Lacking Ethos

In Elizabeth Gilbert’s article, “Fear is boring, and other tips for living a creative life”, the use of rhetorical appeals is clearly present, but does not strongly use all of them. Even failing to address just one of the rhetorical appeals in a piece of writing can leave the reader with negative emotions toward the author’s words. Gilbert effectively uses the rhetorical appeals of logos and pathos, but the lacking use of ethos in her article leaves the reader questioning why they should consider her arguments and tips trustworthy.

One effective way Gilbert used logos to engage the reader in her article is by starting the article talking about how we, as a society, perceive creativity and used this as a commonplace most people can relate to. By starting off the whole article with this, it gives the reader something to immediately connect to and follows it up with a logical way to combat the problem. This immediate relevance makes the reader want to keep reading to see if the rest of the article is just as engaging and beneficial to them as the first paragraph was. Another use of commonplace that was worthwhile in the article is in the third paragraph, when Gilbert uses a Border Collie as an analogy to an active mind. Because it is so logical to most people that Border Collies are one of the most active dog breeds, this is a strong use of logos. It helped her explain a new way of thinking using information most people consider a concrete fact and trust in, which leaves them more likely to trust in the author’s ideas.

Going back to the very first paragraph of the article, Gilbert also effectively used pathos to connect with the reader right away. Not feeling qualified enough to call yourself creative is an emotional struggle that many people can relate to. Giving the reader something to connect to right off the bat makes them more interested to keep reading. This is not the only place that you can see Gilbert successfully using pathos in the article though. In the second paragraph, she uses pathos effectively by using her opponent’s viewpoint to strengthen her own. She states how great creatives often use a certain saying of “this idea came to me” (Gilbert), and they contradict themselves when pushed to explain. Gilbert uses their first thought, which is similar to her own, to strengthen her argument by showing the invalidity of her opponents contradicting themselves. By using pathos to poke holes in her opponents validity, she persuaded her readers that her thoughts are more logical and added to her own credibility.

As you could see in the previous two paragraphs, Gilbert constructively used logos and pathos in her article. Although, the lacking use of ethos leaves a missing piece in trusting the author of what you read. The first paragraph on the page of the website where the article is located briefly introduces her as “author Elizabeth Gilbert”, but this is barely any information about her. The reader has no way of knowing what she is the author of, how long she has been an author for or if the topic of this article is within her expertise to write. It makes the reader question if she is qualified to write such an article and give advice on it. As the article jumps right into the list-type format of tips, she clearly fails to establish who she is and what justification she has to be writing such an article. The reader should feel confident taking the author's advice before the list of advice even starts and give them a reason to want to read the article in the first place. The only place in this article that ethos is used is in the short introductory paragraph before Gilbert’s article, which she didn’t even write herself. This small piece of information, only indicating that she is an author of some sort, is not sufficient enough to effectively contribute to the ethos rhetorical appeal.

The advantages of using all the rhetorical appeals in articles like Gilbert’s are more important than ever. Because her article is essentially a list of tips and advice, the reader needs to be given the sense they can fully trust everything the author says. They need to be persuaded to believe the information in the article is logical, but also that the author is credible and qualified to write such a piece. Gilbert’s thoughts came across as insightful in the article, but lacked the authority it could have easily had with the better incorporation of rhetorical appeals. Failing to incorporate ​*all*​ the rhetorical appeals effectively in an article can, like in this case, drastically undermine the validity of the piece of work. Gilbert’s article powerfully used logos and pathos to build trust in the reader, but the insubstantial use of ethos completely undermined the influential credibility of the whole article.

Works Cited

Gilbert, Elizabeth. “Fear Is Boring, and Other Tips for Living a Creative Life.” ​*Ideas.ted.com*​, 27 Oct. 2015, ideas.ted.com/fear-is-boring-and-other-tips-for-living-a-creative-life/.

Rhetorical Analysis: “The- Out-of-This-World Strategies in Place to Stop an Asteroid Impact” by Carrie Nugent

Carrie Nugent’s article, “The- Out-of-This-World Strategies in Place to Stop an Asteroid Impact”, describes the benefits of observing asteroids in Earth’s shared space and the methods scientist developed to defend the planet from an asteroid impact. By using several rhetorical devices, situations, and strategies to her advantage, Nugent aims to persuade her audience to support and conduct asteroid observation. Throughout Nugent’s article, she makes adequate use of Ethos and Logos, audience familiarity, and tone to fulfill her purpose.

