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Movies That Sell: A Rhetorical Analysis of Product Placements in Marvel Movies

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Media and Communication

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Brand and Media Strategy

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by

Andrew Nii Okai Okai

December 2021

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Keywords: advertising, brand placements, product placements, marvel cinematic universe,  
movies, rhetoric, rhetorical appeals.

## ABSTRACT

Movies That Sell: A Rhetorical Analysis of Product Placements in Marvel Movies

by

Andrew Nii Okai Okai

The advancement of digital entertainment media has given audiences the ability to skip ads that do not interest them. Consequently, brands face the challenge of creating ads that can compel audiences and finding media outlets that can effectively reach target audiences. Brands today use product placements to promote their products because movie audiences are generally attentive to ads when they are incorporated in a movie's narrative. Marvel Cinematic Universe is a globally recognized entertainment franchise that uses product placements strategically to promote brands in their movies and TV shows. In this study, I conduct rhetorical analyses of select product placements in Marvel movies to investigate how they employ different rhetorical appeals in promoting products; and discuss how the appeals can influence audience perceptions of the products advertised. My findings suggest that product placements in Marvel movies leverage Aristotle's rhetorical appeals to draw audiences' attention and influence their opinions about products.

## DEDICATION

To complete this project, I had to navigate many time crunches and high-stress weeks. Yet, through it all, I was blessed with a fantastic support network of family, friends, mentors, and loved ones who encouraged me and prayed me on. I am grateful for your presence in my life. Your immense support continues to impact significantly on my successes. This project is the latest of many achievements to come, and I dedicate it to you all.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

Advertising, like several disciplines, has recorded centuries' worth of evolution in its execution. The basics, however, have remained the same over time; first, attract the attention of an audience, then deliver a message that pitches a sale or at least generates an affinity towards a brand or its product (Yang & Smith, 2009). This is an old insight; it was known and leveraged by first-century Romans in advertising events and services to citizens and tourists. According to Newell et al. (2006), interconnections of public art with brand appearances for commercial purposes trace back to Roman billboards from 2000 years ago. It was custom then for Romans to smooth off and whiten walls in places where crowds gathered. These walls carried announcements of events like theater shows and gladiatorial matches. Also, they featured drawings of different trades to tell masses of artisans nearby who offered those services (Presbrey, 2000).

Centuries later, in 1982, the hit movie *E.T. (Extra-Terrestrial)* was released. It opened the eyes of many to what has grown to be a multi-million-dollar industry (Newell et al., 2006). In the movie, an alien follows a trail of Reese's Pieces to his new home (Spielberg, 1982). The decision to insert this candy into the storyline was not purely artistic; it was an advertisement. Like the Roman billboards, Reese's efforts in *E.T.* fall under a bracket of ads known as product placements.

Product placement, also known as brand placements, can be defined as "the purposeful incorporation of commercial content into noncommercial settings, that is, a product plug generated via the fusion of advertising and entertainment" (Ginosaur & Levi-Faur, 2010, para. 1). Following the feature in *E.T.*, Reese's recorded a dramatic increase in sales for Reese's Pieces

and created what many hailed as the dawn of the product placement industry (Snyder, 1992). However, contrary to what many believe, several brands have been using product placements since the late 1800s by incorporating their marketing messages in movies, television shows, music videos, and other platforms with a captive audience (Newell et al., 2006). Moreover, long before introducing these newer media platforms, the Romans and many after them developed creative means to use product placements to reach target audiences.

In recent years, the oversaturated and fragmented nature of the advertising world has necessitated new and innovative ways to reach audiences with marketing communication (Walsh et al., 2008). The proliferation of technological platforms and devices has brought almost as many disadvantages as it has advantages for marketers and advertisers everywhere. “This is because, with the advent and evolution of the technological age, consumers nowadays have numerous ways to avoid television ads with ease, thus minimizing the guarantee of consumer exposure to advertisements. This has grown to become a challenge for marketers across the world” (Ali, 2016).

Yang and Smith (2009) have argued that for any advertisement to prove truly effective, it must first grab the audience’s attention, then persuade and trigger an emotional response. This is a position that Hovland et al. (1953) support when they mention that in any persuasion effort, the first step to ensure successful results is to get listeners to pay attention to the message communicators want to relay. By this logic, the consumer’s increasing ability to avoid advertisements on several traditional media has effectively rendered these platforms unproductive for advertising in this age. Thus, advertisers need to evolve in their approach to brand messaging and explore other communication outlets.

With many potential customers making a habit of skipping past commercials on television and subscribing to ad-free streaming platforms, product placements have quickly become a more favored means, by advertisers, for reaching target audiences (Williams et al., 2011). This is because product placements, as stated by Mummalaneni et al. (2019), “now provides an alternative way for brands to reach consumers and does so in a more subtle way than through traditional advertising” (para. 1). Furthermore, according to Balasubramanian’s (1994) research, in today’s cluttered marketplace, hybrid advertising messaging like product placements may prove more powerful than traditional advertising methods if they are not identified entirely as persuasive messages. However, despite the excellent prospects, the use of product placements also presents a risk to advertisers and filmmakers than most traditional media platforms (Williams et al., 2011).

Product placements must hit a sweet spot to keep from being annoying and yet, be visible enough to affect audiences. While some filmmakers have succeeded in finding and executing that balance, there is no exact science to a perfect placement. Target audiences can easily miss the advertising messaging unless product placements are executed with enough subtlety to remain noticeable. Contrarily, product placements that are too noticeable can be easily tagged as artificially inserted for commercial purposes. This can ruin an audience’s perceptions of the brand and the entire movie or the show in which the advertisement is placed (Van Reijmersdal, 2009). In addition to finding the right level of subtlety, advertisers must consider several factors such as the phrasing or language used and even the timing of the ad placement in a movie to execute a product placement effectively. Unless advertisers can strike a good balance of these factors and more, product placement efforts can quickly amount to a failed investment (Russell, 2002).

According to data collected by Statista (2020), the figure for product placement spending in the United States in 2019 stood at \$11.44 billion, having risen exponentially from \$4.75 billion in 2012. With the amount of money invested in product placements by brands and advertisers, it has become increasingly imperative to know the best strategies to leverage to ensure that the brands profit from their investments. Like every platform with this much potential to be a goldmine, product placements have attracted a lot of scholarly studies looking to understand the nuances involved in making the best of product placements. Findings from numerous studies conducted over several decades give credibility to the theory that there is both an art and a science to the appropriate execution of product placements filmmakers and advertisers must master.

This study investigates the persuasive *strategies and appeals* that advertisers leverage when investing in and executing *product placements*. In the context of this study, an appeal describes the rhetorical elements that help create an advertising argument or appease audiences. This query leverages Aristotle's theory of persuasion as a framework to determine which rhetorical appeals can potentially influence audiences and how advertisers can achieve that.

Because I am considering film to persuade a target audience, it is essential to understand the elements in a film that work together to facilitate the process of persuasion. To achieve that, I conduct a rhetorical analysis to examine sample clips from select movies from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. This analysis will identify different persuasive appeals leveraged in advertising products in selected scenes and seek to understand how they function to potentially influence audience opinions and purchase intentions about the products advertised.

## Chapter 2. Review of Literature

### The History

The phrases 'product placement' or 'brand placement' were not used for scholarly or trade purposes until the 1980s. Notwithstanding, the arrangement of slipping advertising communique into a public performance or entertainment programming for public consumption has been in existence for centuries (Newell, 2006). Product placements have continued to evolve from their use on Roman billboards to fit several new media platforms with their audience's attention. In the past, many of these placements occurred without formal agreements between advertisers and entertainers. Furthermore, in many cases, there were no preconceived underlying commercial motives. In one example from the Pre-Civil War United States era, entertainer Dan Rice, while on tour, would include names of local restaurants and hotels in his opening number. In return, he got his supper for free (Carlyon, 2001). This barter trade system defined the form of many product placements before they became a famed means of advertising to modern audiences.

Over the past few decades, since the concept of motion pictures first became available for public viewing, the film industry has also recorded many examples of product placements appearing in productions. For example, in 1896, within six months of staging the world's first presentation of projected moving pictures to a paying audience, the pioneering French filmmakers, Auguste and Louis Lumière, struck a deal with a European distributor and promoter on behalf of the U.K soap manufacturer Lever Brothers (Cosandrey & Pastor, 1992; Mannoni, 2000). This arrangement would later result in the first instance of a product placement recorded in any motion picture. The Lumière brothers published and promoted Sunlight Soap, the Lever Brothers' top product. In return, their films showed in Switzerland, and the brothers were allowed



to shoot Swiss-located films and distribute them in Europe and the United States (Lavanchy-Clarke, 1922).

The Lumière Brothers films have the credits for the first documented appearance of product placements. However, it was Thomas Edison who later turned product placement in motion pictures into a profitable venture. Edison's use of product placements provided two-fold benefits of reducing out-of-pocket production costs while providing promotional services for customers of his industrial businesses (Newell, 2006). In the early years of product placements in the United States, the idea of connecting entertainment with consumption messages showed up in films by Thomas Edison featuring shots of products from the Edison factory and Edison's industrial clients (Williams et al., 2011). Then, Proctor & Gamble's "soap opera" radio broadcasts in the 1930s followed with features of its soap powders. Several tobacco companies then capitalized on product placements to generate good publicity on the "right attitude" to smoking (The Economist, 2005).

However, due to poorly organized efforts and negative publicity about the surrender of media content to commercialization, product placements grew dormant after the Depression. It was not until the 1960-the 70s that product placements in movies were revitalized. Following that period, their use saw significant growth during the latter decades of the twentieth century (Balasubramanian et al., 2006). Product placements have evolved significantly alongside the art of filmmaking, in use and capacity, since the Lumière brothers' and Edison's films.

### **The How**

Since the genesis of product placements until a few decades ago, filmmakers executed most brand promotions on a barter basis, like the Lumière and Edison films. The advertising party usually offered products and services in exchange for exposure to the movie's captive

audiences (Karrh, 1998; Russell & Belch, 2005). However, the increased popularity and faith in this revolutionary way of creating advertising impressions and reaching target audiences has led to an upsurge in the amount of reverence both filmmakers and advertisers accord product placements.

Product placements have become a paid strategic marketing tool that advertisers have begun to leverage more, especially in the wake of the remarkable success that came out of Reese's effort in the ET movie (Karrh et al., 2003). "Not only are marketers spending substantial amounts of their promotional budgets on these types of advertising efforts, but production studios are also relying more on such deals as a major source of funds" (Homer, 2009, p.1). Over the years, the definitions of product placements have evolved to reflect the element of paid arrangements. "Balasubramanian et al. (2019) define product placement as a form of paid inclusion and promotion of a specific brand through audio-visual messages within mass media programs. "The paid promotion concept through placement has become more attractive to brand sponsors because the "paid" idea often means they have some influence on how the product messages show in the movie" (Anggeliana et al., 2021, p 2). Also, advertisers can now appreciate the substantial returns that investing in product placements creates. This is because brand messages in product placements continue to show every time the movie plays, and audiences worldwide see the brand's message. Unlike traditional advertisements, a brand's message can air in a movie for several years and in different regions (Singhal et al., 2015).

There are two ways to execute product placements: the first involves controlling and creating editorial content by a party other than the brand's sponsor. Usually, in this scenario, the filmmakers determine where and how the product displays in their movie. This, while a product might make a notable appearance, the focus stays on telling the story, and the movie's scenes do

not necessarily focus on highlighting a product or brand name. Typically, products in this scenario make brief appearances on screen without being mentioned in the dialogue.

