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East Tennessee State University

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Brand-Funded Documentary Films and Climate Change: An Aristotelian Rhetorical Analysis

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
Matthew Rossetti
May 2023

Professor D. Stokes Piercy, Chair
Dr. Mildred Perrault, PhD
Dr. Stephen Marshall, PhD

Keywords: branded entertainment, rhetoric, climate change, documentary film, corporate social
responsibility

ABSTRACT

Brand-Funded Documentary Films and Climate Change: An Aristotelian Rhetorical Analysis

by

Matthew Rossetti

This paper examines the concept of brand-funded documentaries that center on the issue of climate change and uses Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle to better understand how the films use rhetoric in communicating their message. A rhetorical analysis was conducted using four brand films from Amazon, Corona, Patagonia and REI and the results are intended to demonstrate the best methods of persuasion and the most effective rhetoric utilized in brand-funded documentaries. Because brand-funded documentaries not only make an argument about a particular issue, in this case climate change, but also must communicate a particular brand's values and commitments, examining the rhetoric in these films proves particularly interesting and informative both for advertisers and filmmakers. The research shows that using emotions such as fear, awe, sadness, and joy serves to complement information dissemination in documentaries and allows for stronger engagement with audiences.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2014 outdoor clothing retailer Patagonia released a documentary film titled *DamNation*. *DamNation*'s purpose was to shed light on the damaging environmental effects of dams and hydroelectric power, often thought of as a clean renewable energy source, the documentary intended to reveal that using dams as energy sources was anything but environmentally friendly (Horn, 2014). *DamNation* originally premiered at the South by Southwest festival in Austin, Texas and is now available to stream on Netflix. In addition to garnering national attention and raising awareness about the importance of keeping rivers intact and healthy, *DamNation* had another significant influence on the concept of corporate social responsibility.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) pertains to how corporations conduct business in a socially responsible way, taking into account the environmental impacts, social equity, unfair business practices, and organizational governance that may result (Leonard & McAdam, 2003). Patagonia has long been a company focused on lowering its negative impact on the world, while also trying to improve society through awareness, activism, and environmental stewardship (Chouinard, 2016). From campaigns on Black Friday asking consumers not to purchase its products, to supporting political candidates running on a pro-environment platform, to helping with grassroots organizations, Patagonia has established a reputation as one of the most socially responsible retailers in business (Chouinard, 2016).

With its production and support of *DamNation*, Patagonia again became a pioneer in social activism (Moscato, 2016). As a brand-funded documentary film centered around activism and environmental causes, *DamNation* was one of the very first films of its kind. Brand-funded entertainment, or content which has been co-created by a brand, rather than a brand being inserted into existing content, is nothing new (Kunz et al., 2016). This branded content takes on many forms, from social media feeds which blend brand information and entertainment, educational content, or even an app which focuses on function, for example a banking app from Capital One (Kunz et al., 2016). Films such as *DamNation* fall into the category of branded entertainment which is separate from most brand content and communication where the brand involvement is more explicit. Branded entertainment involves more subtle brand

integration into the content and is created to compete with existing media entertainment and will often be distributed alongside existing media entertainment such as feature films and TV series (Kunz et al., 2016). Such is the case with *DamNation* which is currently found in the “Documentary” category on Netflix alongside documentaries produced by traditional production companies and studios such as Discovery and NatGeo.

The other aspect of *DamNation* that differentiates it from traditional brand content is its purpose. Patagonia chose to make the film’s social impact the primary objective of the film. The idea was to galvanize audiences around the environmental issue by using Patagonia’s platform to boost the film’s reach. This was evidenced by Patagonia’s decision to screen the film for free in many of its stores across the country (Moscato, 2016). This form of “impact entertainment”, or the use of films, documentaries, and television to increase awareness and drive change around a social issue, is a relatively new form of storytelling in which many brands have begun to increase their involvement (Warner, 2019). Recently brands such as Procter & Gamble, KitchenAid, Airbnb, and Johnson & Johnson have gotten involved in producing impact entertainment in the form of documentaries around social issues including racial inequality, gay rights, and gender equality in the workplace (Warner, 2019). This increase in involvement comes as brands are facing increased pressure from consumers to be “good citizens” and implement robust CSR initiatives (Moscato, 2016; Warner, 2019).

Patagonia’s first film informed audiences about the use of dam removal as a useful means of river and habitat restoration, moved people to take action including delivering a petition with 70,000 signatures to the White House, and garnered international media attention (Patagonia, 2021). The primary manner in which the film accomplished this was through rhetoric. Originally founded in the 4th century B.C. by Aristotle, rhetoric was referred to as the means to persuade and communicate claims to a common audience (Floyd-Lapp, 2014). This persuasion was predicated on three key concepts, that of “ethos” or the character and credibility of the speaker, “pathos” the emotional influence on the audience, and “logos” the rationality and logical reasoning behind the argument (Floyd-Lapp, 2014; European Rhetoric, n.d.). The goal of this paper is to examine the rhetoric used in impact-based, brand-funded documentary films, about

the environment or environmental issues. The paper will code the rhetoric of brand-funded documentaries for the three areas of persuasion, ethos, pathos, and logos, and will attempt to answer the following questions;

RQ 1: What are the primary methods of persuasion present in brand-funded documentary films?

RQ 2: Does the mode of representation in brand-funded documentary films help determine the effectiveness of the rhetoric?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Corporate Social Responsibility and Cause-related Marketing

One of the primary motivations for funding brand films is the film's ability to communicate the corporate brand's image and strategies around social responsibility and corporate governance. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the commitment made by businesses to meet societal needs outside of economic criteria (Pomering & Johnson, 2009). These societal needs may include contributions to philanthropy, human rights, diversity, the environment, and related efforts to improve a corporation's social standing among stakeholders (Pomering & Johnson, 2009). Using brand films to communicate a brand's commitment to CSR is a form of cause-related marketing (CRM). CRM differs from traditional advertising in that it does not include consumer response in its primary objectives, in other words it is not intending to elicit behavior from consumers, such as making a purchase (Pomering & Johnson, 2009). Central to cause-related marketing is the idea that the cause and its relation to the brand must be beneficial to both parties (Vanhamme et al., 2012). For example, as mentioned in the introduction to this paper, Patagonia communicates about its work in conservation and efforts to benefit the environment, which results in improved consumer sentiment about Patagonia's own commitments (Erickson, 2011). As with Patagonia, cause-related marketing is then used to communicate to consumers and stakeholders about this beneficial relationship between the brand and the cause being targeted (Vanhamme et al., 2012).

A study conducted in 2019 looked at the authenticity of corporate social responsibility and corporate communication and found that in order for CSR to be perceived as authentic, the brand must make clear that the CSR activity is separate from all profit or sales motives (Jeon & An). Cause-related marketing about these CSR activities also must make it clear that the motivations are value-driven and stakeholder-driven, rather than self-centered or profit-driven (Jeon & An, 2019). This is corroborated by concerns that CRM can and CSR marketing can foster skepticism among consumers and can harm CRM's ability to persuade if not used properly (Pomering & Johnson, 2009). One such example of authentic cause-related marketing is the aforementioned *DamNation* film produced by Patagonia. The

only study on the subject of brand-funded documentary films and CSR found no conclusive causal link between consumer sentiment and the production of *DamNation* by Patagonia (Moscato, 2016). The study did conclude, however, that brand-funded content of this type can demonstrate authenticity around CSR activities, and serve as an effective form of communication about a brand's initiatives (Moscato, 2016).

