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Nonprofit Narratives: How Two Organizations Use Social Media and Rhetorical Appeals to
Address Issues of Sexual and Domestic Violence

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

by
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December 2021

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Keywords: nonprofit, social media, narrative, rhetoric

ABSTRACT

Nonprofit Narratives: How Two Organizations Use Social Media and Rhetorical Appeals to

Address Issues of Sexual and Domestic Violence

by

Samuel Jennings Hiester

Though often seen as a panacea for organizational objectives, nonprofits must be judicious in deploying social media, particularly due to resource limitations. Nonprofits deploy many types and styles of digital texts, including social media. Classical rhetorical appeals can be effective means for achieving positive impact in that context. When used correctly, these ‘digital texts’ can be leveraged for maximum engagement with audiences. This study examines both a large, national organization – the National Sexual Violence Resource Center – and a small, regional one – Branch House Family Justice Center – for not only what sort of digital texts are utilized, but also how rhetorical appeals play into building narratives. A census of postings is taken, categorized, and organized. Findings suggest these appeals can and are used for strategic effect in nonprofit contexts. In addition to *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*, *Kairos* is drawn upon to construct organizational narrative in the pursuit of organizational goals.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	2
LIST OF TABLES.....	5
LIST OF FIGURES	6
Chapter 1. Introduction	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	10
Domestic Violence in the U.S.	10
Social Media.....	10
Social Media Platforms	11
Narrative in Social Media	12
Nonprofit Branding	15
Narrative Branding for Social Impact	17
Chapter 3: Methodology	21
Selection of Organizations	21
Data Collection.....	23
Data Coding – Message Classification.....	25
Data Coding – Rhetorical Appeal	27
Chapter 4: Findings.....	31
Branch House Family Justice Center	31
National Sexual Violence Resource Center	32
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Limitations	35
Research Question 1: Message Classifications	35
Research Question 2: Rhetorical Appeals	40
Limitations	48
References.....	50
VITA.....	57

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Social Media Platform Usage Among US Adults	23
Table 2. Number of Artifacts by Message Classification, Branch House Family Justice Center	31
Table 3. Message Classification of Artifacts as Percentage of Total, Branch House Family Justice Center	31
Table 4. Number of Artifacts by Rhetorical Appeal, Branch House Family Justice Center.....	31
Table 5. Rhetorical Appeal of Artifacts as Percentage of Total, Branch House Family Justice Center	32
Table 6. Number of Artifacts by Rhetorical Appeal, with and without <i>Kairos</i> , Branch House Family Justice Center	32
Table 7. Number of Artifacts by Message Classification, NSVRC	32
Table 8. Message Classification of Artifacts as Percentage of Total, NSVRC	33
Table 9. Number of Artifacts by Rhetorical Appeal, NSVRC	33
Table 10. Rhetorical Appeal of Artifacts as Percentage of Total, NSVRC	33
Table 11. Number of Artifacts by Rhetorical Appeal, with and without <i>Kairos</i> , NSVRC	34

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Branch House, Non-Financial Support	26
Figure 2. NSVRC, <i>Ethos</i> Rhetorical Appeal	28
Figure 3. NSVRC, <i>Pathos</i> Appeal	29
Figure 4. Branch House, Gratitude	37
Figure 5. NSVRC, Gratitude, <i>Pathos</i>	38
Figure 6. NSVRC, Uni-Directional Information-Sharing	39
Figure 7. NSVRC, <i>Ethos</i> Narrative-Building	42
Figure 8. NSVRC, <i>Logos</i> Narrative-Building	43
Figure 9. NSVRC, <i>Pathos</i> Narrative-Building	44
Figure 10. Branch House, <i>Kairos</i> – Mental Health Awareness	46
Figure 11. Branch House, <i>Kairos</i> – Local Concerns	47

Chapter 1. Introduction

Organizations of different kinds use a range of media to communicate with their constituents and to accomplish their missions and objectives. In the years since its inception, social media has evolved into one of the many instruments in the metaphorical toolbox that can be used to achieve this goal. However, over the past decade or two, social media has evolved to become a primary way that Americans consume media, accounting for nearly a quarter of all media consumption (Nielson, 2017). Thus, it is understandable that organizations of all kinds would have shifted their focus to social media in order to 'be where the people are,' as the saying goes.

In the world of for-profit corporations, this is something that appears and feels extremely familiar to many people. Targeted Facebook advertising, sponsored posts, and marketing campaigns delivered via real-time tweets have all become commonplace in today's media environment. Furthermore, seeing a company profile posting to Facebook, alongside followed friends, is not all that different from hearing a radio advertisement playing in-between the sought-after music, and seeing a sponsored post as part of a subscribed-to feed appears to be an awful lot like reading a full-page advertisement in a magazine subscription.

In the nonprofit sector, on the other hand, this similar pattern is not quite as straightforward to detect. While there is clearly a presence, particularly with regard to fundraising activities and events such as philanthropic 5K runs and walks, nonprofit organizations use the same social media channels as for-profit businesses. That said, the manner in which this application expresses itself is still up in the air, which posits the first research question:

What kinds of digital texts (and how many) do nonprofit organizations employ to raise awareness, secure funding, and identify constituencies' needs?

This study examines two organizations that deal with sexual and domestic violence: one that operates at the local level (Branch House Family Justice Center) and another that operates at the national level (National Sexual Violence Resource Center). A classification system is deployed to organize the digital texts produced by the two selected organizations according to their principal function (general awareness, financial support, etc.). Then, trends and patterns that emerge from the data are analyzed and discussed.

The primary categorization of digital communications is one thing, but delving deeper than the surface-level categorization can aid in understanding how these digital texts serve a wider function. It is critical for nonprofit organizations to 'tell their story' in order to better engage with a variety of audiences and stakeholders, including donors and volunteers. To the greatest extent possible, these organizations employ social media in the development of said stories, which posits the second research question:

How do those texts make use of rhetorical strategies and appeals in order to generate narratives that serve as the foundation for organizational goals?

The digital texts of the same two selected organizations are sorted and coded in this study according to their principal rhetorical appeal. *Ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*, which are all components of the classic Aristotelian rhetorical triangle, are used in this instance (Braet, 1992).

Additionally, the notion of *Kairos* – which is used to denote a rhetorical argument that is used at the appropriate time and in the proper measure – is investigated as a binary addition to *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* in order to better understand how they work together (Kinneavy & Eskin, 2000). *Kairos* exists outside of the rhetorical triangle, meaning that any of the three primary

components – *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* – may or may not also incorporate it. For the sake of this study, *Kairos* is examined either as being present or not present in a rhetorical argument regardless of whether the primary intent of an artifact is *ethos*, *logos*, or *pathos*. Additionally, there is not an evaluation of the degree to which *Kairos* is used; the evaluation is simply whether or not *Kairos* is present. For intercoder reliability, a second coder was added to the system.

