

Ericka Evangelista
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ENGL 400 T/TH 9:00

Social Media Addiction:

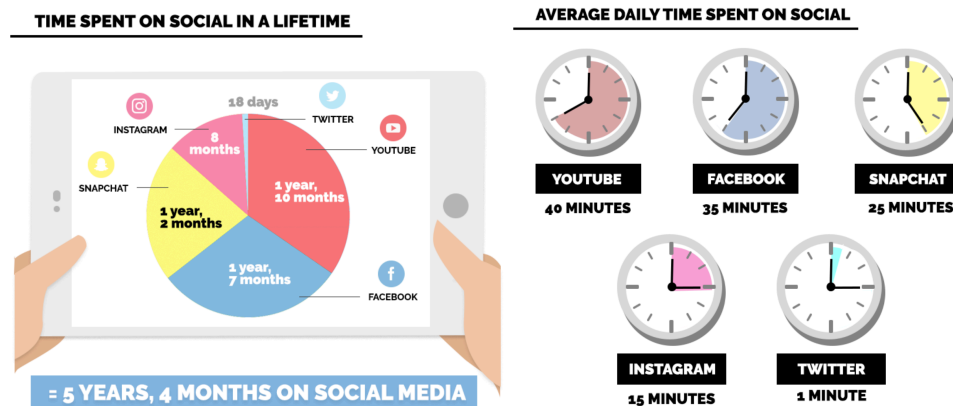
A Rhetorical Analysis on Black Mirror Episode: "Nosedive"

Introduction:

According to the Pew Research Center, about 95% of Americans own a mobile device and about 7 in 10 Americans use social media (Pew Research Center, "Mobile Fact Sheet" and "Social Media Fact Sheet"). Charlie Brooker, the creator of the ominous Netflix Original Series, *Black Mirror*, creates a satire of society's use and dependency on technology. Each episode touches on his concerns on the issue. In 2014, Brooker was interviewed and explained the meaning behind the title *Black Mirror*. He explains that, "any TV, any LCD, any iPhone, any iPad—something like that—if you just stare at it, it looks like a black mirror, and there's something cold and horrifying about that, and it was such a fitting title for the show" (Freeman, Thomas). Brooker's intent with the creation of *Black Mirror* was to rattle his audience by shedding some light on the negative effects that technology has on society. However, it is not the presence of technology that we should be concerned about, but rather society's dependency on technology.

The first installment of season three, "Nosedive", is about a desperate woman attempting to boost her social media "score". Brooker worked with Michael Schur and Rashida Jones of *Parks and Recreation* to create a world where a social media platform allowed online and in-person users to rate each other based on their encounters with each other to determine an individual's value and worth in society. The overall score allows users access to different services, jobs, and benefits based on each tier of scores on a five-star scale. Social media is

shown as a way of life and the users are so dependent on the platform that they rate each other every chance that they get. The protagonist of the episode, Lacie Pound, goes to great lengths to be liked by everyone and boost her score to be able to qualify for a discount on a new luxury home. When Lacie's childhood friend, a well-rated social media star, invites Lacie to be the maid of honor at her wedding, Lacie plots to utilize the opportunity to boost her score. The purpose of this story is to comment on the way that people seek validation through social media posts. The amount time that people spend online and on social media is constantly increasing; teens are said to be spending nine or more hours a day on social media (Asano, Evan). People become so dependent on their social media platforms that they can even become addicted to it.



Although it is not medically recognized, people can find themselves addicted to social media. With platforms such as, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., people are able to constantly check statuses, updates, and the amount of "likes" they receive on their own posts. According to researchers at Chicago University, social media addiction can be more addicting than cigarettes and alcohol (Walker, Leslie). Researchers believe that the addiction can result in

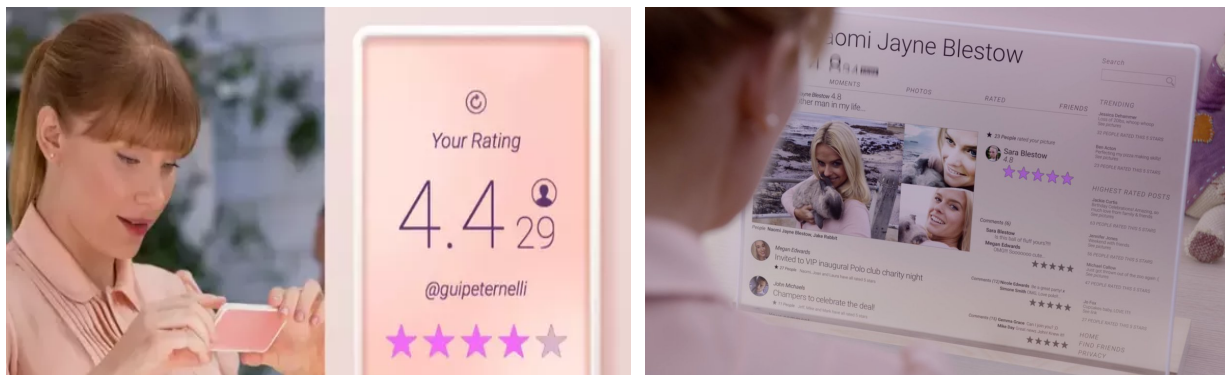
symptoms of anxiety, depression, and psychological disorders (Pew Research Center, “Social Media Fact Sheet”).

