Text Analysis: Starbucks’ Straw-less Lids

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Author Note

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In the article *Starbucks’ new strawless lids are not a win for the environment,* Davis (2019)questions the intentions of companies, citing the example of Starbucks, who have recently announced to end using plastic straws and sees it more as a marketing strategy than a serious attempt at curbing environmental pollution. The article focusses on the recent campaigns to limit the consumption of straws as evidence pointed out its adverse effects on aquatic life and water bodies. However, even as Starbucks announced to replace plastic straws with plastic lids, it will have limited benefits and seems more like a marketing strategy to win over an increasingly environmentally-aware consumer base. The paper will analyze the text in terms of its position, its ability to communicate its message to the target audience, objectivity of the research and findings, and validity of the arguments. The ideas and reasoning presented by the author substantiate her claims that Starbucks is trying to appeal to environmentalism, as a marketing tactic, to increase its customer base and appeal owing to their continued use of plastic in disposable beverage cups.

The key aim of the author in the article is to caution the reader to look beyond an organization’s marketing ploys before accepting their claims. The article is published in Crimson White, a student-published newspaper, and is specifically targeted at student activists besides addressing the surrounding community of the University of Alabama. She asks the rhetorical question, “Are companies really focused on the reduction of plastic waste, or are they merely using this as a marketing strategy?” (Davis, 2019). The case being discussed relates to Starbucks, who banks on the increased sustainability and environmental-degradation concerns of its consumers by announcing to replacing the use of plastic straws with strawless lids in their disposable cups. The author takes a strong position on the subject by examining the justification presented by Starbucks in light of evidence, which was presented in each subsequent paragraph to make the point.

Even before presenting her thesis in the form of a rhetorical question, Davis gives the reader a background of why straws have specifically been made the target of Starbucks latest campaign. According to Davis, Starbucks plans to eliminate billions of plastic straws every year, that are sold in their own franchise. One of the reasons is that many "videos have emerged of plastic straws and other small plastic items affecting ocean life and polluting bodies of water” (Davis, 2019). As most of the target audience are social media users, they have likely come across images and videos of sea turtles, whales, and other aquatic life being harmed by plastic waste. With several of those videos specifically blaming plastic straws for the situation, it was expected that a campaign which would resonate with the concerned population would emerge. Evidence suggests that straws make up a large amount of plastic waste and their ability to break apart into pieces and degrade slowly can pose lasting effects on the air and water quality (Borenstein, 2018). While Starbucks discontinuation of plastic straws may hardly affect the overall waste percentage, however, it serves as a good strategy to enhance their corporate image as a brand concerned about the environment. With this background, Davis provides a good reason for the readers to buy into the arguments she makes.

In the article, Davis uses logical arguments as well as counter-arguments to support her distrust of Starbucks' campaign. One of the first argument is based on the findings that “strawless lids actually use more plastic than the separate plastic straw and lid currently in use at most locations” (Davis, 2019). The findings suggest that the use of thicker plastic would naturally increase the overall plastic consumption of the organization. Furthermore, Davis responds to a common defense presented by Starbucks to back their move; the lids are made from polypropylene which, due to its nature and size, is easy to recycle. Davis anticipates this argument and cites data that only 9% of the global plastic is actually recycled, which means that despite the newer material’s ability to recycle easily, it is highly unlikely that it would be recycled at all. Although Davis fails to cite a source for the data and figures, there is evidence to suggest that only 5.1% of polypropylene is actually recycled within the U.S; 91% of the global plastic remains unrecycled, while thick propylene would take hundreds of years to break down (Parker, 2018). From an economic standpoint, the recycling process of propylene is more expensive than manufacturing new propylene (Parker, 2018). Hence both arguments and counter-arguments presented by Davis find support in the evidence, even if their sources were not cited in the form of hyperlinks.

After examining Starbucks decision and justifications, Davis leads the reader back to her main thesis; corporations are banking on environmentalism as a marketing strategy. She writes, “Although Starbucks has made an effort to aid the environment, this is not the most beneficial way they can help” (Davis, 2019). Although the position taken by the author is strong, the approach is neither forceful nor does it indicate a strong bias. Instead, Davis first credits Starbucks to have at least made an effort that could later inspire serious efforts, and then goes on to prove that the massive effort will not be as beneficial as advertised. She further backs this by Starbucks’ lack of interest in exploring biodegradable options which do not damage the environment as much. Hence, the only reasonable explanation the reader is left to contend with is the fact that Starbucks move was more of a greenwashing attempt. In such cases, the amount of resources and time spent in marketing and advertising the “green” nature of the corporation outweigh their actual business practices that are implemented to reduce the ecological impact of their operations. Davis terms this practice as utilizing environmentalism as a tactic to lure more customers and improve their brand image, based on their lack of interest in investing in other environmental-friendly options.

The rhetoric and the style would resonate well with the younger target audience that the author is trying to address, and helps her successfully achieve the aim of the writing the article. Davis writes, “It appears that environmentalism is something companies are utilizing as a fad in efforts to bring in more customers with new, seemingly helpful tactics” (Davis, 2019). As younger audiences are made aware that corporations are using the pretext of recyclability, sustainability, and green operations to expand their profits, they will be better equipped to understand the deceiving tactics used by these companies and could make the right choices. Since many advertisers portray their products as green to ease the consumption guilt of their customers, it is important for the community to see through these tactics and test a corporation's claims and advertising against evidence before buying into the advertising messages. The style used by the author that mixes rhetorical questions, emotional appeals and logical evidence helps engross the target reader and successfully manages to get the message across.

In conclusion, Davis' literary style alongside her arguments and reasoning help her substantiate her claims regarding Starbucks. The readers are made aware of Starbucks attempt to utilize environmentalism to enhance its brand image and expand its consumers-base. The young audience, at whom the article is primarily aimed at, would feel more informed about the issue through the various data, figures, and arguments Davis presents in the article. In the end, the reader is not pressured to accept the author's conclusion, but rather, finds the author's claims to be the only reasonable explanation behind Starbucks' attempt at greenwashing their products. The article ends with a striking message to the stakeholders of such organizations reminding them of their actual responsibility towards the environment; indirectly pressing them to take concrete and beneficial measures because the community sees through their marketing ploys.

# References

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Conference Worksheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this worksheet and bring it to your conference.

1. What is your thesis statement?

The ideas and reasoning presented by the author substantiate her claims that Starbucks is trying to appeal to environmentalism, as a marketing tactic, to increase its customer base and appeal owing to their continued use of plastic in disposable beverage cups.

2. What is the topic of each body paragraph?

1. Aim and purpose of the author

2. Successful use of background to serve as an explanation of the move

3. Good use of logical arguments and counter-arguments by the author

4. How the premises help the author deduce her position.

5. The style and rhetoric used to appeal to the target audience

3. What do you think is the strongest part of your paper?

The paragraph which highlights how the author anticipates the opposing argument and justifications by Starbucks.

4. What questions do you have about your paper? Which part are you uncertain about, or which part do you think needs improvement?

Uncertain about whether I should pay more attention to the literary and rhetorical aspects of the text or its ideas and arguments. The part where I discussed literary styles could be improved.

5. How will you improve your paper in the next draft? Be specific

I could improve the connectivity between paragraphs and expand on the use of rhetorical devices and emotional appeals used by the author to make her point.