The Rhetoric of Missions Reporting

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ABSTRACT

Missions, especially short-term trips, are becoming more and more controversial. As short-term missionaries interact in the field, they take pictures depicting the poverty, lack of resources, and overall sense of destitution around them. These photos have helped generate income, as many Christians who see the photos as part of updates on mission work they supported come to see themselves in a position of “savior” because they have resources to give to “those in need.” Evangelism is a critical component of Christianity; however, how people evangelize and how they communicate about that evangelism is equally critical. By analyzing both the church and corporate missions reporting of Experience Life Church, Noonday, and Sseko through their use of logos, ethos, pathos, ethical storytelling, and pity appeals, this thesis addresses the questions: how do churches use mediated platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions, and how do ethical businesses use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions?
The Rhetoric of Missions Reporting

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By

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To my dad and mom, I would not have even thought to pursue this without you. Thank you for pushing me to do more than I thought possible.

To Dr. Lemley who taught me everything I know about rhetoric and who saw something in me I couldn’t. Thank you.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

2016. What a year! It was my first year taking up residency in the country of Africa. Some may say I have some done good, but there is still so much to do and so many to save! I am excited to share my New Year’s resolution with you all. By the end of 2017 I will love on 153 million orphans. It’s a lofty goal, but I believe I am up for the challenge.¹

- @barbiesavior on Instagram

Missions, especially short-term trips, are becoming more and more controversial. While the quote above is from an Instagram account parodying the rhetoric surrounding mission work, it accurately reflects the nature of posts many teens and young adults send during short-term trips around the globe. This lack of awareness some missionaries hold about other cultures and the “savior complex” have led many to question whether these trips produce more damage than they offer help. As these short-term missionaries interact in the field, they take pictures depicting the poverty, lack of resources, and overall sense of destitution around them. These photos have helped generate income, as many Christians who see the photos as part of updates on mission work they supported come to see themselves in a position of “savior” because they have resources to give to “those in need.” This mindset was established by missionaries primarily working in the global South (those in need) and supported by the church of the West (those with resources).

With the increase of globalization and technology, churches and schools are able to send families and students around the world for trips quickly and frequently. Many of these trips cost thousands of dollars and last only one or two weeks. While this is not inherently negative, the result of untrained teens (and adults) gallivanting around a country where they may or may not speak the language, taking pictures with cameras more expensive than the homes owned by some of the people in those pictures, and being generally unaware of the culture around them has led many to wonder if more harm is being done than good. Evangelism is a critical component of Christianity; however, how people evangelize and how they communicate about that evangelism is equally critical. In this chapter, I will outline the problems with current missions rhetoric to demonstrate the need for change. I will then highlight the artifacts I will be analyzing in chapters two and three and the framework I will use to analyze them.

**The Rhetoric of Mission**

Today in the West, churches feel an urgency to send individuals into impoverished nations and lend a hand. The trouble becomes determining how to best complete and communicate about these projects. Robert Priest, Terry Dischinger, Steve Rasmusen, and C.M. Brown, writing in *Missiology*, explain that what we have is a grassroots movement in which, for example, youth pastors as a normal and expected part of their job take their youth groups to Mexico, West Virginia, Guatemala, or Haiti on mission trips. Many congregations now routinely organize mission trips for all ages scheduled to fit around school and work schedules.²

While this is not inherently bad, the issue often becomes who is serving whom and how these actions are talked about or publicized. As Catherine Helen Palczewski, Richard Ice, and John Fritch put it, “the real world is built upon the language of the group.” Thus, the way individuals and groups use language in society and to discuss a society largely determines how we understand messages. Missions literature and rhetoric is one example of this. Abbie Erler describes that

while the social constructions of individuals in poverty are varied, they tend to fall into one of two categories: deserving or undeserving. The deserving and undeserving poor differ in their moral culpability for their poverty, their attachment and orientation toward the labor market, and the acceptability of granting them public assistance. Those individuals deemed “deserving” are seen as not wholly responsible for their poverty. They are often viewed as helpless and politically powerless.

Many scholars and leaders voice concern about the trends they are seeing. Missionaries who report from the field back to funding congregations often send photos or videos of what they are experiencing. Unfortunately, in the eyes of many, this has not been done well. As Alam Shahidul, the former President of the Bangladesh Photographic Society states,

invariably films about the plight of people in developing countries show how desperate and helpless the people are but those who realize their plight and step forward are usually white foreigners. In some cases local people are seen to be helping, but invariably it is a foreigner who has enlightened them about the way out, and it is always a foreign presenter who speaks out for them.

These videos often portray white people as “rescuers” and those they are helping as in deep need. Lillie Chouliaraki, professor of media and discourse studies, explains that, “pity, rather, refers to a type of social relationship between the spectator and a distant sufferer, which raises the moral obligation for the spectator to respond to the sufferer’s misfortune in public.” Clearly, the issue with missions reporting is not solely about content, but about the lack of thought or interaction required from the viewer. It is easy for churches and individuals to send money and feel helpful or thoughtful. However, it is much harder for these churches or individuals to know the root of the problem, the context, and be a true part of a solution.

Videos and pictures of starving kids in desperate situations could quite possibly be extending the “problem.” As Alam mentioned, few realize these children’s state of destitution until it is pointed out to them by the rich of the West. Though it is important for the church and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide care in times of disaster, these videos and photos may be offering a false sense of responsibility for problems that are misunderstood through a camera lens. In this school of thought, those behind the camera have a large responsibility to do their best to document the truth of these situations. Alam writes again, “we are aware of the meaning of our words, but forget images may have different meanings to different people, and the meaning of a photograph can depend on a large extent on the context in which it is used.”

This problem, however, is fairly recent. With the rise of technology, missionaries and NGOs have been able to broadcast to much wider audiences than ever before. Psychologist S.

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Dalton and colleges write that, “the ability of the mass media to distanciate provides a means by which people are informed about the poverty that exists beyond their own locale.”

In a related study on globalization explaining the increasing awareness of the world around them, Jane Jackson examined study abroad students, discovering that those (study abroad students) who developed a higher level of intercultural sensitivity displayed more awareness of gaps in their intercultural communicative competence and knowledge of the host culture. By contrast, those with an ethnocentric mindset had less appreciation of the complexity of cultural difference and, in some cases, were blissfully unaware that their style of communication might be hampering relationship-building across cultures.

These two descriptions clearly indicate that, while it is important for individuals to be global and think globally, there is a responsibility that comes with doing so. It is not enough to merely be informed and know about “less-developed” countries or to spend time there. Jackson suggests that to fully understand a culture, it is necessary to recognize the difference between host and home culture and accept not knowing everything as a visitor.

Boisterous visitors are often also critiqued for spending time on their service trips sightseeing and vacationing. In an effort to describe this phenomenon, the term “voluntourism” (or volunteering but mostly site-seeing) was coined by developmental agencies and the western media. Matt Ballie Smith and Nina Laurie write that, “from ‘volunteer tourism’ facilitated by larger travel agencies and corporate sponsorship of established volunteering programs to an increasingly commercialized ‘gap year’ industry,

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new opportunities mean that the neoliberal professionalization of NGOs and volunteering is being framed and performed in increasingly global ways.”\(^\text{10}\) Simply put, the accessibility of volunteering around the world is increasing. With this increase, those individuals participating often take photos of the culture in which they are visitors that oversimplify another group’s way of life; these photos attempt to explain problems, lives, and contexts far bigger in what Shani Orgad and Bruna Irene Seu refer to as “intimacy at a distance.”\(^\text{11}\) Thus, the way missionaries tell and explain narratives within context matters.

**Missions and Dignity**

The problem at hand with how to communicate about globalization and missions, often via a social media or online platform, is one of dignity. As the world becomes more and more accessible through a screen and people increase their ability to fly across the globe in seemingly no time at all, individuals are more and more able to capture stories and share them instantly. This becomes problematic as stories morph into ways to raise money for good causes, often leaving those on the other side of the camera exploited as tools in a fundraising campaign. Manzo argues that the multi-dimensional principle of humanity contains three key components: alleviation of human suffering; protection of life; and respect for the human being (Slim 1997). The underlying human rights premise of the principle is respect for the right to life or (more broadly) respect for a right to life with dignity.\(^\text{12}\)

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This has caused many organizations to wonder how missions can be done, and done well, so that they help rather than harm and create partnerships instead of dependability. Liz Bohannon, founder of Sseko (an organization dedicated to creating sustainable businesses in Uganda), said in an interview about missions that

one of the things that I became pretty disillusioned with when I was in Uganda was I realized that there was this really intense relational dynamic that’s been set up between Westerners and Africans kind of over the last few decades with the rise of humanitarian aid and that relationship is, you know, I as the white American am coming over to give, and you as the African your job, your role in this is to receive and to be thankful. And that to me, even in the best intentions, felt really dehumanizing. Not just for our brothers and sisters in Africa but even for us, right? My belief is our role in God’s kingdom is constantly changing; there is something so beautiful about the fact that one day I’m in need and you as my community are giving to me and then the next day you happen to be in need in a really specific way that I happen to pour into and it’s kind of this constant flow of giving and receiving and interdependence.¹³

This kind of thinking about work as mutually beneficial is gaining popularity among missions scholars. Here, Bohannon is getting at the same principle: every human being deserves to be treated like a human being. The verse, “love your neighbor as yourself”¹⁴ does not mean “love your neighbor with your leftovers or when it is easy or when it is glamorous.” Dignity requires that mission efforts must help participants to truly love their neighbor in the way they want to be (and will be) loved by their neighbor.