A typical example of this kind of product placement will be the inclusion of "Corona Extra" in several of the Fast and Furious movies. The beer brand's distributors reportedly made no payments or contractual agreements with the Fast and Furious movies' makers in exchange for having the product featured in the film. However, the filmmaker obtained consent to use the product in their storytelling and received a few cases of Corona Extra for free (Vega, 2017). This arrangement gave the filmmakers complete autonomy in making creative decisions on how and where Corona Extra appeared in the movies and which characters were associated with the product.

In the second instance of advertising via product placements, however, advertisers are more involved in creating editorial content. They usually influence when and where the product placement appears and how the film represents their product's message (Cooper & Nownes 2004; van Reijmersdal et al., 2009). This type of product placement often involves more intricately woven tie-ins of a product with the plotline or selected scenes.

It is common in this scenario to find the product taking center stage in the story, as is seen with the tasteful execution of BMW Mini Cooper's placement in the 2003 film "The Italian Job." Throughout the movie, the mini-Cooper alluringly appears in numerous scenes, demonstrating the vehicle's agility as it maneuvers through traffic and provides the nimble handling to allow its drivers to navigate through several dangers (Gray, 2003; Pokrywczyński, 2005).

In both instances of product placements, however, it is an unchallengeable fact that like most ads, the brand aims to persuade target audiences to develop a positive affinity towards their

product (O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2003). Consequently, this has created a need for professionals and scholars to pursue concise and actionable insights into what makes a product placement, effective: and the measures that give credibility to any conclusions that may be drawn (van Reijmersdal et al., 2009).

### **The Measures of Effectiveness**

"Advertising effectiveness is not a new concept, but what contributes to it has long been debated in academia and industry" (Ali, 2016, p.2). Several studies conducted around product placements and advertising, in general, have typically tested for brand or product recall and recognition. Additionally, an advertisement's impact on consumer's purchase intention has also been studied as a yardstick metric to categorize product placements as effective or otherwise (Babin & Carder, 1996; Gupta & Lord, 1998; Toh & Leng, 2014).

Brand recall describes an audience's ability to recognize and remember a promoted brand after the commercial has shown. Brand recognition refers to the audience's ability to identify the brand or product that shows in an advertisement (Aaker, 2010). An impact on purchase intentions can be positive or negative. Depending on how prominent a product placement is and how the movie promotes it, movies can influence consumers to think favorably or otherwise about the advertised product (Aaker, 2018).

While earlier research has yet to prove widely that product placements can impact consumer purchase intentions, many studies have supported the theory that product placements impact brand recall and recognition (Homer, 2009). The potential impact varies depending on the mode of presentation and the degree of prominence attached to the placement in a film (Aaker, 2018; Babin & Carder 1996; Gupta & Lord 1998). Russell (2002) adopted the same theoretical lens when she concluded in her study that "the modality of presentation (visual and auditory) of

the placements and the degree of connection between a brand and the plot of the show interact to influence memory and attitude change" (p. 1).

In a more recent study, Homer (2009) introduces "repetition" as a metric that influences the efficacy of a product placement effort and how audiences receive the placement. Building on bodies of literature exploring the impact of repetition and prominence of advertisements placements, Homer establishes that repetition of product placements has differential effects on subtle versus prominent types of product placements. Contrary to popular beliefs among advertisers, Homer's research affirms that audiences are less likely to look favorably on prominent product placements when they repeatedly appear in a movie or television series.

According to Friedman (1987), it is essential to note that product placements differ in the form they take depending on the purpose a brand has. Product placement strategies are not a one-size-fits-all solution. Consequently, there is the need to differentiate between the kinds of product placements typically seen in movies. Categorizing product placement types helps establish what strategies are most effective in reaching consumers and influencing their ability to recall a brand and purchase intentions.

Homer (2009) categorizes placements in two ways; prominently or subtly placed. Prominently placed product placements, according to Homer, employ vivid audio-visual stimuli in promoting products and are usually purposefully planted to grab attention. Subtle product placements, on the other hand, are typically limited to visuals-only promotions. Russell (2002) used her Tripartite Typology of Product Placement to classify product placements into three groups. First, according to Russell (2002), Product placements can be visual: where a brand makes an on-screen appearance. Secondly, product placements can be auditory or verbal: where brands are mentioned recognizably during the dialogue. Finally, the third dimension of the

Tripartite Typology of Placement is the plot connection dimension, which describes the degree to which the filmmakers incorporate a brand into the plot of a story. Product placements can achieve this with a high or low intensity. For example, a plot connection is considered low intensity if a brand is merely mentioned and appears briefly on screen. On the other hand, a high-intensity plot connection involves cases where actors associate with the brand or the products play significant roles in the storyline (Russell, 1998).

However, I intend to categorize product placements using the three modes of persuasion as given in Aristotle's Theory of Persuasion for this study. To differentiate between product placements, I conduct a rhetorical analysis to determine which of Aristotle's modes of persuasion are leveraged more frequently in communicating advertising messages through product placements.

### **Persuasion In Film**

The theory of persuasion traces back to the 4th century BC. Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, posited the theory. In his work, "Rhetoric," Aristotle emphasized that for politicians to achieve success, they must perfect the art of persuasion (Gass & Seiter, 2018). Thus, Aristotle first posited the theory of persuasion in the context of political speech. Over the last few years; however, Aristotle's theory of persuasion has been applied widely beyond the scope of politics. Specifically, in advertising research, scholars have used the theory of persuasion often to examine the different rhetorical appeals advertisers leverage when communicating with their consumers and the effects these appeals have on said consumers (Torto, 2020). Beyond advertising, Aristotle's theory of persuasion and rhetorical appeals have proven relevant in film research and criticism. For example, Behrens (1979) uses the theory to argue that film is both a rhetorical and a dramatic construct. According to him, films generally attempt to influence how

we think and feel and persuade us of their truth and value. For this reason, they are deserving of being classified as arguments.

Alongside the increase in the use of product placements, film arguments in many subtle ways now expand beyond the scope of selling a storyline to audiences to potentially influencing their impressions of products and services they are bound to encounter in the real world.

"Understanding rhetorical decisions, that go into the making of a film, or advertising a product, could account for not only "its distinctive tone, its flavor, and possibly even its style, but also the power, the focus; and the validity of its argument" (Arnett, 1986, p.1; Behrens, 1979).

Arnett (1979) highlights audience dependency and participation, as one aspect of rhetoric that stands out when considering a film as an argument. "The audience participates by making certain assumptions prompted by the consistency of the premises implicitly placed by the filmmaker, and from previous exposure to similar film scenes" (Arnett, 1986, p. 3). This is known as the enthymematic process. According to Bitzer (2009), the enthymeme is a form syllogism based on probabilities, signs, and examples whose function is rhetorical persuasion. Aristotle (1932) asserts that enthymemes are the substance of rhetorical persuasion. The enthymematic process succeeds in persuasion "because its premises are always drawn from the audience" (Blitzer, 1959, p.10).

By leveraging the enthymematic process, a filmmaker can instigate audience participation in the argument for a film's storyline or product promotion. The use of enthymemes can strategically generate an appeal or a combination of appeals that serve as a premise and can attract audience participation to complete the circuit of the argument the film or product placement aims to deliver.

## **Aristotle's Modes of Persuasion**

As with oratory arguments, films, in a bid to persuade audiences, will often selectively employ an appeal or a combination of appeals to accentuate relevant portions of their storyline (Arnett, 1986). However, according to Behrens (1979), "the precise nature of this selection will depend on the subject matter, the occasion, the current situation, the nature of the audience, and the filmmaker's personality and needs (p. 2).

In his work, "Rhetoric," Aristotle identifies three modes that speak to the effectiveness of a persuasion effort: the speaker's credibility (ethos), the logic and reason behind an argument (logos), and the feelings of the audience (pathos) (Aristotle & Cooper, 1932; Higgins & Walker, 2012). The appeals are not mutually exclusive. In some cases, their effectiveness as communication tools depends on the preconditioned premises of a viewer (Arnett, 1986). These modes of persuasion intend to draw in an audience to connect with the argument and get them to participate in reaching the conclusions a speaker means to establish.

Kinneavy (1996) connects ethos, pathos, and logos with other factors in a generic model of rhetoric in his theory of discourse. "He notes that in Aristotle's work:

- ethos focuses on the author, the attractiveness of the character, and the authority the author inspires.

- pathos involves the audience, especially the emotions of the audience; and

- logos involves references to the world ("reality") shared by the author and audience"

(Killingsworth, 2005, p.3)

Killingsworth (2005) argues that Aristotle's three modes of persuasion are more than simple appeals and three positions with a metaphorically spatial relationship to one another. The ethos position represents the author and his credibility, yet this position goes beyond a personal



account. Instead, the author's position includes any invented personae with communally agreed-upon values pertinent to the rhetorical work. These values established by the ethos of a character, in turn, become implicit premises that invite audiences to make assumptions or draw conclusions that complete the circuit of the author's desired rhetorical argument (Arnett, 1986; Killingsworth, 2005).

Like many scholars before him, Killingsworth (2005) agrees with Aristotle's assertion about the position of pathos in his revision of rhetoric. Pathos focuses primarily on audiences by leveraging emotions that an audience is likely to relate easily to. Described by Stewart et al. (2007) as a "physiological response to external stimuli," Emotions are a crucial element of every human nature with the ability to influence daily decisions (Murray, 2020). This makes the ability to leverage and arouse emotional responses a relevant tool in the arsenal of any communicator looking to persuade an audience.

Many appeals to pathos occur in conjunction with ethos appeals. The success of pathos appeals depends on the audience's reaction to an author or the personae created. The audience's ability to sympathize or empathize with the established ethos position is what makes the pathos appeal effective (Arnett, 1986). As a result, an argument built on the pathos position will appeal to common emotions like fear or happiness to help sell a message to a target audience who can relate to the feeling of being happy or afraid. Thus, it is much easier for an audience to grasp the essence of the author's argument or participate in the enthymematic process by arriving at the same implicit message that an author hoped to send by evoking those emotions.

Lastly, the third of Aristotle's modes of persuasion discussed in scholarly circles is *Logos*. *Logos* has been defined widely as influencing an audience by using logic and letting said audience see the reasoning behind an argument (Higgins & Walker, 2012). While a logos appeal

does establish a logical base for an argument, Killingsworth (2005) likens the position of logos as the position of value, which acts as a consolidating point that defines the common ground of the ethos and pathos positions. In leveraging logos, "the author may merely refer to an already existing point, to remind the audience of an authoritative concept, or may actively construct a new image or idea that attracts the audience. This works by using new evidence or recognized authorities: whether people, texts, or abstract concepts such as love, justice, and community" (p. 252).

The logos position creates a reality- fictional or otherwise- that supports ethos by accounting for the author's credibility or that of a character who is created to support an argument. This reality legitimizes "the way characters central to the ethos argument behave, the situations in which they find themselves, the sequences of action and reaction in which they are involved, and the ends to which they come" (Arnett, 1986, p.8). By providing this layer of legitimacy, audiences are more prone to being influenced by whatever pathos appeals may play in the same argument.

