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Rhetorical Analysis of Articles on Global Warming

In his book *The Telling Room*, Michael Paterniti states, “In the end, it wasn't so much that there was an alternative narrative—there always was—but it came down to belief: Which one did you want to believe? Which one suited you best? Or, perhaps more to the point: Which one told the story you were already telling yourself?” (567) This quote claims that people who have already set their minds hear only the things that they want to hear. They ignore the other side of the story which contrasts with their own beliefs. Furthermore, they don’t even try to figure out the credibility of the news that is fed to them by various news media if the news upholds their beliefs. This habit of ignoring the reliability of the news source can lead the readers to false information on the material which can cause serious problems if such practice of disregarding the credibility of the news media is followed by many people. Therefore, news must be analyzed properly to find out the accuracy of its contents. In this paper, I will examine rhetorical strategies used by James Delingpole in his article “Climate Change: The Greatest-Ever Conspiracy Against the Taxpayer” which denies global warming and that used by Wayne Drash in his article “Yes, Climate Change Made Harvey and Irma Worse” which supports the reality of global warming. I will also point out the rhetorical appeals and logical fallacies used by both authors to persuade their readers and explain how those fallacies could prevent readers from having a clear view of the current situation pertaining to climate change. My analysis of both articles will help readers decide the reliable news source and conclude if the global warming is real or just a hoax.

Although the analysis of the articles mentioned above may produce different results regarding the reality of global warming, the definition of the global warming is same in both articles. Global warming is a gradual increase in an overall atmospheric temperature of the earth caused by the rise in greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, chlorofluorocarbon, and sulphur dioxide in our planet’s atmosphere. According to a study by Brian Kahn of Climate Central, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has been permanently set to 400 parts per million (Kahn), which is very high for our atmosphere. This high concentration of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere has resulted in continuous and rapid warming of the earth.

The earth’s temperature has been increasing for a long time. It is not an issue that is new to us. For years, scientists have warned the public about calamities like melting glaciers, rising ocean temperatures, and inducing life-threatening heat waves if the warming of the planet continues. Multiple independent scientific teams have concluded that the global average surface air temperature has risen by about 0.8 degrees Celsius since 1900. Although there are several pauses and accelerations in the change in climate, each of the last three decades has been warmer than any other decade in the industrial record since 1850 (Wolff, et al. B4). Furthermore, some of the excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is being absorbed by the ocean, causing the change in its chemical composition (B5). Other pieces of evidence of global warming have also emerged lately. For instance, the average sea level has risen by 20 centimeters, many Arctic glaciers have begun to melt, and other natural disasters related to climate change have started to show up around the world (Wolff, et al. B5). These are very clear signs that the global warming is real and if no necessary steps are taken to stop it, our planet may come to an end.

However, to my surprise, James Delingpole in his article “Climate Change: The Greatest-Ever Conspiracy Against the Taxpayer” which was published in Breitbart News Network argues that climate change is the biggest scam in the history of the world, a $1.5 trillion –a –year conspiracy against taxpayers. He uses an appeal to ethos in his argument as he says this was published by the *Climate Change Business Journal*, a subscription-based newsletter that provides detailed market research on many segments of the climate change. He also adds that “none of the money goes toward a cause remotely worth funding and that it is a complete and utter waste.” To get the readers to believe him, he quotes PJ O’Rourke in the article: “Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys.” However, he uses the fallacy of presumption here. What happens when we give whiskey and car keys to teenage boys? He never answers that question. Also, there is a false analogy in the quote. Giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys has no relation whatsoever to giving money and power to the government. The government constitutes of more than one individual so the money and power cannot be utilized according to an individual’s wish whereas a teenage boy can do whatever he wants with the whiskey and car keys. Thus, the author’s argument is illogical. In addition, the author uses the fallacy of appeal to authority while quoting PJ O’Rourke. He never mentions who PJ O’Rourke is and why a quote from him adds credibility to an article on climate change.

Furthermore, the author comes up with his own logic that because of the high market price of wind energy, nobody will buy it, resulting the climate change industry’s worth being almost zero. And the only way to fund the industry is by getting money from people in the name of tax. Here, we know that Delingpole is using faulty logos and the fallacy of presumption to convince his readers that climate change is just a scam fabricated to steal money from them because he cannot be certain that nobody will buy the expensive energy source. In fact, it could be just the opposite Moreover, to support his logic he quotes Warren Buffett: “wind farms don’t make sense without the tax credits.” It is clear that he is distorting the quote to prove his point. He is using the fallacy of accent here because he doesn’t give us enough information to have a clear understanding on Buffett’s view on wind energy. In addition to that, he is using the fallacy of appeal to authority while quoting Buffet as he doesn’t mention who he is and why his quote matters in the article. To further argue against wind turbines, Delingpole says, “one study claims German turbines kill more than 200,000 bats a year.” But, he doesn’t give us any information on who conducted the study, and how they came up with the data. This directly leads us to point out the fallacy of questionable statistics.