This becomes difficult for missionaries when, in the West, the common images associated with mission efforts are those meant to elicit an emotional response. Manzo writes that, “mass media and NGOs have been widely criticized for using such images to prompt emotional responses in readers and viewers—everything from sympathy, pity,

empathy and sadness to anger and indignation—as a means to elicit donations and capture attention.”15 Similarly, Manzo continues that Save the Children’s guidelines on this matter are direct, asking the “photographers to portray vulnerability without robbing subjects of their dignity is even more forceful: Don’t show children as helpless victims—closely cropped pictures of children with sad eyes looking up at the camera. We should be truthful not sentimental.”16 Susan Moeller goes on to argue that the only way to keep these photos from being headlines is to fight for change because “if images of starving babies worked in the past to capture attention for complex crisis of war, refugees and famine, then starving babies will headline the next difficult crisis.”17 This is problematic as it demeans geographical areas, labeling them as helpless.

Herein lies the issue described by Birgitta Höijer, an expert on media and meaning creation, that “photographic pictures are often perceived as truthful depictions of reality.”18 Barrett Ward, founder of ABLE, has recently voiced his company’s view on the ethical responsibility they feel for those they employ and those who support their work. He said in an interview that

over the last few years I’ve become sort of disillusioned, cynical of the social enterprise world. It’s kind of become a tagline, you know “you buy something, we’ll plant a tree”, and not that that in and of itself is a bad idea until it becomes more about the marketing than about the impact it’s having on the world. And so it keeps me up night thinking that I could be talking to Saint Peter and he could be saying, “you sold a lot of bags but you really didn’t invest in understanding the impact you’re having on the world.” And so, we wanted to make sure that we were not about marketing more than the

impact that we were having and that the marketing supported the impact we were having. 19

This push for marketing to support the impact (or really for the impact to support the marketing) is a new way of thinking Ward hopes will ignite a movement to empower similar companies to do the same and in doing so push companies who are not making ethical decisions to rethink their actions. Maria Urbaniec defines sustainable entrepreneurship as based on the concept of sustainable development, or the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” 20 Lucy Wanza defines sustainable development the same way. 21 These definitions add an important piece to the mission work puzzle—both noting the importance of not comprising the capability of the future generations to provide for themselves. This is fundamental in terms of mission and dignity—that though times may be tough for the current generation, those who want to provide relief should keep future generations in mind and also work to give them a chance to make their own way.

This push for reform is a reaction to years of social activists using emotionally shocking propaganda to draw in audiences. Kate Nash quotes an interview with Bono saying, “‘years ago we were very conscious that in order to prevail on Africa, we would


have to get better at dramatizing the situation so that we could make Africa less of a burden, and more of an adventure.””

This way of thinking has penetrated Western missions, creating an atmosphere of supremacy.

**Colonialism**

Since they were settled, primarily white societies in the West have presumed positions of power. However, their power was often taken or assumed by settlers rather than given or earned. It is important to note that “colonization was not a single event or even a bounded process. Colonialism was a creeping force that set off chains of social, political, economic, religious, and demographic change that extended well beyond the borders of colonial control.”

As Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, two colonialism scholars, write, “America is a special case. . . . America reversed directions: it put its Orient in the West, as if it were precisely in America that earth came full circle; its West is the edge of the East.”

This description is not far off from past ways of thinking by many in the West; America as the center of attention, as the way the rest of the world is or should be, the ones with everything figured out. Thus, many in the West see themselves as the ones with something to offer. Especially in regions of the world that are not as developed, Westerners have pushed their ideas and ways of life onto less developed nations.

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As Sarah Trabert describes “colonialism [as] a complex process involving not only territorial acquisitions and the establishment of colonies, but also the ensuing social, economic, political, and demographic disruptions for those groups experiencing colonialization.”

However, this way of thinking and operating is not neutral. As Eric Bain-Selbo writes, “one of the central consequences of the essentialization of the Other is that the Other becomes an object for our manipulation. The Other becomes a datum that must fit into the theoretical apparatus of the dominant culture.”

In what the West would often consider “lending a hand,” the culture of who Bain-Selbo refers to as “the Other” is squashed and “the Other” culture is forced to operate under or within the dominate culture. While this is occasionally welcomed in times of tragedy or war, often this dominance is not invited; instead, the people being manipulated have no way to stand up or fight for their way of life. This dynamic is a common feature of charity work around the world. Not only do these long-term acts of charity suffocate cultures, but external dominance leads to dependence and extended need. As Barrett Ward explained in an interview,

I believe charity is so critical, is so important. There are people in the world that [sic] are destitute and they need a hand; they need to be loved and cared for physically and the other side of that coin is we don’t see that charity ends generational poverty. We see that it’s a beginning point of help but often charity goes too far and it makes someone dependent.

While charity is necessary for short-term survival, particularly in disaster relief situations, this work rarely ends generational poverty as Ward argues. Thus, it is necessary to

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investigate how socially responsible companies, specifically those that are employing and empowering locals, work to provide long-term solutions and create opportunity rather than dependency. Stemming from the work of Comer and Alison Calder, Campbell asks:

what if “the West” were not about America—that is, if its narratives were not always telling the nation’s story (Manifest Destiny, progress, rugged individualism, frontier, entrepreneurialism, etc.), imbued with what Alison Calder calls “inside knowledge,” and endlessly refreshing the national imaginary as exceptionalist, but were read differently, across traditions, to tell complex, multiple stories and redraw the region’s political maps?  

This way of thinking, that America is not the center of the universe, could and would have a massive impact on the way stories are told by missionaries, individuals, and churches, inside and outside America’s boarders. This way of thinking could also revolutionize the way nonprofits and individuals work missionally to shift the paradigm from a “savior complex” to a partnership.

**Problematic Missions Rhetoric**

Within the scope of missions rhetoric there are many problems with the ways current mission trips, mainly short-term trips, are being communicated about by churches and organizations. Many people who partake in these trips are interested in sharing their journey with others, and rightly so. However, the rhetoric they use is instrumental in how those watching understand the story of this mission work. This poor communication is often due to a lack of awareness about the problem. Thus, in the following pages, I will highlight some of the issues with the current rhetoric of mission work. I will do so by first examining a video that demonstrates many of the problems in today’s mission discourse.

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“Ghana Mission Trip 2017”

This video documents the trip of a church group to Ghana, Africa, in 2017 that the rhetor, Annie Ryan created and shared. At the time of the trip and the video’s debut, her stature, dress, and actions in the video indicate she was a teenager. This video helps to show how a precedent set by organizations or churches can become culturally accepted and reproduced by others. As I will explain below, this video documents a trip in a way that shows mostly the elements of fun, not much work, and not many takeaways for those watching. While she likely made the video for personal use or to be shown to a specific group of people, over five thousand people on YouTube have watched it. The fact that a simple home video made by a teenager can reach so many demonstrates the churches in the West have to characterize churches in other countries -- whether a video is made for the purpose of persuasion or not.

I am particularly interested in this video as it does a great job of capturing “voluntourism.” I chose this video specifically because of how the author communicates about the events happening throughout; her language about the trip they are on is particularly insightful as it highlights the mindset of many others in her shoes on these trips. She documents the trip in ways that bring up questions of ethical storytelling and dignity among the people with whom she is interacting. Interestingly, in the comments section for this video, a YouTube user writes, “just a funfair, little in a way of mission work.”29 While it is possible the group may have done incredible work, that aspect of the trip is absent from the video. Examining how the trip is communicated is vital to helping

individuals and organizations understand how the rhetoric they use impacts those who watch their videos.

**Rhetorical Problems**

With the internet making content increasingly accessible, the standards for what is deemed acceptable must also increase. It is important for people of all ages, not just teens, to understand the influence videos, photos, and words can have, especially as they relate to missions and sharing trips with others. Sharing is vital, but *how* content is shared by individuals, churches, and organizations is also vital. We model relationships with our rhetoric—the language of partnership produces dignity, while language or photos communicating an “us and them” divide are harmful to all parties involved. It is likely that Annie made this video based on videos she has seen in the past that feature days of fun or selfies with orphans, which only emphasizes that these problems have become a larger trend. Annie is not the only teenager communicating poorly about mission work abroad. From her video, I have identified three problems that I see in many videos or Instagram posts of this nature. I outline these problems here to introduce the exigence for rhetors to understand the power of words and images, to demonstrate the impact they make on those who view them, and to begin the conversation about sustainable mission reporting.

**Problem I: Lack of a “Big Picture”**

One of the largest problems with this video and others like it that the rhetor does not communicate a clear “big picture” in the text. This video showcases the team in airports, driving around Africa in a van, and whatever the rhetor found to be interesting about this new environment (e.g., warthogs, ants, bananas, etc.). The trouble for the
audience is that none of this footage points them in any way to why this trip was beneficial for those going or the locals. The trip is merely chronicled and compiled for the audience to make sense of for themselves. This is problematic as it does not show the work being done or why it would be valuable for a church to support the project.

Subsequently, there is no narrative to follow. It is merely clips of videos or photos documenting what she is experiencing without any explanation or context. When Annie does explain where they are or where they went, the paragraphs of text explain lengths of layovers and other information that does not build a storyline. Many of the photos and videos are repetitive (seemingly every picture and video she took ended up in this video).