Branded Entertainment

This paper will aim to define the term “branded entertainment” for the purposes of this study in order to establish a means to apply the results of the study to other instances of branded entertainment not included in the research. A 2021 study attempting to define branded entertainment across six continents stated broadly that branded entertainment is, “a communication effort that invites target audiences to watch, engage with or spend time with, out of their own free will or on their own terms” (Van Loggerenberg et al., p. 9). Some other definitions have included parameters for the inclusion of the brand while differentiating branded entertainment specifically from traditional commercial advertising (Um & Kim, 2014). A differentiation should also be made between branded content and branded entertainment more specifically. While marketers often use the two terms interchangeably, some scholars find branded content the more broad definition as it can refer to brand initiatives beyond entertainment (Van Loggerenberg et al., 2021). A more specific definition of branded entertainment can be considered any integration of brand advertising into existing entertainment media (Um & Kim, 2014). This definition is closer to the approach to branded entertainment that this study aims to examine. The definition is missing one key element, however, which is to differentiate branded entertainment from product placement. Um and Kim (2014) found that many practitioners separate branded entertainment from product placement based on how the brand is integrated into the story present in the media. Product placement tends to be more interruptive and blatant advertising, whereas branded entertainment often includes branding in a more subtle manner, blending the inherent marketing within the existing story narrative (Van Loggerenberg et al., 2021). Product placement is also different in intent, branded entertainment is often more authentic and creates engagement and attachment to the brand (Van Loggerenberg et al., 2021). As a result the operational definition for branded entertainment that this research will utilize is; the

integration of brand advertising into existing entertainment media for the purpose of conveying the brand message to consumers.

Having given branded entertainment an operational definition, this review will background brand-funded films, a primary vehicle of branded entertainment. Brand-funded films are not a new phenomenon, in fact brand entertainment in the form of television shows began in the 1950s with soap operas, television dramas that were sponsored largely by soap brands (Van Loggerenberg et al., 2021). Modern examples of brand films are found as early as 2001 when BMW Films debuted a series of films, *The Hire*, from Hollywood directors Ang Lee, Guy Ritchie, and others (Owczarski, 2007). Since then major brands including Red Bull, Patagonia, and Nike have continued to move brand films into the mainstream with documentaries like *Red Bull Stratos*, Patagonia's aforementioned *DamNation*, and *Artifishal: The Fight to Save Wild Salmon*, and Nike's *Breaking2* (McClure, 2020; Patagonia, 2021).

Brands are also capitalizing on the trend by releasing Hollywood blockbuster films such as the ever-popular *The LEGO Movie* and its subsequent sequels (Wegert, 2019). This new effort by brands to create films that mirror Hollywood studio productions has a lot to do with how consumers engage with brands (Kelley, 2021). With so many choices, and the ability to avoid disruption on commercial-free services such as Netflix, consumers prefer to support brands with the ability to tell a story of a larger purpose, beyond the product or service, in a non-interruptive way (Kelley, 2021). For this reason, issues-based films similar to Patagonia's *DamNation* have been gaining popularity among both consumers and marketers in recent years (Bloom, 2019).

Rhetoric

Written in the 4th century B.C., Aristotle's "Rhetoric" was the first text of its kind that dealt with persuasion by defining the three main appeals to persuasion, ethos, pathos, and logos (Talaue, 2022). Aristotle claimed that persuasion "gives effectiveness to truth", but could also be used to deceive (Simons, 2011, p. xxi). Although Aristotle's rhetoric originally referred to public speaking and logical discussion (Berger, 2016), this has particularly interesting implications for how persuasion and particularly Aristotle's rhetorical triangle has been used in advertising (Talaue, 2022). Today, modern

rhetoricians often take the form of advertisers looking to persuade audiences not only to consume products, but to adhere to different ideologies and exhibit certain behavior (Floyd-Lapp, 2014).

Advertisers demonstrate rhetoric throughout different forms of media as Claire Floyd-Lapp writes, “From images to copy, footage to music, those with visual messages to sell find success by carefully considering the presentation of the components of their communication” (2014, p. 9).

Traditional advertisements using emotional appeals (pathos) might invoke a sense of happiness when consuming a particular product, or even fear that not having the right product might leave consumers in a lurch (Talaue, 2022). An appeal to logic (logos) might position an advertiser’s product among expert testimony or facts and figures supporting the claim that their product is best (Talaue, 2022). Lastly, ads that position a company as reliable and trustworthy are attempting to use an ethical (ethos) appeal (Talaue, 2022). This demonstrates the many ways advertisers continue to use the rhetorical triangle as a primary means of persuasion in traditional commercial advertising.

Rhetorical Analysis

Additionally, a study published in 2020 examined how rhetoric can be used in social media advertising in order to strengthen customer-brand relationships and engagement (Panigyrakis et al., 2020). The aim of the study was to demonstrate that rhetoric and the three appeals, ethos, pathos, and logos, can be more powerful in establishing consumer-brand connections than merely language alone (Panigyrakis et al., 2020). This has implications for brands intending to create effective marketing messages that improve the brand’s credibility and establish greater trust among consumers. Because social media is a relatively new form of brand marketing, the study also serves to legitimize rhetoric as a means of persuasion in modern advertising techniques.

Studies on rhetoric and persuasion have so far centered on print advertising, visual rhetoric present in magazine advertisements (Scott, 1994), and more recently on social media advertising (Panigyrakis et al., 2020). This study looks to expand on this research by conducting a rhetorical analysis of documentary films that are used as branded entertainment. Citing Medhurst and Benson in his text on media and communication research methods, Arthur Asa Berger lays out the rationale for using rhetorical

analysis on mass media because it allows us to understand how people arrange and order thoughts, select terminology, and deliver their message to an audience (Berger, 2016). This is particularly useful for documentary films funded by brands because not only are the films themselves making an argument and delivering a message about a particular issue, event, or person, but the films also include messaging about the brand. This analysis will attempt to understand how those messages are being delivered and what techniques are commonly used in the documentary medium. The analysis will draw on some techniques cited in Berger's text originating from Medhurst and Benson, beginning with the social values and symbolic forms found in the films (Berger, 2016), what symbolism and values are demonstrated in the films? The techniques by which the film communicates with the audience, (Berger 2016) which could include talking head interviews, narration, expert testimony, graphic overlays, or other methods. And finally the persuasion techniques used which will deal with the three appeals of Aristotle's Triangle.

Existing analyses include an examination of Audi's online commercials, specifically how the ads used metaphor as a rhetorical device (Amoako, 2020). The analysis coded for the three rhetorical appeals (pathos, ethos, logos) present in each ad and discussed how the appeals were conveyed using metaphor and how effective metaphor as a rhetorical device was when used by Audi (Amoako, 2020). The methodology in this paper will utilize a similar approach to Amoako's, although instead of analyzing a specific rhetorical device, the research will look into how the three appeals are used to effectively communicate the specific values of each film's brand sponsor.

McQuarrie and Mick proposed a framework for analyzing verbal rhetoric and later visual rhetoric (Mulken, 2003). Their framework divides rhetoric into two main subcategories, *schemes* and *tropes* based on whether the rhetoric deals in devices such as rhyme and alliteration (schemes), or hyperbole, metaphor and irony (tropes) (Mulken, 2003). Because this framework was primarily developed for analyzing rhetoric in advertisements, this study, in dealing with documentary film, will not require an adaptation of this framework the way previous rhetorical analysis of advertisements have.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The study employed a mixed methods approach to the rhetorical analysis. The quantitative analysis involved tracking the frequency with which each appeal was used in the films analyzed. First, the films were coded for the three appeals and the frequency of each appeal was recorded using Table 1. To conduct the qualitative portion of the analysis the effectiveness of each appeal was determined based on how well the film communicated its message using ethos, pathos, and logos. This mixed approach allows for the research to remain as objective as possible in the rhetorical analysis. By determining a quantitative measure for the number of appeals, it allows the qualitative discussion to occur in an objective manner by coding for each occurrence of an appeal. The results first detail the quantitative findings and use the qualitative analysis to provide necessary context for each film's content and message. This method was adapted from Brown and Gershon's (2016) content analysis of a congressional debate and was chosen for its ability to allow the study to answer the first research question using quantitative results to demonstrate the primary methods of persuasion present in brand-funded documentary films and the second using qualitative analysis of their effectiveness.