To begin, Nugent demonstrated that she was familiar with the audience that she aimed to convince. Understanding the audience is crucial to persuading the reader because the effectiveness of the other rhetorical devices may depend on the audience. In Nugent’s case, she was writing to readers interested in science, but not science professionals. This was evident when new information was presented in the article. Nugent briefly simplified and explained what was said to the reader. Nugent showcased this after she quoted NASA’s Planetary Defense Officer, Lindley Johnson. Johnson stated, “’A sufficiently sized impactor, of sufficient velocity in the right direction, hits the asteroid hard enough to change its velocity by a few millimeters to centimeters per second...’” (Nugent). Nugent built off what Lindley said by explaining that slightly changing the velocity of an asteroid would cause it to avoid Earth’s orbit (Nugent). If she decided to not explain the evidence and information she presented, it may have alienated the audience and caused the article to lose its purpose. Overall, Nugent had a clear idea of who her audience was and put effort into organizing her rhetorical devices to appeal to her readers.

Logos and Ethos are the main rhetorical appeals used throughout the article. Ethos was utilized at the beginning of the article; the article description described Carrie Nugent as an “asteroid hunter, scientist, and writer...” (Nugent). Therefore, readers know Nugent’s credibility, and as a result, are more easily persuaded. Nugent decided that her credentials were not sufficient and interviewed Johnson to support her claim. The inclusion of Johnson’s statements proved to the audience that, not only did she firmly understand the topic but also conducted further research to support her ideas. Interestingly, Nugent did not use Ethos and Logos as separate entities. She used the credibility built through Ethos to strengthen the claims and evidence in her article. An example of this is the explanation for the impactor method mentioned earlier. As Johnson detailed the fundamentals required for the impactor method, he emphasized that this method had been tested (Nugent). In addition to that, Nugent offered a counterargument. Nugent stated,

There are other complications to this technique. Some asteroids appear to be very loosely held-together clumps of dust, boulders, and small rocks. Gravity holds them together but it’s almost impossibly weak; roughly 1/100,000 of what it is on Earth (assuming an object about 1 kilometer across). (Nugent)

The presence of a counterargument by the author provided readers a sense of transparency, further building the trust between the reader and writer. Since Nugent forged a bond of trust with her audience, her use of Logos to describe how the method could fail was convincing. Carrie Nugent extensively worked to gain the trust of her readers using Ethos and employed that trust to strengthen her use of Logos. In turn, this resulted in her producing an effective argument that she would not have achieved if she had done otherwise.

Another rhetorical device that Carrie Nugent used was tone. Once again, tone works best when it matches the audience. Since Nugent’s audience consisted of casual science readers, the tone she chose for her article was formal while also optimistic. This tone was appropriate because the characteristics created balance to keep the text engaging. If the article were too serious it would lose the attention of her readers, while the readers would not take her article seriously if it were too zany. As a result, her purpose would be counteracted. Nugent knew this and found a balance by switching tones when necessary. She was formal at one point to display evidence, then switched to a joyous, optimistic, or humorous tone. An example of this is when Nugent says, “The mission’s goal wasn’t to change the comet’s orbit... The impact altered the comet’s velocity by about 0.00005 mm/s. To put that in perspective, at a speed of 0.00005 mm/s, it would take you 72 hours to traverse the surface of an M&M candy” (Nugent). Here Nugent used a formal tone to describe the speed at which these space objects traveled. This let the reader know the information was trustworthy and important. Then immediately after she described how the meteor was as large as 300 billion “really big” pumpkins (Nugent). For the readers the use of pumpkins may sound silly when initially used as an example, but it worked to help the audience visualize how asteroids were affected by the impactor method. All in all, Nugent decided to not use one consistent tone throughout her article and instead used a combination of tones to fit her audience, so she could better relate to them. The combination of tones made the article seem like it was trying to inform and teach its readers, which is important to convince readers to support scientific research.

As with any literature, there were concepts and themes that could use improvement to help her arguments fulfill the article’s purpose. One thing that Carrie Nugent could have done to improve her article was include her own research and findings. This would add another layer of credibility with the readers. She would also gain the advantage of having more firsthand knowledge on the topic. This would display her passion for asteroid observation to inspire readers’ passion. Another thing she could have done was describe the consequences of an asteroid impact. It can be assumed that the readers already know that an asteroid impact would not produce a positive outcome but reminding the audience the negative effects of an asteroid striking earth could sway readers more easily.

Overall, Carrie Nugent’s use of several rhetorical devices worked toward the purpose of the article. Nugent’s awareness toward her intended audience made the article focused and orchestrated how the other rhetorical devices were structured. On top of that, she seamlessly used Ethos to build up credibility to increase the effectiveness of the Logos. Then she used her varying, yet appropriate tones to let the reader know when the information was important and to not push away her intended audience. Carrie Nugent used all the rhetorical situations and devices like cogs in a wheel and produced a compelling argument for why her readers should support asteroid observation.

Works Cited

Nugent, Carrie, and Rebecca Henderson. *The out-of-This-World Strategies in Place to Stop an Asteroid Impact*. 15 Mar. 2017, ideas.ted.com/help-an-asteroid-is-headed-toward-earth/.

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