The three modes of persuasion discussed above, although they have much potential, individually and combined, to influence an audience, do not exhaust the totality of elements involved in the process of persuasion. Among other pertinent factors worth considering are "the medium of exchange, the textual context of language and signs as well as the cultural context that includes obstacles that must be worked through or avoided" (Killingsworth, 2005, p.253). Moreover, the everyday use of Aristotle's modes of persuasion may differ, depending on the communication medium. Therefore, this study identifies and analyzes audio-visual content from select movies to find answers to the following questions:

**Q1:** What are some modes of persuasion that filmmakers employ when executing product placements in movies?

**Q2:** How do these persuasive strategies function rhetorically in the context of product placement goals and influencing target audiences?

**Q3:** How do the conclusions of this study suggest that movies can tactfully deploy persuasive strategies to promote brand messaging and advertisement to engage and influence target audiences?

## Chapter 3. Methodology

### Rhetoric Defined

Leach (2000) mentions that rhetoric can be understood in three ways: firstly, as an act of persuasion, then the analysis of persuasive effort, and finally, a worldview about the persuasive power of discourse. Behrens (1979) agrees with Leach's first definition of rhetoric when he describes films as rhetorical constructs because they aim to persuade audiences of their truth and value. Aristotle, however, defined rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering in the particular case all the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle & Cooper, 1932, p.7). Thus, his definition supports Leach's second description of rhetoric as a tool to analyze persuasive text.

All three of Leach's interpretations of rhetoric align with the purpose of this study which is to consider product placements in films as a rhetorical argument and then deconstruct the persuasive abilities of the rhetoric. Leach's study uses rhetoric firstly to identify rhetorical appeals and elements present in the scenes to be considered, and then to formulate a hypothesis on how said appeals can function to structure an audience's thinking and influence their perceptions of advertised products. It is essential to identify and understand how rhetorical appeals function because they are how rhetors deploy strategic advertising messaging throughout the movie. Several scholars have explored three rhetorical appeals- *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*- employed in strategic communication to influence audiences. These rhetorical appeals are also commonly referred to as Aristotle's modes of persuasion.

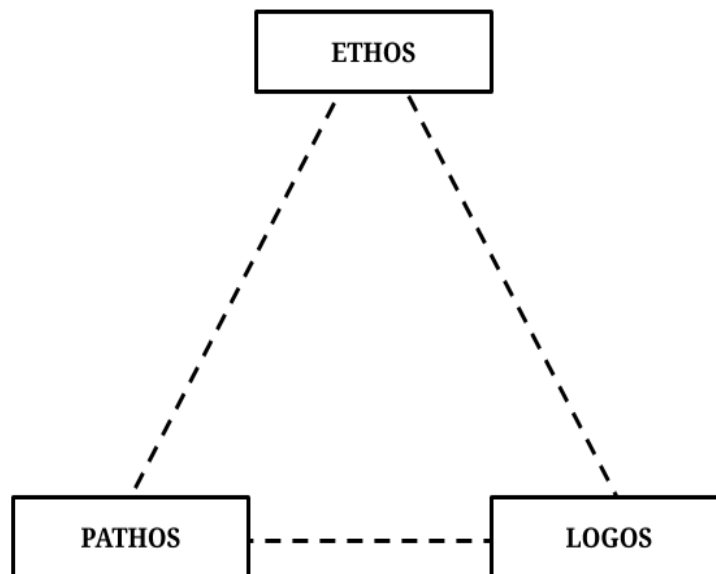
### Aristotle's Modes of Persuasion

Aristotle, in his work, identifies three artistic modes of persuasion that constitute the method of Rhetoric through an author's efforts (Aristotle & Cooper, 1932). These modes of persuasion are *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. According to Aristotle, the three modes of persuasion

are essential to a communicator's efforts to construct a strategic message. Higgins and Walker (2012), like many other scholars, emphasized that Aristotle's rhetorical appeals highlight the credibility and authority of the author (ethos); the feelings and emotional response of the audience (pathos); and the substance of an argument or the logic and reasoning behind it (logos). These appeals each represent a unique way for rhetors to communicate to their audiences and influence their position on a specific issue. However, Aristotle argues that a balanced combination of the three appeals by communicators is essential in executing a persuasion effort.

**Figure 1**

*Aristotle's Modes of Persuasion*



***Ethos***

Many scholars have posited that the ethos appeal relies on establishing the credibility and authority of the author or character. “While who the author is, does not make an argument more

or less valid, subtle forms of persuasion play out in power relationships set up in texts” (Leach, 2000, p.8). According to Killingsworth (2005), a strong ethos element in an argument generates a bond of trust with audiences. This, in turn, speaks to the credibility of a speaker and makes it easier for an audience to buy into the author’s argument (Gårdemyr & Kiholm, 2017).

A good application of ethos in product placements is to associate the advertising brand with a credible character in the plot whom audiences admire, can relate to, and might aspire to emulate. Aristotle asserts that a well-built character (ethos) worthy of belief is the most potent of all the means of persuasion (Aristotle & Cooper, 1932). An impressive example of a well-built character with a strong ethos appeal is Tony Stark from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Many people admire and strive to model Stark’s “genius, billionaire, playboy, philanthropist” persona in their personal lives (Whedon, 2012). As a result, Tony Stark becomes an influential authority on several subjects or products representing luxury and advanced technology for those who hope to fit in his persona. According to Arnett (1986), “if we are impressed with the quality of the work done by the filmmaker, an appeal to ethos has succeeded” (p.6).

### ***Pathos***

Pathos is arguably the most leveraged of Aristotle’s three modes of persuasion by rhetors. This is partly because most communicators recognize that emotions easily influence audiences. Aristotle (1932) posits that persuasion is achievable when an argument can usher into an emotional state. This position is supported by Berger’s (1982) argument that humans are not entirely rational creatures who act only based on logic. “Audiences are generally vulnerable to emotional and other kinds of non-rational appeals” (Berger, 1982, p.70). This makes the ability to leverage pathos a powerful tool in any communicator’s arsenal.

Applying pathos in product placements will influence viewers by emotionally attaching the advertised brand to a character or something in the movie that they care about (Torto, 2020). A successful effort to leverage pathos relies on the audience's ability to connect with the narrative and participate in the filmic argument. This is because pathos appeals persuade audiences to react emotionally to characters they see on the screen. Until viewers have a reason to be invested in the narrative or a character, a pathos appeal is unlikely to influence them significantly. Arnett (1982) argues that appeals to pathos reside in the audience's reaction to performers and are closely related to a strongly built ethos. Pathos typically invokes feelings such as happiness, anger, sadness, guilt, Etc., and can be executed using music, imagery, or a simple dialogue. According to Vu (2017), it is helpful to understand audiences' beliefs and emotional states to know the best combination of these emotions to leverage pathos.

### ***Logos***

Lowenhaupt (2014) asserts that logos aims to persuade by a rational appeal. Logos is widely defined as a rhetorical appeal that attempts to influence audience positions with logical reasoning. However, Aristotle's interpretation expands on this position and mentions that persuasion by logos succeeds when rhetors demonstrate truth, whether in a realistic setting or otherwise. In his work "Rhetoric," Aristotle noted that rhetors must provide a well-developed body of factual evidence when appealing to logos.

A good logos appeal does more than present a list of truths where film and film criticism are concerned. Behrens (1979) describes a film as an argument that aims to convince audiences of its truth and value. Logos is the element in a film's persuasion effort that convinces audiences that the world portrayed in a film is a "real" world. Logos convinces viewers that the narrative and characters are plausible and deserving of their attention. In other words, "What the audience

is allowed to see and where they are placed to see it establishes a rhetorical stance based on logos” (Arnett, 1986, p.13). A good logos effort in product placements will convince the audience that the brand belongs in the narrative and is a logical choice in the situation where it appears.

It is important to note that Aristotle developed these three modes of persuasion as a blueprint for effective argumentation and not for image-based text. As a result, it has some limitations when applied to product placements in movies. It, however, remains useful for understanding persuasive marketing intent in movies.

### **Rhetorical Analysis**

Rhetorical analysis is a widely used method for studying texts and visual messages embedded in pictures and videos. Beyond analyzing text, it also investigates the reason behind a message and the effects authors hope to have on audiences (Graff, 2010). In addition, a rhetorical analysis explores how authors apply various rhetorical elements in their work to achieve an intended effect. This makes it a suitable method for assessing persuasive intent (Gross, 2016). There are five important elements that scholars explore in a rhetorical analysis; these are written texts, diegetic sounds (dialogue), non-diegetic sounds (music, sound effects, etc.), imagery, and motion graphics (Amoako, 2020, p.28). Diegetic sounds include all forms of sound that exist with the world of the film’s reality, and characters can hear. Contrarily, a non-diegetic sound describes sounds that originate from outside the world of the movie (Dykhoff, 2012).

According to Gardemyr and Kiholm (2017), scholarly studies have rarely applied rhetorical analysis to investigate advertising messaging and how they persuade consumers. Similarly, Behrens (1979) argues that few studies have employed a rhetorical analysis in evaluating films’ persuasive intent and capacities. Hence, rhetorical analysis in this study



establishes how product placements in movies leverage the three rhetorical appeals to persuade audiences and why the subject is worth pursuing.

Arnett (1986) notes that rhetoric offers more than just a vocabulary of terms to recount messages from a film. Instead, he argues that a rhetorical analysis is a “heuristic device for understanding why a message is presented” (p.13). This is because rhetorical analysis applies rhetorical theories of communication like Aristotle’s modes of persuasion as a theoretical lens to serve as a viable investigative tool in accounting for a film’s argument.

The analysis process involves observing and making deductions based on elements such as imagery, spoken words, motion graphics, sound, etc., and the context in which they appear.

Below, I employ rhetorical analysis to:

- identify scenes from select movies that contain product placements and the brands that promote their products in the scenes.
- describe the content and context of the product placements in the scenes in detail.
- and analyze how the presence of rhetorical elements in the scenes appeal to *logos* (reality and logic), *ethos* (character), and *pathos* (emotions) to promote a product.

Specifically, I explore brand placements from the movies from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Because it is a famous movie franchise with a significantly large following, several brands advertise their products in Marvel movies. As a result, brands that promote their products in Marvel movies can reach a wide range of captive audiences from the Marvel fandom.

By applying rhetorical analysis, I can identify and describe elements of rhetoric, including appeals leveraged in executing product placements in some marvel movies; and discuss how those appeals can function strategically to capture consumers’ attention and influence their perceptions about the products advertised.

## Sampling Technique

This study employs purposive sampling to select seven brands whose products appear in movies from the Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise. “Purposive sampling involves deliberately seeking out samples with particular characteristics, according to the needs of the developing analysis or emerging theory” (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004, p.1). Specifically, this study selects movie scenes based on the authors' use of rhetorical appeals in executing the product placements for the brands considered.

Purposive sampling is fitting for this study because of the small sample size analyzed. Also, purposive sampling is appropriate because this study aims not to make absolute generalizations about the best ways to execute product placements. Instead, this study’s conclusions merely establish that rhetorical appeals are leveraged strategically in product placements shown in a well-known movie franchise; and that insights from this analysis are noteworthy and can motivate further fruitful inquiries into the subject.

Table 1 below lists seven brands selected for this study, the movies they appear in, and their advertising products.

**Table 1**

*List of Brands, Their Products, and the Movies in Which They Appear*

<b>BRAND</b>	<b>PRODUCT(S)</b>	<b>MOVIE(S) FEATURED IN</b>
Acura	Acura MDZ, TL, ZDX	Thor (2011)
Apple	iPhone 6	Ant-Man (2015).