As can be expected, the arguments Annie makes are also unclear, when they are present at all. The text provided by the rhetor merely describes to the audience tasks such as handing out mosquito nets or thanking supporters for being part of the journey. All of the video footage feels scattered; there is no clear direction for what will happen next, why this is important to watch, or why this trip was worthy of support.

*Problem II: No Contextual Information*

The rhetor also provides no context for this trip. Outside of handing out mosquito nets, the audience is left guessing what actually took place during the team’s time in Africa. Annie describes nothing about the work on the trip, its purpose, or the need in Ghana that necessitates this trip. This is problematic as, accompanied by the footage she uses of days of fun and rest, this trip looks more like vacation than a mission trip.

With the audience in mind, it is fundamental for rhetors of these videos to communicate why the trip is necessary and what they went to do. No matter the reason, whether encouraging long-term missionaries, assisting with VBS, or digging water wells,
the audience needs to know why this trip matters. For those who will never visit these places, the videos they see from trips like these might be their only view of that part of the world. To promote an accurate depiction, rhetors must provide contextual information about the current state of the place they are going and why the trip matters to someone who did not go.

**Problem III: Ethical Storytelling**

In the *Ghana* video, Annie portrays herself and her American friends as the main characters. Annie writes in text in the video, “pastor Solomon decided to have a bbq for us!”30 This, in conjunction with the aforementioned footage of the fun days off, demonstrates that much of what she takes away from this trip is the fun she had and what was done for her. Many of the pictures are selfies of her and the kids with whom she is spending time or pictures others took of her with different people. She is made to be the central character of the story she is writing for her viewers.

As I will describe in detail in the following chapters, the rhetorician has significant responsibility when reporting his or her work back to sponsoring congregations and partners. How missionaries communicate these reports is fundamental to their sponsors’ understanding of the work being done, the need, and their role as a sponsor in the story. Ethical reporting, then, must truthfully depict the need while also showing how both parties, the locals and the missionaries, work together for the good of the community. Unfortunately, this video does not describe any problems the group sought to solve or assist their local hosts with; rather, it promotes a good time abroad.

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This is unhelpful for those looking to partner with a group through providing financial support, as they do not know the need because the rhetor takes no responsibility in ethically telling the story of his or her work.

**Artifacts and Rationale**

Though the current problems with missions rhetoric are many, there are churches and missional organizations doing this type of communication well. In the following pages, I will describe the church and companies I have chosen to analyze in order to better understand how to communicate about mission work well. I am utilizing a church and two companies for this analysis, as they each have something specific to offer to our understanding of missions rhetoric. Experience Life Church’s video demonstrates a trip from the perspective of those traveling there to serve, while Noonday and Sseko communicate from the perspective of artisans and entrepreneurs. I have decided to examine these companies because they are both doing mission work in countries abroad and communicating well about these efforts. Each communicates about their work differently; thus it is beneficial to examine each to better understand how mission language can be improved. It is important to note that for the purpose of this thesis, I am only examining communication about short- and long-term mission trips that are not for the purpose of disaster relief. I believe this type of communication, while still necessary and important to examine, falls into its own category of missions communication. Long-term and short-term trips should communicate about sustainability and partnership while, in most relief work, teams need to assist immediately for safety and rescue. Because of these differences in the urgency and scope of the work involved, sustainability is a different conversation for each context.
Experience Life Church

In Chapter II, I will analyze Experience Life Church’s video *Guatemala Mission Trip 2014*. Out of the thousands of mission trip videos posted on YouTube, this video captures short-term and long-term missions in a particularly dignifying way for all parties involved that makes it a great video for others hoping to improve their mission’s communication. This video highlights a trip taken to work with locals in Guatemala and speaks to the value of partnership in mission work. I will be analyzing this video to see how the language used promotes partnership and dignity for the vulnerable communities they serve. This video was captured and produced by Austin Wideman, a volunteer at Experience Life Church. He went on this trip to produce a different video for the church and made this video from the extra footage. The church later used this video for promotional material for their trips.\(^31\)

Years ago, Pastor Chris Galanos says he heard God telling him to start a church for the unchurched in Lubbock, Texas.\(^32\) At the time he was not sure what that meant or looked like; however, his vision sparked Experience Life Church--a church seeking to save the lost. Now a church network that encompasses nine Lubbock area churches, an online stream, and television broadcasts, Experience Life Church is dedicated to making sure people hear the Gospel message. This is evident in the way the church talks about mission work, not only in their videos and publication about missions, but also in the way

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they prioritize missions as a church. Experience Life Church offers classes where students learn about how God feels about the world and what role they as a member of the church play in reaching those who do not yet know Jesus.

**Noonday**

In Chapter III, I will analyze Noonday and their communication strategy. I have seen first-hand how effective their communication is through friends and family who work for Noonday as Ambassadors, and I am interested to see how this company’s strategy could be used by individuals looking to communicate about short-term trips. This company continues to gain recognition and grow due to the way they treat those making and selling their products, including being named 2017 Ernst & Young Entrepreneurs of the Year. In doing so, Noonday is worthy of being analyzed for the groundbreaking work they are doing within this field; their award “recognizes entrepreneurs who are excelling in areas such as innovation, financial performance and personal commitment to their businesses and communities.”

I will be analyzing their Instagram account and the “Impact” page on their website to see how the language they use promotes partnership and dignity for the vulnerable communities in which they serve. Noonday’s Instagram and website both display the lives being changed by their work. Their Instagram account is very active and interactive, often posting photos from people who are using their products. The interaction with customers about ethical mission and


domino effect of their communication are worth studying to understand how that same
type of communication could take place with individuals sharing about mission trips.

Noonday Collection was founded in 2010 by Jessica Honegger after a trip to Uganda. She and a few others dreamed of what it would be like to create dignified jobs in a part of the world that is often used by other countries for cheap labor. Honegger first sold some jewelry made by her Ugandan friends as a fundraiser to adopt one of her children. When the sales were incredibly successful, she began to think even bigger about the possibility of an ethical jewelry company. She partnered with friends who care about social entrepreneurship and began to build a business. Today, Noonday utilizes Ambassadors in America to sell the jewelry and partner with women in Africa, Central and South America, and India to create a growing marketplace. Their Instagram biography describes their mission succinctly saying, “We’re a socially responsible business that uses fashion to create meaningful opportunities around the world.” As of July 10, 2018 they have 87,000 followers on Instagram and 3,409 posts on their profile.

Sseko

I will be analyzing Sseko and their communication strategies in Chapter III to gain another perspective on how communicating about ethical mission work can be done well. Similar to Noonday, Sseko uses Fellows to sell their products in America. Founder Liz Bohannon describes the beginnings of the company simply: “four women under a

mango tree making leather sandals with interchangeable straps.” In the nine years since then, the company has learned that these sandals, or rather the opportunities the sandals provide, are changing the world. The company has gone from three girls to 106, providing jobs and opportunity many of the girls never thought possible. Because of the way this company has boomed and provided great change for this community in Africa, I will analyze how Sseko communicates on the website, specifically on their “Mission and Impact” page and Instagram feed, to promote empowering messages for those who make and sell their products. Sseko’s website and Instagram are worth analyzing as they are constantly looking to improve the market in how those in the geographical West talk about those in other countries. This language is an excellent example for others looking to talk about trips abroad and worth studying for that reason.

Sseko Designs, an ethical fashion brand, was founded by Liz Bohannon in response to seeing poverty up close and the relief efforts she experienced while living in Uganda after college. While there, she discovered there were real problems that needed attention but required more attention than simply throwing money at the issues as she had seen so many other organizations do. She saw girls graduating from high school and not being able to afford college, while the jobs they needed were often given to men. She decided the best way to help was to start a business that could employ these girls and help them become problem solvers and difference makers in their corner of the world. According to their website,

Sseko Designs is an ethical fashion brand that hires high potential women in Uganda to make sandals to enable them to earn money through dignified employment that will go directly towards their college educations and

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ensure they will continue pursuing their dreams. To date, we’ve enabled 87 women to continue on to university. We currently employ 50 women in Uganda from all walks of life. We believe that every woman has a dream. When she is given the opportunity to pursue those dreams, we are collectively walking towards a brighter and more just and beautiful world. 38

In this quest, they have gained a significant following, especially on social media. They currently have 55,200 followers and 2,180 posts to their Instagram profile. Through their social media, they specifically invite followers to participate, saying in their bio they believe in “ethical fashion that empowers women globally. Join the sisterhood, make an impact, and earn an income through the Sseko fellows program.” 39

Methodology

Before analyzing each of these artifacts in the following chapters, I will first explain how I will use logos, ethos, pathos, ethical storytelling, and pity appeals to examine each text. I have laid out this framework in order to answer two research questions. In Chapter II, I will address the question: how do churches use mediated platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions? And in Chapter III, I will answer the question: how do ethical businesses use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions?

Logos

In Greek, the word logos plainly means “what is said.” 40 However this concept is more complex in that it encompasses both how a claim is worded and how the argument itself is structured. For the purpose of this analysis, I will analyze appeals using logos on

the basis of three components: (1) data (through the use of facts and figures), (2) relevance to the audience (through the use of organization and visual appeals), and (3) clear arguments (through the use of other forms of proof such as narratives or analogies).