This study first detailed the criteria for which a sample of brand-funded documentary films was chosen. After choosing the sample each documentary was viewed in full while coding for the three appeals (ethos, pathos, logos). The content was then categorized based on the mode of representation that is utilized in each film in order to determine how the appeals are being used. These modes of representation were originally defined by Bill Nichols and later expanded on by researchers Yu and Yan to provide a framework for legitimation for each mode (2021). The modes include "expository" typical of a voice-of-God narration. "Participatory" primarily utilizes witness testimony. "Observational" can include engagement with and interactions in the everyday life of the film's subjects. "Performative" has to do with the expression of the filmmaker him/herself with the subject. "Reflexive" deals with conventions in the filmmaking process itself. And finally "poetic" involves filmmaking techniques and visual associations such as montage and metaphor in image and sound (Yu & Yan, 2021, p. 4). Yu & Yan

categorized each of these six modes based on whether they provided direct or indirect legitimation in documentary films (2021). Figure 1 includes their framework as portrayed in their research.

Figure 1

Photo of Table (Yu & Yan, 2021 p. 8)

Table 1. A framework of documentary legitimation.

	Modes of representation	Legitimizing strategies
Direct legitimation	Expository mode	Voice-of-God commentary Expert speech Expository intertitles
	Participatory mode	Witness testimony
	Observational mode	Audience observation
Indirect legitimation	Performative mode	Performance
	Reflexive mode	Filmmaking process
	Poetic mode	Montage, metaphorical images and sounds

For the purposes of this analysis, these modes of representation will be condensed to allow for easier coding of the sample and the appeals present within the sample. The research will rely on Yu and Yan’s framework of legitimation to determine whether the appeals are coming from a direct source, a narrator, testimonial, audience observation, or informational graphics and titles, or indirect as in b-roll montages, visual metaphor, and sounds used by the filmmakers (2021). Table 1 demonstrates how these modes have been coded in the research.

Table 1

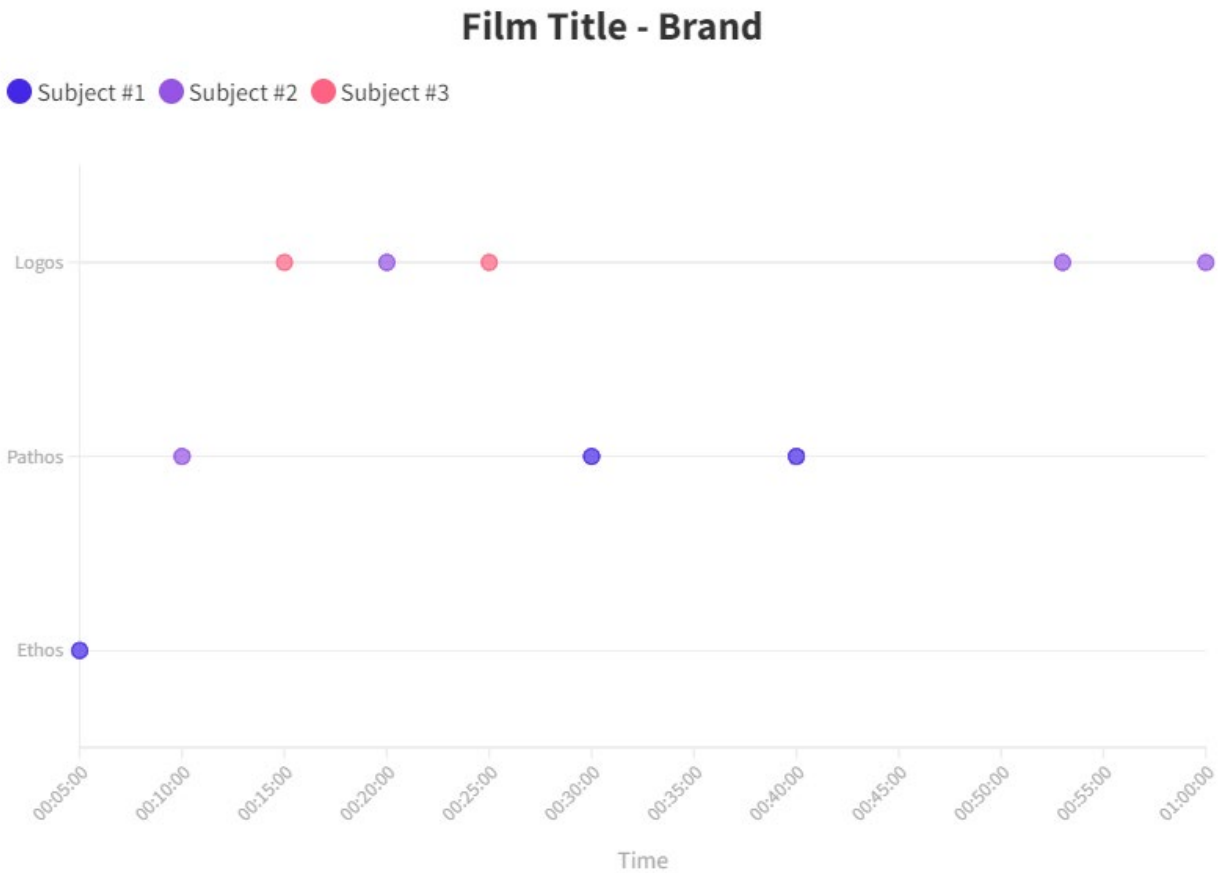
Sample Table

	[Film Title] by [Brand Sponsor]			
M o d e	Appeals			
		Ethos	Pathos	Logos
	Direct Legitimation			
	Indirect Legitimation			

After the modes of representation of each film were categorized the analysis determined how often each appeal is used using Table 1 to track each occurrence. Figure 2 shows a visualization of the quantitative data and how it will be displayed for each of the four films analyzed. I then rated the effectiveness of these appeals as they are used in the film. Effectiveness was determined by perceived authenticity and legitimacy of the mode of representation.

Figure 2

Sample Figure



Sample

This study examined four brand-funded documentaries from Amazon, Corona, Patagonia, and REI. The criteria for the selection of the four brand films were as follows; each film had to include environmental issues and climate change as the primary message of the film, the films had to be recent and have debuted no earlier than 2020, they had to have a brand attached in an official capacity in order to constitute being deemed a brand-funded film, and finally each film had to follow a traditional non-scripted, non-narrative documentary structure.

The four films chosen for this research are Amazon’s “The Future of Farming” (Checkoway, 2023) from its “Future Forward” documentary series, Corona’s “Paradise Won’t Protect Itself” (Hassan, 2021), Patagonia’s “Unfenced” (Fernandez & Mionske, 2020), and REI’s “Our Land” (Afolabi, 2022).

Each film approaches issues dealing with the environment and climate change from a different point of view while following the traditional verite documentary style. A short synopsis of each film can be found in the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Amazon - The Future of Farming

Synopsis

Amazon’s “The Future of Farming” documentary centers around the conflict between traditional farming practices, soil health, and climate change. The subjects featured in the film lay out the conflict that soil health in many U.S. farms is worsening as a result of the climate crisis. The proposed solution by the film’s experts is the use of cover crops which help protect soil from erosion and reintroduce carbon back into the soil. The film interviews both experts in cover cropping and farming practices as well as several Iowa farmers who have implemented the practice and have seen positive results.

Appeals

Table 2 shows the use of the three appeals in “The Future of Farming.” The three appeals are as follows; ethos, the credibility of the speaker, logos, the rational argument, and pathos, the emotional influence on the audience (European Rhetoric, n.d.). The film begins with footage of a damaging storm in Iowa combined with voiceover from news anchors and subject interviews about the damage that was done to farmland as a result of the storm. This is the first use of pathos in the film invoking the emotions of sadness and fear felt by Iowa farmers after the losses. Expert testimony continues with this same fear explaining that the soil loss caused by erosion from the storm represents the loss of farmers’ livelihoods.