Baskin Robbins	Mango Fruit Blast	Ant-Man (2015).
Ben & Jerry's	"Hunka-Hulka Burning Fudge" and "Stark Raving Hazelnuts"	Avengers: Infinity Wars (2018).
Burger King	Cheeseburger	Iron Man (2008).
Chevrolet	2014 Chevrolet Tahoe	Captain America: Winter Soldier (2014).
Hyundai	2019 Hyundai Veloster	Ant-Man & The Wasp (2018).

## Chapter 4. Findings and Analysis

The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) is a media franchise centered on a series of superhero-themed films, television and digital series, and literature produced by Marvel Studios. The MCU is currently one of the most popular and commercially successful entertainment brands globally (Ray, 2020). Richardson (2017) argues that Marvel's popularity stems from its unique storytelling strategies created to draw viewers from across their fandom. As a result, marvel audiences earnestly watch most if not all movies in the franchise, even when the main characters are not their favorite superheroes. This is because Marvel Studios leverages the idea of the cinematic universe to encourage sub-fandoms to interact with each other and consume each other's content.

Marvel Studios can advertise to a large audience with the Marvel Cinematic Universe's popularity and captive fan base. This has made Marvel a favorite, with several brands looking to advertise their products to large captive audiences. Consequently, Marvel fans get exposed to many product placements in the movies and TV shows they watch. For this reason, I consider it appropriate to explore product placements in movies from the Marvel Cinematic Universe; and how they leverage rhetorical appeals in execution to arouse consumer interests and influence brand perceptions.

### **Acura: Acura MDX, TL, ZDX**

#### ***Context Description:***

*Thor*, released in the United States on May 2, 2011, is the third of the movies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The film tells the story of Thor (Chris Hemsworth), the Asgardian God of thunder and son of Odin (Anthony Hopkins), the King of Asgard. As the crown prince of

Asgard, Thor was to be crowned king in place of Odin. However, on the day of his coronation, Thor reacts brutally to an enemies' invasion of their palace. Thor's reaction violates a peace treaty brokered by Odin, and as punishment, Odin banishes him to earth. While Thor learns humility and finds love on earth, his brother, Loki (Tom Hiddleston), plots mischief in Asgard. Now stripped of his powers, Thor must thwart an assassination attempt on his life and return to save Asgard from Loki's illegitimate rule.

Acura, the luxury vehicle division of Japanese automaker Honda, promotes several of its models in the film. Throughout *Thor*, agents from the Strategic Homeland Intervention Enforcement and Logistics Division (S.H.I.E.L.D.) drive various Acura vehicles, including the MDX and Z.D.X. models. Earlier movies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe establish S.H.I.E.L.D. as an esteemed counter-terrorism and intelligence agency entrusted with preserving national and global security. Several of their agents in the movies are admirable and reflect values of strength and moral uprightness. In *Thor*, S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents investigate a series of unusual activities linked to Thor's and other arrivals from Asgard to a small earth town.

***Content Description:***

After Thor is banished to Earth by Odin, he crashes in a New Mexico desert where Jane Forster (Natalie Portman), a physicist, conducts a study with her team. Soon after Thor's arrival, Odin sends Mjølfnir, Thor's mystical hammer, down to earth after him. Thor and the hammer's arrival cause a lot of atmospheric disturbances that invite S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents to investigate. Upon arrival, the agents find a crowd from a nearby town gathered around a crater where the hammer had landed. The agents then establish a satellite camp to study the hammer.

Days later, some of Thor's friends in Asgard discover Loki's mischievous plot. They travel to earth to fetch Thor hoping he can set things right. Unfortunately, the friend's arrival on earth

stares up similar atmospheric disturbances that read on S.H.I.E.L.D.'s systems at the satellite camp. The agents quickly drive towards the arrival site to investigate further. On their way out of the Satellite camp, some of the S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents drive off in an Acura Z.D.X.

## **Figure 2**

*S.H.I.E.L.D Agents Drive Off in Acura ZDX*



When they reach the arrival sites, agents line up their cars distinctively. The cars shown are Acura models: seven Acura MDXs, 1 Acura Z.D.X., and 1 Acura TL. Minutes later, Loki sends the Destroyer, a giant metal robot, to earth to kill Thor. The destroyer arrives with a loud thud in the same place where the S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents had gathered. In the scene, the agents hide behind their Acuras for cover. The destroyer attacks the agents and heads into the town to find Thor. A few agents who survived the attack later drive back into town in their Acuras.

**Figure 3**

S.H.I.E.L.D Agents Lineup Acura Vehicles in a Circular Display



**Figure 4**

*S.H.I.E.L.D Agents Hide Behind Acura ZDX*



## Figure 5

### *S.H.I.E.L.D Agents Stand Next to Acura ZDX*



#### ***Analysis:***

Acura primarily employs imagery as a rhetorical element to promote their vehicles in the *Thor* Film. The placement of the various Acura models in the film draws on the position of ethos to advertise the brand to viewers.

#### ***Ethos:***

This central argument by Acura in this movie is that their vehicles are a desirable choice because S.H.I.E.L.D. endorses them. Knowing they are a law-enforcement and counter-terrorism agency, audiences can expect S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents to drive in agile and durable vehicles to assist them in executing their duties. The agent's association with Acura vehicles establishes the brand as a trustworthy choice for strong and agile cars that work well for law-enforcement services. Also, the Marvel Cinematic Universe establishes S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents as "the good guys"; this makes them likable characters that audiences might want to emulate. Aristotle's interpretation of ethos suggests that by highlighting the ethos of S.H.I.E.L.D. Agents, this scene can persuade



viewers and convince them that an Acura gives them something in common with a S.H.I.E.L.D. Agent.

### **Baskin Robbins: Mango Fruit Blast**

#### ***Context Description:***

Baskin-Robbins is a well-known chain of ice cream and cake specialty shops with a presence in many countries. In 2015, the restaurant brand advertised itself and one of its menu items through product placement in Marvel Studios' *Ant-Man* movie. The movie tells the story of Scott Lang (Paul Rudd), an ex-convict who comes out of prison and must figure out a way to earn a living to earn his ex-wife's respect and spend time with his daughter. Scott commits a crime that connects him to Dr. Hank Pym (Michael Douglas) when things get tough. Dr. Pym becomes a mentor who teaches Paul to use the Ant-Man suit and partners with him to pull off a heist that will save the world.

The movie notably features Baskin Robbins in two scenes. In the first scene, Scott works at a Baskin-Robbins location and is dressed in the restaurant's uniform. In an interaction with a customer, Scott suggests the customer buys a "Mango Fruit Blast," an item on the Baskin-Robbins' menu. Later in the scene, the restaurant manager audibly mentions the Baskin-Robbins in a conversation with Scott Lang. In the next scene, Scott returns home and informs his friend Luis (Michael Pena) that he had lost his job. Luis, in his response, also mentions Baskin-Robbins audibly; so does Dave (T.I), a friend of Luis' who happens to be in the room at the time.

#### ***Content Description:***

Early in the movie, Scott, after being released from prison, is picked up by Luis. On their drive back, Luis attempts to invite Scott to meet with some of his shady friends. Scott

immediately turns Luis down and mentions that he is determined to find a legitimate job to take care of his family. Luis then tells Scott about the hardships of finding a job as an ex-convict. Scott responds boldly, stating that his master's degree in Electrical Engineering should give him an advantage.

Contrastively, the next scene opens with Scott standing behind a counter at a Baskin-Robbins and fully dressed in Baskin-Robbins' clothing. Scott welcomes a customer and suggests the "Mango Fruit Blast" to him. The customer refuses and asks for a burger instead. Scott tells him they do not serve burgers. The customer then asks for a hot pretzel with mustard, and Scott reminds him that he is in Baskin-Robbins, and they serve ice cream. The customer proceeds to ask for "whatever is hot and fresh," and Scott responds "dude," with a look of frustration. Soon after, the restaurant's manager asks to see Scott in the back, and Scott asks one of his co-workers to attend to the customer.

### **Figure 6**

Scott Invites a Customer to Try Baskin-Robbins' Mango Fruit Blast



In his office, the manager invites Scott to sit and reveals his knowledge of Scott's history in prison. Scott is surprised when he realizes his manager has uncovered his past. In response to his surprise, the manager tells him, "Baskin-Robbins always finds out." He then goes on to read Scott's criminal history back to him admiringly. The manager describes Scott's crime as "cool" before proceeding to fire him. He finally tells Scott that he will allow him to grab a mango fruit blast on his way out, off-the-books.

In the scene after this, Scott walks back to Luis' apartment. When asked why he was not at work, Scott tells Luis he had lost his job. In his response, Luis also tells Scott, "Baskin-Robbins always finds out." Dave, a friend of Luis's who is also in the room, also chips in "Baskin-Robbins don't play."

### **Figure 7**

The Manager Tells Scott Baskin-Robbins Always Finds Out



***Analysis:***

With the scenes discussed above, Baskin-Robbins uses a combination of imagery and diegetic sound (dialogue) to insinuate that the restaurant company is a reputable brand that does well to investigate its employees. The scenes audibly mention Baskin-Robbins and spotlight one of its menu items to a customer, and consequently, the movie's audience. The use of dialogue and imagery in these scenes makes an argument to audiences using ethos and pathos.

***Ethos:***

The inclusion of the statements "Baskin-Robbins always finds out" and "Baskin-Robbins don't play" in both scenes do more than highlight the brand to viewers. These statements also insinuate that Baskin-Robbins cares enough about their business and customers to thoroughly investigate their employees and weed out people who lie about their identities from their service. This speaks to Baskin-Robbins' credibility by establishing the brand as reputable and trustworthy. Thus, using the brand's ethos to appeal to viewers.

The first scene again appeals to the ethos position in promoting the mango fruit blast. This happens when the manager agrees to turn a blind eye if Scott decides to grab a mango fruit blast on his way out. The manager's comment suggests to viewers that in a restaurant like that Baskin-Robbins location, a thief's priority will be to steal a mango fruit blast and not any of the equipment or money that the restaurant must have made from earlier sales. This tells viewers that the mango fruit blast is a desirable treat and invites them to try one.

***Pathos:***

This placement by Baskin-Robbins uses humor as a tool to establish a pathos appeal to viewers. Before Baskin-Robbins first appears in the movie, Scott makes a bold statement about his master's degree in electrical engineering and his chances of finding a decent job despite

being an ex-convict. Immediately after, the movie cuts to a scene of him dressed and working as a server at a Baskin-Robbins counter. Running a counter at Baskin-Robbins can be considered a low-rank job for anyone as educated as Scott Lang. By showing this image immediately after Paul's bold claim, the movie creates an appeal to humor that can grab viewers' attention and draw their focus to Baskin-Robbins, which plays an essential role in executing the joke.

Secondly, the statement "Baskin-Robbins always finds out" is used amusingly, first by the manager at Baskin-Robbins when he uncovers Scott's criminal history and fires him, and then by Luis when he learns Scott had lost his job. In the movie's dialogue, these uses of humor employ pathos to create an appeal that draws customers into the conversation. Aristotle mentions that people make "different decisions under the sway of pain or joy, and liking or hatred" (Aristotle & Cooper, 1932, p.8). Correspondingly, the scene's attachment of humor to the Baskin-Robbins increases the chances of viewers noticing the brand and forming favorable opinions about it.

