The main function of a sales letter has been established as persuading and eliciting a specific response from the receiver to buy a product or service [7]. Thus, the 'all-encompassing' communicative purpose [25] of sales letters from RDAs can be established as persuading the receivers to make a purchase

on the products promoted in the letters. Although sales letters from RDAs share similar communicative purpose with sales letters discussed earlier, other sub-purposes [26] have been identified and these have been used to categorize the letters into loyalty recognition (LR), contest eligibility (CE) and potential winners (PW) mentioned earlier. Although the information in the categories may overlap, for example, how long the receiver has subscribed to RDAs in Loyalty Recognition and Privileged Subscriber, distinct words and phrases are used to distinguish the categories. The sub-purposes are used by the writers for *Setting the scene* in most of the letters.

Loyalty Recognition (LR)

The sub-purpose of sales letters in this category is to thank or acknowledge customers who have been subscribing to Reader's Digest magazine for a number of years. Phrases such as 'your loyalty', 'loyal customer', 'customer of honor' and 'valued friend' are used to realize this sub-purpose as exemplified in the following opening lines:

- (10) *Your loyalty represents incontestable proof of your interest in our products, ... (LR1)*
 (11) *I am pleased that the Contest Committee has acknowledged your excellent customer status. You are without doubt ... and I want to personally thank you for your remarkable loyalty. (LR4)*
 (12) *Thank you for your order ... we have held you in the highest regard, both as a loyal customer and valued friend. (LR8)*

Contest Eligibility (CE)

Letters in this category were sent after payment for the (renewed) subscription or product purchased. In this category, the sub-purpose is to inform the subscriber that she/he has qualified for opportunity to participate in the various contests at RDAs.

- (13) *Thank you so much for your recent payment for Reader's digest magazine. ... that's why it is even more exciting that I can say: "(RECEIVER'S NAME), your opportunity to win a share in over RM500,000 in prize awards could be 100% guaranteed!" (CE1)*
 (14) *Your name has been designated a "PASS NAME" concerning valuable benefits, which include prize opportunities in the RM750,000 Super Contest. ... (CE3)*
 (15) *I have some astonishing news. You are eligible for no fewer than NINE opportunities to win RM220,000 in our Grand Prize and Super Bonus Contest. (CE7)*

Potential Winner (PW)

This category of sales letters has the sub-purpose of

informing the recipient about the opportunity and the high potential to win different categories of cash prizes.

(16) *Are you able to keep some information secret? ... as we prepare to award cash prizes to our winners. You could be one of them, (receiver's name) (PW2)*

(17) *As Finance Director, ... Today the paperwork that could see the release of a RM250,000 prize check in the (receiver's name) name is ready. (PW3)*

(18) *I have some great news for you. Should you reply to this notice promptly to claim your place in the Final Stage of the RM750,000 Super Contest, there is a real possibility of you receiving a priority letter from my office informing you THAT YOU HAVE JUST WON OVER RM250,000. (PW8)*

The communicative purposes have been stated very clearly in the letters and can be considered as successful in influencing

(19) *Use of persuasive communication strategies in RDAs sales letters (PW1)*

TEXT

*There's no doubt it!
If our registered courier arrives at your Selangor home, It's official, you have RM220,000
Dear (name of receiver)
What you have just read ... immediately after the Grand Prize judging, ... "and here is an advance cheque for you to start celebrating today"
Your Selangor home – yes, YOUR ADDRESS – could very well be our registered courier's destination. ...
The award presentation for the RM220,000 cheque would follow soon after in case you win...
Within 72 hours of winner confirmation I should issue important documents such as official flight arrangements, prize delivery instructions, and the first advance upgrade cheque ...
...I'll also then send you our invaluable NEW book (title of book). This comprehensive reference book shows you what to do...
Say "YES" to (title of the book) now, and we'll rush your book for 3 easy, interest-free monthly payments of ... Or if you prefer one-time payment ... You will receive a FREE ...
See the enclosed brochure now.*

Treat the 7-day maximum award deadline as if a small fortune depends on it. Because it could.

When you say "YES" within 7 days you could take home additional prizes ...

... it is in your best interests to send in your valid documents promptly. If ever there is a time to act swiftly, this is it!

Sincerely,

*P.S. PLUS... YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO WIN...when you say "YES" to our book offer. See your enclosed Contest flyer for details!
P.P.S. the guaranteed quickest – and easiest – way to process your order and instantly guarantee ALL your opportunities to win in the Super Contest is to go to www.rdasia.com.my/go and quote Contest code ...*

purchase. This is seen in the case of the customer from whom the sample letters were obtained. The customer subscribed to RDAs for more than five years and had made a number of purchases in order to get the opportunities to win prizes.