Delingpole uses lots of logical fallacies to attempt to prove his point. In one part of this article, he says that about 345,000 German households could not pay their electricity bills because Energiewende had made them so expensive. However, he doesn’t give us any reference to how he got that number of people. It is completely possible that he made up that number to seem more credible in front of his readers. This once again leads to the fallacy of questionable statistics. Furthermore, he doesn’t consider other factors that could lead to people not being able to pay their electricity bills. He accuses Energiewende of the problem without gathering enough evidence against it. Therefore, there is a fallacy of hasty conclusion in the argument.

Delingpole argues that there have been times in the past when the temperatures were like the temperatures today. He appeals to logos by implicitly arguing that there were no industries during those times that would emit carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, therefore, concluding that the global warming is not man-made. Delingpole also points out that South Korea abandoned their carbon reductions targets which they set in the UN climate conference in Paris in 2015 where all the leaders of the world flew in to save the planet from global warming. Taking that as an example, he says, “This is how much — best case scenario — that various countries are prepared to do to combat climate change.” He is using the fallacy of hasty generalization here; it is true that South Korea broke the agreement, but Delingpole cannot be certain that other countries will also do the same. He also references Bjorn Lomborg who calculated all the countries’ intended nationally determined contributions to fight global warming and found out that the total reduction in global warming by the year 2100 will be 0.170 degrees centigrade. But he is using an appeal to authority, as Lomborg is an author not climate scientist or data scientist (Fog).

Delingpole ends his article by saying that communists, especially green advocates, are using the world’s environment to advance all their usual obsessions like control, regulation, puritanism etc. He appeals to pathos by saying that people are once again being controlled or forced to pay taxes by the climate advocates. However, we can find many fallacies in his arguments. Firstly, he is representing all green advocates as communists which is not necessarily true, so there is a fallacy of hasty generalization in his argument. Secondly, he is arguing that green advocates are trying to control people using the world’s environement. This also constitutes a hasty conclusion because there is no proof that the He is just giving his own logic, which is not necessarily true as seen with his logical fallacies.

On the other hand, Wayne Drash in his article in CNN, “Yes, Climate Change Made Harvey and Irma Worse” argues that climate change is real, and that the recent hurricanes, Harvey and Irma, were made worse by the warming of the planet. He starts his argument by saying, “Changes in our planet’s atmosphere did not cause hurricane Harvey or Irma. But the consensus among scientists is that the effects of climate change, such as rising sea levels and warmer oceans, made those storms far more destructive than they would have been in previous decades.” The first part of his sentence was meant to address the straw-man argument of climate change deniers; the deniers constantly argue that global warming is not real since hurricanes were not caused by the warming of the earth. However, no scientists who believe in climate change have claimed that the hurricanes were the result of global warming. Deniers are arguing against a self-created argument. The second part of his sentence was to clarify that climate change affects hurricanes by increasing their destructive capacity. To support his argument, he quotes Sean Sublette, a meteorologist with Climate Central which is a nonprofit group that studies climate change: “Climate change is not the cause of the storm, but it makes these bad storms worse. And in the case of a really bad storm, climate change can make it totally disastrous or catastrophic.” By doing so, Drash is using ethos to prove his credibility to his readers. At the same time, he is eliciting fear, an appeal to pathos in them with the idea of more violent storms coming in the future, which will be much more dangerous than the storms that recently passed. Furthermore, he references NASA to explain that the global ocean temperatures have warmed on an average of 1 to 3 degrees Fahrenheit over the past century and that the hurricanes use warm, moist air as a fuel to increase its intensity. This supports his previous argument that the more forceful storms may come in the future due to the climate change.

Drash further quotes CNN senior meteorologist Brandon Miller, who has studied global warming for more than a decade, to support his argument: “There’s more water vapor in the atmosphere. The ocean is warmer. And all of that really only pushes the impact in one direction, and that is worse: a higher surge in storms, higher rainfall in storms.” Here, Drash is using appeals to ethos and logos to make his readers believe that his argument is true and hurricane Irma and Harvey must have worsened due to global warming. In the end, he again quotes Sublette: “More than 90% of the people doing the research agree that there are going to be hurricanes that form heavier rain and, perhaps, stronger winds.” Here, the author is trying to use inductive reasoning to persuade his readers that climate change will cause storms to be worse in the future.

After analyzing the articles, it is apparent that Drash uses no logical fallacies in his article. Many scientific pieces of evidence and studies back up his argument and stress the reality of global warming. Delingpole, on the other hand, uses lots of logical fallacies to prove his point. His article was basically made up of fallacies like hasty generalization, appeal to authority, hasty conclusion, the fallacy of presumption, the fallacy of false accent, and so on. This prevents the readers from getting accurate information and tricks them to believe what the author wants them to believe which is detrimental to solving real-world problems like global warming. If a person does not read his article critically, he/she could end up believing him and, as a result, deny the existence of global warming. If this phenomenon of climate change deniers occurs in a large mass, then there is nothing that can save our planet. So, to truly defeat global warming, people must first defeat the false news presented by media or at least make the consumers of that news aware and critical. Hopefully, this habit of critical reading will make the topic of climate change clearer for people and enable them to make rational decisions. More awareness can weaken the public resistance against climate change and the world could be a better place once again.

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