Table 2

Amazon

The Future of Farming by Amazon				
Appeals				
		Ethos	Pathos	Logos
M o d	Direct Legitimation	XX	XXX	XXXXXXX XXXXXXX XXX

e	Indirect Legitimation		XX	
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The first appeal to logos is another news anchor explaining in a voiceover the financial toll of the damage stating that the storm “wiped out an estimated 10 million acres” which would cost billions of dollars (Checkoway, 2023, 0:54).

The first appeal to ethos comes from Stefani Millie Grant, one of the featured experts and representative for the brand Unilever, who points out that she is from Iowa and therefore “knows how to talk to farmers” (Checkoway, 2023, 1:23). Her being from Iowa and her ability to relate to farmers as a result of her upbringing is meant to establish her as trustworthy and credible; a direct appeal to her integrity as an expert on farming.

The film goes on to introduce several other farming experts as well as farmers who have used cover crops on their farms. All of their expert testimony can be considered direct legitimation to logos. The use of expert testimony is the primary driver of “The Future of Farming” and the film leans heavily on logos and rational arguments about the benefits of cover crops as a farming practice to be used as a solution to soil erosion and the larger issue of climate change as a whole.

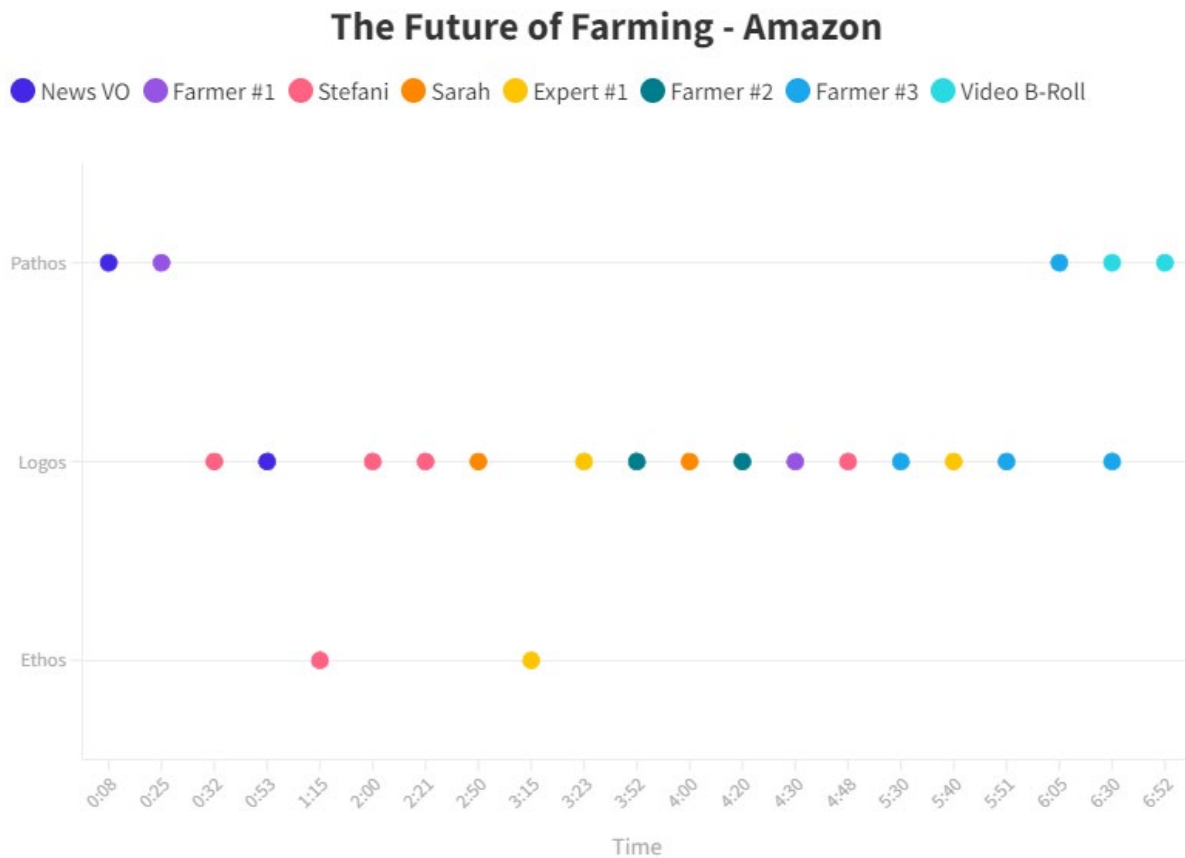
The final act of the film begins to utilize appeals to pathos more often. First using direct legitimation from expert testimony by the final featured farmer, who speaks about the future of his farm and what he hopes to leave to his grandchildren as well as his concerns for the future of his farm.

The film concludes with young children playing on the farm and planting vegetables in the ground as uplifting and hopeful music plays. The scene is shot during golden hour, the time of day when the sun is beginning to set and the sky is golden yellow, and it concludes with a family of four walking towards their farmhouse trailed by their two dogs. This is the film’s only use of indirect legitimation in which metaphor, sound, and montage is used to convey hope and the children represent the future of the farm mentioned by the older farmer in the previous scene.

Figure 3 shows a visualization of the quantitative results of the rhetorical analysis. From the chart it is clear that pathos is used to introduce and conclude the film, but the majority of the film relies on information dissemination to make its main argument for the use and benefit of cover cropping. This chart also shows the distribution not only of the rhetoric, but the characters. This shows that unlike many documentary films with a main protagonist, most subjects appear for only a segment of the film. This is best evidenced by the farmers; Farmer #2 and #3 are only shown for a very short segment in the film rather than appearing throughout.

Figure 3

Amazon



Effectiveness

“The Future of Farming” leaned heavily on expert and witness testimony to tell its story and inform viewers about the concerns surrounding soil erosion, farming, and climate change, while advocating for cover crops as a solution. The use of working farmers and their difficulties with soil health as a primary component of the film was effective as viewers are able to hear firsthand accounts of farmers’ concerns as well as their demonstrated success in the use of cover crops. The film also used logos as its primary rhetorical appeal. The logical argument is intended to alleviate the emotions portrayed in the start of the film by using rational and evidence-based solutions to the problem. The film ends with a message of hope and a final appeal to pathos, completing a story arc from negative to positive emotion.

The primary mode used in the film was direct legitimation from the expert and witness testimony as well as expert narration from news anchors and meteorologists. The way in which these techniques were used to both convey emotion and information was effective and viewers are able to learn not only about the problem facing farmers in Iowa, but how and why cover crops can be a solution to the problem.

Corona - Paradise Won’t Protect Itself

Synopsis

“Paradise Won’t Protect Itself” from Corona follows marine biologists in Australia as they fight to protect endangered coral reefs in an archipelago near the Great Barrier Reef. The film opens on marine biologist Laura Wells swimming and snorkeling among fish before introducing the second principal character, surfer Frank Solomon. The film shows a montage of Frank enjoying the islands until introducing the final expert, marine biologist Johnny Gaskell. Together the three subjects discuss the importance of coral reefs and Johnny details his efforts to restore and protect the reefs in the region he works in.

The second act of the film delves into the problem of plastic pollution and includes the main subjects conducting a beach cleanup and sorting through plastic that has washed up on the shore. This is

also the moment where viewers see the Corona brand for the first time in the film. Corona’s logo appears on the burlap sacks the subjects are using to collect the plastic from the beach.

The final act concludes the film with a discussion about the importance of experiencing nature and understanding human’s impact on the environment. We see a montage of the three subjects enjoying the paradise of the islands over a voiceover about people around the world connecting with nature in an effort to better protect the environment.