3.3. Persuasive Communication Strategies

Rhetorical Appeals

Persuasive communication strategies are traced in the sales letters from RDAs in the form of the three types of Aristotelian rhetorical appeals: logos, ethos and pathos. As stressed by Frey (2009), people are motivated to make a purchase based on their emotions and they will justify their action based on logic only after the purchase. This is captured in the sample letter from the category of Potential Winner (PW1) in Example (19) below where the use of logos, ethos and pathos is indicated in the 12 moves.

RHETORICAL MOVES & STRATEGIES

- Announcement *Pathos*
- Salutation *Pathos*
- Setting the scene *Pathos*
- Establishing credentials *Ethos*
- Introducing the offer (1) *Ethos*
- Introducing the offer (2) *Ethos*
- Enhancing the offer *Pathos*
- Enclosing documents *Ethos*
- Using pressure tactics *Logos*
- Soliciting response *Pathos*
- Ending politely *Pathos*
- Closing salutation *Pathos*
- Postscript 1 *Pathos*
- Postscript 2 *Pathos*

Of the 12 moves, 8 have been realized by appealing to the emotion of the receiver (pathos). Although the move *Establishing credentials* is realized with ethos, the information presented (the huge prize money and the luxury

offered) seems very enticing which makes this move appeal to the emotion as well (pathos). Similarly in *Enclosing document* which is realized with ethos, the use of colorful, glossy catalogues and product flyers also makes it partly

appealing to the emotion (pathos). In these two moves, pathos is embedded in ethos. Overall, the copywriter has applied a careful interplay of the three rhetorical appeals undermining the most effective appeal, pathos, more than others.

If you are judged the winner

Apart from the use of the Aristotelian theory of appeals, another persuasive communication strategy has been detected. A phrase *if you are judged the winner*, ... and its variations have been very frequently used in sales letters from RDAs. The variations include *Should you be declared the winner; If you are confirmed the winner; If you win; Provided you are confirmed the winner; in case you win*; etcetera. As charted in Appendix B, these phrases can be found in almost 87% of the letters in the corpus and as can be seen in Examples (20) to (22), they can occur in different moves and in the different categories of sales letters.

(20) *Find your 'Boarding Entry Pass' and affix the seal from below ... if you're judged the winner of the customers-only Advance Award. (Announcement) (LR4)*

(21) *In fact, within minutes of delivering the executive order to pay you, should you become the winner, I would also arrange for your money to be deposited ... (Establishing credentials) (PW3)*

(22) *The most exclusive is the Thank you Prize ... where you could choose between cash or car if you're judged as the Contest Winner! (Enhancing the offer) (CE7)*

Anybody reading the sentences above would easily be enticed by the opportunity to win and the amount of cash prize stated and certainly would not be able to notice the 'catch'. In other words, very few people would ask "What's the catch?" This is because of the careful interplay of the opportunity to win and the persuasion to make a purchase. The 'catch' is in the use of 'if' as a conditional, making it a conditional sentence, conditional clause or if clause. Conditional sentences are used to express something that has a high degree of probability. The action stated in the sentence can only take place when a certain condition is fulfilled. It can work both ways, in the case of the sample sentences above, the receiver can be judged as the winner or can be judged as not the winner – depending on the fulfilment of the conditions stipulated, in most cases placing an order for the products on offer. This persuasive strategy can be concluded as successful as it entices readers to make a purchase in order to qualify for the prizes or even for the opportunity to win the prizes.

Interdiscursivity

In theory, interdiscursivity is the function of appropriation of generic resources [27] which in practice, occurs when writers

operate within as well as across generic boundaries creating new but essentially related and/or hybrid form [22]. This is done when writers need to express their private intentions but within the socially accepted communicative practices and shared generic norm [28] revealing the important implications of interdiscursivity for social practice [29]; [30]; [31].

Unlike literary texts which usually constitute one type of genre, for example novel or poetry, professional texts can constitute more than one genre and involving writers from more than one profession. A common example is the corporate annual report which comprises a number of sections, among them, corporate information produced by Public Relations, financial disclosure by the Accountants, and corporate governance by the legal team. Exemplified above is the act of mixing of the diverse genres, discourses, or styles associated with institutional and social meanings in a single text [32] known as interdiscursivity. Producing a document known as the corporate annual report requires a concerted effort from all "preparers" of the different sections so that the texts in the document gel well to become the target genre. Thus, it has been stressed that "interdiscursivity is central to understanding of the complexities of professional genres which are typically used in professional, disciplinary, institutional as well as workplace contexts" [27] (p. 33). Knowledge of interdiscursivity is required by both the writers and the readers of texts.