In analyzing the first element, data, I will be considering how the rhetor uses facts and figures to create an argument.41 The rhetor often uses data as a justification for or defense of his or her actions. Thus, through examining the data, I will explain how the rhetor is using concrete examples and statistics of what is happening in the mission field to support his or her persuasion.42

In examining the second element, relevance, I will consider how the rhetor structurally and visually constructs his or her arguments to tell a story that is meaningful to the audience.43 Specifically, I will look for how the rhetor organizes and visually supports his or her messages. Relevance considers how the story is told for the audience as “we experience the world through our senses, particularly our eyes.”44 As this quote states, how the rhetor tells the story and unpacks it using all of the senses translates into how relevant the audience will perceive the message to be.

The last element of my logos analysis will be evaluating the clarity of the rhetor’s arguments. Much like my consideration of relevance, I will analyze how the rhetor constructed stories or analogies. This category will look at the “argumentation texture,”


44. Beckwith, Unthinking: The Surprising Forces Behind What We Buy, 59.
or the inferences the rhetor makes, to consider whether or not these are rational arguments.\textsuperscript{45} Understanding whether or not an individual message is on target with the group’s overall message or if they seem ambiguous, as “ambiguous messages and evidence create difficulties for targets [audiences],” is key to assessing the rhetor’s persuasion.\textsuperscript{46} All of these factors of logos—data, relevance, and clear arguments—will be vital as I consider whether or not each rhetor’s logical appeals were successful.

**Pathos**

Aristotle argued that persuasion can take place “when they [the audience] are led to feel emotion by the speech; for we do not give the same judgement when grieving and rejoicing or when being friendly and hostile.”\textsuperscript{47} In many ways, pathos, or emotion, drives decision-making and is vital in persuasion. For Aristotle, these appeals to emotion were “psychological appeals; they relied on the receiver’s emotion. Before using these appeals, persuaders had to assess the emotional state of their audience – an ability or skill which might be called empathy or emotional intelligence in contemporary terms.”\textsuperscript{48} For the purpose of this analysis, I will analyze appeals using pathos on the basis of two components: (1) mood/tone, and (2) motivation/reference to pleasure or pain.


In analyzing the first element, mood/tone, I will be considering “the mood or tone of the speech that appealed to the passions or the will of the audience”\textsuperscript{49} as well as “the suitability or fit of a product to the intended user or community of users.”\textsuperscript{50} In other words, I want to know how the rhetor’s use of mood or tone fits with the message the rhetor is trying to communicate. In the case of missions reporting videos where nothing is being sold, I want to understand the suitability of the mood and message for the intended community. Whether a product or message, I want to know if the artifact’s mood/tone fits the content of what the rhetor is communicating.

The second element, motivation, “depends on the speaking appealing to human desires the audience may or may not be aware of.”\textsuperscript{51} This involves the specific emotions the rhetor is trying to elicit, “an appeal to the audience’s emotions either positive (joy, excitement, hopefulness, pleasure) or negative (anger, sadness, pain). It is used to establish compassion or empathy.”\textsuperscript{52} The emotions the rhetor uses are vital to understanding the way he or she is persuading. Is the message full of hope or pity? How does the rhetor anticipate the audience reacting? Kristin English, Kaye D. Sweetser, and Monica Ancu argue that “using emotional appeals adds different elements and/or perspective to information.”\textsuperscript{53} Specifically, knowing which type of emotion the rhetor is

\textsuperscript{49} Demirdogen, “Roots of Research,” 192.

\textsuperscript{50} Erin Friess, “The Sword of Data,” \textit{Massachusetts Institute of Technology Design Issues}, 26, no. 3 (2010): 44.


targeting will enable me to classify the strategies the rhetor is using as either positive or negative motivation. As Christof Rapp writes, “though Aristotle nowhere offers a straight definition of pathos (emotion or affection) it is not coincidental that the other emotions are defined by reference to pleasure or pain.”54 These two categories provide an understanding of how the rhetor depicts information or situations. Both of these factors of pathos—mood/tone and motivation—will be fundamental as I consider whether or not each rhetor’s emotional appeals were successful.

**Ethos**

*Ethos* is arguably the most important of the pillars of persuasion. Aristotle argued that “persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible . . . his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses.”55 A person’s character makes or breaks the words coming out of his or her mouth. However, it is important to note that many would argue the audience’s feelings about a rhetor should come from the speaker’s words and not from another interaction or opinion the audience previously held. For the purpose of this analysis, I will analyze appeals using *ethos* on the basis of three components: (1) credibility, (2) image (reputation and appearance), and (3) similitude.

In analyzing the first element, credibility, I will be considering the “mode of persuasion that relies on the speaker creating a credible character for particular rhetorical occasions.”56 This element will look at how the speaker or rhetor demonstrates his or her

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trustworthiness to the audience. How long has he or she been doing this work? What expertise does he or she have that qualifies him or her for this? Who is supporting his or her cause?

In examining the second element, image, I will look at the reputation\(^\text{57}\) of the rhetor as well as his or her physical appearance.\(^\text{58}\) Both of these factors play a role in how audiences feel about the person or organization. Details such as the professional quality of the photos, video, or website, how these items are presented, and what websites/platforms the rhetor used to publish them are all worth noting when considering about image.

Lastly, in my analysis of *ethos*, I will be examining similitude. In persuasion, audience members want information to be relevant to their personal lives; much of this can come through their ability to relate to the speaker. Phrases like “a person like me”\(^\text{59}\) or “the ability to say ‘we’”\(^\text{60}\) are phrases that “bolster identification with speaker.”\(^\text{61}\) This provides a sense of familiarity for audience members and makes it easier to trust the words of the speaker.\(^\text{62}\) All of these factors of *ethos*—credibility, image, and similitude—will be critical as I consider whether or not each rhetor’s appeals to character were successful.

**Ethical Storytelling**

\(^\text{57}\) Demirdogen, “Roots of Research,” 192.
\(^\text{59}\) Pang and Law, “Retweeting #WorldEnvironmentDay,” 57.
When crafting persuasive messages, one thing rhetors must consider is ethical storytelling. As noted by communication scholar Robert S. Fortner,

it is impossible to dismiss lightly the ethical criticisms of persuasion. What must not be lost sight of is that persuasion is an art, which may be used for good or evil . . . surely we must remind ourselves most soberly that persuasion can be and often has been an instrument of evil in some instances as well as of great good in others.63

Whether communicated through words, actions, or pictures, persuasive content must be examined by audience members to determine whether it is being used for good and not evil. Especially within the context of photojournalism and missions, rhetors can easily use or interpret photographs of the people served by mission groups across the globe in a way that dishonors them or their nations. For this reason, it is vital for those behind the lens or those curating the messages that accompany the photos to take ethical practices into consideration.

For this thesis, I will analyze ethical storytelling, ethics, as presented by Katherine Saunders Nash in Feminist Narrative Ethics, through the functions of “characterization, point of view, and narrative progression.”64 These three qualities examine how the rhetors make locals and themselves look in a persuasive message (characterization), who the story is being told by or who the story is being told about (point of view), and what kind of story the rhetor is trying to tell (narrative progression). These three qualities will be critical as I consider whether or not each rhetor’s persuasion was ethical.


As previously mentioned, characterization deals with how rhetors make individuals look in these artifacts; this involves revealing personality through the plot.\textsuperscript{65} It is important for me to understand how the rhetor is characterized, especially in relationship to the local people he or she is serving. Audiences can determine this by details like how the pictures are taken—who is sitting and standing, who is doing the work, what posture everyone in the picture takes (nonverbal cues); “angles are also considered to influence the perception of a certain situation and thus frame the photograph. Within campaigns, information alone is considered insufficient to attract people’s attention, therefore visual material is called upon.”\textsuperscript{66} Thus, these are important details that will help me understand how individuals and groups are characterized in these artifacts.

Next, I will examine the point of view from which the rhetor tells these stories. Point of view is important as it relays information from the individual who is telling the story. With that in mind, the details of the story or the audience’s perception of the actions taking place can vary from person to person. Thus, I am interested in who is telling the story and how their perspective aids in the overall goal of the narrative.

Lastly, I will be considering the narrative progression. As mentioned above, this deals with what kind of story the author is trying to tell. Michael Toolan describes it this way:

\begin{quote}
here are forms of special attending, a metaphorical taking up or taking in, by the reader, of those textual articulations, hot spots, foregroundings, turning points, key evaluations, and so on, that the writer deploys so as to
\end{quote}


guide the reader’s expectations as to the narrative’s continuation, and their reactions at its end. Like Toolan describes, often in missions rhetoric, the rhetor presents the story as sad and destitute, drawing on the emotions of the audience to want their help. Some organizations have begun to tell stories of hope and how, given new opportunities, those in need can be agents for change in their communities. I want to know what kind of story is being told. Partnered with the characterization and point of view, these three qualities will help me to examine the ethical elements of each artifact.

**Pity Appeals**

Lastly in considering the elements of persuasion, I will be examining the pity appeals present in each artifact. Aiming to raise money for their cause, many missionaries (churches, individuals, and organizations) display photos of small, impoverished children.

The images of plague victims, corpses ready for cremation, destitute families at the poorhouse, and “half-naked, wasted creatures” consisting of nothing but “bone and sinew” moved viewers to send “many letters of generous appreciation, accompanied often by contributions of money for the immediate relief of suffering.”