Appeals

Table 3 shows the distribution of the appeals (ethos, logos, pathos) in “Paradise Won’t Protect Itself”. The film begins by introducing the two main experts, marine biologists Laura and Johnny. By explaining their reasons and experience-levels with marine ecosystems they are appealing to ethos by establishing their credibility up front. The third subject Frank primarily discusses the sense of beauty and amazement he felt in visiting the archipelago which appeals to pathos and the emotions of awe and wonder.

Table 3

Corona

Paradise Won’t Protect Itself by Corona				
Appeals				
		Ethos	Pathos	Logos
M o d e	Direct Legitimation	XX	XXXXXX XXXX	XXXXXX XXXXXX XXX
	Indirect Legitimation		X	

The first appeals to logos are found shortly after the opening scenes as marine biologist Johnny Gaskell explains the importance of coral on marine ecosystems and how they support other wildlife. He also discusses the destruction of several reefs caused by a cyclone and the need to repair the damaged

reefs. Laura further explains the negative consequences for wildlife associated with losing coral and coral diversity.

In the following scene Johnny shows before and after pictures of the damage caused to the reef by the cyclone. He also explains the challenges that face coral that try to grow back on damaged reefs. The entire scene appeals heavily to logos as Johnny demonstrates how to restore and regrow coral while continuing to explain more about the delicate nature of their circumstances.

The scene concludes with the three subjects scuba diving on a site where coral is being grown. We have both direct and indirect legitimation appeals to pathos as voice overs from the subjects describe the beauty and wonder of the coral being grown, and a video montage and swelling music is intended to evoke positive emotions around the beauty of the coral. The subjects also make remarks about paradise and the beautiful backdrop in which they are located. Lastly, Laura finishes the first act on coral restoration with a quote about “feeling like she was in another world” and “wanting to be a part of saving that world” (Hassan, 2021, 07:18) yet another use of pathos.

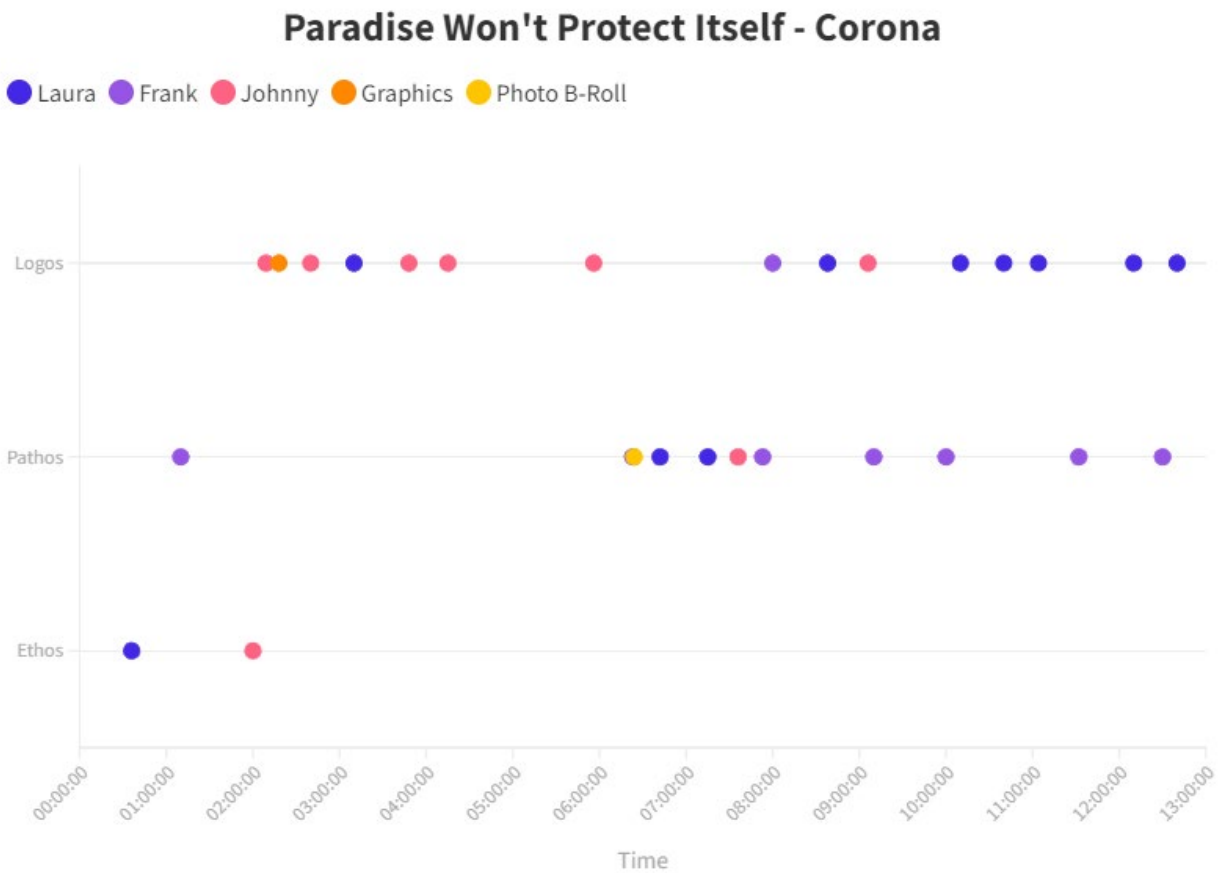
In the second act there are again heavy appeals to logos as the beach cleanup and negative impacts of plastic pollution are described. The act begins first using pathos as Frank discusses the picturesque nature of the islands despite the fact that there are significant amounts of plastic pollution on the beaches. A comment which first inspires then instills fear and anxiety that such picturesque landscapes are being harmed. While the plastic cleanup is largely informational (logos), it also makes a strong appeal to pathos by evoking anger about how much plastic is discarded after one use and ultimately contacts or is ingested by wildlife, a particularly concerning issue for environmentalists (Bering & Karasik, 2022).

The film ends with a call to action using both logos and pathos to encourage people to act by finding connection with nature. Laura and Frank speculate that the more people that make positive connections with nature, the more likely it becomes they will want to save it. This call to action is appealing to logic and reason in the effort to save places like the Great Barrier Reef, and to positive emotions including inspiration in our ability as humans to come together and create positive impacts.

Figure 4 shows a representation of how the three appeals are used over the duration of “Paradise Won’t Protect Itself.” The distribution of the two main appeals (logos and pathos) is fairly even throughout the film. “Paradise Won’t Protect Itself” uses logos initially when explaining the importance and challenges facing coral reefs in the Great Barrier Reef. The film then begins to shift to a balance between emotional and informational appeals as the subjects share their feelings about the delicate and beautiful environment they are advocating for. As Figure 4 portrays, this shift happens around the halfway point of the film. This chart also shows that this is driven largely by the surfer Frank Solomon. As he begins to take a more prominent role in the film, he also carries much of the emotional appeal in the second and third acts.

Figure 4

Corona



Effectiveness

Similar to “The Future of Farming”, “Paradise Won’t Protect Itself” uses primarily pathos and logos in its rhetoric through the direct legitimation mode of representation. The film’s use of two marine biologists as experts and a third subject in surfer Frank Solomon allowed the film to evenly distribute its rhetoric between information and the positive emotions of awe and amazement with the paradise in which the documentary was set. Frank as a non-expert was used to represent everyday people who don’t understand the risks to wildlife and biodiversity that are associated with losses of coral reefs. This was an effective approach which provided the experts, Laura and Johnny, an organic and practical way to share their expertise, and Frank’s curiosity allowed the film to transition between logos and pathos seamlessly as Frank described how he felt about what he learned.

The structure of the film was also an effective format for telling the story of the risks and dangers facing the islands and the Great Barrier Reef as a whole. Beginning first with the cyclone and the damage caused to coral reefs, the efforts and challenges of trying to repair and restore the destroyed reefs, and finally the problem of plastic pollution and the additional threat it poses to wildlife. Using expert testimony (direct) and montage (indirect) legitimation in this way allowed the film to make its argument about the importance of saving the marine ecosystem present in the Great Barrier Reef in a concise way without losing the attention or interest of viewers through overbearing negative emotional appeals or a barrage of facts and figures. By following a traditional three-act structure and finishing with a hopeful call to action, “Paradise Won’t Protect Itself” effectively uses positive emotional appeals to inspire action after informing viewers on the challenges facing the Great Barrier Reef and Australia’s once pristine archipelagos.

Patagonia - Unfenced

Synopsis

The film “Unfenced” produced by Patagonia makes an argument for protecting and preserving a swath of land in southern Wyoming known as the Red Desert. The Red Desert is the largest unfenced area in the continental U.S. and is currently designated as a wilderness study area, or an area under

consideration for wilderness protection by the federal government (Fernandez & Mionske, 2020). The Red Desert is currently under threat of losing protections, particularly by lobbyists who want the land made available for oil, gas and mineral development (Fernandez & Mionske, 2020). Locals and conservationist groups have organized a trail race to bring awareness to the area and the challenges facing its continued preservation.

The film follows two separate protagonists, and one expert beginning with John Mionczynski a wildlife biologist who has lived near the Red Desert since the 1960’s. The other protagonist is Clare Gallagher, a long distance runner and environmental activist and a local to the Red Desert. Finally Shaleas Harrison is an environmental advocate and organizer of the trail run “Run The Red”.

The film largely focuses on the importance of protecting the Red Desert as one of the few largely undeveloped areas in the continental U.S. and includes many wide tracking shots of the desert landscape which provide viewers a sense of the area’s scale and beauty. The film showcases the trail run and the activists’ efforts and desire to protect the Red Desert. The film ends on a call to action to keep the Red Desert wild and prevent its development for oil and gas and other industry purposes.

Appeals

Table 4 shows the number and distribution of appeals as they appear in “Unfenced”. This film was the first of the three to use descriptive titles to convey information which is direct legitimation and an appeal to logos. The film uses these titles throughout the film to inform viewers on the definition of a wilderness study, how the land is being used and how that use might change, and the case for why the land should remain protected. The informational use of the titles is a direct appeal to logos and occurs multiple times throughout the 9-minute documentary.

Table 4

Patagonia

	Unfenced by Patagonia
	Appeals

		Ethos	Pathos	Logos
M o d e	Direct Legitimation	XX	XXXXXX	XXXXXX XXXXXX X
	Indirect Legitimation			X

The film begins with John Mionczynski establishing himself as a decades-long local to the Red Desert, providing an appeal to ethos and his trustworthiness as a stakeholder in the effort to protect the area from development. He shortly follows his background with a statement about how the Red Desert is so untouched by humans that it remains the same as it did five hundred years ago, an appeal to pathos through wonder and awe. John carries the first act of the film, providing important context to some of the early oil development that occurred on the land (logos), and his feelings upon seeing some of the places he loved be overtaken by industry and energy production (pathos).

The second act features environmental advocates and race organizers for “Run The Red”, Shaleas and Clare, who appeal to logos as they explain the stakes of not protecting the land, and the reason for organizing the run to spread awareness and establish a connection to the Red Desert among the participants in an attempt to generate further advocacy. Clare also establishes her credibility and interest in saving the area by discussing the “air of being in Wyoming” and how she feels “less human” when she is unable to run in a wild place (Fernandez & Mionske, 2020, 05:47).

The film’s only use of indirect legitimation is a b-roll shot of indigenous people playing music. This is an appeal to logos that is used to demonstrate that local indigenous people are also active stakeholders in trying to preserve the Red Desert. The indigenous population is referenced throughout the film, but the b-roll shot is the only moment in which they are seen in the documentary.

The film ends as Clare and John both speak about the future. Clare speaks of her hope for the future that generations from now people can still enjoy the Red Desert, while John makes a pragmatic argument that much of the country consists of human impacts through development of cities and towns,

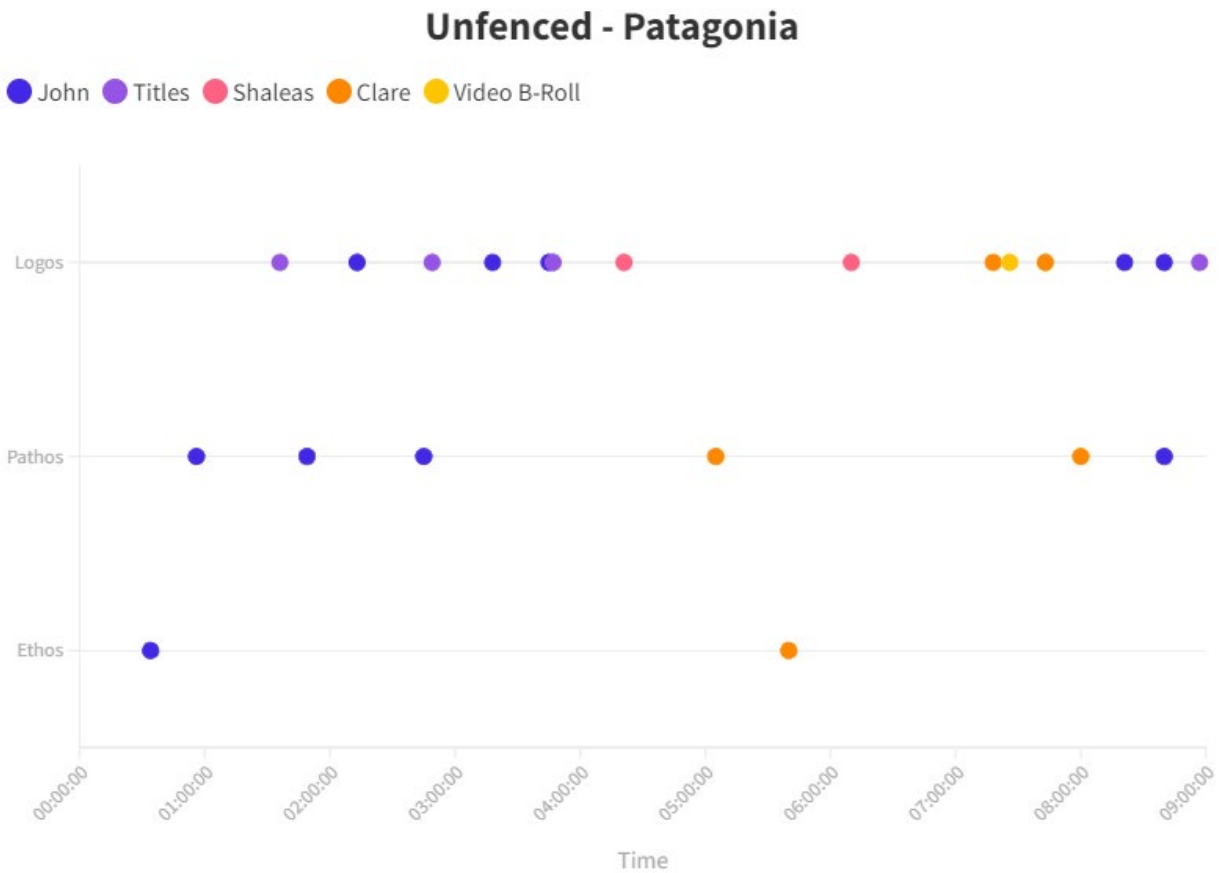
and that we should protect the few untouched wildernesses that remain because there aren't many left.

Both are appeals to pathos in trying to evoke both fear and hope about the future, hope that humans can protect the land and fear of what might happen if humans fail to do so.

Figure 5 demonstrates how the three appeals are spread throughout the “Unfenced” documentary. The chart shows that John and Clare were the only subjects who used emotional appeals in their rhetoric and John was the emotional messenger in the film, evoking pathos more than any other device used in the film. “Unfenced” also leaned heavily on information dissemination as evidenced by the unbalance in the chart towards logos. Another interesting aspect of the chart is the way in which pathos is distributed in the film. There is a clear emotional appeal in the beginning and end of the film and only one use of emotion in the middle. This demonstrates a typical three-act structure in which the first act is meant to make viewers care about the issue being presented, the second act provides information and context (logos), and the third act attempts to evoke more emotion in order to support the final call to action in hopes that an audience has been moved to take the action proposed.

