

Denny's: "America's Diner"

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Date: 9/23/15

Subject: Rhetorical Analysis of Denny's



Intro to Denny's

For this project, I chose to analyze the American-style diner chain franchise Denny's. Denny's began in 1953 as "Danny's Donuts", a small donut stand owned by Harold Butler and Richard Jezak. Their mission was to "serve the best cup of coffee, make the best donuts, give the best service, offer the best value and stay open 24 hours a day." This company mission still stands today, although the repetitive use of "best" is highly debatable.

Denny's serves cheap "comfort fare" and breakfast food around the clock. Their most popular menu items are their cheeseburger and their ham and cheese omelet. Their primary customers are the average middle-class family, breakfast lovers, people looking for cheap eats, and whoever stumbles in around three thirty a.m.. (These audiences sometimes overlap, although it's rare to see all four at once.) They distinguish themselves from their competitors, such as IHop and other breakfast chains, by advertising their non-breakfast fare in addition to breakfast and emphasizing the fact that they are open twenty-four hours. Denny's currently has 108 international locations and multiple locations in every U.S. state, with 1,700 locations total. Although they have been an American household name for awhile, Denny's has recently boosted in notoriety because of their bizarre and popular social media presence.

However, their social media presence is not the only way Denny's communicates with the public. In this audit, I will be picking through their TV commercials and investor information before analyzing their Twitter account. Although their food is (in my opinion) decent at best, their flexibility in varied rhetorical situations is impressive. Let's take a look.

Rhetorical Situation: TV Commercials

TV Commercials and Micro-Situations

Oh no, a smaller heading underneath the secondary! Don't worry, I won't be doing this for every paragraph. I will, however, need these smaller headings because of the nature of this segment. Although they are all broadcasted on the same, high-traffic channels, (ABC, NBC, CBS, Nickelodeon, etc.) each commercial has its own specific purpose and targets its own specific audience. They are each their own rhetorical situation in and of themselves, and must be analyzed as such.

Commercial One: "Dream Kitchen"

This commercial was originally broadcasted on May 14th, 2015. It opens with a young boy and his father sitting at the spotless, stainless steel diner bar. "Breakfast – Lunch – Dinner – Late Nite" glow above their heads in red neon in the unfocused background. A friendly, female voiceover asks, "How did Denny's put the magic of Dreamworks into their kids' menu?" as the adorable little boy is about to take a bite of his pancake. His jaw drops in comically cute surprise: Shrek, Donkey, and Puss from *Shrek* are in the kitchen taking orders and making pancakes! The female narrator, with fondness: "...That's a secret. Kind of." The Penguins of Madagascar slide down the stainless steel counter. They ring the order-up bell as the Denny's logo and slogan pop up over a perfectly plated meal of pancakes and bacon. The friendly voiceover reads them out loud: "Denny's. Welcome to America's Diner." The end

card is shown with a brief promotional note on the upcoming *Penguins of Madagascar* movie. The narrator finishes the commercial with an announcement that kids eat free on Tuesdays from 4:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m..

This commercial doesn't make a whole lot of sense. How *did* Denny's put the magic of Dreamworks into their kids' menu? Did they sponsor the kids-eat-free happy hour? What is this Dreamworks "magic", exactly? Why are Shrek, Donkey, and Puss in charge of cooking? I've seen what Shrek deems as edible material, and I want no part of it. Donkey is a quadruped, so he can't do much. That leaves Puss, and with him and the Penguins in charge, it's safe to assume that the new kids' menu consists entirely of cat food and fish. Not exactly the most appetizing message. However, the message isn't really important. The purpose is what matters, and the purpose is clear: to attract parents and kids into the restaurant.



Let's go through the rhetorical triangle. The actor is, of course, Denny's advertising team. (Or rather, Edwin Penland's advertising team, but I'll get to that later.) This is shown through the logo, slogan, and the announcer. The topic is that kids eat free on Tuesday evenings, and that Dreamworks may or may not sponsor it. One audience is children ages 5-10, around the same age of the boy in the commercial. They presumably like pancakes, seeing kids their own age, *Shrek*, and *Penguins of Madagascar*. In theory, they will get excited at these things, and ask their parents to go to Denny's. Their parents are the other audience, and are one more important than the kids, because they are the ones buying the meals. Because the topic is that kids eat free, you could say that the purpose is solely to attract parents to the restaurant; otherwise, Denny's wouldn't get any money whatsoever. In that case, the kids are just a medium through which to manipulate the adults into eating omelets and burgers. Harsh, but true.

Commercial Two: "Picture Perfect"

This commercial premiered on August 8th, 2015. It opens with a close up, rotating, high-definition view of expertly plated burgers. A young teenage girl narrates, quickly introducing and describing each burger. In the focused background, someone takes a picture of one of the burgers on their phone. The girl says that this burger is "apparently" her mom's favorite. The camera zooms out, showing a middle-aged mother and who we assume is the narrator. The girl gives her mother, who is just enjoying her burger and trying to have a nice dinner out with their family, a dirty look. The voiceover exclaims, "Eat it, don't tweet it, mom!" The mom frowns at her annoying daughter as her dreams are crushed. A different female narrator takes over, possibly the same voice from the "Dream Kitchen" commercial. Preparation of a burger is briefly shown: a juicy, already browned patty flips through the air over the spotless griddle, avocado is dropped onto a toasted bun on a clean wooden countertop, and sauce is artistically drizzled onto a juicy, perfectly-arranged burger. The female voiceover announces Denny's Burger Bash, with burgers starting at \$6.99. Burgers the same as the ones first shown are put on a spotless, stainless steel order up counter. The hashtag #BurgerBash is prominently shown, with the deal written in ribbon script beneath it.



Like the "Dream Kitchen" commercial, "Picture Perfect" was created by Denny's advertising team. However, the audience is very different. Instead of targeting young children, this commercial targets teenagers; instead of parents looking for a cheap bite to eat, this targets parents looking for somewhere their (teenaged) kids would actually be willing to go. Having a clear-skinned, decent looking teenaged narrator adds an air of "trendiness" to the teenaged audience, which might accompany or enforce the social media campaign that I will discuss. At the very least, the situation is relatable for a teenager of that age: having your mom do something embarrassing when you are with her in public, like enjoy her meal or share things on social media. (Geez, mom! What the heck!) Up until her daughter shuts her down, the mom is having a great time and enjoying her burger, showing parents that they can have a good time and eat good food with their family at Denny's during Burger Bash. Once again, the purpose of the commercial is to draw in customers to Denny's and show that Denny's is a clean, quality restaurant.

General Rhetorical Analysis of Denny's TV Commercials

In general, Denny's advertising team (by Edwin Penland) creates the TV advertisements. They are broadcast on a variety of high-traffic networks at a variety of time. The general audience is the audience of these networks: primarily white, African American, and Latina people, middle-class. The main target group is parents and families. The general purpose is to get customers into Denny's restaurants. However, it is not effective to analyze their commercials on a broad scale, since each one is a rhetorical situation in and of itself. TV commercials are by far the widest-spread form of advertisement. Because of the stations that Denny's broadcasts their commercials on and the frequency that they broadcast them at, if you watch TV for an hour on any given day at any given time, chances are you will see a Denny's commercial.

Rhetorical Situation: Investor Information

INVESTOR RELATIONS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investor Relations Press Releases Events & Presentations Corporate Governance Financial Information Annual Reports 	<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px; text-align: center;"> INVESTOR RELATIONS </div> <p>Denny's is the franchisor and operator of one of America's largest franchised full-service restaurant chains, based on the number of restaurants. The Denny's family of restaurants includes nearly 1,700 restaurants, of which 91% are franchised or licensed, with combined sales around \$2.7 billion. Denny's has 108 international restaurants in Canada, Costa Rica, Mexico, Honduras, Guam, Curaçao, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic and New Zealand. We are committed to serving the best interests of our shareholders. You will find key shareholder information and financial reports.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px; text-align: center;"> Stock Quote (NASDAQ: DENN) </div> <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td>Price:</td> <td style="text-align: right;">11.52</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Change:</td> <td style="text-align: right; color: red;">- 0.02</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Day High:</td> <td style="text-align: right;">11.55</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Day Low:</td> <td style="text-align: right;">11.41</td> </tr> </table>	Price:	11.52	Change:	- 0.02	Day High:	11.55	Day Low:	11.41
Price:	11.52									
Change:	- 0.02									
Day High:	11.55									
Day Low:	11.41									