These photographs inspire serious concern or pity and, as Heather D. Curtis describes, often result in immediate contribution as audiences feel pity for what will happen to suffering people if they do not act immediately. Robert H. Gass and John S. Seiter write that “appeals to pity are the bread and butter of charities.”

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efforts seem to be working by raising money to help the poor, there is more to the situation than simply raising funds for immediate aid. For this problem to really be solved, those working with relief efforts should consider the long-term consequences of what could be described as a “Band-Aid,” or simply covering the wound without fixing the real problem.

Rhetoricians also acknowledge that “a good picture can prompt lively and insightful debate; it encourages and embeds deeper learning. Most people remember pictures far better than words or diagrams.” 70 It is clear pictures shape how many people view places far away and what is happening abroad. Emile Bojesen writes that pity is what carries us without reflection to the aid of those we see suffering. Pity is what, in a state of nature, takes the place of laws, more, and virtue, with the advantage that no one is tempted to disobey its sweet voice. 71

Thus, pity is a driving force in decision-making. Thus, I will be examining the use of “faces in need,” 72 or pictures of things/people that are perceived by audience members as “broken or in need of being fixed,” 73 to determine the use of pity appeals within each artifact. While pity appeals can be manipulative, they can also shed light on subjects the audience may have otherwise never cared about. The key is giving the audience a sustainable way to help and participate. Examining the use and type of photos the


rhetoricians use will be vital as I consider whether or not each rhetor used pity appeals within their persuasive messages.

**Conclusion**

While there are currently problems with the rhetoric of missions reporting, specifically in communicating about short- and long-term missions, there are ample examples of churches and companies doing this well. These are great examples that individuals and others seeking to communicate about missions can learn from. By examining rhetorical texts created by Experience Life Church, Noonday, and Sseko through the described characteristics of logos, ethos, pathos, ethical storytelling, and pity appeals, I hope to further outline the ways rhetoricians can improve communication about mission work. In Chapter II, I will examine Experience Life Church to answer the question: how can churches and individuals use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions? Then, in Chapter III, I will examine Noonday and Sseko to answer the question: how can ethical businesses use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions? In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the mutual benefit of persuasive rhetoric that promotes partnership.
CHAPTER II

EXPERIENCE LIFE CHURCH

Experience Life is a church built on the foundation of making a home for those who have not yet experienced the Gospel. From their website and videos, it is easy to see they are extremely mission-minded and aim to share the Good News with as many as they can. Through training, mentorship, and then heading out into the world, the church equips leaders to go. The video I will analyze tells the story of a trip to Guatemala organized by the church. The team tells stories of their experiences with the local people pouring concrete, taking trips through the city, and organizing Vacation Bible School for the children. The team reports the success of many Guatemalans coming to know Jesus and dedicating their lives to Him. As I will explain throughout this chapter, the team uses partnership language to demonstrate mutual benefit from this trip. In this chapter, I will analyze the video Guatemala Mission Trip 2014 to answer the question: how can churches and individuals use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions?

Experience Life Church and Austin Wideman

From the beginning, Experience Life Church has been committed to a vision of seeking the lost. Chris Galanos, Pastor at Experience Life Church, says he heard God telling him to start a church that would be a welcoming place for unchurched people. At a conference required for his seminary degree, he heard some men talking about churches they were planting:
These young guys got up on stage and started talking about going back to their hometowns and starting churches. And these were towns that already had a bunch of churches but they were saying that most of the churches in their towns were designed for churched people. And so they were going back into these towns that they were from to start churches not just designed for churched people but really even more focused on connecting with unchurched people, and I thought “man, I’ve never heard of that before.” And they start talking about meeting in gyms and cafeterias at schools and all kinds of different, not churchy places and they start talking about all these people, all these unchurched people were coming.¹

The men talked about the success of these churches and the life change that was coming for people who had experienced hard times in church and people who had never been to church before. Chris thought to himself, “I’d love to be a part of something like that one day.”² He said God whispered to him in that moment and said, “Hey Chris, I want you to start a church like that.”³ He came home and told his wife and she agreed that she thought God wanted them to start a church.

Experience Life now has nine physical campuses in Lubbock, Texas, and surrounding areas. They also stream their services online and broadcast via television. They say, “We envision a church which utilizes Lubbock’s reputation as the ‘Hub City’ to become a hub for a church planting movement which starts churches in other parts of Lubbock, the state of Texas, the US, and around the world.”⁴ It is no surprise then, that the church highly values missions and spreading the Good News. The church offers classes to learn about “God’s heart for all the nations” and helps students “discover what

². Experience Life, “Awakening.”
³. Experience Life, “Awakening.”
⁴. Experience Life, “Awakening.”
role they can play in reaching them." Experience Life Church is focused on their goal of growing the body of Christ and has clear pathways for their members to participate in this mission.

Experience Life Church is not the sole rhetor of this video. As I will explain below, Austin Wideman created this video for personal use. Later the church asked to use it for their own mission promotion. Wideman has done videography for the church prior to this project and, as audiences can see from watching *Guatemala Mission Trip 2014*, is very skilled in this craft.

**Audience**

After speaking with Josh Parker, the Missions Director at Experience Life Church, it is clear the church was not the intentional audience of the *Guatemala Mission Trip 2014* video. Parker said they asked Wideman, the church’s volunteer videographer, to come on the trip and get footage for a different mission promotion video. Parker said he did not know this video existed for quite some time. Although the church later used this video at an event promoting their trips, this video was not made to be used by the church for promotional purposes. Instead, Parker said Wideman made the video to highlight his personal experience.6

From this interview, it is clear that Wideman knew the video was not for church use; however, he may have had the church or people he thought would enjoy the trip in mind while editing. Additionally, the video is clearly promotional because it explicitly


encourages viewers to visit the Experience Life Mission website for more information about their trips. However, it is safe to say the intended audience was Wideman’s YouTube audience. Wideman has 1,210 subscribers to his personal channel who would have each received a notification when he posted this video for the first time. As of August 1, 2018, the Guatemala Mission Trip 2014 video had 3,544 views.

**Guatemala**

Guatemala sits in Central America between El Salvador, Honduras, Belize, and Mexico. This country, taking up slightly less land area than Pennsylvania, has endured much in terms of war and governments. According to the CIA’s World Factbook, “in 1996, the government signed a peace agreement formally ending the internal conflict, which had left more than 200,000 people dead and had created, by some estimates, about 1 million refugees.” From this chaos and turmoil, it is not a surprise that many of the country’s citizens struggle and are living in poverty. The World Factbook also reports that

Guatemala is a predominantly poor country that struggles in several areas of health and development, including infant, child, and maternal mortality, malnutrition, literacy, and contraceptive awareness and use. The country's large indigenous population is disproportionately affected.

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7. This and all future references to the “Guatemala Mission Trip 2014” video analyzed in this chapter come from the following: Austin Wideman, “Guatemala Mission Trip 2014 – Experience Life Church,” April 28, 2014, video, 6:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kx85q3RuWcM.


10. “Central America and Caribbean: Guatemala.”

11. “Central America and Caribbean: Guatemala.”
With the majority of the population living in rural mountain regions, the country struggles to provide resources for these issues.\textsuperscript{12}

The country is also highly impacted by volcanoes and earthquakes. In 2012, the region experienced a magnitude-7.4 earthquake that left 48 dead; in July of 2014, a 6.9.\textsuperscript{13} Guatemala is home to at least 37 active volcanoes, which is the most in the region.\textsuperscript{14} The Pacaya, close to Guatemala City, is “one of the country’s most active volcanoes with frequent eruptions since 1965.”\textsuperscript{15} The proximity of these volcanoes to human populations causes the trouble; many have to evacuate in these situations due to ashfall. In a country where most live in rural areas, this can be a devastating situation.

In 2014, Guatemala experienced a severe drought, leaving many families devastated from the loss of crops, not to mention hungry.\textsuperscript{16} Later that year, many families, “tens of thousands of women and children,” began fleeing to America.\textsuperscript{17} The New York Times described the situation saying, “in Phoenix, up to four buses a day arrive at the Greyhound station, each filled to capacity with women and children from El

\begin{itemize}
\item[12] “Central America and Caribbean: Guatemala.”
\item[15] Reid, “2018 Guatemala Volcano Eruption: Facts, FAQs, and Help.”
\end{itemize}
Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.” 18 Guatemala is a country that has experienced much violence and corruption, including their former President Alfonso Portillo being sentenced to prison for “conspiring with others to launder millions of dollars through United States bank accounts.” 19 These issues of natural disaster, corruption, and violence make it hard for locals to build a stable life. However, the countries surrounding Guatemala also experience corruption and gang violence, and Guatemala has become their safe place. Since 2014, 178 Salvadorans and Hondurans have received refugee status in Guatemala; from 2014-2016 “asylum requests rose by more than 200 percent.” 20 Even in their own distress, Guatemala is a country that welcomes their neighbors.

Analysis

In this chapter, I will analyze how Experience Life Church and Austin Wideman employ rhetorical elements to promote partnership and community among their audience with respect to international mission work. I will be examining their video, Guatemala Mission Trip 2014, that describes both short- and long-term mission efforts in Guatemala to answer the question: how can churches and individuals use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions?

