Logos, Pathos, and Ethos

Eric Schlosser, the author of *Fast Food Nation*, used many persuasive writing techniques in order to persuade the reader that fast food companies, especially McDonalds, conceal a variety of unethical practices from the public. In particular, he successfully used three tenets of rhetoric, logos, pathos, and ethos, to make this claim credible.

The first, logos, consists of using facts and logic to support a claim or theory. Facts such as those in statistics and statements from an authority are crucial to making a sound argument. Schlosser uses logos because data such as facts and figures are the easiest and most reliable way to convince his audience that his information is credible. His argument with logos does contain a few holes in it. He wrote about the daily average soft drink consumption in teenagers and children. In one of his statements he wrote, “excessive soda consumption in childhood can lead to calcium deficiencies and a greater likelihood of bone fractures. Twenty years ago, teenage boys in the United States drank twice as much milk as soda; now they drink twice as much soda as milk” (54). Schlosser’s writing style makes it easy for a reader to confuse true facts with his argument. For example, Schlosser uses many citations and references for a solid argument, and then proceeds to justify a particular viewpoint by using additional numbers and stating them as fact. One example of this is when he wrote, “about one-fifth of the nation’s one-and two-year-olds now drink soda... in one of the most despicable marketing gambits, Michael Jacobson, the author of “Liquid Candy” reports, ‘Pepsi, Dr Pepper, and Seven Up encourage feeding soft drinks to babies by licensing their logos to a major maker of baby bottle, Munchin Bottling, Inc’” (54). The citation and reference of the report is a weakness in Schlosser’s argument as it does not support his claim that one-fifth of one- and two-year olds now drink soda. The “Liquid Candy” report...
does not mention the approximate number of babies drinking soda. The data he does give is too
general, but it appears credible when preceded by more specific data.

One specific example of this when he used logos well is in his math, which Schlosser used when he
wrote, “the fast food chains purchase Coca-Cola syrup for about $4.25 a gallon. A medium Coke that
sells for $1.29 contains roughly 9 cents’ worth of syrup. Buying a large Coke for $1.49 instead...will
add another 3 cents’ worth of syrup--another 17 cents in pure profit for McDonalds,” (54). By using
this example, he strengthens his argument. With only this information to go on, the evidence is irrefutable
that McDonalds is making more of a profit than one can figure just by looking at the menu and
comparing prices. This would lead a reader to conclude that McDonalds is being dishonest to their
customers. By revealing solid evidence that casts doubt on the character of a fast food company,
Schlosser effectively engenders the distrust of fast food companies that help support his claim.

This distrust becomes pathos. While logos are convincing, pathos also need to be used to
convince an audience. Pathos is could be described as using persuasive or connotative words to
stimulate emotions in an audience. He used this to make his writing more interesting to read and to
explain points in his argument that are hard to describe using other tenets. Words of this kind are found
when Schlosser wrote, “tThe proponents of advertising in the schools argue that it is necessary to
prevent further cutbacks; opponents contend that schoolchildren are becoming a captive audience for
marketers, compelled by law to attend school and then forced to look at ads as a means of paying for
their own education,” (52). Obviously the students are not all young children, their eyelids are not glued
open, and they are not searching school to find more ads so that they can afford a textbook. Key words
like “schoolchildren,” “forced,” and “paying” are all used to provoke the emotions as if children actually
were being tortured. By describing the marketing plans used by some companies using negative and
powerful words, even though Schlosser gives the companies’ defense of their campaigns, he persuades the reader to emotionally detach from fast food companies. A weakness using this method is to alienate people in charge of business, authority figures, leadership. Schlosser alienates people of authority by presenting them to the reader as a bad person for disciplining the people they have authority over. One example is a high school student who was wore a Pepsi shirt during a Coke in Education day during a marketing photoshoot in light of gaining five hundred dollars from the corporation. “Mike Cameron-a Greenbrier senior standing amid the letter C-suddenly revealed a T-shirt that said Pepsi”. “His act of defiance soon received nationwide publicity, as did the fact that he was immediately suspended from school (55).

Also, by presenting the companies’ defense as well as those who oppose their marketing plans, Schlosser demonstrated ethos. Ethos involves giving accounts from opposing views to help establish that the author is ethical, trustworthy, and knowledgeable in his or her argument. Schlosser also demonstrates this when he compares the benefits and expenses of owning a franchise of a fast food company. Schlosser uses this method to create a winner and a loser in his argument. First, he positively describes a franchise as, “an odd combination of starting your own business and going to work for someone else. At the heart of a franchise agreement is the desire by two parties to make money while avoiding risk,” (94). He goes on to describe in further detail what that means for the franchisor and franchisee. It quickly spirals to end in the statement, “when things go wrong the arrangement often degenerates into a mismatched battle for power. The franchisor almost always wins,” (94). The rest of this topic has the same pattern of positive to negative, but ends up with a longer list of negatives on the part of the franchisee. This pattern is effective in answering possible arguments a reader may have. It is another way that he proves his view of fast food companies is true. It is also the most
obvious way to demonstrate flaws in a writer’s argument because it involves partially defending the
opponents side along with the author’s side, which can create weaknesses in an argument when there is
too much balance between the positive and negative statements. Balancing opposing views as evenly, as
Schlosser tends to do in this section, can give a reader cause to question the soundness of an
overly-balanced argument. Using ethos too much can make a writer’s argument stray from it’s focus.

Altogether, the triad of logos, pathos, and ethos create a thorough, persuasive and convincing
argument. Eric Schlosser correctly used these three tenets of rhetoric to convince his audience that fast
food companies are generally unethical.

Work Cited