Method:

In my analysis, I will be discussing four key concepts from our text, to include: visual symbols, pathos, logos, and resignification. *Visual symbols* are symbols that convey meaning such as, pictures, images, objects, artifacts, and actions. *Pathos* is an appeal to emotion that is used as a way to convince an audience by creating an emotional response. *Logos* is an appeal to logic and reason that relies on “argument itself, by showing or seeming to show something.” *Resignification* is defined as a process in which people reject the connotation of a symbol, expose how the meaning of the symbol is constructed, and attempt to change its construction. It is useful to analyze the episode as a rhetorical artifact with the course concepts from our text to get a better understanding of the concepts and how they are utilized in rhetorical artifacts (Palczewski, Catherine Helen, Fritch, John, Ice, Richard).

Analysis:

Visual Symbols



Visual symbols are symbols that convey meaning such as, pictures, images, objects, artifacts, and actions (Palczewski, Catherine Helen, Fritch, John, Ice, Richard). Nosedive contains

a variety of visual symbols that convey meaning to its audience. The first symbol we observe are the mobile devices used in the show. Lacie is constantly checking her social media feed on all of her devices including special contacts that provides users with more access to view everyone's current score. Brooker stated that these devices are horrifying and cold and the cause of many problems. Mobile devices are objects that a majority of people have and use daily and I believe that the audience can relate to the episodes usage of mobile devices. Another symbol would be the generic social media platform that is used for the show. It has similar visual characteristics that resemble a lot of the big social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. I feel as though this is done to also give the audience something to relate to when it comes to the social media platforms they use in their everyday lives. People are so dependent on these devices and platforms that we do not realize the dependency is in fact a problem to be concerned about.

Appeal to Emotion



Pathos is an appeal to emotion that is used as a way to convince the audience by creating an emotional response (Palczewski, Catherine Helen, Fritch, John, Ice, Richard). The overall message of *Nosedive* appeals to emotion in the sense that we are being shown a story

that is very relatable to our everyday lives that many can see is a problem. Brooker, Schur, and Jones wanted their audience to feel concerned about what the affects social media has on us. We are all so dependent on social media that we spend hours out of our days making sure we are portrayed in such a way that makes ourselves more appealing to others. By showing this to the audience, I believe Brooker can evoke concern for the issue at hand. The lengths Lacie goes through to get people to like her is realistic and I feel as though people can relate to Lacie. We start the episode with Lacie practicing laughs in front of the mirror that she believes will be more appealing to others, she takes “instagrammable” photos to boost her score, and when her life comes crashing down, she breaks down and becomes very open about her emotions which really makes the audience feel for her as a character. When Lacie is sent to prison for crashing her friend Naomi’s wedding and being offensive to Naomi and her guests, we can relate to her outburst over the issue because we can see just how silly it is to care so much about the opinions of others.

Appeal to Logic and Reason

Logos is an appeal to logic and reason that relies on “argument itself, by showing or seeming to show something” (Palczewski, Catherine Helen, Fritch, John, Ice, Richard). While on her arduous trip to her friend’s wedding, Lacie finds herself without a car and ends up hitchhiking the rest of the way. With a low score of 2.8, Lacie discovers that no one is willing to help her until she encounters Susan, a widowed truck driver with a lower score of 1.4, and even then Lacie judges the woman for having such a low score but decides to hitch a ride with Susan in the end. While on the road, Lacie tells Susan about her journey and the reasoning behind her low score. Susan is amused with Lacie’s obsession with the scores and explains that she had a

high score of a 4.6 before. It is then that Susan tells Lacie about the flaw in the system. Susan's husband had been suffering from cancer and Susan did all she could to get her husband the best treatment. In the end, Susan's husband had lost his hospital bed to someone with a 0.1 higher score than him. After her husband dies, Susan gave up her obsession with the platform and decided she would do and say what she wanted without seeking validation from those around her. Susan may have lost the people she believed were her friends but she was happy and at peace. It is at this moment that the audience too can see the flaw in finding our self-worth from the opinions of others on social media. Her story appeals to logic and reason as it provides some insight and reasoning behind why society's obsession with social media is flawed.

Resignification

Resignification is defined as a process in which people reject the connotation of a symbol, expose how the meaning of the symbol is constructed, and attempt to change its construction (Palczewski, Catherine Helen, Fritch, John, Ice, Richard). During Susan's story, we also see how Susan rejects the norm of obsessing over a high score and chooses to see how freeing it is to do and say what you want even if it means getting a lower score. This applies to resignification because Susan accepted and embraced her lower score and by doing so, she found the positives of having a lower score instead of obsessing about it like everyone else in the episode. We also see an example of resignification at the end of the episode when Lacie crashes Naomi's wedding. When Naomi, kicks Lacie out of the wedding for having a score of 2.8, Lacie is determined to attend and speak at the wedding after enduring so much to be there. When Lacie arrives and crashes the wedding, Lacie decides to rant about her "friendship"

with Naomi and eventually Lacie gets herself arrested. While in her cell at the police station, we can see Lacie going through withdrawals of not having access to her feed. In the air, Lacie goes through the motions of rating her prison mate as if she would have if she had access to her feed. It is then that Lacie and her prison mate realize they can say whatever they want to each other without repercussions. They both decide to enjoy the freedom of not having to live by rules and yell profanities at each other. In the end, the two accept their new role of having a low score and the freedom it entails.

Conclusion:

The creator of Black Mirror, Charlie Brooker, produced a world that expresses his concern for society's use and dependency on mobile devices and social media. Social media addiction is the theme discussed in the Black Mirror episode "Nosedive." I have analyzed this rhetorical artifact with four course concepts discussed in our text: visual symbols, pathos, logos, and resignification. It was beneficial to utilize these concepts to get a better understanding of the concepts themselves and to see how the concepts were used to argue the specific concern in the episode. With the usage of these elements, Brooker is able to convey his concern of social media addiction and dependency to his audience in a way that makes his audience reflect and reconsider our views on the issue.

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