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Writing 2101F-003

11 April 2013

**Rhetorical Analysis of the Article “Let’s unplug the digital classroom”**

The OpEd (opposite the editorial page) article, written on October 6, 2012 and appearing on *thestar.com*, “Let’s unplug the digital classroom,” by Doug Mann, a Professor in the Sociology Department and in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at Western University, argues that the extensive use of electronics for entertainment and social communication is a cause of undergraduate students’ procrastination, Mann states: “Digital technologies can be great delivery devices. But what they too often deliver has nothing to do with education,” however, he fails to persuade his audience as he uses vague diction, fails to build a serious argument, has an overwhelming number of assumptions and does not provide a reasonable solution. Therefore, “Let’s unplug the digital classroom” is an unpersuasive article.

Despite the fact that this article fails to persuade its readers, it does carry a noble purpose and a balanced argument. Mann tackles an important problem in the modern education process. The motivational aspect of this article is fueled with the worries Mann has over the future of the next generations. Furthermore, the argument is fair for the point that since he exhibits the pros of electronic devices in the modern classrooms, the article states:

“On the plus side, the use of the computer as a delivery device for texts and images is largely a positive development. […]. It’s also useful from a teacher’s point of view to be able to display images and video via classroom computers when teaching things like fine art, comics and film.” (Mann)

Therefore, Mann does fail to persuade his readers; however, he does successfully appeal to his readers’ emotions and build some credibility by conducting a balanced argument.

The article avails many phrases that generates imprecise information such as, “Almost all,” and “dozens.” The use of vague words in this article decreases the significance of the points presented. For example Mann states: “Mark Bauerlein’s The Dumbest Generation contains literally dozens of studies […]”, the use of the phrase, “dozens,” diminishes the significance of the point Mann presents. Moreover, Mann states: “Almost all undergraduate students in North America are addicted to texting on their smartphones and checking their Facebook pages on an hourly basis,” he also writes: “Almost all professors use computers, projectors, Power Point presentations and the Internet as part of their lectures.” Both statements use the phrase “Almost all” which suggests that the article does not have studies nor resources to base these statistics on. In addition, some article sentences are wordy, for example: “[…] literally dozens […]”, and “[…] enthusiastic futurists […]”; the wordiness of this article suggests that it is not scholarly edited which decreases its credibility. Therefore, the weak and imprecise diction of this article affect the document’s credibility.

Secondly, the article fails to build a serious argument through the use of inappropriate humor. Mann injects humor in the article throughout the use of metaphorical sentence: “Calling for more digital technology in education today is like calling for more white people in the Republican party.” Mann compares the extensive number of electronics in the modern higher education classroom to the extensive number of white people in the Republican Party. As a result of this comparison, man loses the seriousness of his argument and fails to deliver his point, which is that modern classrooms already acquire a large number of technological devices and does not need more. In addition to the failure of conveying the point, his metaphorical humor comments can be viewed by readers as racial comments. Thus, the use of unnecessary humor in this article contributes to a failure in constructing a serious argument backfiring on the logos and ethos of this article.

Moreover, the studies presented in the article are not cited, therefore, as far as the reader is concerned they are only assumptions that the author is making; furthermore, these assumptions are also imprecise and inaccurate. For example, Mann states: “[S]tudy after study shows that digital technology has dumbed down higher education.” Mann use this assumption to argue that technology effects the education of higher institutes negatively without providing any type of studies or data to support his claims. Also, he generalizes many statements, such as: “Yes, one student in 10 actually uses them [laptops] to look up relevant facts and issues, but the other nine are using classroom Wi-Fi to check their Facebook pages, email or celebrity websites,” this text segment presents an imprecise generalized fact, “one student in 10,” without supporting it with any specific citation to a study that confirms these numbers. Thus, the assumptions made by Mann have decreased the article’s credibility and harmed its logical appeal because of the lack of data to support his claims.

Lastly, Mann fails to provide the reader with a reasonable solution, he presents the readers with an unreasonable solution: “Turn off Wi-Fi in the classroom, restricting it to student lounges scattered across campus. Create a schoolwide policy that bans the use of cellphones during lectures and seminars […]. Stop promoting Internet-managed distance-education courses”. Such a solution would slow the learning operation down and restrict professors and students from numerous advantages that would affect their time management and work outcome. Wi-Fi may not be crucial to courses such as English Studies, Classical Civilization, etc.; however, it is required in Computer Science classes for both teachers and students to fulfill the requirements of the course material such as web design and live coding operations. Moreover, a “schoolwide” ban of cellphones may be possible to conduct in a twenty student classroom but when facing 1,000 student classroom it is impossible for one or even twenty professors to prevent such an enormous number of students from using their cellphones. Additionally, Internet-managed distance-education courses have become an important tool for many students, helping them manage their time better and giving them more options for their course schedules, “Distance-learning education has made it possible for a larger number of people to earn an education” (Jafri). Halting such program will be a significant disadvantage to many students. Therefore, the solutions presented through this article are absurd, which brings another blow to the article’s logos appeal.

To conclude, Mann’s purpose for this article is noble but that is not enough to persuade his readers because of the article’s vague diction, failure to build a serious argument, extensive number of assumptions, and absurd suggested solution; these four points result in failing the article in all modes of persuasion: logos, pathos, and ethos. Therefore, this article would be much effective as a satire because it carries a noble cause, integrates humor and gives an illogical solution.

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