Logos

*Logos* is a word rhetors use to describe the complexity of how they word a claim and structure an argument. This concept is fundamental, as the way rhetors utilize words

and arguments directly impacts how that claim impacts the audience. Rhetors must not only know their audience and how to reach them specifically, but must also present good data and clear claims to their audience. Without clear arguments and data, it is hard for audience members to make sense of what a rhetor is trying to prove. Relating the information to the audience goes the extra mile, helping the rhetor to truly persuade and make the material come to life. In this section, I will analyze the Guatemala Mission Trip 2014 video using logos on the basis of data (through the use of facts and figures), relevance to the audience (through the use of organization and visual appeals), and clear arguments (through the use of other forms of proof such as narratives or analogies).

Data. Throughout the video, Experience Life Church and Austin Wideman made it clear that this trip made a difference; they showed audience members the numerical impact of the changes that took place as a result of their time in Guatemala. Halfway through the video, a female voice shared that the team served more than 400 kids in their Vacation Bible School (VBS) program in the villages. She said, “we probably loved on four hundred plus kids because we prepared for four hundred and we ran out of stuff.” This data showed not only that kids wanted to participate in this event, but that there was an even greater need and that more would be needed for the next trip. Following that comment, another voice said,

we actually had twenty kids get saved while we were here, which is just astounding to know that their lives are changed at such a young age, that they can go on and carry on with Christ for the rest of the lives and be disciples for God. It’s just incredible.

Here the rhetor argued that not only were kids coming to VBS and having a good time, but that they were truly being impacted and their lives were changed forever. Another speaker noted that their trip impacted both children and others in the villages, saying,
“through this trip we had close to thirty salvations.” This data gave audience members a peek into the work that was done and a look at one way the team measured success. Through attendance at events in the village and dedications of lives to Christ, the team and their audience were able to see that this trip had an impact on the lives of people in Guatemala.

**Relevance to the audience.** Austin Wideman and Experience Life Church made the content of this video relevant to their audience by using the testimonies of multiple people who were willing to share their personal thoughts about this trip. Humans are drawn to stories, and the rhetors of the video were aware of that fact. They outlined this trip strictly with multiple voices who told about their experiences. They also showed footage from the village of children playing, the team working alongside locals, and views of the landscape so that the audience can understand what the trip and area were like. These elements helped bring the video to life for audience members; though some may never go on this trip themselves, they saw and virtually experienced the trip through the stories and video footage of the team, which helped audience members to feel more connected and able to understand what they had potentially prayed for and financially contributed to.

**Clear arguments.** One of Austin Wideman and Experience Life Church’s strongest arguments in this video was that spiritual preparation before the trip was critical for success. Throughout the video, various voices depicted the preparation done by the team before, as well as the outcomes they saw while on the trip. One of the voices, Mike McComb, who was the missionary they worked with who lived in Guatemala, said that “when a team like ELife comes they bring with them so much energy, they bring with
them so much spiritual preparation and it just stirs the pot, it just stirs things up and lots of things happen.” Another voice continued saying, “we’ve seen eternity changed for some people when we come in focused and trust in God to see lives changed and He’s faithful to do it.” These two narrators expressed that the team was truly focused on tuning in to what God had before them and trusted His plan over their own, referencing the spiritual preparation the team did before the trip (mission classes, etc.), and how that directly impacted the work that was accomplished. A third voice said:

So through this trip we had close to thirty salvations and God had turned these lives completely around and healings were taking place left and right and these people were freed from these aches and pains that had been taking part in their bodies for years and years and years. So God was able to show up when we lay ourselves down and we truly surrender all to Him God shows up in those moments and He’s saying “I’ve got this” and “let me show you what I can do.”

It is clear the Experience Life Church team is focused on God when working with the people of Guatemala. Experience Life Church placed high value on preparing for mission work. They offered classes to help those going on trips to help them prepare spiritually and mentally for what is ahead. Thus, we know this team had spent time before the trip preparing spiritually and were eager to share the results of being tuned in to what God had for them.

Experience Life Church and Austin Wideman also argued that the team who came from the United States had just as much to learn from the locals as the locals had to learn from them. A female voice told the audience, “God loves Guatemala just as much as God loves Lubbock, Texas, in that His love was here before we even got here and it’s gonna be here when we leave.” This narration gave audience members a great reminder that the people in Guatemala were not projects, but brothers and sisters in Christ from whom the
team had as much to learn as they had to teach. One voice talked about the traditions the
Guatemalans have and what she learned from them saying:

Here, in Guatemala, they stick to tradition and they see what has worked in
the past and they want to hold true to that because that’s what’s important
to them. I loved it. I love the food. I love the potholes in the street. I love
the donkeys walking on the side of the road. I love it all.

Though the team from Lubbock came from a culture that was wildly different from the
one they experienced in Guatemala, they saw the value in their differences and
understanding that there was more than one right way to do things. This was also
depicted by a man describing their time working with the men pouring concrete.

yeah concrete was hard work but really awesome to work alongside the
people there. Seeing the way they do things, everything is done manually
and the processes they’ve come up with to get the job done the most
efficient way they can, it’s pretty amazing—it’s pretty awesome to see.

This man’s description is a great example of how the team took time to learn and did not
rush in with new ways to do things; rather, they spent time learning from and
understanding the ways of the people they were working with. This is an invaluable
characteristic of missionaries working ethically, as partners and not saviors, in foreign
countries. The team noticed the Guatemalans were extremely generous, noting,

these people, they don’t have very much. So they’re literally killing their
chickens and they’re serving them to us and not really leaving any for
themselves. They’re giving everything that they have all the time. I think
they set another example for us as believers that giving everything that you
have to the Lord because it’s not yours it’s His.

Again, the Experience Life Church team, by putting aside their own expectations and
cultural norms, learned valuable lessons from the people they were doing life with in
Guatemala. Their testimonies taught audience members they did not go to show the
Guatemalans how to do things; rather, they went to learn and help however the
Guatemalans needed. One narrator described their time together by saying,

It was just such unity and such honor to be with those men and know that
one day we will be worshiping in the kingdom with those men and how
much stronger they were in the Lord and how much more faith that they had
in the Lord than what I have.

This narrator again reminded the audience that the Kingdom of God is better as a unified
team and that all cultures have much to learn from each other. Through these narrations,
the rhetor argued both groups had things to learn and worked humbly together toward the
goals of the trip.

Pathos

There are many things for a rhetor to consider when communicating with an
audience, one of those things being the emotions they may induce with their message.
Being aware of the audience members emotional state and how the information will
impact them are very important for the rhetor to consider when creating their message.
Pathos, or emotions, are a valuable tool when rhetors begin thinking about how to
connect with their audience. For the purpose of this analysis, I will analyze appeals using
pathos on the basis of two components: (1) mood/tone and (2) motivation/reference to
pleasure or pain.

Mood/tone. The mood/tone communicated in this video was one of hope,
compassion, happiness, and inspiration. The rhetor opened this video with footage of a
man overlooking the ocean as the narrator remembered,

the [native] people did not believe that there was any God anywhere that
cared for them; they cared for the gods. They did the incantations. They did
the prayers. They burned the incense. They carried the gods around. But
there wasn’t a god that could care for them. And so when a team comes that
is so full of love and so full of the love of Christ and the love just spills out,
just pour out of them onto the people, it is like refreshing water that just washes their soul.

As this narration from the long-term Guatemalan missionary progressed, the video changed to footage of the team riding the bus to the village laughing and enjoying each other’s company. One girl wore a brightly colored headband of yellow and purple that added to the happy tone. As the video continued, the rhetor showed footage of little kids in the streets smiling, women in the villages weaving on looms with brightly colored strings, and locals laughing. Later, the audience got to hear about the success the team experienced when many locals came to know the Lord and dedicated their lives to Him. Each of these examples demonstrated a tone of hope and left the audience with feelings of inspiration and compassion. As I will describe in more detail later, unlike many other videos of this kind, this particular video did a great job of showing this nation of poverty in a way that is hopeful and ethical.

**Motivation/reference to pleasure or pain.** The mood and tone of the video played directly into the rhetor’s motivation—for audience members to see the outcomes of the trips and somehow get involved. Thus, the rhetor appealed to excitement by showing the team driving into the villages in anticipation of what they would be doing the next few days; the rhetor showed the hope through the narration of those on the trip, talked about the life change, sacrifice of the people they were working with, and unity that took place while they were there. They rhetor showed the depravity of the situation through quotes, such as when a narrator discussed how the Guatemalan people have so much less and yet continue to give to the missionaries, and video clips, but also highlighted that the situation is not without hope. While listening to narration describing the hard work the long-term team has been working toward for many years, footage
played of people hugging and smiling, depicting that while there has been struggle, they were seeing the fruit of the hard work. This was the team’s motivation to continue through the tough situations—they saw the hope that perseverance provides.

**Ethos**

*Ethos*, for the purpose of this analysis, is made up of three elements: credibility, image (reputation and appearance), and similitude. Each component assists in the rhetor’s quest for the audience to view them as trustworthy. Audience members want to know if the rhetor is trustworthy (credibility), if the work is professionally presented (image, reputation, and appearance), and if they as an audience member can relate to the content being shared (similitude).