## **Apple: iPhone 6**

### ***Context Description:***

*Ant-Man* (2015) also featured a product by the multinational technology company Apple Incorporated. Apple is a brand known across the globe as a leading manufacturer of consumer electronics, computer software, and online service provider. The brand uses a scene in the *Ant-Man* movie to promote the then-new iPhone 6. The movie includes a scene where Scott Lang (Ant-Man) battles Darren Cross (Yellowjacket). During their fight, Ant-Man, while shrunken to a miniature size, steps on the button of an iPhone 6 and activates Siri, Apple's virtual assistant. Siri listens for instructions and mistakes a statement made by Yellowjacket as a command to

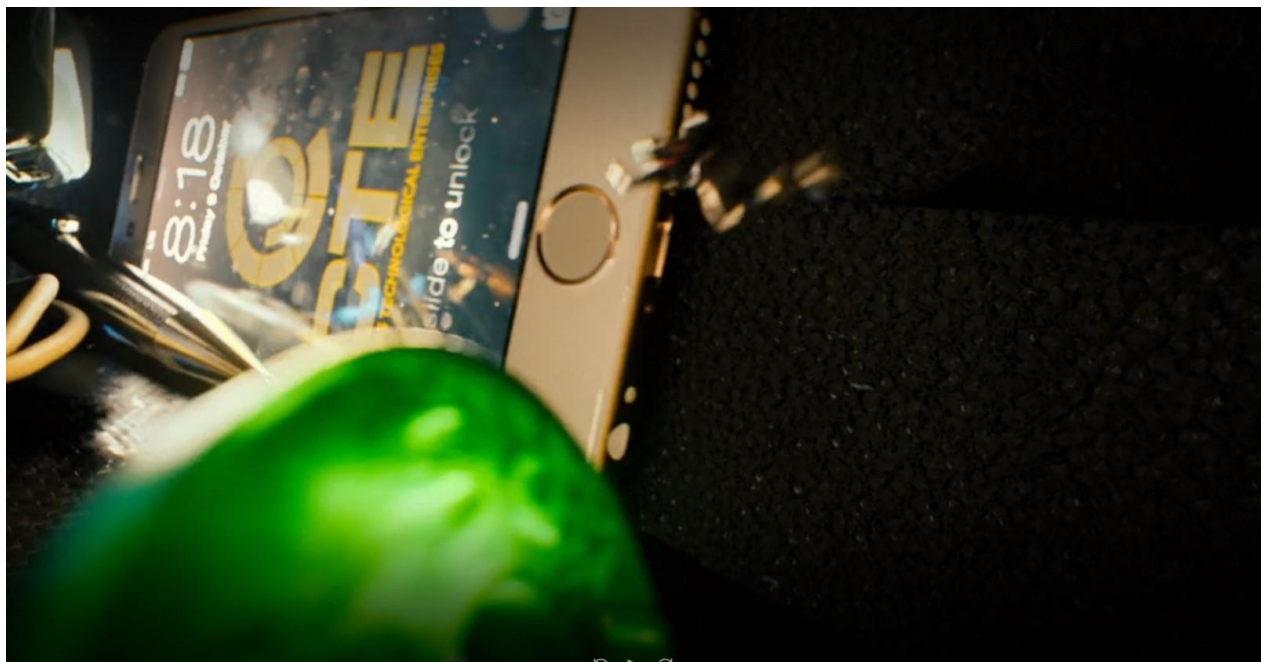
play music. As a result, the iPhone begins to play the album “Disintegration” by The Cure as the fight goes on.

***Content Description:***

After a plan by Scott Lang, Hank Pym, and Hope Pym to steal the Yellowjacket suit from Darren Cross goes wrong; the trio gets in a fight with Darren and his bodyguards. Darren packs the Yellowjacket suit into his suitcase and escapes to his helicopter. Scott Lang pursues Darren into the helicopter, and their battle continues. Scott stays miniaturized in his Ant-Man suit to knock out Darren's bodyguards, forcing Darren to wear the Yellowjacket suit. Darren shrinks to a smaller size as the fight continues, and they both get locked in a Darren Cross's suitcase. While the two keep battling, the suitcase rolls off the helicopter's floor and enters a free fall toward the ground. As the suitcase falls to the ground, its contents begin to roll around and Scott steps on the home button of an iPhone 6.

**Figure 8**

iPhone 6 Rolls Around in Cross' Suitcase



## Figure 9

Ant-Man (Scott) Steps on the Home Button and Activates Siri



The phone responds immediately with a proprietary iPhone sound that indicates that Siri is listening for a command. At that moment, Darren yells out to Scott, "I am gonna disintegrate you." Siri mistakes Darren's threat to Scott as a command and responds, "playing disintegration by the cure." The phone, still rolling around with other items in the bag, begins to play the album "Disintegration" as the fight between Scott and Daren continues. The song keeps playing until the suitcase falls into a pool.

### *Analysis:*

In this scene, Apple advertises the iPhone 6 by highlighting its durability and responsiveness. The scene employs imagery and diegetic sound (dialogue and music) as rhetorical elements in executing this product placement. These elements, in turn, create a



persuasive argument by establishing ethos and pathos to appeal to audiences and direct their attention to the iPhone 6 and its abilities.

**Figure 10**

*iPhone Plays the Album "Disintegration" by "The Cure"*



***Ethos:***

This scene uses ethos as an appeal to promote the iPhone 6 and the Siri feature by showing how robust and responsive the phone is. Scott Lang could activate Siri with a simple touch even though he had shrunk to the size of an ant when he stepped on the phone. Also, the phone rolls around and takes several hits against the walls of the suitcase without breaking. Instead, it operates flawlessly and plays a song when it senses a command. This makes an argument for the strength of the iPhone 6.

***Pathos:***

This placement by Apple in this scene uses humor in two ways to create a pathos appeal that promotes the iPhone 6 to viewers. First, Siri often misunderstands several iPhone owners who use the feature on an iPhone. This makes the virtual assistant's mistake in the scene a relatable joke to many viewers. Secondly, the choice of music Siri plays in the scene completely



contrasts the mood in the scene. While Scott Lang and Darren Cross were actively fighting each other, Siri played a song on the album "Disintegration" by The Cure, which is a slow-paced song. Again, this gives viewers a reason to laugh and draws their attention towards the iPhone by generating an emotion they can relate to. Inferring from Aristotle's views on pathos, the association of the iPhone 6 with a happy emotion in this scene can persuade viewers to think favorably about the product.

### **Ben & Jerry's: "Hunka-Hulka Burning Fudge" and "Stark Raving Hazelnuts"**

#### ***Context Description:***

Ben & Jerry's is a United States-based company that manufactures ice cream and other treats. The company promoted two flavors in a product placement featured in Marvel Studios' *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018). The two flavors were the "Stark Raving Hazelnuts" and the "Hunka-Hulka Burning Fudge." In the movie, the Avengers, the Guardians of the Galaxy, the Masters of the Mystic Arts, and the armed forces of Wakanda band together to battle Thanos and his children. Their goal was to prevent Thanos from collecting all six infinity stones and instantly killing half of the universe's population.

A scene in the movie included utterances of the flavors mentioned above of Ben & Jerry's ice cream. In the scene, Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo), Dr. Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch), and Wong (Benedict Wong) brief Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) about Thanos' plan with the infinity stones. Stark suggests that they destroy the time stone to prevent Thanos from ever having all six stones. Wong then tells Stark that the masters of the mystic art (Wong and Dr. Strange) swore an oath to protect the time stone with their lives. Stark responds to Wong and mentions he also swore off dairy until Ben & Jerry's named a flavor after him. Dr. Strange

mentions the 'Stark Raving Hazelnuts', the flavor named after Tony Stark and Wong chips in that they prefer the "Hunka-Hulka Burning Fudge."

***Content Description:***

After Tony Stark arrives in the New York timekeeper's sanctum, Dr. Strange and Wong brief him on the history and abilities of the six infinity stones. Banner then mentions that Thanos already possessed two of the stones, and if he got all six, he could destroy life on a massive scale. So Stark suggests that they destroy the time stone that Dr. Strange kept in a pendant around his neck to prevent Thanos from ever getting all six stones. Dr. Strange refuses, and Wong mentions that they both swore an oath to protect the time stone with their lives.

To make the case that Dr. Strange could break the oath, Stark immediately responds, saying he also swore off dairy, but Ben and Jerry's named a flavor after him. Dr. Strange mentions "Stark Raving Hazelnuts," the Ben & Jerry's ice cream flavor named after Stark. Stark compliments the ice cream flavor as "not bad," and Dr. Strange describes it as a bit chalky. Wong then goes on to mention that the "Hunka-Hulka Burning Fudge" is their favorite. Banner, shocked to find out his alter ego, the Hulk, had a flavor named after him, turns to Wong to ask if that was real. Before Wong could respond, Stark cuts in and continues to make his argument for destroying the time stone.

**Figure 11**

Dr. Strange Mentions Stark Raving Hazelnuts Flavor



**Figure 12**

Wong Mentions Hunka-Hulka Burning Fudge Flavor



***Analysis:***

This product placement uses the scene's dialogue to highlight two of Ben & Jerry's ice cream flavors. The execution draws on the position of pathos to notably and tastefully present an argument for Ben & Jerry's ice cream flavors to the movie's viewers.

***Pathos:***

According to Aristotle's interpretation of pathos, this scene attempts to influence audience opinions by employing humor as a tool in the dialogue to promote the two ice cream flavors and pit them against each other. Using an analogy to support his argument for destroying the time stone, Stark brags about having an ice cream flavor of his own. In response, Dr. Strange immediately criticizes the "Stark Raving Hazelnuts" flavor, and Wong mentions their preference for the "Hunka-Hulka Burning Fudge," named after the Hulk.

This is funny for two reasons; First, viewers are used to seeing Wong and Dr. Strange in serious settings fighting to protect the world's fate. It is difficult to imagine them taking time off to enjoy a treat, much less having a favorite ice cream flavor. Secondly, by bringing up the second flavor, Wong took away Stark's bragging rights. Also, Wong insinuated that Stark was not as unique as he tried to be, considering his flavor was not as good as Hulk's. This is a sentiment Stark is not used to hearing hence his quick decision to end the analogy and go back to making his argument. The mention of both ice-cream flavors gives audiences a brief comic relief, and in so doing promotes the Ben and Jerry's brand to viewers.

## **Burger King: Cheeseburger**

### ***Context Description:***

*Iron man* is the first movie to be released in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The widely anticipated superhero film premiered in the United States on May 2, 2008. The movie tells the story of Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.), a genius inventor and billionaire industrialist abducted by a terrorist organization and pressured to build a deadly weapon. Instead, Stark intelligently repurposes the resources he is given to make a high-tech suit of armor and escapes captivity. After his escape, Stark uncovers a nefarious plot within his company with global implications and dons his powerful armor to protect the world against the perpetrators as Iron Man.

Burger King, an American multinational chain of fast-food restaurants, capitalized on the popularity of *Iron Man* to advertise to the film's captive viewers. In the scene following his escape, Stark's assistant, Pepper Potts (Gwenyth Paltrow), tries to get him to a hospital to get a check-up. Instead, Stark orders his driver to take him to get an American cheeseburger and then drive him to a press conference. Upon arriving at his office for the press conference, Happy hands Stark a burger-king branded paper bag from which he pulls out a burger and begins to eat. Stark later eats another burger from Burger King during the press conference.