Figure 5

Patagonia



Effectiveness

The use of a local to the Red Desert as its primary emotional messenger was an effective method for the “Unfenced” film. John’s trustworthiness and credibility was established within the first thirty seconds of the film as he makes known how long he has lived in the Red Desert region. By using this appeal to ethos, John is now seen as someone who has something to lose, and for viewers his pain and anger at seeing a place he loves being destroyed is more relatable once they understand his connection to the land.

Using distance runners as subjects and stakeholders was also an effective technique as it further allowed viewers to relate the desire to save the Red Desert with a love for adventure and enjoyment of

running in wild places. Humanizing the environmental activists through their love of running and particularly running in wild unspoiled places, creates an aspirational appeal for viewers who enjoy running in nature.

The film ends with a call to action to keep the Red Desert wild. John's final emotional appeal that we need more wild places and to protect the ones we have because "there aren't many of them left" (Fernandez & Mionske, 2020, 08:40), precedes this call to action in an attempt to use pathos to urge the audience to take action towards saving this endangered wilderness. The final shot before the end credits is a wide shot of two runners running on a ridge in front of a wide open landscape of red cliffs and ridges in the distance. This serves as a final and effective attempt by the filmmakers to illustrate the untouched beauty of the Red Desert expanse which might be at stake.

REI - Our Land

Synopsis

The documentary "Our Land" from REI features a coastal city in Maryland named Eagle Harbor. The Eagle Harbor area has been victim to significant environmental harm and catastrophe, including a major oil spill which devastated the river. The black residents of Eagle Harbor speak about the devastation as well as the environmental racism they have experienced as environmentalists have overlooked their well-being while looking to protect the land and the surrounding ecosystem.

The film opens with a voiceover of a woman paying homage to her ancestors who arrived on slave ships from Africa and inhabited the same land while working on tobacco plantations (Afolabi, 2022). Titles follow the monologue explaining that many black people made the area their home in the 1920s due to beaches being segregated (Afolabi, 2022). The primary expert in the film, Fred Tutman, a river conservationist, appears throughout the film to testify to the environmental challenges and degradation the river has faced, the racism as a result of segregation, and the efforts to save the river from further harm. The film also includes testimony from several residents who have been impacted by the destruction. Issues include flooding due to runoff from a nearby coal plant, as well as lingering effects from the oil spill.

The environmental racism and perception of ignorance from the larger environmental movement is also a featured topic in “Our Land”. The mayor states that Eagle Harbor is one of the last predominantly African American waterfront communities in the U.S., and Fred makes the claim that wealthier areas would not allow for a polluting power plant to be built near their homes the way it has been in Eagle Harbor (Afolabi, 2022).

The main call to action to conclude the film is a call for humans to treat the Earth with a greater respect and that the planet is resilient and can recover from the devastation if people do more to protect and conserve the earth than to “slash, and burn, and conquer” (Afolabi, 2022, 6:07). The film ends on a title which implores viewers to “advocate for justice and equity in nature” (Afolabi, 2022, 6:30).

Appeals

The appeals in “Our Land” from REI were used in a much different way than the previous films analyzed. Table 5 offers a visual for how this film differs from the prior three. The film relied heavily on information and made only one direct appeal to emotion which occurred toward the end of the film when the environmentalist Malaika Elias expressed that we should not be angry at nature for being angry with us. Her expression of anger was also an appeal to logos as she is explaining that the environment is “rebellling” against the poor treatment from humans. It is also emotional in that viewers can sense anger in her facial expression with the treatment of the land and waterfront she calls home.

Table 5

REI

Our Land by REI				
Appeals				
		Ethos	Pathos	Logos
M o d e	Direct	X	XX	XXXXXX
	Legitimation			XXXXXX XXXXXX XX

	Indirect Legitimation		XXXXXX	
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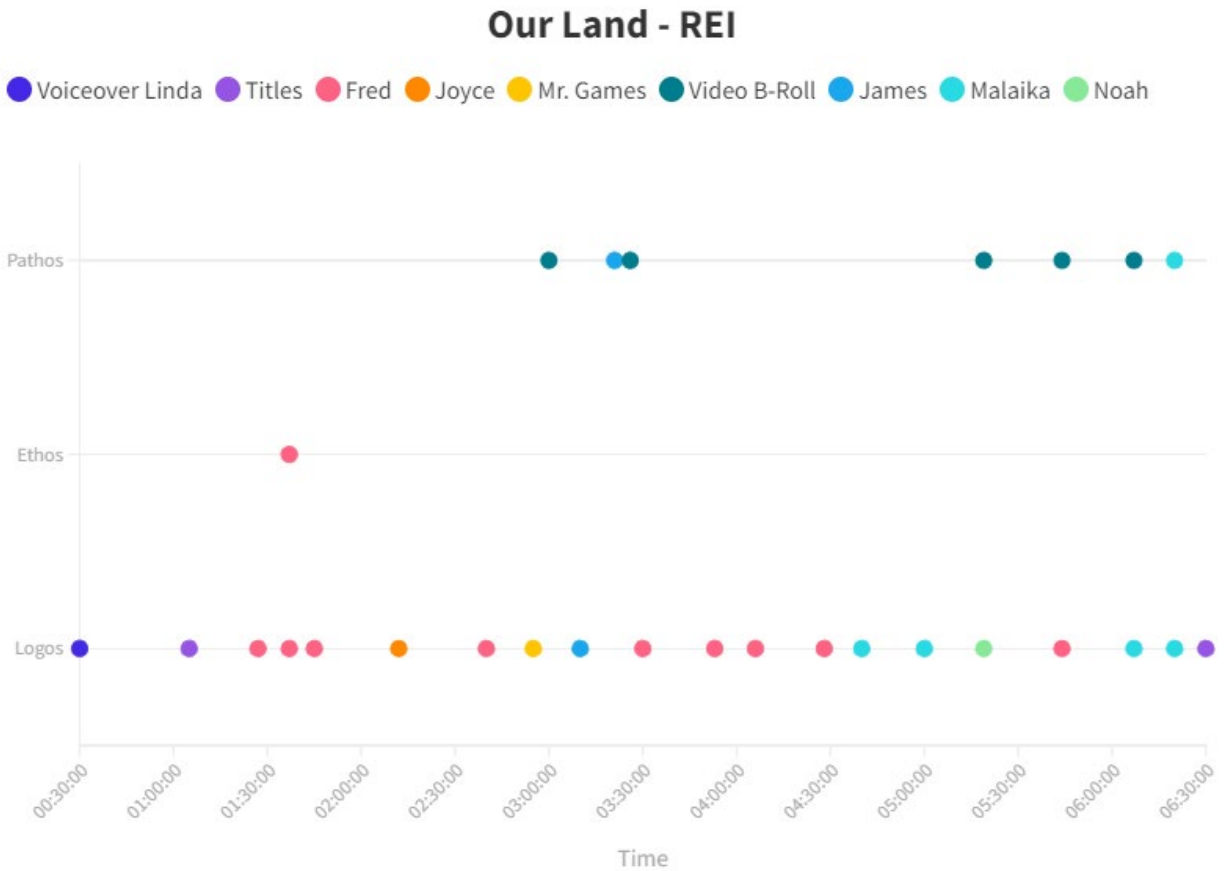
“Our Land” also differed in its use of many subjects and one main protagonist (Fred Tutman). The film featured several interviews from local residents and the mayor of Eagle Harbor. All of the interviewees appealed to logos as they described their experiences with environmental destruction and the frustration that comes with it. Resident James D. Crudup Sr. expressed his frustration and annoyance that he can’t access the riverfront for fishing the way he used to in the past, an appeal to pathos that is more direct than the subtle appeals present throughout the film.