**Credibility.** Experience Life Church had some credibility with its target audience—church members who watched this video in a gathering about mission work. There was a certain level of trust gained by the church with the members who have decided to worship and attend. Wideman also had credibility with those watching this video on his YouTube channel as they had chosen to watch it and sought it out because they were interested in the videos he created. Another way Wideman demonstrated credibility was by beginning the video with audio from the long-term missionary, Mike McComb, hosting the short-term team coming to work. He spoke in the native language and described why having the team come to work with them was beneficial and important. The rhetor continued to build credibility by inserting references to Biblical principles and referencing the work being done by the team. One narrator described,

> they’re literally killing their chickens and they’re serving them to us and not really leaving any for themselves. They’re giving everything that they have all the time. I think they set another example for us as believers that giving everything that you have to the Lord because it’s not yours it’s His.
This Biblical principle bolstered the credibility of the team by demonstrating they learned from the locals and had a deep understanding of the life of Jesus. As mentioned, they also built credibility with video and narration about the work they did while in Guatemala; they described the concrete work as hard but a great opportunity to learn about the locals’ process of getting this task done. The rhetor partnered this narration with footage of the locals and missionaries working together on a concrete project. They worked together to get the project done, learning from each other in the process. Audience members could see the work that was accomplished and hear about what participants learned along the way, adding to their trustworthiness.

**Image: Reputation and appearance.** The rhetor put his best foot forward by using high-quality footage and well-cut videography for this video. Wideman was an experienced videographer working to tell a story through video, weaving footage and narration together to create a seamless storyline of the trip. In doing so, he invited audience members to momentarily participate in the trip, to journey with the team to Guatemala and see what this trip was all about. Each shot in this video drew the audience into a deeper understanding of the culture and the participants’ experience. Wideman showed this team was humble and excited to serve; accompanied by images of tearful faces and people hugging, a narrator voiced over saying, “we encourage those leaders and those pastors who are in the thick of it every single day, we help them to reap a harvest that they have been working hard for for years.” This narration alongside the video footage demonstrated the humility of the team, much like mentioned previously by McComb. The reputation of this team came from their humility and submission to what
the Lord had for them. Wideman used the footage and narration to highlight these elements for the audience.

**Similitude.** While the rhetor succeed in many areas, the *Guatemala Mission Trip* video did not do a great job exemplifying “people like us.” Throughout the video the rhetors showed people of mostly the same ages and ethnicities within the mission team. The exception was one scene, when the team was sitting outside near some trees and viewers were able to see the diversity represented in the team. But for the most part, other than the long-term missionary, this short-term team looked to be made up of college students and young adults. This team was a mix of males and females who, from these shots, appeared to be mostly white. While this may have demonstrated Wideman’s largest audience (as in his YouTube profile, he appeared to be about the same age as many represented), this likely did not represent all the people who attended Experience Life or who the church was looking to have participate in their mission trips. Experience Life’s target audience, the people they wanted to participate in future trips, were anyone that was willing and able to participate. So, while Wideman made this video originally for personal use, it would be helpful for him and the church to consider diversity as it relates to similitude for their congregants.

**Ethical Storytelling**

The rhetorician has a huge responsibility when it comes to reporting mission work. How missionaries report to funding congregations and supporters about their trip contributes largely to the way these audience members view their role in the story of mission work. Ethical reporting, for the purpose of this analysis, consists of characterization, point of view, and narrative progression. The way the rhetor
communicates these concepts determines the relationship the audience will feel toward the subjects. The work can be seen as one-sided, or as a partnership with mutual benefit. The way the audience views these relationships is determined by the way they are talked about and depicted.

**Characterization.** The rhetor did a great job throughout this video of showing both cultures interacting and contributing positively. Before talking about pouring concrete together, there was a shot of the team and locals circled up and holding hands praying together. Wideman also included footage of the team and the locals working together pouring concrete, laughing and playing together, and praying as a larger group with the kids and families who came for VBS. This footage demonstrated partnership and value in difference. Though they all came from different backgrounds and walks of life, the footage portrayed their desire to learn and grow together. Wideman emphasized this by what the team had to say about the trip; as previously described, they wanted to learn from the locals and experience the culture. The team also talked about how their time with the Guatemalans told a bigger story about the ways God was at work among both groups. They knew that God was active while they were there, would continue to be when they left, and that He was working in the hearts of all involved.

**Point of view.** The video was narrated from the perspectives of many participants from the trip, including the long-term missionary who hosted the team. This first-person narration allowed the audience to hear the stories and think about what it would be like to be in their shoes and go on a trip with Experience Life. Having multiple voices, both male and female, involved also gave the audience a fuller story than just one person telling their perspective. It would be helpful in future videos for Experience Life and
Wideman to consider getting audio testimonies from the locals they are partnering with; this would enable them to tell an even fuller story and capture the essence of partnership and working together.

**Narrative progression.** The rhetor began this story with a narration of a long-term missionary telling the story of how the locals in this village came to know about God. Mike McComb explained, “the [native] people did not believe there was any God anywhere that cared for them.” He then unpacked how the Gospel has impacted this community and how the mission efforts have been beneficial. As outlined in previous sections, as this story unfolded, members from the team explained what the experience of the trip was like for them, what they learned, and how they saw God working among them. These examples demonstrated the team was learning from the locals about the culture and participate in ways that were helpful. They talked about the Guatemalans’ generosity, how it taught them to be generous, and the faithfulness they observed. The team went from being strangers in an unfamiliar place, to sharing with the camera the joys of their time together and the things they learned from their new friends. The way this story was told, through first-person narrations, was beneficial as each person’s experience wove with another’s to capture the full story of the trip. This progression brought the story full circle as it told the journey these Guatemalan Christians took from not knowing God to now using their faith to impacting those who came to visit. Not only did audience members see how those serving on the trip aided the Guatemalans, they saw how the Guatemalans served them as well. This is the type of full circle storytelling, of the Experience Life team going to serve and later realizing they had things to learn from the locals as well, increased the view of partnership in mission’s rhetoric.
Pity Appeals

Within the sphere of missions reporting, it is common practice for organizations to use pity to persuade their audiences to participate in/contribute to their mission work. This often includes photos or stories of impoverished children intended to inspire immediate action from audience members as they worry about what will happen if they do not participate. As I argue in this chapter, there are better ways to use emotion to invite audience members to be part of mission efforts. In analyzing pity appeals, I considered the rhetors’ use of photos depicting those in need or those portrayed as needing “to be fixed” within the artifact.

While this video utilized footage of what would be considered destitute situations – images of women and children in poverty, footage of situations that look to be without hope (small amounts of food, manual labor) – Wideman and Experience Life did a great job of using this footage ethically to portray a different message. Instead of using this footage to talk about the community’s desperation or lack of opportunities, the rhetors used this footage to talk about the hope and knowledge the locals shared with their team. The rhetor the team used to talk about the locals was authentic and ethical, sharing about their time together in a way that was empowering. This shift away from pity appeals was refreshing and a great example for other churches and organizations communicating about their mission work in similar countries.

Conclusion

Experience Life Church and Wideman did an exemplary job of demonstrating how churches and individuals can showcase a trip in an ethical way, which in turn promoted sustainable missions. Through the use (or lack thereof) of logos, pathos, ethos,
ethical storytelling, and pity appeals, this video captured the audience’s attention and tells the story of a trip that is mutually beneficial and worth participating in. First, through logos, the rhetor used data representing the trip’s impact, related to the audience, and used clear arguments. Then, through pathos, the rhetor used the mood/tone and motivation to represent the partnership taking place. Credibility, image (reputation and appearance), and similitude encapsulate ethos and show the audience that the rhetor and message can be trusted. However, as previously described, the rhetor did not do a great job of capturing “people like me;” this is the biggest area the rhetor could improve to make the video accessible and relatable to more people. Through ethical storytelling—the video’s characterization, point of view, and narrative progression—the rhetor displayed how missionaries can communicate about a community’s lack of resources while still sharing a hopeful message that is inviting to audience members. Finally, through pity appeals, or rather lack of pity appeals, the rhetor showed again that communication about a place in great need can be hopeful, full of partnership, and still invite people to want to join in. Overall, this video did a great job of just that—inverting audience members to participate in an effort that was a partnership with mutual benefit. This video showed the importance of partnership and how through joining together, mission efforts can be sustainable, ethical, and authentic.
CHAPTER III

NOONDAY AND SSEKO

Noonday and Sseko are two companies working to share fashion in ways that support more than the consumer. Both companies have business models that work to enable artisans in typically impoverished countries to generate income and have a more hopeful future. Additionally, both companies also empower women (typically in the West) to sell the products made by artisans—thus creating business opportunities for women across the globe. Noonday and Sseko are dedicated to improving fashion and consumerism, especially in the United States. They provide fair wages for those they employ, unlike most of the fashion industry. This type of business model is on the rise, and these two companies know the impact and payoff is worth the investment.

As I will explain, both companies use the language of partnership, using words like “family” and “sisters” to describe artisans on the other side of the world. Noonday and Sseko are making huge strides in the way organizations communicate about third-world work, and thus, a lot can be learned from each company. In this chapter, by analyzing the “Impact” page on the Noonday website and their Instagram page as well as Sseko’s “Our Story” and “Sseko Graduates” pages, I will answer the question: how can ethical businesses use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions?