### ***Content Description:***

After three months of captivity, Tony Stark builds the first iron-man suit with which he destroys his captors' weapons collection and escapes into the desert. Stark is picked up by the American military in the desert and flown back home, where Pepper greets him. The two then sit in the back of a car, and Stark's driver, Happy Hogan (Jon Favreau), asks Stark for a location to drive to. Pepper responds to Happy and asks him to drive them to the hospital. Stark immediately cuts in with a "no." Pepper tries to convince Stark to go to a hospital and get checked out by a

doctor. In response, Stark tells her, “I don’t have to do anything, I’ve been in captivity for three months. There are two things I want to do. I want an American cheeseburger, and the other, I want you to call a press conference for now” (Favreau, 2008). Stark then orders Happy to drive, first to get the cheeseburger.

The scene cuts to Stark arriving at the press conference location, where he receives a warm welcome. Stark steps out of his car and wipes his lips with a Burger King napkin. Soon after, Happy walks to him with a Burger King branded paper bag from which Stark takes out another burger and begins to unwrap and eat it. When Stark arrives in the room for the press conference, he sits on the floor and asks everyone to do the same. Then, as he speaks to the journalists gathered, he pulls out another burger from Burger King, unwraps it, and takes a bite. Stark then drops the burger and proceeds to make an emotional speech where he declares his weapons manufacturing company will no longer make weapons.

### **Figure 13**

Stark Reaches into a Burger King Bag



## Figure 14

### Stark Holds a Burger King Burger



#### *Analysis:*

This scene establishes Burger King as a top choice for anyone looking to have an American cheeseburger. The scene employs imagery and dialogue to draw viewers' attention to the Burger King brand. Burger King's placement in this scene draws on the positions of ethos, pathos, and logos in its execution.

#### *Ethos:*

The main commercial argument in this scene is that Burger King is the essential American cheeseburger. The scene helps in communicating this message by associating the brand with the character of Tony Stark. According to the plot of the movie, Stark is a well-known billionaire who lives a notably extravagant life. Therefore, it makes sense that Stark will eat from restaurants that serve the best meals irrespective of price. Therefore, by choosing a Burger King cheeseburger, Stark endorses the brand as the best representation of an American cheeseburger. Stark also eats several bites of the burger, suggesting that he is a legitimate fan of the brand and enjoys eating it. Thus, the association of Burger King with Stark serves as an

application of ethos, as Aristotle explains it, to promote the fast-food brand as a credible choice for delicious cheeseburgers.

***Pathos:***

Burger King, in this placement, appeals to feelings of nostalgia, stress, and sadness to promote their cheeseburger to viewers. In the movie, Tony Stark did not just travel out of the country; he had been abducted for three months. While in captivity, he had to live in conditions less comfortable than he was used to. An experience like that could have amplified his feeling of nostalgia. Audiences can relate to that nostalgic feeling of wanting a taste of home after being away for a long time. Consequently, audiences can understand Stark's desire for an American cheeseburger and be persuaded to share in his love for Burger King's choice.

This scene also appeals to feelings of stress and sadness to invoke pathos when Stark talks about his late dad during the press conference. In the scene, Stark takes a bite of the burger and talks about never having said goodbye to his dad; many audiences can relate to this moving picture of sometimes finding comfort in food. Food can be a powerful source of comfort and relief in high-stress and emotional situations. With this scene, Burger King communicates to viewers that their cheeseburger is a desirable food choice for such difficult times.

***Logos:***

Logos in this scene creates a persuasive argument by leveraging real-life emotions characteristic of Stark's situation. It is realistic for a person to feel homesick or crave a taste of home after being gone for an extended period. This is a concept most audiences can appreciate as truthful and logical. As a result, Burger King's appearance in the scene is organic and believable for that context.



## **Chevrolet: 2014 Chevrolet Tahoe**

### ***Context Description:***

*Captain America: Winter Soldier* premiered in the United States on April 4, 2014.

Chevrolet used a feature in the movie to advertise their then-new Chevrolet Tahoe to the movie's viewers. The superhero film produced by Marvel Studios is a sequel to the previously released *Captain America: The First Avenger*. *Captain America: Winter Soldier* shows Captain America played by Chris Evans, teaming up with Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) and Falcon (Anthony Mackey) to uncover a conspiracy within S.H.I.E.L.D, the intelligence agency for which they work while facing a mysterious assassin referred to as the Winter Soldier (Sebastian Stan)

The movie includes a five-minute scene in which Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson), the director of S.H.I.E.L.D, is attacked by a group of HYDRA operatives. Despite being outnumbered and outgunned in the encounter, Fury, who drives a 2014 Chevrolet Tahoe, makes an impressive escape. The scene shows his car to be an instrumental part of his escape in this scene. Several shots of the Tahoe show throughout the scene, demonstrating its strength and agility as it navigates through traffic and takes countless hits on all sides. To complement the chase, the scene includes loud sound effects and intense music that increases and decreases in tempo to perfectly compliment the visuals showing on the screen.

Also, this movie showcases the 2014 Chevrolet's capacity to be enhanced for security purposes with heavy-duty weaponry, bullet-proofing, flight systems, guidance cameras, and an intuitive onboard computer system. The computer system in Fury's Tahoe is equipped with life-support monitoring systems, remote driving capabilities, and Head-Up Displays (HUD). These features are highlighted in Fury's encounter with the HYDRA operatives and work impressively

to assist in his escape. Additionally, the Chevrolet Tahoe's placement uses imagery to suggest that it can be a life-saving vehicle that keeps its riders safe from several exterior threats.

***Content Description:***

The scene opens with an electronic voice from the S.U.V.'s computer confirming the activation of the vehicle's communications protocol. Fury responds to the computer and asks to open a secure line. The voice then confirms and makes a call to Maria Hill. After the call ends, the scene shows the front view of Fury's Vehicle stopped at a traffic light. The Chevrolet logo displays clearly on the grill of the S.U.V., which stands next to a police cruiser, also with the Chevrolet logo showing on its grill.

**Figure 15**

*Fury's Chevrolet Tahoe Stopped Next to a Chevrolet Police Cruiser*

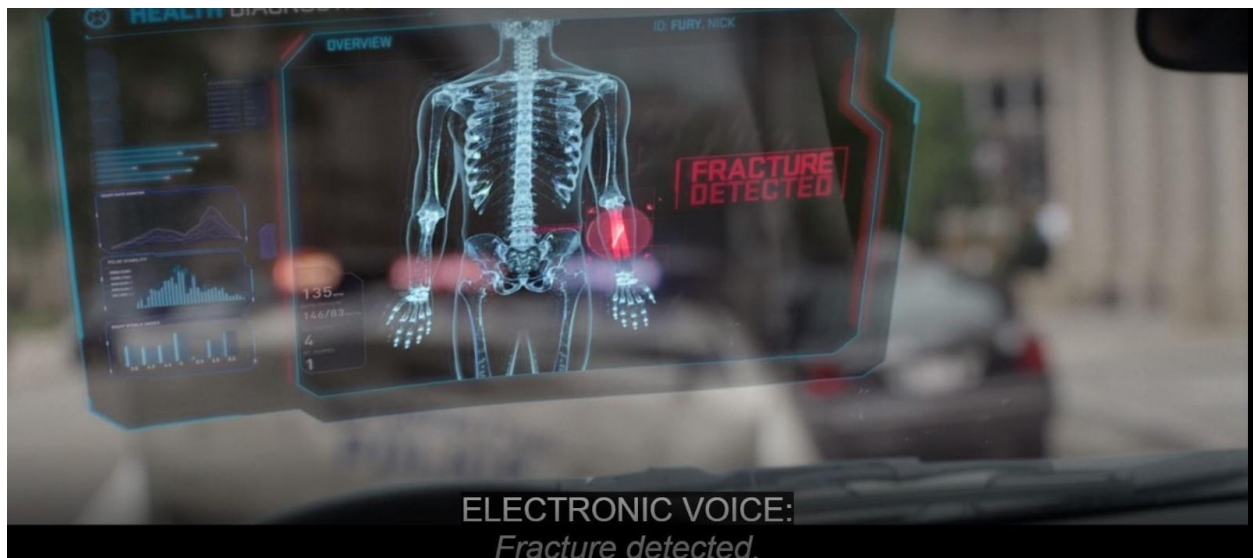


Soon after both vehicles move from the traffic light, another police cruiser rams into the left side of Fury's S.U.V. at top speed. The first S.U.V. then backs into the front of Fury's car, and two more police cruisers slam into the back and the right side of the S.U.V., trapping him in. The vehicle's computer system announces "fracture detected" and shows an X-ray image of Fury's torso on a H.U.D. The computer system then recommends an anesthetic injection for

Fury. The electronic voice warns Fury that there are no units from the D.C. Metropolitan police in the area, leading him to believe his attackers are HYDRA operatives. The operatives open fire on Fury's vehicle, and he commands the S.U.V. to get him out of the area, to which the electronic voice responds, "propulsion systems offline." Fury then follows with a command for the computer to reboot. As the operatives keep firing, the S.U.V.'s H.U.D. shows a real-time report of the armor integrity of the vehicle.

## Figure 16

### *Head-Up Display Inside Fury's Chevrolet Tahoe*



Soon after, the HYDRA operatives attempt to use an electronic battering ram to break through Fury's window, which had already taken several bullet shots. The window survives three hits from the battering ram. With each impact, the electronic voice gives an update on the window integrity and advises offensive countermeasures. After the third hit, the window integrity is at one percent. Fury then commands the vehicle to deploy countermeasures, and immediately, a four-barreled automatic weapon with an under-barrel grenade launcher emerges

from the S.U.V.'s central console. Fury uses the weapon to break through the damaged window and shoot back at his assailants.

**Figure 17**

*HYDRA Operatives Attempt to Break the Chevrolet Tahoe's Windows with a Battering Ram*



At that moment, the vehicle's propulsion systems reboot successfully, and Fury commands it to take off. Meanwhile, he still maintains control of the weapon and shoots at the HYDRA operatives. As the vehicle drives off on its own, Fury commands it to initiate vertical takeoff only to learn that the flight systems were damaged. He then commands the vehicle to activate guidance cameras and to hand over control of the wheel. As he drives off, Fury asks the vehicle to call Agent Hill and learns that the communications array has been damaged. He proceeds to ask for a report on what systems remain intact, and the computer responds with "air conditioning is fully operational."

The computer warns of traffic ahead and provides an alternate route when Fury asks for one. While trying to get away from the HYDRA operatives who are now pursuing him in police cruisers, Fury hits a few civilian vehicles and causes them to stop, thus creating a standstill on the road. Fury writhes his way through the pile of stationary vehicles while his SUV takes more

gunshots from the Hydra operatives. Two police cruisers continue to pursue him and manage to trap the SUV between them. The electronic voice then warns of an intersection ahead, and Fury slams the brakes while the HYDRA operatives speed into the intersection and get hit by a truck.

**Figure 18**

*Fury's Tahoe, Still Running After Enduring Severe Damage*



Fury believes he has lost his attackers and commands the severely battered SUV to get him off the grid. But just as the computer calculates a route to a secure location, Sergeant Barnes, the Winter Soldier, appears in the middle of the street ahead of Fury. Barnes shoots a disc grenade at Fury's SUV and flips the vehicle over. Caught upside down, Fury escapes through a tunnel he cuts using a "Mouse Hole": a laser-cutting device with the ability to cut through almost any material.