The film also used indirect legitimation more than any other film analyzed. “Our Land” was the only film that used “hero shots”, or static b-roll shots of each resident, to convey emotion. The anger and dismay present on many of the residents’ faces is a clear display of emotion and an indirect appeal to pathos. The film also used metaphor with a beautiful flower being held next to the edge of the river. As the camera shifts focus from the flower to the river we hear Fred in a voiceover speak about the resilience of nature. This occurs more than once and is meant to appeal to the beauty and wonder of nature, another indirect appeal to pathos.

Figure 6 provides a visualization for not only the spread of the appeals, but also how each character appears in the film. It clearly demonstrates that Fred is the only subject to appear throughout the duration of the film, and it shows the multiple occurrences of indirect legitimation to pathos (Video B-Roll). Interestingly the indirect appeals to pathos are the dominant driver of emotion in “Our Land” which is unique among the four brand films analyzed.

Figure 6

REI



Effectiveness

One of the more effective uses of rhetoric in “Our Land” was its introduction to the issue of environmental racism by backgrounding the land with its roots to slavery and tobacco farming. This gave important context to the centuries of struggle that people have faced in Eagle Harbor, and to black people’s inherent connection to the land and waterfront in Maryland. While the film did not make many direct appeals to pathos as many of the other films analyzed attempted to, providing this context and delving into the experience of environmental racism in the current time period created one emotional through line on which the rest of the film’s argument was based. This was an effective technique that did not require the use of rhetoric to evoke emotion. Rather, viewers understood that through the injustice

being described by the film's subjects, there existed deep-rooted anger and sadness within the community as a whole that did not need to be explicitly stated through their rhetoric.

The film also did well to juxtapose the waterfront, the coal plant, and b-roll of the Eagle Harbor residents. Another effective use of subtle indirect legitimation which was paired with direct legitimation and information about the river being a rare waterfront community that was primarily African American. Far from the pristine ocean front properties of Southern California or Southern Florida, this degraded and polluted riverfront situated next to a large industrial power plant looks much less desirable than the image "waterfront" typically conjures in one's mind. This serves as a powerful way to form an argument about not only environmental issues but racial inequality and injustice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This analysis makes several important observations about brand-funded documentary films about climate change. Principally the use of Aristotle's rhetorical triangle is prevalent throughout the films. All three appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos) appear in the rhetoric of each of the four films analyzed. Ethos was only utilized a maximum of two times in the films, comprising 7% of the overall rhetorical appeal in the study. Logos was the most used appeal comprising 64% of rhetoric. Therefore, the study concludes that the answer to research question 1, which asks what are the primary methods of persuasion most used in brand-funded documentaries, is the method of logic and rational argument or logos, followed by emotional persuasion (pathos). This is perhaps unsurprising since a documentary film's principal objective is to inform the audience about a particular issue.

It is also clear in the research that the filmmakers elected to convey their arguments through a fact-based approach and rational arguments presented through witness testimony and other direct legitimation. As a result research question 2 which asked whether the mode of representation in brand-funded documentary films helps determine the effectiveness of the rhetoric, has been answered in the research. Direct legitimation was the primary mode of representation used in the documentary films. Because direct legitimation is the most common and straightforward way to present information to an audience using techniques such as expert testimony and informational graphics it follows that this is the most effective and prevailing mode of representation in these films.

The results of the study draw interesting conclusions for how documentary films are used to persuade through a combination of presenting information and evoking emotion. Because documentary films differ from traditional commercial advertising, a brand-funded documentary has the potential to first educate its audience about a specific issue before using emotion to influence audience attitude towards the brand. Brands also use the films to convey their brand message. In the instance of Corona's "Paradise Won't Protect Itself," the beach cleanup and plastic pollution discussion which comprised the second act of the film is directly related to Corona's mission to protect and clean beaches while eliminating significant amounts of plastic from beaches (Corona U.S.A., n.d.). This is one example of how brands are

using brand-funded documentaries to communicate about their initiatives and mission around climate change.

As the research has indicated, these brands are using persuasive rhetoric within the films to convince audiences and consumers about the importance of particular environmental issues. Additionally, as the Corona brand film indicates, the brand-funded films serve the additional purpose of conveying brand values, mission, and initiatives about issues deemed important by the brand. Amazon is using The Climate Pledge to debut a documentary series “Future Forward” which includes “The Future of Farming” which was analyzed in this study (The Climate Pledge, 2022). The “Future Forward” series was initiated by Amazon to inspire consumers about what is possible when it comes to a carbon neutral future (The Climate Pledge, 2022). As a result, the rhetoric present in “The Future of Farming” has multiple intended purposes comparable to Corona’s “Paradise Won’t Protect Itself”; to first inform and persuade viewers on the importance of cover cropping as a solution to soil erosion, and next to inspire the audience about the possibility of a future in which innovative climate solutions have solved complex environmental challenges.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Areas for Further Research

This research sought to determine not only the form of branded entertainment brands are interested in creating, but also the language their content is using to communicate best with audiences and stakeholders about their brand message. Brands such as Amazon and Corona with specific initiatives based on ocean and beach cleanup, or a goal to be carbon neutral, have sponsored brand films which seek to communicate about those objectives (Corona U.S.A., n.d.; The Climate Pledge, 2022). Past research has focused on the use of branded entertainment in sports, as well as branded entertainment on the internet and social media (Kunz et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2010). By expanding on past research into branded entertainment to include brand-funded documentary films, brand practitioners can gain a better understanding of how different forms of content can communicate with stakeholders. By examining the use of rhetoric in this way, it allows for a framework to be implemented for effective brand storytelling and persuasive messaging in brand films.

This research was focused on brand films that specifically addressed the issue of climate change and the environment. Therefore future studies could cast a broader net in terms of the subject matter of the film itself. An analysis that looked at brands in different silos or with differing social programs which produced brand films would be useful to expand our knowledge of how these films use rhetoric to persuade audiences. While the study selected its sample of brand films based on film content, future research could select a sample based on brand category. For example, a comparison of content produced by retail brands compared to technology brands could be useful in determining whether or not brand category plays a role in effective branded entertainment. This research also did not account for audience sentiment or satisfaction with particular brand films. Research into how audiences are reacting to brand-funded documentaries and whether it is an effective means of increasing consumer loyalty or positive sentiment is an area worthy of increased understanding.

In conclusion, as today's consumers continue to seek more genuine connections with brands and brand messages, the importance of effective branded entertainment which communicates authentically about brand values is essential (Brenner, 2015). Purpose-driven content such as issues-based documentary

films funded by brands is one form of content that is increasingly being used to drive this communication (Kelley, 2021). As consumers seek brands that are committed to ESG and CSR initiatives (Rizkallah, 2012), branded entertainment and brand films can succeed at not only entertaining, but educating and informing audiences about specific commitments by the brand in ways that traditional advertising cannot (Kelley, 2021). One way in which brand-funded films can communicate most effectively is with persuasive rhetoric using Aristotle's rhetorical triangle as a framework. As this research has pointed out, pairing logos and pathos, or a rational argument with emotional appeals, is a common method used in recent brand-funded documentary films about environmental issues. Brand-funded documentaries have the capability to use this rhetoric to demonstrate knowledge and compassion about social issues, as well as a brand's commitment to the problem. Brands which seek to improve sentiment and loyalty among consumers should consider the use of issues-based brand-funded documentary content as a means of authentic brand communication.

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VITA

MATTHEW ROSSETTI

Education: M.A. Brand and Media Strategy, East Tennessee State University,
Johnson City, TN 2023
B.A. Film and Media Arts University of Tampa, Tampa Florida, 2011

Professional Experience: Producer/Director, “John Dee” Documentary Film, Johnson City, TN
2021-2023
Director of Photography, Go To Team Inc, Chicago, IL 2013-2019