The objectives of a marketing campaign or strategy are very often to garner sales and to bring in profits while the objective of using a contest or a sweepstake in marketing is usually to promote the organization or its products. When the prize money is paid out, the organization ensures maximum publicity. Sales letters from RDAs can be viewed as hybrid, combining the discursive activities of i) promoting a contest and ii) marketing products. In the letters, interdiscursivity occurs with the use of persuasive strategies appealing to ethics (ethos) and to emotion (pathos) to convince the receiver to participate in the contest or to grab the winning opportunities as a strategy (in return) to persuade the receiver to make purchase. Instances of interdiscursivity occur in all categories of letters from RDAs. The first instance is in Example (19) from the category of *Potential Winner* (PW1) presented earlier where the move *Introducing the offer* occurs twice: i) to offer the opportunity to win the prize money in the contest and ii) to offer the book. The second offer is presented at the end of the paragraph for the move *Enhancing the (first) offer*.

Another example is an instance from Loyalty Recognition (LR1). The offer is stated in paragraph 3, and paragraphs 4 through 9 enhance the offer by adding more cash prizes if the receiver is judged the winner. These are stated as the many

benefits available and emphasized in paragraph 9 as ‘exceptional benefits’. This is an effort to convince the receiver which also flows into the first sentence of Paragraph 10. Example (23) demonstrates the occurrence of interdiscursivity from paragraph 9 onwards.

The interdiscursivity is heightened with the way the book offer is introduced in paragraph 10 where only the title is

(23) *Interdiscursivity in action (LR1)*

Para	Text	Move
9	<i>So you can see, we really have gone to extraordinary lengths to reward you ... with exceptional benefits.</i>	Enhancing the offer
10	<i>But we haven't stopped there. Gain the additional benefit of unlocking the keys to history's long-held secrets with (TITLE OF THE BOOK). ... Step back in time as you discover and demystify these enigmas with the latest scientific findings. ...</i>	Introducing the offer (2)
11	<i>(TITLE OF THE BOOK) can be yours for the first low payment of ...</i>	Enhancing the offer
12	<i>So I urge you to say 'YES' today. Validate your Qualification notice ... even better, you'll also be among the first to discover the amazing edition of (TITLE OF THE BOOK)</i>	Enhancing the offer

4. Conclusion

This article sets out to analyze the genre of sales letters from RDAs in order to compare its structural organization with that of other types of sales letters as well as to examine the persuasive communication strategies in these letters. Sales letters from RDAs can be categorized in the same genre with other sales letters as they share common generic construct and communicative purpose but with extra sub-purposes. The 12 rhetorical moves are established based on the texts of complete letters, not only the content section. The structure conforms to the requirements of the discursive practices of the discourse community of marketing, from grabbing the attention to making the offer to repeating the offer – as suggested by [1].

In terms of persuasive communication strategies, RDAs letters also comply with the requirements of direct marketing which should have the elements of persuasiveness. However, RDAs letters differ greatly from other sales letters in the

mentioned (in CAPS and bold) followed by a brief description of the contents and paragraphs 11 and 12 enhance the offer. Amazingly, not once in the three paragraphs was the word ‘book’ nor the word ‘purchase’ mentioned. Instead, the careful application of ‘low payment’ was used, an instance of “appropriation of generic resource” to take away the receiver’s attention of being pressured to make purchase.

types of persuasive communication strategies used. The use of special type of phrase “if you are judged the winner” and its variations can be viewed as an effective strategy to engage and entice the receiver to read on and participate in the contests. Finally, while most sales letters focus on the products or services on offer, sales letters from RDAs seem to focus on the sweepstakes particularly on the opportunity to win the different categories of cash prizes, instances of interdiscursivity to downplay the act of persuading the receiver to make a purchase. This in itself is the strongest pull, the rhetoric at play in this type of letters which surpasses the different persuasive communication strategies discussed earlier.

In sum, sales letters are still relevant in marketing products and services whereby many organizations disregard the high cost and low response rate in order to reach the unreachable consumers. Due to the personalized nature of these letters, many organizations believe that they can capitalize on this strategy.

Appendix

Appendix A. Total Number of Paragraphs in RDAs Letters

Loyal Recognition	Total Number	Contest Eligibility	Total Number	Potential Winners	Total Number
LR1	14	CE1	13	PW1	14
LR2	12	CE2	12	PW2	14
LR3	15	CE3	14	PW3	13
LR4	15	CE4	16	PW4	14
LR5	14	CE5	14	PW5	17
LR6	11	CE6	13	PW6	12
LR7	12	CE7	16	PW7	16
LR8	11	CE8	16	PW8	13
LR9	14	CE9	16	PW9	13
LR10	12	CE10	13	PW10	17

Appendix B. Frequency of “If You Are Judged the Winner”

Loyal Recognition	Total Number	Contest Eligibility	Total Number	Potential Winners	Total Number
LR1	3	CE1	1	PW1	5
LR2	1	CE2	1	PW2	2
LR3	2	CE3	0	PW3	3
LR4	0	CE4	3	PW4	6
LR5	2	CE5	0	PW5	3
LR6	1	CE6	1	PW6	2
LR7	2	CE7	2	PW7	1
LR8	1	CE8	2	PW8	1
LR9	1	CE9	2	PW9	1
LR10	2	CE10	1	PW10	2

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