***Analysis:***

With this scene, Chevrolet argues for the strength, dependability, and intuition of the 2014 Tahoe. The scene notably establishes these attributes of the Tahoe by subjecting it to several attacks that will disable any other vehicle within seconds and having the Tahoe survive through it all. Also, Nick Fury's constant interaction with the vehicle's computer highlights the

intuitiveness and helpfulness of the Chevrolet Tahoe computer system. The scene leverages a combination of rhetorical elements such as imagery, diegetic sound (dialogue and sound effects), and sounds (background music) to excite audiences and grasp their attention. These elements also create an argument based on ethos, pathos, and logos to appeal to viewers.

***Ethos:***

The overriding argument in this product placement effort is that the Chevrolet Tahoe is a strong, secure, and agile choice for an SUV. To support this argument, the movie associates the product with Nick Fury, a character who plays the director of S.H.I.E.L.D. Previous scenes and movies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe have established Fury as a security-conscious man. Fury is also a man with a plan, having the foresight to create viable solutions to counter threats yet to be seen. As director of S.H.I.E.L.D, Fury has reasonable access to innovative technology and several vehicles that he can reinforce to provide an extra level of safety.

Consequently, it is logical to assume that Fury will choose the best-equipped vehicle to satisfy his safety needs. Therefore, his association with the 2014 Chevrolet Tahoe serves as an endorsement for the S.U.V. brand. This, in turn, creates an ethos appeal for the vehicle by suggesting to viewers that it is a worthy choice for consumers looking to drive a strong and secure vehicle. Additionally, Fury's Tahoe possesses an advanced computer system that allows him to issue voice commands to the vehicle. Furthermore, the computer system is equipped to project a H.U.D. on the vehicle's windshield, drive the vehicle remotely and plot escape routes, among other things. This sells the Tahoe as more than just a big strong car and a smart car.

Fury's interactions with the vehicle's computer system establish it as intuitive and a helpful tool in a car. By having the computer system respond verbally to Fury and give relevant

suggestions and feedback throughout the encounter, the scene again uses the Tahoe's ethos to appeal to audiences and make an argument for its utility and effectiveness.

***Pathos:***

This scene uses several elements to persuade audiences by invoking feelings of fear and concern for Nick Fury and his well-being. Despite being a man with many secrets, previous movies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe establish Nick Fury as a likable character. In addition, he is credited with masterminding the Avengers Initiative, which brought together earth's mightiest heroes to defend the planet from an invasion. This makes Fury a hero to many of Marvel's audiences.

After the Tahoe takes its first hit, the scene shows Fury bleeding from his nostrils. The vehicle's computer system then shows an X-Ray of Fury and announces that it had detected a fracture. This arouses a feeling of concern in viewers for Fury and invites them to pay closer attention as they hope to see him triumph in the encounter with the HYDRA operatives.

The scene also uses loud sound effects to accompany the gunshots and impact from the battering ram that Fury's Tahoe takes. Additionally, a background tune intensifies throughout the scene to signal when a significant hit is about to take place. The scene also features several close-ups of Fury's injured face allowing audiences to read his emotions and empathize with his situation. These close-up images add to the intense music and sound effects to amplify audiences' feelings of fear and concern for Nick Fury.

The scene then generates a pathos appeal for the product by showing the Chevrolet Tahoe as instrumental in Fury's escape from this life-threatening situation. The product placement accomplishes this by associating viewers' feelings of relief and gratitude to the Chevrolet Tahoe. Another use of pathos in this scene is in leveraging feelings of humor and comic relief. In the



heat of the chase, Fury tries to activate flight systems and learns that they were damaged. He then asked the computer system what was operational. The system responds with "air conditioning is fully operational." Considering the life-threatening situation in which Fury found himself and the innovative nature of the systems in his vehicle, air conditioning could not do much to help him escape. Viewers who follow the scene attentively will not expect to have that answer from the computer system at that moment. This makes the response a funny and relaxing one that draws attention to the wit of the computer system and the vehicle.

By ushering viewers through all these emotional states, audiences stay tuned to the scene and its content: and the association of the 2014 Chevrolet Tahoe with the positive emotions of relief, gratitude, and humor, according to Aristotle's logic, can sway viewers to think favorably about it the vehicle (Aristotle & Cooper, 1932).

***Logos:***

*Logos* in this scene adds a layer of truth and reality to the entire encounter. Most S.U.V.s cannot survive the attack Fury's Tahoe suffers. However, as the director of S.H.I.E.L.D., it is logical to expect Fury to drive a heavily reinforced car that can take upgrades with advanced computing and flight systems and an integrated automatic weapon, as shown in the movie. While the scene establishes the 2014 Chevrolet Tahoe as a vehicle that makes room for those modifications, the appeal of logos convinces viewers that a car as heavily reinforced as Fury's Tahoe is not out of place in that narrative.

Also, logos appeal is executed by showing signs of wear and tear throughout the encounter and having the computer system give real-time updates on the damage suffered by the S.U.V. Finally, it communicates to consumers that the Tahoe is not invincible or a fictional



vehicle that only high-level spies like Fury have access to; however, it will only take a hit as significant as a disc grenade to knock down a Chevrolet Tahoe.

## **Hyundai: 2019 Hyundai Veloster**

### ***Context Description:***

*Ant-Man and The Wasp* premiered in 2018 as a sequel to the *Ant-Man* film (2015); and another installment in the Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise. In this chapter, Scott Lang partners with Dr. Hank Pym and Hope van Dyn again as they embark on a mission to save Hank's wife, Janet (Michelle Pfeiffer), from the microscopic "Quantum Realm." The movie takes viewers on a riveting ride with incredible fight routines and high-speed car chases as Scott and his associates race to execute their mission within a small window of time. While they prepare to rescue Janet, they must fight off Sonny Burch (Walton Goggins), a black-market dealer, and "the Ghost," to stop them from stealing Pym's technology.

Hyundai Motor Company, a South Korean multinational automotive manufacturer, partnered with Marvel Studios to show off several models of their cars in the movie. The movie specifically spotlights the 2019 Hyundai Veloster by prominently featuring it in a high-speed chase scene. In this scene, the Veloster had been upgraded with Pym's technology, allowing it to shrink and restore to standard size at the pull of a lever. Luis, who drives the Veloster, shrinks it several times throughout the chase to evade Burch's men. After the chase, Scott and Hope take the same car out on a date with Cassie (Abby Fortson), Scott's daughter seated in the back.

### ***Content Description:***

With Dr. Pym transported into the Quantum Realm to find Janet and bring her back home, Hope shrinks his lab, intending to transport it to a rendezvous location away from the

Ghost and Burch's men. However, the plan is interrupted when Burch and his men intercept them before getting to the rendezvous point. Hope and Luis begin to drive away with the miniaturized lab in their van, and Burch's men pursue. The Ghost attacks the van during the chase and grabs the lab but leaves the remote that restores it to its original size. Hope goes after the Ghost to retrieve the lab, and they both lose it to Burch.

Luiz, now alone in the van, which got into a crash after the Ghost attacked, realizes that he had the remote for the lab. Hope asks him to bring the remote to them. With no means to drive to them, Scott tells Luiz to choose a car from the “Hot Wheels Rally case.” Luiz looks in the case which contains several miniaturized vehicles and selects a 2019 Hyundai Veloster. He looks up and whispers, “Thank you, Dr. Pym.” Meanwhile, Burch’s men realize they are missing the remote and drive towards the van to retrieve it. As they approach the van, it shrinks, and the Veloster appears in its place. Luiz speeds past Burch’s men in the Veloster and excitedly yells out, “Awesome.”

**Figure 19**

*Luiz Picks Out a Miniaturized 2019 Hyundai Veloster*



Burch's men pursue Luiz in the Veloster, and he shrinks and restores to lead some of them into crashes while Hope takes out the others. Hope then joins Luiz in the Veloster, and together, they meet with Scott, who pursues and retrieves the lab from Burch. While the fighting goes on, the Ghost restores the lab to full size, and Dr. Pym returns safely from the quantum realm with Janet. After all the chaos passes, Scott, Hope, and Cassie attend a drive-in movie in the 2019 Hyundai Veloster. While watching the movie, a moth lands on the car, and Scott turns on the headlights and honks at the Moth to get it to fly off.

**Figure 20**

*Front View of 2019 Hyundai Veloster*



**Figure 21**

*Rear View of 2019 Hyundai Veloster Riddled with Bullet Holes*



**Figure 22**

*Front View of 2019 Hyundai Veloster with the Headlights on at Drive-In Movie*



**Analysis:**

*Ant-Man and The Wasp* introduces the 2019 Hyundai Veloster to viewers and sells it as a luxury-style fast car. This is a message that Hyundai vehicles are not famous for. The movie,

however, presents the Veloster in a manner that shows audiences a new side of the Hyundai's abilities. The product placement in this movie uses imagery, diegetic sound (dialogue and sound effects), and non-diegetic sound (background music) to support the chase scene's execution and highlight the 2019 Hyundai Veloster. Including these elements creates an argument for the Veloster that appeals to viewers using ethos and pathos as modes of persuasion.

***Ethos:***

The Veloster's product placement in *Ant-Man and The Wasp* employs ethos in its execution. This is achieved firstly with Luiz's facial and verbal reactions to the vehicle. When he notices the miniaturized 2019 Hyundai Veloster in the hot wheels rally case, Luiz chooses that over all the other options, and then with a look of excitement on his face, he softly thanks Dr. Pym, who was nowhere around him. Luiz's gratitude to Dr. Pym indicated that he had high regard for the Veloster and was happy about the opportunity to drive one. This tells audiences that the Veloster is a car that a character like Luiz would ordinarily not have access to. As a result, the scene associates the Veloster with an image of luxury and exclusivity.

The big reveal of the Veloster after it restores to a standard size also shows an impressive paint job that makes the car aesthetically pleasing to viewers. Additionally, the chase scene displays the car's agility and nimble driving as Luiz excitedly evades his attackers and drives off. The representation of the Veloster in this scene establishes an ethos for the vehicle as a beautiful luxury-style sports car. The drive-in movie scene also promotes the idea of a comfortable family car with enough room for more than two people.

***Pathos:***

This placement applies pathos in its execution by using different rhetorical elements to promote the 2019 Veloster to viewers. First, the scene uses the element of dialogue in Luiz's

comments to communicate his excitement about the car. Luiz first thanks Dr. Pym for the car and later yells out “awesome” while driving it. Both comments describe his feelings about the car and give audiences a reason to be excited about the Veloster.

Next, the scene uses imagery to show different flattering images of the Veloster, to incite an interest in viewers. Finally, the placement leverages sound effects and background music to add humor to the scene. Luiz shrinks the Veloster during the chase as he drives down a slope with Burch's men on his tail. As they go down the slope, audiences can hear the revving of the Veloster's engine, which sounds like a toy compared to the engines of the cars Burch's men were driving. This appeals to viewers' sense of humor as they root for the Veloster to escape Burch's men. The appeal to the feeling of excitement and humor helps viewers consider the Veloster favorably and associate it with positive emotions.

## Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Along with the surge in its popularity among filmmakers and advertisers, product placements have evolved significantly since their use in ancient roman billboards. Modern-day audiences can skip through advertisements on several platforms, making it difficult for advertisers to show their marketing messages. Product placements, however, have provided a means to break that barrier by allowing brands to advertise to a captive audience. Without taking viewers away from their movies, tv shows, or video games, brands can now promote their products strategically and have their efforts yield a good return (Ali, 2016).

Similarly, film production companies now appreciate the value of incorporating brand messaging in their films. The prospect of having reduced production costs is in itself an enormous motive that drives more filmmakers to welcome brand involvement in the production process. Being one of the more sought-after production houses, Marvel Studios has developed the skill for tasteful execution of product placements.

Marvel's productions are typically superhero-themed movies and TV shows with a massive following. Usually, Marvel audiences immerse themselves in these productions. They are vigilant about catching every detail that shows in the movies and tv shows. Several of the productions incorporate brand messaging and utilize different modes of persuasion in their execution. Aristotle argued that when these modes of persuasion are applied strategically, they can arouse an audience's interest and influence their decision-making (Aristotle & Cooper, 1932).

The purpose of this study is to identify different modes of persuasion employed in promoting products in movies and investigate their ability to influence audience opinions and purchase intentions about the advertised product. Above, I identified three rhetorical appeals-

ethos, pathos, logos- used by Marvel Studios to promote seven different brands in movies from the Marvel Cinematic Universe. In my analysis, I investigate how some rhetorical elements in the selected movies create persuasive arguments to help promote products to viewers.

This study suggests that in leveraging the three modes of persuasion, brand placements also employ different rhetorical elements to elicit audience responses and invite them to complete the circuit of the advertising argument. For example, in the movies considered for this study, the present rhetorical elements include; imagery, diegetic sound (dialogue), and non-diegetic sound (music and sound effects).

Some of the placements considered above use imagery to either show a product's presence physically or communicate an emotion. For example, the movie *Thor* shows several quick shots of the various Acura models and the Acura logo on the cars in the Acura placements. In *Captain America: Winter Soldier*, the imagery shows the make of Fury's car and the extent of damage it can take and still be operational. The close shots of Fury's face with a bleeding nose also qualify as a use of imagery that helps to arouse feelings of concern. Similarly, imagery is present to show the expression of excitement on Luiz's face and the beauty of the Veloster in Hyundai's placement in the *Ant-Man and The Wasp* movie.

Another element that features in some of the brand placements considered above is the diegetic sound. Promoting products using diegetic sound can be done either by mentioning the product in dialogue or by using the dialogue and other sounds to draw attention to the brand. For example, the placements for Baskin-Robbins and Ben and Jerry's humorously mention their products in the dialogue to appeal to pathos.



In contrast, the placements for Chevrolet, Burger King, and Hyundai do not mention their products. However, the tactfully prepared dialogue highlights the use of the product in the scene. Luiz's gratitude to Dr. Pym indicates his excitement about the Veloster in Ant-Man and the Wasp. Tony Stark's request for an American cheeseburger also highlights the Burger King brand. Finally, Fury's interactions with his vehicle's intuitive onboard computer invite audiences to pay more attention to the vehicle. Again, the Apple, Chevrolet, and Hyundai placements use music and sound effects as diegetic sound to spotlight their products humorously.

The third rhetorical element used in executing the product placements discussed above is non-diegetic sound. Hyundai's and Chevrolet's placements use background music to add a layer of intensity to the car chase scene. Table 2 below summarizes the various rhetorical elements used in advertising the selected brand placements and the rhetorical appeals that these elements create.

**Table 2**

*List of Brands and the Rhetorical Elements and Appeals They Employ*

PRODUCT	RHETORICAL ELEMENT	APPEAL GENERATED
Acura: MDZ, TL, ZDX	Imagery	Pathos
Apple iPhone 6	Imagery	Ethos
	Diegetic sound (Dialogue and Music)	Pathos
Baskin-Robbins: Mango Fruit Blast	Imagery	Pathos
	Diegetic sound (Dialogue)	Ethos, Pathos

Ben and Jerry's: "Hunka-Hulka Burning Fudge" and "Stark Raving Hazelnuts"	Diegetic sound (Dialogue)	Pathos
Burger King: Cheeseburger	Imagery	Ethos, Pathos
	Diegetic sound (Dialogue)	Ethos, Pathos, Logos
Chevrolet: 2014 Tahoe	Imagery	Ethos, Pathos, Logos
	Non-diegetic sound (Music)	Pathos, Logos
	Diegetic sound (Dialogue and Sound effects)	Ethos, Pathos
Hyundai: Veloster	Imagery	Ethos
	Non-diegetic sound (Music)	Pathos
	Diegetic sound (Dialogue, Sound effects)	Ethos, Pathos

While the findings from this study revealed that Marvel movies leverage all three rhetorical appeals- ethos, pathos, and logos- in executing product placements, the data also suggests that ethos and pathos appeals appear more often.

### **Ethos**

Several of the placements primarily appeal to ethos by associating a product with admirable characters in the movie. This makes the character a part of the advertiser's argument to promote a product to viewers. According to Aristotle (1932), this action is strategic because

the *ethos* of the character that represents the product message persuades audiences when they consider the characters as worthy of belief. For example, in the movie *Thor*, S.H.I.E.L.D agents were associated with several Acura models to suggest to audiences that the Acura brand is a credible choice where strength, agility, and desirability are concerned. Burger King also associated their cheeseburger with Tony Stark to emphasize that theirs is an essential choice for a cheeseburger, even among the rich and famous. Similarly, Chevrolet's placement uses *ethos* by making the 2014 Tahoe Nick Fury's vehicle of choice in *Captain America: Winter Soldier*.

Other placements also appealed to *ethos* by incorporating dialogue or imagery that speaks to a brand's credibility. In *Captain America: Winter Soldier*, Fury's interactions with the Chevrolet Tahoe's onboard computer highlights the intuition of the car's systems to consumers in a manner that arouses a desire to own a system that is as helpful and intuitive. Luiz's verbal and facial reactions to driving a Hyundai Veloster in *Ant-Man and The Wasp* also promote the Hyundai Veloster as a highly desirable car choice to viewers. Apple's placement in *Ant-Man* also appeals to *ethos* by using Siri's response in the dialogue to highlight the phone's responsiveness and imagery to show its strength and durability. Finally, Baskin-Robbins' placement in *Ant-Man* also employs *ethos* in the dialogue to establish the brand as a credible organization that only keeps trustworthy employees.

## **Pathos**

The findings from this study also suggest that Marvel movies make many appeals to *pathos* in executing some of the brand placements. Aristotle (1932) asserts that the *pathos* position achieves persuasion when an argument ushers audiences into a state of emotion. This is because audiences make different decisions under the sway of their emotions. The use of *pathos* in these movies is primarily by invoking specific emotions in viewers. An appeal to the viewers'

sense of humor is the most commonly employed tactic by the product placements considered in this study.

Apple, Baskin Robbins, and Ben and Jerry's utilize humor in promoting their products to viewers. Hyundai's placement in *Ant-Man* and *The Wasp* also appeals to the emotions of humor and excitement in promoting the Veloster. Similarly, Chevrolet Tahoe's placement employs humor at some point to create a sense of relief. However, Chevrolet also invokes feelings of fear and concern for Fury when HYDRA operatives attack him and a feeling of gratitude and relief when he seems to have gotten away.

### **Logos**

According to Aristotle (1932), persuasion is effect by arguments that demonstrate the truth, whether real or apparent. He described this mode of persuasion as logos. In the product placements considered for this study, logos creates an air of reality and authenticity that justifies the product's presence. For example, Chevrolet's placement incorporates logos by promoting their product as strong yet destructible under extreme circumstances. Similarly, Burger King's appearance in *Iron Man* utilizes logos by inserting the product in a realistic and relatable situation. The logos element in this particular placement legitimizes the pathos appeals made in the scene.

Although the logos appeals are more noticeable in the Chevrolet Tahoe and Burger King placements, it is possible to argue that logos, as Aristotle posits it, is an underlying appeal in all brand placements. It legitimizes the inclusion of ethos and pathos appeals. The Logos appeal establishes a need for the products' appearance by developing a movie world or narrative where a product can fit appropriately. Arnett (1986) supports this position when he argues that "logos convince audiences that the world portrayed in a film is real" (p.6).

## **Shortcomings and Directions for Future Research**

Among this study's limitations are the sample size and method. I use purposive sampling for this study to select brands that advertise in Marvel movies. As a result, the analysis in this study does not address brand placements appeals and strategies in other movie genres and television shows. Even though they do not account for all product placements, this study's sample size and sampling method worked well to answer my specific research question.

This study solely uses Aristotle's three modes of persuasion as a theoretical framework to analyze product placements and draw conclusions on their persuasive abilities. Aristotle developed his theory of persuasion for the context of political speech and argumentation. As such, its application to image-based text in this study has some limitations. Nonetheless, the three rhetorical appeals remain a viable and useful heuristic device for analyzing and understanding persuasive marketing intent in movies, as is done in this study.

Scholars have also argued that rhetorical appeals do not address the entirety of a rhetorical situation. According to Leach (2000), the three rhetorical appeals explore context as an introduction to rhetorical analysis. Supporting Leach's position, Killingsworth (2005) asserts that a more accurate rhetorical analysis must factor in other elements like "the medium of exchange, the textual context of language and signs as well as the cultural context that includes obstacles that must be worked through" (p.5). While the analysis in this study factors in the context of the scenes in which the product placements appear, it does not include inferences based on many of the variables Killingsworth posits are necessary for rhetorical analysis.

Some scholars also express concern about rhetorical analysis' ability to study persuasive intent in any text accurately. For example, Leach (2000) highlights a concern about rhetorical analysis that applies to this study; this research treats analysis of filmic arguments merely as the

reverse of the construction of discourse and assumes that the intentions of filmmakers and advertisers can be defined solely by the content of the product placements.

Rhetorical analysis, however, is effective in the context of this study because of the focus on specific rhetorical elements and their ability to form a persuasive argument. "The power of rhetorical analysis is its immediacy, its ability to talk about the particular and the possible, not the universal and the probable" (Leach, 2000, p.5). Thus, the goal of this study is not to draw absolute conclusions on the persuasive abilities of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals. Instead, the goal is to establish that applying ethos, pathos, and logos can create product placements that capture the audience's attention and influence their opinions about a product.

In the future, research on this subject can use other methods in conjunction with rhetorical analysis to assess the impact of applying Aristotle's rhetorical appeals in product placements and their effects on audiences in terms of brand recognition and purchase decision-making.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this query was to investigate the persuasive strategies and appeals that advertisers can leverage in executing their product placements. This study's findings establish that several brands can promote their products via product placements in movies and reveal different modes of persuasion that advertisers can employ. In addition, the analysis confirms that all three of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals play strategic roles in a persuasion effort. Aristotle asserts that the character of a speaker (ethos), the ability of an argument to create emotions (pathos), and the truthfulness of a statement (logos) are essential factors that can persuade audiences (Aristotle & Cooper, 1932).

In this study, the selection of Marvel movies shows how Aristotle's rhetorical appeals can work, individually and collaboratively, to create a persuasive argument. These insights are relevant to both industry and academia. The findings here can inspire further research into the subject to better understand the process of creating a persuasive advertisement in different movies and television shows. Furthermore, these results contribute to a body of research that filmmakers and advertisers can leverage when planning to promote products in a movie to generate audience interest and influence purchase decisions.

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