Noonday

Jessica Honegger founded Noonday in 2010 as an effort to raise funds to adopt her son, Jack. Honegger had spent significant time abroad in various countries learning
Spanish and seeing the immense need for opportunities for local artisans. She saw artisans who made jewelry and bags but had no one to buy their goods; as a result, they could not make money. Then, she began dreaming about what it would look like for these women to not only sell their products but to also tell their stories. At the first Noonday trunk show for her son Jack, Jessica sold her friends pieces of jewelry she had collected on trips around the world and told the stories of the artisans who made them. Today, the company is much bigger than Jessica’s living room; it covers many living rooms across the United States where women do exactly what Jessica did in her early years—tell the stories of men and women who create and who now have people supporting their businesses.¹

Sseko

After college, Liz Bohannan, founder of Sseko, visited Uganda “on somewhat of a whim.”² She set out to learn. She knew there was still a lot she did not know and was interested in seeing life from a new perspective. During this trip she met young women her age who were working hard to learn and lead. However, she noticed that because of their gender and the structure of the country, many did not have the opportunity to work during their gap year between secondary school and university, making it fiscally impossible for them to continue. Liz wanted to help. Her first attempt at creating opportunity was a chicken farm that she now looks back on and laughs. It did not work out. She began designing sandals and hunting for materials. She writes in a letter on her website that she


had entered into a community, like most communities, with obvious brokenness and despair. But there was also so much hope, success and life. I believed that these women deserved the same opportunity to continue their education that I had been afforded. But I also believed that our world needed these women to have voice and platform to create change.³

And so, she set out to give these girls a chance to make money at a place that was “dignified and honoring.”⁴ That is how Sseko was born—out of a heart for growing the opportunity for women in Uganda. Today, the partnership is flourishing, employing Ugandan and American women and connecting them all to opportunities for empowerment and business.

**Audience**

In all types of communication, it is important for rhetors to be mindful of their audiences. Knowing their audience, rhetors can tailor their message in a way that meets each member where he or she is. Noonday and Sseko both have target audiences to whom they gear their content.

Based on the products Noonday sells, it is no secret that the company is aimed toward women. Their Instagram page usually features younger to middle-aged women, making it seems as though this is their target demographic. In an email interview with their Press Department, Noonday said, “our target audience tends to be middle-aged women who are engaged with their communities and interested in socially responsible business.”⁵ Their audience is currently limited to women in the United States, as this is the only country where Noonday ships their products.

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Sseko’s audience is similar to Noonday’s as they target women looking to purchase world-changing products. In an email interview with their Customer Service department, they replied that their target audience is “women of all ages! Mainly women from 20-60!” This large target gives the company vast options for the range of which they can communicate and advertise.

**Exigence and Context**

The demand for companies like Noonday and Sseko is great because, as Forbes argues, “the most fulfilling goods and services are those that connect us in relevant ways to other people and help us live in concert with our values.” In a world of fast fashion, poor working conditions, and low-quality products, organizations like Noonday and Sseko are gaining traction and popularity among those who see the problem and want to be part of the solution. This trend is especially popular with millennials who are known for their interests in social justice and sustainability.

**Social Entrepreneurship and Fast Fashion**

Fast fashion is gaining notoriety around the world. What used to be a four-season calendar for clothes being debuted for each new season is now in some cases a 52-week calendar. Clothes cycle quickly, and products are made cheaply with no expectation to last long-term. Ed Filipowski, president of KCD, a public relations firm that represents some of the biggest and best-known brands in fashion, says this of the change in the fashion industry:

> What that has done is made the industry move faster and work faster and have to produce more product. It's created a sort of year-round calendar for

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fashion as opposed to a biannual calendar for fashion. It's made our job a lot harder and it's made creativity a constant challenge.  

This change in cycle also affects those producing the product. According to Forbes, 75 million people are making clothes today; 80% of the clothes are made by women who are only 18-24 years old. Ayesha Barenblat, founder of Remake (a company dedicated to sustainable fashion), answered in a Q&A posted on Forbes that

Cheap clothes are made by underage workers entering the industry as young as 14 to work long hard hours (an avg. 14 hrs per day in sweatshops) for low wages, while dealing with sexual harassment.

These unbelievable conditions stacked on top of poor wages are somewhat unavoidable to those looking for income in any way they can find it. First-world consumers of the fashion industry should be on guard for this type of mistreatment and vote with their dollars by choosing to support companies that are making a positive change.

Especially in recent years, many companies and individuals have been on the lookout for ways to create sustainability and change. Orsola de Castro, founder and creative director of Fashion Revolution, said in an interview with Vogue, that

transparency is the first step towards a different culture, one where brands become open and accountable, and customers are ready to become vigilant and ask, “who made my clothes?” Transparency provides an open door. We can’t fix what we can’t see... We need to make it as easy for us to see the clothes as it is to buy the clothes.

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Thus, a growing number of companies are reaching for higher standards, providing information about what they pay their employees, their working conditions, and producing clothing or jewelry on more of a traditional four-season schedule. These companies are often referred to as social entrepreneurs, as they aim to solve problems and create change through their business efforts. While there is still plenty of work to be done, companies like Noonday and Sseko are driving forces in an industry in need of serious revision. Both companies are open about the way they treat their employees and are willing (and happy!) to answer questions about on the subject. The honesty and visibility of both companies is setting a standard of higher quality and better accountability for those involved in fashion.

**Countries of Impact**

Together, Noonday and Sseko are working to change lives by giving Artisans and their families dependable jobs in thirteen countries: Uganda, Afghanistan, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, India, Kenya, Nepal, Peru, and Vietnam. Many of the countries of impact have had or are currently experiencing similar struggles. Many are coming out of wars including civil war; most are in need of reliable job opportunities that are not dependent on weather; countless are currently experiencing or have experienced poverty—some due to rapid population growth in their country; many are affected by HIV/AIDS; most deal with gender discrimination and sexual exploitation; and many have experienced natural disasters and government corruption.\(^\text{11}\) All of these issues affect

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countries and families differently; however, each of these problems creates instability. Through their time in these countries, Noonday and Sseko have helped to create stable jobs and environments for Artisans and their families to flourish amongst the chaos and trauma around them.

**Analysis**

In the following pages, I will be analyzing how both Noonday and Sseko utilize rhetorical elements to promote partnership and community among their audience members. I will do so by looking at the “Impact” page on the Noonday website and their Instagram page as well as Sseko’s “Our Story” and “Sseko Graduates” pages. Ultimately, my analysis in this chapter answers the question: how do ethical businesses use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions?

**Logos**

As I previously described, *logos* is a complex concept that encompasses both how a claim is worded and how the argument itself is structured. The way rhetors use words to

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structure a claim or argument is fundamental to how that claim or argument is perceived and received. It is important for claims to have evidence to back up what the rhetor is trying to prove as well as make sure it is pertinent to the audience. It is also vital to make sure the arguments and claims are clear so the audience knows what the rhetor is saying.

In this section, I will analyze the previously described elements of Noonday and Sseko using *logos* on the basis of data (through the use of facts and figures), relevance to the audience (through the use of organization and visual appeals), and clear arguments (through the use of other forms of proof such as narratives or analogies).

**Data.** After even a brief look at Noonday’s website, it was easy to see they wanted visitors to know the impact of a purchase. On their webpage dedicated to describing that impact, Noonday reported the data to back up their work. As of June 2018, the company had 29 artisan business partners (these are the craftworkers in other countries who make the items Noonday Ambassadors sell). With 29 artisan business partners, Noonday directly impacted 4,431 artisans whom these businesses employ. In doing so, 20,354 family members experienced a change and impact in their life. Along with the artisans, 1,600 ambassadors have benefited from Noonday’s work by selling this product and from product sales, Noonday has supported 3,500 adoptive families.¹³

Noonday also strategically used data in posts on Instagram. In a recent post they stated, this yellow house is the jewelry worship of Fermin and Madelyn, Artisans who create jewelry for Noonday in Peru. Fermin has created jewelry for 25 years. Together they employ 15 people who hand craft jewelry for Noonday’s customers. For Fermin, supporting the economic health of this community is the principal reason he continues his work. He shared, “We

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want to provide people with the tools to get ahead and ensure that they always have a place with us here.”

This data not only told the customer facts about the company but also allowed them to see the number of people and the depth of benefit from this effort through storytelling. Another post from February 15, 2018 stated “Adventure awaits. Spring 2018 is here. Shop 90 new styles by 4,500 artisans in 12 countries.” Repeating the data on Instagram that they had on their website was beneficial for those who may not yet go on the webpage; this was a great way to introduce new and old customers to how their purchases made a difference in the lives of those around the world.

Sseko also used data to support their claims. On their Mission and Impact page, Sseko reported 87 graduates of their program with 50 women currently employed in Uganda. Alongside their mission statement, these facts and figures showed those visiting the website the actual lives being changed with this sustainable opportunity. On the Sseko Graduates page, visitors were able to see each graduate—all 87—and read about their stories and the difference working with Sseko has made in their lives.

**Relevance to the audience.** Noonday’s Impact page provided the audience with information that was relevant to them by using clear organization on their page—each section was clear and the progression of content was logical. The sections had clear headings like “Women are Empowered,” “Children are Cherished,” “People have Jobs,” and “We are Connected.” Visitors to the page knew what to expect based on these headings; they were then able to see what content interested them most and visit

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accordingly as the information was broken up and easily accessible. Not only did the Impact page have clear organization, it also had great visual appeal with photographs of ambassadors and artisans. