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Plastic is a Problem: Rhetorical Strategies in Parker’s

“We Depend on Plastic. Now, We’re Drowning in it.”

Plastic is a part of modern life. It’s a part of daily routines, and it covers almost everything we buy. According to the article used for this paper, “*We Depend on Plastic. Now, We’re Drowning in It*”, by Laura Parker, more than 40% of plastic is only used once before being thrown away. This is an issue because the plastic we use and throw away daily can end up in the ocean. According to Parker, this is an important issue that needs immediate action. The purpose of this artifact is to talk about the effects of plastic in our oceans, the ways we can solve the issue, and why we haven’t actually fixed the issue. The platform that hosts this article is National Geographic. National Geographic is a famous magazine, known for its factual and interesting articles. This article was posted as a part of an effort, called *Planet or Plastic,* to raise awareness about the plastic crisis in the oceans. The platform used to host this article is important because it lends credibility to what the author is saying and ultimately makes the overall tone of the article even more serious. She begins her article by talking about facts and then dives into a metaphor about the pilgrims and how the world would be different if they had plastic back then. She elaborates on why plastic in the oceans is bad and talks about how the trash the pilgrims would’ve created would most likely still be here today. Parker does a good job using pathos in her article. She uses logos and ethos as well, but pathos seems to be her selling point. The artifact also has photographs of polluted rivers and beaches that invoke a feeling of sadness. Parker’s arguments for cleaning up the ocean are strong and backed up through facts, feelings, and authority figures, the issues are with the lack of solution and no strong credibility from the author.

The Logos

Of the 6.9 billion tons of plastic we have thrown away since 2017, “…6.3 billion tons never made it to the recycling bin,” *(We Depend on Plastic. Now, We're Drowning in It)*. An estimate of 5.3- 14 million tons of plastic waste is added each year to the ocean. One reason this is such an issue is because plastic doesn’t break down naturally, or in another term, biodegrade, very quickly. Most estimates say that the biodegradation of plastics can “…range from 450 years to never,” *(We Depend on Plastic. Now, We're Drowning in It).* Since plastic doesn’t break down, it just floats around the ocean, killing sea animals and destroying parts of the ecosystem. These numbers appeal to her readers because it touches on logos and helps the reader to understand exactly what is going on in terms of the size of the problem. This contributes to her argument because the point of the article is to raise awareness of the amount of plastic we have floating around in our oceans.

The Ethos

The ethos of the argument was mostly reliant on the platform the actual article was presented on. The other authority figures used were researchers, for example, Jenna Jambeck’s information about costal plastic waste. Parker also used a small quote from the global summit in Nairobi spoken by the head of the United Nations Environment Programme, which is about as high on the chain of authority a person could go when dealing with the plastic pollution in the oceans. She also used a few other specialists’ opinions in her article, but overall the article was mostly reliant on National Geographic to lend it credibility. She did, however, make her own credibility semi-apparent when she spoke about her time spent with marine ecologist Richard Thompson. Her experience working alongside him, even if it wasn’t for very long, gave her a little authority to speak about the subject.

The Pathos

The article was filled with photographs, metaphors, scary facts and anecdotes. Photographs of plastic filled beaches, pictures of sea animals holding trash, which all had captions that made the reader feel dismayed at the state of the ocean. The photo of the seahorse holding a plastic cotton swab had the caption, “…a photo I wish didn’t exist,” *(We Depend on Plastic. Now, We're Drowning in It),* which is supposed to make the reader sad. There is another photo of a mother and child in a sea of plastic sheets that have washed up onto the beach, the mother is trying to collect the sheets to recycle them and the child is helping. Part of the caption for this photo is, “Less than a fifth of all plastic gets recycled globally. In the U.S. it’s less than 10 percent,” *(We Depend on Plastic. Now, We're Drowning in It).* The next appeal to the readers emotions would be the metaphor of the pilgrims using plastic and throwing it away. This is a scary thought because, “their plastic trash would likely still be around, four centuries later,” *(We Depend on Plastic. Now, We're Drowning in It).* The next appeal to the readers emotions would have to be Parker’s story about meeting a marine ecologist named Richard Thompson. Thompson helped to discover what is known as ‘microplastics’, which are almost imperceptible to the eye, but they are tiny bits of plastic that have accumulated in the ocean on a large scale. This is bad because they are easy for fish to eat and not only could they kill the fish, but microplastics are made of potentially dangerous chemicals and when a fish eats them, the chemicals might pass into the tissue of the fish. A human might eat that fish and become very sick. Parker used pathos to her advantage in her article. She played on the emotions of the people who care for animals, family, the earth, and those who care most about themselves.

The largest attempt to tug on people’s heartstrings to get them to pay attention to the growing crisis would be the Siena’s story. These people live their lives surrounded by trash on “…Manila’s waterfront in a one-room flat lit by a single bulb, furnished with a pair of plastic chairs, and lacking plumbing, bedding, or refrigeration,” *(We Depend on Plastic. Now, We're Drowning in It),* and the author talks about how Armando Siena and his family all go outside to find trash worth recycling to make money for food. This story is a major appeal to the readers emotion as it calls on the feeling of compassion. The pathos here makes the readers want to help in whatever way they can. The author makes a few mentions about how it is hard to help these people because we have no centralized waste management to deal with these large piles of trash in these areas.

The Issues and Effects of the Issues

An issue this article had was the authors lack of credibility. Her article was full of other people’s research and stories about other people. She had done the research, but her own opinions were not backed up by her job, her hobby, or her schooling. The biggest issue was the lack of solution offered by the author. Parker does mention what big companies are doing to reduce their plastic output, “…PepsiCo, Amcor, and Unilever, have pledged to convert to 100 percent reusable, recyclable, or compostable packaging by 2025,” *(We Depend on Plastic. Now, We're Drowning in It),* but she makes no mention of what is being done about the waste they created in the past. Parker used a quote that talks about how the only thing we can do is to just pick it up. But how are we going to reach all of it? The biggest issue with this article is its lack of a feasible solution to ending oceanic plastic pollution, which leads to the audience feeling confused. The author just made them feel as though they should be doing something to help and then they are given no real solution to the problem and therefore they have no way of helping.

The End

This article did a fantastic job of making the reader feel something in response to the plastic polluting our oceans. Pathos was interwoven throughout the entirety of the article. The stories about the people living in trash, the photographs of animals and plastic, the short story about the authors own experience with the marine ecologist, all helped make her argument feel more personal for the reader. The author presented this information in such a way that that it could cause feelings of guilt, or even personal responsibility for the state of the oceans. This is using a terministic screen to show her facts and figures in a way that the reader can only perceive as important, and it works. Yet, the lack of a feasible solution to the pollution of the ocean, drags down the argument, because we are not given a clear way to clean up the oceans. I think that if Parker had suggested some ways the reader can really get involved in cleaning up the oceans the article would have benefited. This would have allowed the audience to feel as though they could do something to help the people, animals, places mentioned in the article.

Works Cited

Parker, Laura. “We Depend On Plastic. Now, We're Drowning in It.” National Geographic, National Geographic, 16 May 2018, www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2018/06/plastic-planet-waste-pollution-trash-crisis/.