Unlike their TV commercials, Denny's Investor information page is relatively private. If you are simply looking on the Denny's home website, it is not directly available. You must go to a menu option, then a link, then a sub-category, then a link to get to it from the home page. This already indicates that you must hold at least a vague interest in investing to find it. A crisp, clean, page greets you when you arrive, well designed with comprehensive navigation menus. It was created by a Denny's finance-centered public relations team. There are no pictures besides the logo; the normally garishly-bright colors are muted with only a subtle drop shadow. The font is only slightly modified; the information is straight-forward and statistical. In the left margin, there's a menu navigating to related corporate information; in the right, there's a stock quote. If this webpage were an office, the dress code would be office formal, preferably black suits with black AmEx cards.

The topic is, of course, money. Specifically, the buying and selling of stocks; the buying, selling, and creation of franchise locations; and company tax information. The audience is potential investors, specifically stock traders, potential franchisees, and auditors. This is shown in the Investor FAQs page: 5/14 of the questions are stock market related, 4/14 are franchise related, and 4/14 are tax or auditing related. Like the TV commercials, this investor website is incredibly important for bringing money into the company. Unlike the TV commercials, both the money and information are directly transferred. No gimmicks, no special camera angles. It is boring to those who aren't interested in investment, and is nearly indistinguishable from the similar page of a different company. The investor website is the complete opposite of the social media campaign

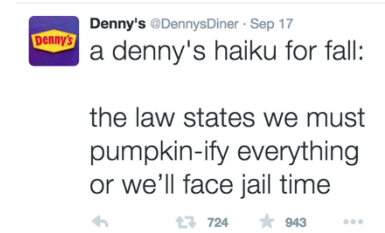
Rhetorical Situation: Twitter

Denny's social media outposts, such as Facebook, Tumblr, and Twitter, have taken on a bizarre, meme-centric, "chill teenager" presence unique from any other company. The Denny's Twitter account is colloquial, humorous, relatable, interactive, personable, and in touch with pop culture. It began in 2013 when Erwin Penland, a large advertising agency known for their work with L.L. Bean and Verizon Wireless, took on Denny's as a client. Their goal was to emulate the voice of a realistic, friendly, talkative customer, always excited to share their random thoughts and discuss daily events.

As strange as it seemed initially, the Denny's social media campaign quickly proved to be a stroke of genius. Their Twitter following jumped into the millions. People began to discuss it outside of the internet; some complained, some laughed, some quoted, some wondered, but they all said Denny's name. Companies, such as Taco Bell and IHop, tried to emulate their voice, but it was too late: Denny's was too popular, carving a social media niche for themselves where no one else had dared to venture. Their literal up-to-the-minute meme culture mastery fit perfectly with the 18-29-year-old demographic of Twitter. When users tweet at Denny's, they have a high chance of responding, normally in a humorous nature and sometimes with a gif.

But why? Why take such a big risk? Well, first of all, there wasn't much to risk in the first place. Company Twitters weren't particularly popular, and Denny's had hardly any attention at all. The team from Edwin Penland viewed the risk worth the potential payout, which it obviously has been. But for what purpose? Like I previously said, it got people talking. It showed that Denny's was hip and approachable. Their strange Twitter and other social media give Denny's a tangibility unlike that of any other company. You feel the person behind the tweets, and you can even see yourself being their friend. This gives Denny's a positive place in your mind.

"It's really all been rooted in [Denny's] positioning as America's diner," said Kevin Purcer, Erwin Penland's director of digital strategy, in an Entrepreneur Magazine interview. "It's about... the little conversations that might not mean a lot at the surface level that you might have in a Denny's booth with your friends and family. But, when you look back at your life, those might be the moments you enjoy the most."



Conclusion

Denny's is an American-style diner chain. In this audit, I analyzed their campy TV commercials, professional investor information, and ingenious Twitter account. Within each rhetorical situation, or situation within the situation, Denny's is incredibly sensitive to the differing audience and topic and effectively reaches their purpose. The variety that they lack in their menu is made up for in their flexibility in a variety of rhetorical situations.

Websites Used

<https://www.dennys.com/>

<http://investor.dennys.com/>

<https://www.dennys.com/media/>

<http://investor.dennys.com/faq.cfm>

<https://twitter.com/DennysDiner>

<http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/244361>