The collected artifacts are analyzed and discussed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This study first presents a numerical analysis of the number and type of rhetorical appeals that each organization deploys, as well as whether or not *Kairos* is being employed. Then, it conducts a rhetorical analysis that examines in depth specific instances of rhetorical appeals, compares emergent patterns and trends, and suggests how each organization's rhetorical tactics function to further their targeted narratives.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Domestic Violence in the U.S.

'Domestic violence' refers to a variety of different sorts of abuse, assault, and criminal activity within the home. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), it includes both “intimate partner violence” (n.p.), which is abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship, and “teen dating violence” (n.p.), which are acts of aggression, abuse, stalking or assault that occur when teenagers are involved in a romantic relationship. Aside from threats and economic control/manipulation, the majority of groups fighting against domestic violence define the term to encompass emotional/psychological abuse, as well as widening the definition to include people of all ages, not just adults and teenagers (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2020).

These groups seek to educate individuals about the dangers of domestic abuse, the importance of reporting such occurrences, and the importance of removing undesired practices from society, among other objectives. They employ a variety of strategies to reach their target audiences and financial supporters, depending on their goals: raising awareness, recruiting volunteers, or raising funds, to name a few examples. However, in recent years, academics have emphasized the importance for nonprofits to deploy narrative in their communication strategies and tactics, particularly in the context of fundraising (Hermann, 2011; Mitchell & Clark, 2021).

Social Media

Since the advent of various forms of social media in recent years, many people have embraced them, with some even preferring social media over conventional media as a method of staying up to speed with the latest news and happenings. Organizations that work to end

domestic violence have used a variety of social media channels to reach a wide range of audiences and raise awareness about the issue while also informing them about the organization's mission and values. These narratives and other forms of storytelling have been used to reach a wide range of audiences and raise awareness about the issue of domestic violence.

A recent study by Nielsen (2017) found that, on average, consumers in the United States spend around one-quarter of their media time on various social media platforms, which translates to approximately five-and-a-half hours per week on social media platforms. When opposed to conventional media, such as television or radio, social media offers the benefit of allowing individuals to connect with organizations through the medium of their choosing, rather than through a standardized channel. As a result, they have the ability to make a significant contribution to the overall form of the organization.

For a long time, many people were doubtful about social media's capacity to make a positive difference in society. The majority of people, notably in the United States and the United Kingdom, have changed their minds on this (Baytiyeh, 2019; Orben et al., 2019). Due to the widespread use of social media, positive initiatives in society have emerged with the objective of removing bad concerns such as prejudice and violence.

Social Media Platforms

Nonprofit organizations use Facebook platforms to fundraise. The site gives users the ability to integrate both textual and visual components. The platform's peer-to-peer mechanism allows these nonprofit organizations' supporters to make monetary contributions to the organization through the site. Those who wish to contribute to the organization have also been able to do so directly through its Facebook page, which includes a donation option. Because 69

percent of Americans utilize the platform on a daily basis, the platform successfully reaches a large number of people (Lillqvist & Louhiala-Salminen, 2014; Pew Research Center. 2020).

As Walter and Jones (2011) point out, YouTube provides the ability for nonprofit groups using narrative to teach people about the hazards of domestic abuse. Through this site, specialists broadcast live videos on a variety of issues relating to domestic abuse. Therefore, YouTube educates individuals about domestic violence, and demonstrates how it can be committed against various persons in a number of different situations through the use of their videos. In addition to raising awareness about the issue, the platform is used by organizations to educate individuals with methods on dealing with similar situations. Furthermore, funds are raised by attaching donation cards to films being broadcasted by the organizations on their respective channels using the platform. Because it is used by such a diverse set of people, it can be an effective technique for organizations trying to raise awareness and solicit contributions from a broad range of demographic groups and individuals.

Shin et al. (2015) discuss in detail how nonprofit organizations use Twitter as a means of reaching people and possible contributors who help to fund organizations' operations. Platform users can engage with and respond to organizations' initiatives and other concerns by posting messages on the platform and encouraging others to do so as well. As a result, the organization is better able to comprehend and assess the type and severity of domestic abuse that exists in households. The results will be better initiatives to address the issues that are being faced by the general population.

Narrative in Social Media

Bonchek (2016) recognizes that developments in technology, people's behavior, and regulatory requirements demand the development of compelling strategic narratives by

companies. Following Bonchek's advice, a company's story should clearly demonstrate the organization's vision and goal, as well as the operational techniques the company uses. Bonchek also believes the strategic story should originate at the highest level of the company; nevertheless, he believes all members of the organization should be involved since the narrative shapes the culture that governs the business.

According to Herman (2011), the multiple narratives conveyed inside an organization, and among its workers and other stakeholders, influence the performance of the company's employees and stakeholders. He concludes, after studying at a nonprofit art center, personal narratives should be taken into account while developing organizational narratives. The fact that an organization's narratives are impacted not only by the industry's micro-narratives, but also by the intermediate and personal narratives, makes it a vital component that can have an impact on it. As a result, narrative perspectives should be used in conjunction with other managerial techniques in order for nonprofit organizations to perform better and endure longer in their respective sectors.

An example of internet marketing is the narratives used by various businesses and organizations that create their brands on online platforms. The narratives adopted by different businesses and organizations have consequences for an organization's overall success (Kadembo, 2010). The narratives that a business employs on its online platforms have an impact on the behavior and opinions of consumers, as well as the relationship that the firm has with the general public. Nonprofit organizations' narratives must have well-developed plans in place to guarantee they contribute to well-known brands in order to maintain their legitimacy. As a result, their narratives in branding are guided by social ecology due to nonprofit organizations concern for

enhancing the social welfare of the areas in which they are located than they are with making money.

Siegel (2017) assesses the creation of explicit messages and communication by nonprofit organizations, as well as the effectiveness of these messages. He claims that communication inside a nonprofit organization is done to a variety of audiences, including workers, funders, the community, and various other stakeholders. The goal of communication is to facilitate the exchange of information among the many stakeholders in order to ensure the smooth operation of the organization. While it is difficult to formulate messages that would appeal to all of the stakeholders, nonprofit organizations have found success by using story to communicate more successfully. Narratives are an effective fundraising strategy because they utilize additional persuasive methods than simply employing statistical facts. As a result, for an organization to meet people's expectations, it must communicate with them while also achieving the goal of the communication. It might include story into its communication strategies to do this.

The power of storytelling is an additional area of emphasis for nonprofit organizations in their communication. When tales are properly presented and effectively delivered, Barden (2015) asserts that they can provide greater outcomes than other approaches. Kanani (2014) emphasizes, in order for enterprises to effectively communicate, there is a need to combine tales with other statistical approaches. It is his contention that narratives are ineffective in communicating on their own.

Cadet and Carroll (2019) explore the importance of a nonprofit organization in conveying the hazards that exist in society to the general public. They suggest that organizations should build good and effective means of communicating these risks in order to evaluate the extent to which an organization's success and relevance in the community has been established. Despite

companies having a limited number of risk management literary resources at their disposal, organizations may nevertheless develop engaging narratives and tactics, which are accepted by their target audiences.

Furthermore, nonprofit organizations play an important role in every society by contributing to its overall well-being. It is possible for organizations to convince more individuals to join and support them financially, and in other ways if they use engaging narratives to do it. According to Erlach and Muller (2020), when a company wants to rebrand, it should first establish a story that explains what it is trying to achieve. However, the story produced should be consistent with other narratives already in use by the organization; this will assist to minimize collisions and misunderstanding among the intended audience members. As a result, narratives help to increase the participation of all organization members in the organization's development, resulting in increased loyalty from all stakeholders to the organization. Therefore, companies should develop narratives that are consistent with their goal and vision.

Nonprofit Branding

Using a case study approach, Gregory et al. (2020) examine how nonprofit brands impact donors' decisions to support or not support the organizations. They conclude that it is critical for managers and organizations to understand the effects of communication on various people's opinions toward their company and brand. Thus, this guarantees people's attitudes and choices about an organization being favorable by employing effective communication strategies.

Chad (2016) highlights the importance of nonprofit organizations' branding, as well as the relevance of adopting ideas of corporate rebranding. According to the findings of an investigation into a nonprofit organization that underwent rebranding, the procedure was a

failure. The failure of the process was ascribed to a lack of team members who were involved from the outset, as well as a lack of specialists on the subject who were hired to lead it. It is critical for rebranding efforts in both for-profit and nonprofit companies to incorporate all of the rebranding concepts. As a result, rebranding is a long-consuming process that necessitates a significant investment of knowledge, time, and finances. Chad finishes by stating that while rebranding, nonprofit organizations should make certain that they stay within their budget and vision boundaries.

Stakeholder engagement must be clearly defined up-front in order for a rebranding process to deliver positive outcomes. Haigh (2019) examined a small nonprofit organization and how it may be able to compete more effectively in the market if it uses a narrative approach in the development of its online brand. He came to the conclusion that – in order for any company to be excellent in its operations – they must tell a captivating story to develop new brands or make adjustments to current brands. As a result, despite the fact that many nonprofit organizations are small in size and some have limited resources at their disposal, they may compete successfully and deliver superior services by utilizing storytelling.

Further driving home this point, Ritchie et al. (1999) address the importance of branding in the context of charitable organizations. They demonstrate that strong brands enable consistency to be achieved via the provision of services to the various clientele that these firms serve. The development of strong relationships between a company and its stakeholders is another advantage of branding. This gives the business the ability to survive the high level of competition that it faces. They do, however, point out that branding has flaws, and that a company should do a thorough review before committing to a branding strategy or campaign.

Narrative Branding for Social Impact

Milner (2012) examines a nonprofit organization that promotes its existence and operations by incorporating social narratives into its marketing strategy. Throughout its activities, the company and all of its stakeholders employ story techniques. It is critical for a movement to be mediated in order to include the narratives of all stakeholders. While developing its story, the organization takes into consideration the views of the youth involved. It should be taken into account that the majority of teenagers are active users of social media. By providing services to a diverse range of customers, an organization guarantees that its presence in the community is felt. Consequently, an organization's general culture will represent their subculture if all stakeholders are consulted during the formulation process. A nonprofit organization's brand image is impacted by how it fulfills its corporate social responsibility (Rim et al., 2016).

Nonprofits' audience and constituent publics are diverse and may be persuaded by a variety of different types of information; narratives will compel some, but the existence of statistical data can only persuade others in the absence of narratives. According to Williamson, nonprofit organizations employ communication for a variety of purposes (2009). It contributes to the development of an organization's brand by stating its goal, increasing donations, and fostering positive social interactions. For example, social marketing tactics are used to control the behavior of people in a community in order to forward the purpose of the organization. As a result, while expressing the organization's goal, the methods have the potential to have a positive impact on society.

According to Gallo (2019), the advantage of a story is that it allows the narrator to connect with audiences' emotions. Storytelling is more persuasive than statistical data when it comes to persuading donors because the narrator may persuade individuals that their gift will be used by the organization. Stories elicit empathy in individuals, which allows them to view things

in the same manner that the organization does, therefore increasing their interest in supporting the organization. Thus, narratives are effective fundraising strategies that charitable organizations may utilize to generate cash from donors.

McCullum et al. (2014) evaluate the relevance of narrative as a technique for raising public awareness. They establish that tales which elaborate on topics that may have been neglected are not in the spotlight of society. Individuals have been given permission to share the narrative in the organization's portfolio by the organization. It provides people with the capacity to comprehend the perspectives of others on a variety of problems, therefore inspiring them to learn more about the issues. Tales are shared by people in the organization's portfolio, serving as a method of spreading the culture of those who participate in it to others serves as a method of spreading the culture of those who participate in it to others. By employing storytelling, nonprofits cultivate intercultural empathy and understanding.

Mascovich's study (2017) examines the ethical challenges potentially surrounding charitable organizations' use of tales in order to solicit donations from the general public. People give permission to these groups to share their experiences with the world in ways that inspire others and solicit assistance. However, when the organization tells such stories they should consider how it will affect the lives of the individuals who are the subject of the stories.

Some charitable organizations were condemned by the public decades ago for failing to observe ethical problems while conveying people's experiences, and the public was right to be concerned, in Mascovich's opinion. Some tales were perceived as degrading the individuals who were being presented in the stories. As a result, the people felt humiliated by these tales.

Because narratives are also used in the branding of organizations, this underlines the importance of effective management practices for nonprofit organizations in attracting and

retaining volunteers, who are the primary source of labor for many organizations. Groza and Gordon (2016) explore the impact of a nonprofit organization's brand on its connection with stakeholders. Designing a powerful brand is essential for any non-profit organization, especially given the fact that they operate in highly competitive contexts with both limited financial resources and human resources. Strong brands of nonprofit organizations impact people's engagement and contribution to the organization because they include storylines into their branding efforts.

Nonprofit organizations operate in highly competitive contexts, and their management might be affected by the commercial sector at times, which can be detrimental to their mission. Curran et al. (2016) discuss the influence nonprofit organization branding has on individuals' eagerness to volunteer. They discovered that organizations with successful brands were able to maintain their appealing positions over time and retain a large number of volunteers.

Zak (2014) assesses the effectiveness of narratives as they are utilized by charitable organizations. He argues the acts of an organization always force individuals to support it by altering the lives of those who are affected by the organization's actions. As a result, companies create narratives that captivate the attention of viewers, allowing them to understand and follow the meaning of the narrative. Storytelling may be used to express an organization's culture, which includes all of its stakeholders, and as a result, it can attract more donations and volunteers.

Nonprofit organizations' fundraising and advertising, according to Gharib (2015), are held to a higher level of ethical behavior than would be expected in the for-profit sector. They are not allowed to be even in the gray area of ethics, which means they are not allowed to portray unfavorable pictures of the persons who appear in these stories, as an example. He claims that

narratives and commercials produced by nonprofit organizations are intended to empower and inspire the people who are portrayed, as well as society as a whole. However, there are instances in which organizations show and disseminate information about persons that is derogatory in the course of marketing their operations and soliciting money from the general public.

In light of the reviewed literature, it is important to carefully choose organizations for study, particularly to ensure that the selected organizations have some sort of commonality of purpose. Additionally, a careful structuring of study, classification system, and common definitions are extremely useful.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Selection of Organizations

Three organizations were initially selected for examination—one operating at a local/regional level, one at the state-wide level, and one at the national level. This was done to mitigate any effects localized culture and norms may have on the narrative messaging, as well as to give greater depth than may be found in national-level organizations.

Branch House Family Justice Center (BHFJC) was selected as the regional nonprofit. Based in Blountville, TN, the organization's stated mission is that it "advocates for and empowers survivors of abuse through unified community engagement, education, and collaboration" (Branch House, 2020). BHFJC serves the Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia region. It is a 'one-stop shop' for victims of abuse and domestic violence, providing a myriad of services including advocacy, legal aid, emergency housing, and crisis counselling. It is a highly-networked organization which relies upon partnership and communications with various local agencies, advocacy groups, referrals, and victims themselves. As such, organizational success is highly dependent upon effective implementation of communication and narrative strategy.

Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic & Sexual Violence was selected as the state-level organization. Based in Nashville, TN, the Coalition works with agencies and smaller organizations throughout the state of Tennessee to "end domestic and sexual violence in the lives of Tennesseans and to change societal attitudes and institutions that promote and condone violence, through public policy advocacy, education and activities that increase the capacity of programs and communities to address such violence" (Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic & Sexual Violence, 2020).

Futures Without Violence was initially selected as the national-level organization. With physical offices located in Boston, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, this organization truly appears to have a ‘target market’ of the entire United States, rather than a specific region (Northeast, West Coast, etc.). A brief examination of ongoing programs and campaigns indicates accessibility to the entire country, without regard to a rural/suburban/urban classification, though the physical locations may suggest a skew toward urban-only environments (Futures Without Violence, 2021).

However, upon the initiation of data collection, it became clear that Futures Without Violence was a significantly different organization when compared to the other two. Though their stated mission indicates that “For more than 30 years, FUTURES has been providing groundbreaking programs, policies, and campaigns that empower individuals and organizations working to end violence against women and children around the world” (Futures Without Violence, 2021) it became clear that advocacy was the dominant function of the organization. Because of this, the organization is misaligned with the other two, as advocacy is outside the scope of this study. As such, another organization was found to be a replacement.

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center was chosen, instead, as the national-level organization. Their stated mission – NSVRC provides research & tools to advocates working on the frontlines to end sexual harassment, assault, and abuse” (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2021) – is in line with the missions of the other two selected organizations, and it appears the NSVRC’s communications are mission-aligned.

Data Collection

Two methods were employed for the collection of artifacts to be examined. Both methods focused solely upon U.S.-based communications, with the understanding that these artifacts may be accessed and viewed around the world but have an intended audience of those residing within the United States. A census was determined to be the most effective for communications posted via social media. The Pew Research Center reports the social media platforms listed in *Table 1* as the most popular among U.S. adults, listed in order of reported usage percentages (2020).

Table 1

Social Media Platform Usage Among U.S. Adults

Platform	% of US Adults
YouTube	73%
Facebook	69%
Instagram	37%
Pinterest	28%
LinkedIn	27%
SnapChat	24%
Twitter	22%
WhatsApp	20%
Reddit	11%

In order to determine which of these platforms would be included, individual organizational usage was examined. Upon initial investigation, the selected organizations are not active in all of these locations. The following is a listing of organizational usage for the major social media platforms listed above, as of August 26, 2021:

Branch House

Facebook: “Branch House Family Center”, 1,330 followers, 1,266 page likes

Instagram: “branchhousetn”, 188 posts, 195 followers, 341 following

Twitter: @branch_house, 97 following, 31 followers

Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic & Sexual Violence

Youtube: “TN Coalition”, 366 subscribers, 101 videos

Facebook: “Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence”, 5,290 followers, 4,564 page likes

Instagram: “tncoalition”, 426 posts, 1,228 followers, 404 following

Twitter: “@TNCoalition”, 369 following, 3,916 followers

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

YouTube: “NSVRC”, 673 subscribers, 198 videos

Facebook: “NSVRC”, 73,246 followers, 67,972 page likes

Instagram: “nsvrc”, 1,430 posts, 19,800 followers, 798 following

LinkedIn: “National Sexual Violence Resource Center”, 2,940 followers

Twitter: “@NSVRC”, 2,634 following, 39,300 followers

Based on the above data, all three organizations use Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. As such, YouTube, Pinterest, LinkedIn, SnapChat, WhatsApp, and Reddit were excluded. Though there may be benefit in the utilization of these and other popular social media platforms, it is beyond the scope of this study and was not evaluated. Thus, a census of Facebook posts, Instagram posts, and Tweets was collected for each of these organizations for a two-month period: May 1, 2021 – June 30, 2021. This period of time was chosen so as to be reasonably removed from COVID-specific communications, as COVID-related communication patterns are

outside the scope of this study. Only original postings and retweets/shares were included; comments, replies, and the like were excluded. Additionally, temporal social media postings, defined as those which are designed to disappear after a set amount of time (generally 24 hours), were excluded. All three selected platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) have this functionality, and although they represent a potentially powerful tool for nonprofit organizations, adoption is still scattered and piecemeal (Nonprofit Leadership Center, 2020). For the sake of cross-platform comparison, each individual Tweet, Facebook post, or Instagram post was considered an ‘artifact’.

The initial census collected nearly 450 pages of artifacts for the three organizations across the three included platforms. For the sake of this mixed-methods study, it was determined that this was far more data than could be meaningfully examined within the scope. As such, it was determined to exclude the state-level organization, Tennessee Coalition to End Domestic & Sexual Violence, leaving the focus on regional vs. national-level organizations.

Data Coding – Message Classification

Each artifact in the truncated collection was examined and coded by the researcher based on two dimensions: message classification, and rhetorical appeal. For this study, the following five categories were utilized for message classification: general awareness (includes all ‘learn more’ or similar), financial support, non-financial support (includes ‘join us’ events or similar calls-to-action), constituent services (includes educational/inspirational material for constituents and that which is created by the organization for constituents), and gratitude. Though many artifacts displayed features of multiple categories, all were classified into a single category, based upon primary *intent*. For example, Figure 1 – a Facebook post by Branch House – invited

Figure 1

Branch House, Non-Financial Support



The image is a screenshot of a Facebook post from the 'Branch House Family Center' page, dated May 12. The post features a purple and white logo of a tree with the text 'BRANCH HOUSE' below it. The text of the post reads: 'Join us at [Vida Hot Yoga](#) this Sunday, May 16, at 4 pm for an hour long hot power class for Yoga For A Cause, benefiting Branch House! This is a FREE class, and donations will be accepted at the door. To register, download the Vida Hot Yoga app or the Mindbody app TODAY!'. Below the text is a large promotional graphic with a light purple background and faint leaf patterns. The graphic includes the same 'BRANCH HOUSE' logo, the text 'Yoga for a Cause', 'Everyone's Welcome', 'Register on Vida Hot Yoga App', and a photo of two women standing in front of a brick wall. At the bottom right of the graphic, the location and time are listed: 'Vidya Yoga & Fitness, 125 W Center St, #102, Kingsport, TN, SUNDAY, MAY 16TH 4PM'.

Branch House Family Center
May 12 · 🌐

Join us at [Vida Hot Yoga](#) this Sunday, May 16, at 4 pm for an hour long hot power class for Yoga For A Cause, benefiting Branch House! This is a FREE class, and donations will be accepted at the door. To register, download the Vida Hot Yoga app or the Mindbody app TODAY!


Yoga for a Cause
Everyone's Welcome
Register on
Vida Hot Yoga App



Vidya Yoga & Fitness
125 W Center St, #102
Kingsport, TN
SUNDAY, MAY 16TH 4PM

the public to attend a specific yoga class. While this was a free activity the Branch House was trying to persuade people to attend (suggesting non-financial support), Branch House was to receive a donation based upon the number of attendees, thus making the primary *intent* that of seeking financial support, though indirect.

Data Coding – Rhetorical Appeal

A rhetorical appeal is a persuasive device utilized within a piece of communication. Though there are various derivations, rhetorical appeals essentially are broken into to three types, as outlined in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* (Cope, 1867). A breakdown of the three would be as follows: *logos* utilizes logic and reason, *pathos* focuses on emotions, and *ethos* utilizes the reputation and credibility of the source. The rhetorical appeal is not so much based on the content, but rather on what would be most effective when persuading a given audience; a single target goal can effectively utilize multiple rhetorical appeals (Rapp, 2010), *Figure 2*.

Figure 2

NSVRC, Ethos Rhetorical Appeal



This Tweet post from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) utilizes an *ethos*-based appeal. Readers/listeners are intended to give attention and credence to the podcast episode because, it is assumed, the guest speaker from FORGE Forward is intimately familiar with the topic, and an expert on it, and thus his thoughts and insights are both useful and

credible when talking about the subject of sexual assault on transgender men. Because of this, the reader is driven to learn more and/or listen to the podcast.

Figure 3 offers a different rhetorical appeal by the same organization and about roughly the same subject matter.

Figure 3

NSVRC, Pathos Appeal



The design of the post is a *pathos*-based appeal, even though the Tweet utilizes a statistic. The statistic is included to elicit an emotional response from the reader, which would then drive said person, because of an emotional response, to learn more about the problem.

The same appeal could be restructured for *logos* by pointing out that sexual violence centers and programs are not often equipped/educated to handle transgender issues. Because of this, transgender individuals do not have access to the same resources as cisgender individuals.

Therefore, this plays a part in almost half of all transgender people having been sexually assaulted at some point in their lives.

Additionally, each artifact was examined separately for whether or not *Kairos* was being utilized. Because, for the sake of this study, *Kairos* is being examined as present or not, this represents a third category by which each artifact was classified. Neither message classification, nor *ethos/logos/pathos* rhetorical appeal had any direct influence as to whether or not *Kairos* usage was present.

Each artifact being examined was coded by the researcher based on the primary rhetorical appeal being utilized. As with message classification, many artifacts employed more than one rhetorical appeal. In these situations, the primary method was determined. Because the nature of rhetorical appeals can be highly subjective, a second coder was utilized to ensure data reliability. The second coder was instructed in rhetorical appeals by the researcher and conducted a blind coding of the artifacts. This resulted in an initial 95.9% intercoder agreement, with 13 artifacts needing to be reconciled. All 13 were able to be reconciled. The most common reason for disparity in rhetorical coding was for artifacts displaying both *ethos* versus *pathos*. In all cases, an agreement was reached as to the primary rhetorical device.

Chapter 4. Findings

A total of 316 artifacts were examined between Branch House Family Justice Center and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. Tables 2 – 6 and 7 – 11 detail the classification of artifacts for the Branch House Family Justice Center and then National Sexual Violence Resource Center, respectively.

Branch House Family Justice Center

Table 2

Number of Artifacts by Message Classification, Branch House Family Justice Center

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	All Channels
General Awareness	0	12	4	16
Financial Support	0	1	1	2
Non-financial Support	0	1	0	1
Constituent Services	0	6	3	9
Gratitude	0	9	7	16
Total	0	29	15	44

Table 3

Message Classification of Artifacts as Percentage of Total, Branch House Family Justice Center

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	All Channels
General Awareness	0%	41.4%	26.7%	36.4%
Financial Support	0%	3.4%	6.7%	4.5%
Non-financial Support	0%	3.4%	0%	2.2%
Constituent Services	0%	20.7%	20.0%	20.5%
Gratitude	0%	31.1%	46.6%	36.4%
Total	0%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4

Number of Artifacts by Rhetorical Appeal, Branch House Family Justice Center

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	All Channels
<i>Ethos</i>	0	9	6	15
<i>Logos</i>	0	3	2	5
<i>Pathos</i>	0	15	7	22
N/A	0	2	0	2
Total	0	29	15	44

Table 5*Rhetorical Appeal of Artifacts as Percentage of Total, Branch House Family Justice Center*

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	All Channels
<i>Ethos</i>	0%	31.1%	40%	34.1%
<i>Logos</i>	0%	10.3%	13.3%	11.4%
<i>Pathos</i>	0%	51.7%	46.7%	50%
N/A	0%	6.9%	0%	4.5%
Total	0%	100%	100%	100%

Table 6

Number of Artifacts by Rhetorical Appeal, with and without Kairos, Branch House Family Justice Center

	Twitter		Facebook		Instagram		All Channels	
<i>Kairos Present</i>	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<i>Ethos</i>	0	0	8	1	5	1	13	2
<i>Logos</i>	0	0	3	0	2	0	5	0
<i>Pathos</i>	0	0	13	2	6	1	19	3
N/A	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Total	0	0	24	5	13	2	37	7

National Sexual Violence Resource Center**Table 7***Number of Artifacts by Message Classification, NSVRC*

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	All Channels
General Awareness	120	31	3	154
Financial Support	1	0	0	1
Non-financial Support	28	5	8	41
Constituent Services	38	15	19	72
Gratitude	0	0	4	4
Total	187	51	34	272

Table 8*Message Classification of Artifacts as Percentage of Total, NSVRC*

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	All Channels
General Awareness	64.2%	60.8%	8.8%	56.6%
Financial Support	0.5%	0%	0%	0.4%
Non-financial Support	15.0%	9.8%	23.5%	15.0%
Constituent Services	20.3%	29.4%	55.9%	26.5%
Gratitude	0%	0%	11.8%	1.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 9*Number of Artifacts by Rhetorical Appeal, NSVRC*

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	All Channels
<i>Ethos</i>	56	13	13	82
<i>Logos</i>	68	20	3	91
<i>Pathos</i>	58	17	17	92
N/A	5	1	1	7
Total	187	51	34	272

Table 10*Rhetorical Appeal of Artifacts as Percentage of Total, NSVRC*

	Twitter	Facebook	Instagram	All Channels
<i>Ethos</i>	29.9%	25.5%	38.3%	30.1%
<i>Logos</i>	36.4%	39.2%	8.8%	33.5%
<i>Pathos</i>	31.0%	33.3%	50%	33.8%
N/A	2.7%	2.1%	2.9%	2.6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 11*Number of Artifacts by Rhetorical Appeal, with and without Kairos, NSVRC*

	Twitter		Facebook		Instagram		All Channels	
<i>Kairos Present</i>	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<i>Ethos</i>	14	42	3	9	5	9	22	60
<i>Logos</i>	18	50	4	16	1	2	23	68
<i>Pathos</i>	30	27	7	11	11	6	48	44
N/A	5	1	1	0	0	0	6	1
Total	67	120	15	36	17	17	99	173

Chapter 5. Discussion, Conclusions, and Limitations

Research Question 1: Message Classifications

The initial research question posited for this study was: What kinds of digital texts (and how many) do nonprofit organizations employ to raise awareness, secure funding, and identify constituencies' needs? In order to address this question, digital texts in the form of Facebook posts, Instagram posts, and Twitter tweets were categorized both by platform and message classification.

As the results show, both organizations focus most of their activities on general awareness posts. This seems to make sense, as both emphasize an element of engaging with and/or educating target audiences about issues of sexual violence. A notable difference, however, is that Branch House gives equal attention to messages of gratitude as they do general awareness, whereas the National Sexual Violence Resource Center employs gratitude messaging less than a tenth as often as general awareness. In fact, despite the NSVRC having nearly eight times as many postings during the examination period, Branch House has four times the number of gratitude-based posts.

This is likely due to the nature of target audiences for the two organizations. Though Branch House serves a non-specific regional audience, the three main counties it serves (Sullivan County, TN; Washington County, TN, and Washington County, VA) have a total population of roughly 350,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The NSVRC, in comparison, ostensibly has a target audience of the entire United States population, a little more than 330,000,000 as of the 2020 Census, or nearly a thousand times larger (U.S. Census Bureau). Because of this, increased importance is placed on engaging with the community and maintaining open lines of communication so as to foster local collaboration in addressing sexual and domestic violence.

Ultimately, this aspect of the organization's culture plays a large role in determining what classifications of texts are most effective at narrative-building (Rim et al., 2016).

This difference can be seen in the nature of the gratitude-based posts. Figure 4 shows a gratitude post from Branch House; notice that it thanks specifically named individual people for a very specific contribution, in this case raising over \$600 from a *Yoga For A Cause* class. This specific call-out not only serves to strengthen the relationship between Branch House and Vida Hot Yoga, but also acts as a follow-up to previous posts requesting support (Figure 1).

Figure 4

Branch House, Gratitude

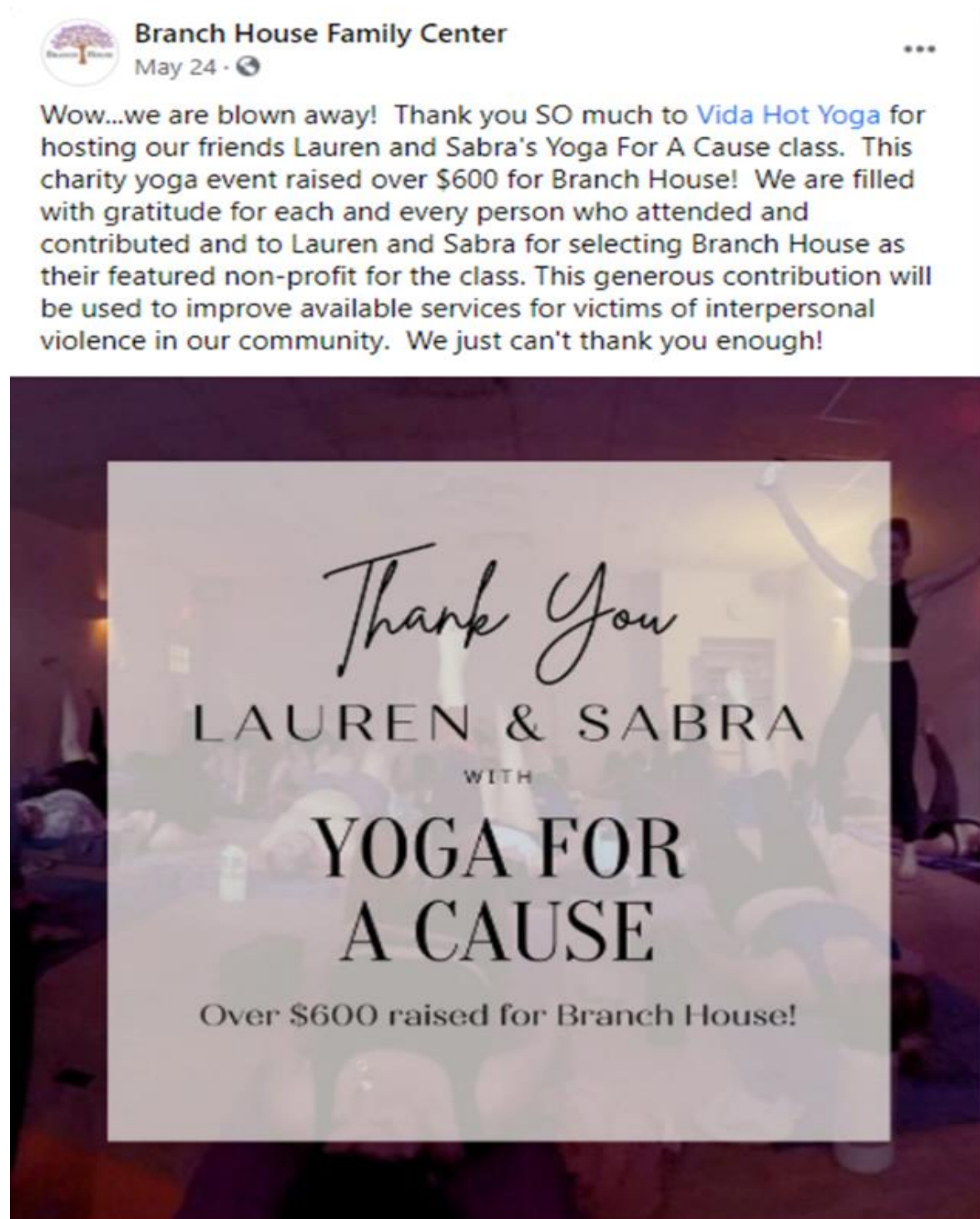
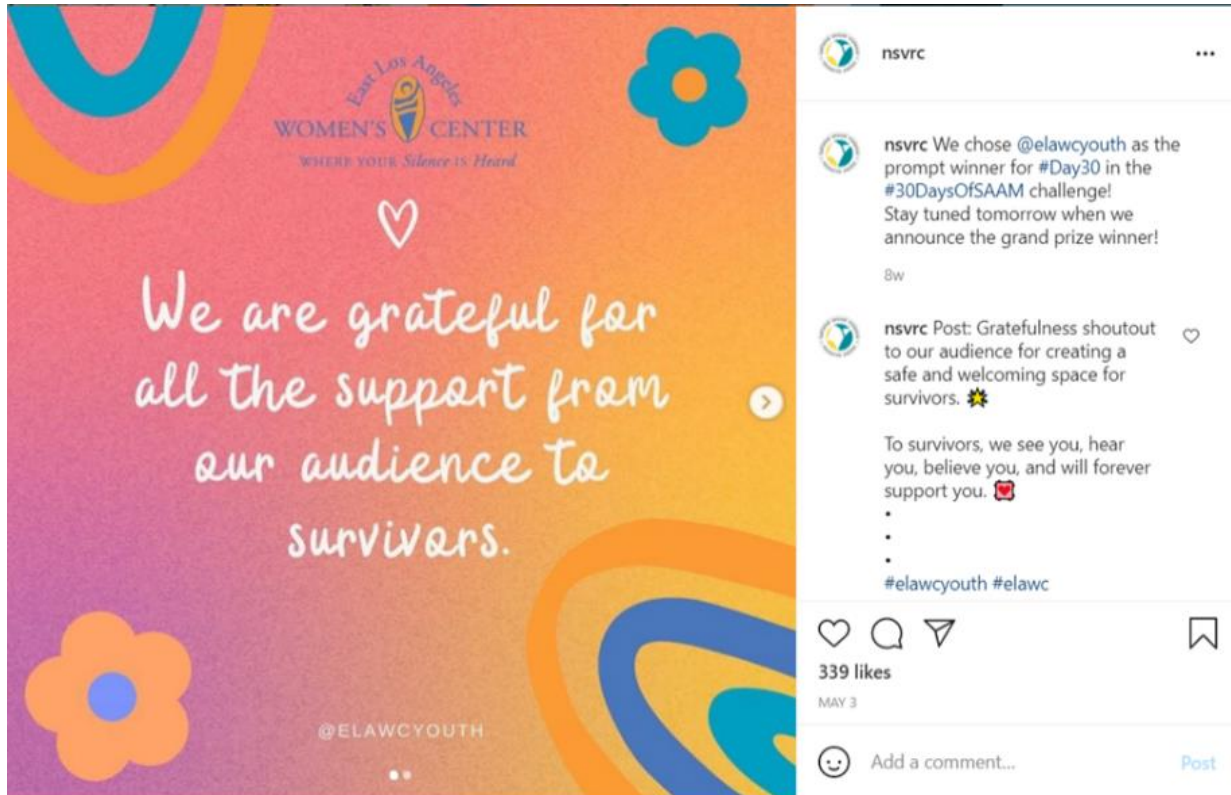


Figure 5 shows a parallel post from the NSVRC, also classified as gratitude; both posts also are classified with a rhetorical appeal of *pathos*.

Figure 5

NSVRC, Gratitude, Pathos



Note that, while a specific organization is indicated, individuals are not called out, nor a specific outcome. Instead, a much more general thanks is going to the ‘audience’ for a non-specific act of ‘creating a safe and welcoming space for survivors’; this serves to address a large swath of the organization’s audience. Likely, this is due to the relative inability to address individuals. To thank the same proportion of people as Branch House did (2 out of 350,000 for Branch House), the NSRVC would need 500 posts, assuming each post thanked two people, as was the case in Figure 4.

Facebook and Instagram usage amounts seem to be roughly the same for the two organization at about twice as many posts to Facebook as Instagram. Notably, the NSVRC only posts to these platforms about twice as much as Branch House does. Where the NSVRC stand out, though, is in its usage of Twitter, which Branch House did not utilize during the examination period at all, despite having a Twitter handle. Specifically, the NSVRC's utilization of Twitter was overwhelmingly for unidirectional, information-sharing posts (those categorized as either 'general awareness' or 'constituent services'), as seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6

NSVRC, Uni-Directional Information-Sharing



National Sexual Violence Resource Center  @NSVRC · May 3 ...
We can learn a lot about how the general public understands sexual violence by looking at the way it's covered in the media. Learn more in our latest podcast episode with @CDCInjury:

PODCAST EPISODE:

What Can We Learn From Media Coverage of Sexual Violence?



What Can We Learn From Media Coverage on Sexual Violence?
How we talk about sexual assault and abuse impacts how people understand it, and that is especially true of media coverage about sexu...

 nsvrc.org

In discussions with the Marketing Chair for Branch House, several known gaps came to light. One is that Twitter is under-utilized, and the other the organization does not deploy very many general awareness posts. Perhaps, based on the NSVRC's usage patterns, these two gaps will be able to be addressed at the same time and with the same messaging.

Research Question 2: Rhetorical Appeals

The second research question posited asked how the texts each organization crafts and utilizes employ rhetorical appeals and devices to construct narratives that underwrite organizational purposes. Because there is a great deal of 'competition' for resources given to nonprofits (both financial and non-financial), it is ultimately up to the organization itself to convince potential benefactors they are worthy of support. Research indicates one of the most effective ways to accomplish this is by including narratives in organizational communication (Dixon, 2014).

It is worth revisiting the stated purposes of the two primary organizations. Branch House Family Justice Center "advocates for and empowers survivors of abuse through unified community engagement, education, and collaboration" (Branch House, 2020). The National Sexual Violence Resource Center "provides research & tools to advocates working on the frontlines to end sexual harassment, assault, and abuse," (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2021).

Usage of rhetorical appeal is where the greatest difference between Branch House and the NSVRC appears. The NSVRC utilizes a roughly equal split between *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. This would seem to be motivated by an attempt to offer equal-opportunity appeals to target audiences so as to maximize message influence (Gregory et al., 2019). Because social media allows for a great degree of equity among participants, this broad-strokes approach likely allows

NSVRC to reach and engage with a much larger audience that would a more targeted, niche approach. Such a strategy makes sense for a large, national organization.

An example of this can be seen in how the NSVRC builds a narrative that it is a one-stop-shop for information and resources related to sexual and domestic violence, regardless of an individual's demographics, experiences, and type of trauma. Figure 7 shows an *ethos*-based appeal, wherein the audience is invited to join both the NSVRC and a partner organization, Prevent-Connect, on the basis of the credibility these two organizations have to speak to the subject.

Figure 7

NSVRC, Ethos Narrative-Building



Note the appeal towards a specifically targeted audience not only as members of the Latinx community, but even more narrowly those who may need Spanish-language resources.

Figure 8 shows a similar narrative, that the NRSVC is a one-stop-shop for diverse constituencies from all walks of life (in this case, those with adverse childhood experiences), with a *logos* messaging. This not just provides a data-driven, logical argument – adverse childhood experiences can be tallied/scored, there is a quantified method of doing so, and that score can be linked to adult health issues – but it also provides the reader with a link in order to

explore the research more. The link even leads to a self-assessment for tools and resources.

Figure 8

NSVRC, Logos Narrative-Building



National Sexual Violence Resource Center  @NSVRC · May 18 ...

ACEs stands for adverse childhood experiences. A person's score is a tally of how many of 10 such traumas — specific kinds of abuse, neglect, or household challenges — they suffered.



There's a score to quantify childhood trauma. Some health experts wa...
Adverse childhood experiences can be linked to adverse adult health issues, such as asthma, cancer and heart disease.

 [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com)

Figure 9 indicates a parallel usage of a *pathos*-based appeal to accomplish the same narrative-building.

Figure 9

NSVRC, Pathos Narrative-Building



By targeting another subsegment of the organization's stakeholder demographics (male survivors of rape), this text is designed to elicit an emotional response by aligning something ostensibly desired by the target group – signs of strength – with a desired behavior – recognizing a need for help. As seen before, the NSVRC positions itself as the one-stop shop, by being a central contact point for various other resources and organizations, in this case the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center.


In a marked difference from the NSVRC, Branch House primarily focuses their texts on *pathos*-based appeals, representing over half of all digital postings. This very well may be a reflection of the much smaller organization having more limited resources, resulting in a focus on what is at least perceived as the most-effective rhetorical appeal for nonprofit organizations dealing with sensitive issues such as sexual and domestic violence: *pathos*-based emotional messaging (Gallo, 2019; Haigh, 2019). Because humans are social creatures who can identify with others' experiences, this perception makes a great deal of sense.

However, this is not to say that Branch House is necessarily less effective at building a narrative than the NSVRC because of a focus on *pathos*-based appeals. There is another highly important facet of rhetorical appeal at play – *Kairos*.

Kairos can be understood as the qualitative, relational aspect of time, as opposed to the quantitative (Pantiledes, 2021). When it comes to narrative-building, proper usage of *Kairos* can be the most powerful of all rhetorical appeals (Kirby, 2020). This is something that at which Branch House seems to excel; Figure 10 shows one of Branch House's first Facebook posts for the examination period. This sets the narrative at the very beginning of Mental Health Awareness Month that Branch House helps to advocate and empower, in this case specifically through engaging and educating regarding available resources.

Figure 10

Branch House, Kairos – Mental Health Awareness



The image is a screenshot of a Facebook post from the "Branch House Family Center" page, dated May 4. The post features a green ribbon icon and text about Mental Health Awareness Month. It includes statistics about mental illness and four panels with messages about mental health awareness, each with a logo for "THE DEPRESSION PROJECT" and the website "BRIALDEPRESSIONPROJECT.COM".

Branch House Family Center
May 4 · 🌐

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a reminder that it's okay not to be okay. Understanding the issues concerning suicide and mental health is an important way to take part in suicide prevention, help others in crisis, and change the conversation surrounding mental health. We all must play our part to break the Stigma.
[#MentalHealthAwarenessMonth](#)

If you are struggling, help is available:
National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273-8255
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Helpline 1-800-662-4357
Tennessee Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-855-274-7471

May Is Mental Health Awareness Month
1 In 4 People Suffer From A Mental Illness
So Please Remember...

You can sound confident and have anxiety

Mental health is invisible so please check in on your loved ones... even if they appear to "have it all together".
Please share to raise awareness

You can have depression and still smile and make jokes

Figure 11 shows another example wherein Branch House is providing the right information, at the right time, to the right target audience, further demonstrating their effective use of *Kairos*-based appeals.

Figure 11

Branch House, *Kairos* – Local Concerns

**Branch House Family Center**
May 10 · 🌐



We have been notified that, in some areas of Tennessee, the elder population is receiving calls from someone pretending to be with the Sheriff Office or Police Department. The person on the other end of the phone states that a grandson of the client has been arrested for drunk driving and needs bail money. It is a scam, and they are just looking to see if anyone bites and send money.

Not sure if anyone else is having this happen, but it is very upsetting to the older adult. If the older adult has a grandson it becomes a very believable statement. Be on the lookout for these calls and assure your loved ones that it is a scam.



Scott County Family Justice Center
May 10 · 🌐
Scam Alert. Please share with your loved one.

This utilization is something which could only be accomplished by an organization intricately tied to their local community (fitting into the organization's narrative). Information about the organization can be effectively conveyed to the general public through informal modes of communication (such as social media) because an overarching narrative about the organization's activities is being adhered to. Additionally, this demonstrates a close monitoring of and reaction to the happenings of the local community being served. With a single post, the organization is able to communicate a large number of attributes about itself and its values. This allows Branch House to build a narrative of 'we are here for *you*, with what *you* need, when *you* need it.'

Limitations

This study has a few notable limitations, and one which may seem at first to be, but likely is not. To begin with, only two organizations were selected, where the National Center for Charitable Statistics indicates there are over one million public charities operating in the United States (2020). Though both selected organizations operate within the same field, they are not necessarily indicative of overall trends within the larger scope of nonprofit organizations dealing with sexual and domestic violence. Further examination of the organizations within their typographical categorization is needed, i.e. Branch House compared with other regional nonprofits operating within rural Appalachia. Additionally, it would be helpful to examine the same organization over time and at different periods of the year for either seasonal differences or growth/change.

An unintentional limitation appeared once data collection began. Although the selected organizations were examined for social media platform participation and data collection was limited to the three platforms held in common (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), Branch House did

not have any Twitter activity during the collection period. While there was Twitter activity before the collection period, it was primarily related to COVID communications, which is outside the scope of this study. Thus, it was decided to go ahead with the selected collection period in spite of this limitation. As such, future research would benefit from a local/regional organization with a decent Twitter presence.

The month of June may be seen as a limitation itself, particularly with regards to the use of *Kairos*-based rhetorical appeals. Because June is Pride Month in the United States a great number of posts from both organizations and across all platforms were related specifically to LGBT issues, as detailed in Figures 2 and 3 above, whereas these issues were not very prevalent in the preceding month. At first glance, this appeared to introduce bias by over-emphasizing the use of communications related to something happening at a specific time.

However, after further research, it was decided that this would not be the case, as the United States has many months-long observances which would potentially fall within the purview of these organizations. January is Slavery and Human-Trafficking Prevention Month (Office of the Press Secretary, 2017); February is Black History Month (Wilson, 1970); March is Women's History Month (National Women's History Museum, 2021); April is Arab American Heritage Month, National Child Abuse Prevention Month (Office of the Press Secretary, 2010), and Sexual Assault Awareness Month (National Sexual Violence Resource Center, 2021); and May is National Mental Health Awareness Month (Office of the Press Secretary, 2016) to name a few. Because of this, nonprofit organizations will quite often have the opportunity to engage in cause-specific, *Kairos*-classified appeals. As such, Pride Month being a part of the collection window was deemed not to be a biasing factor.

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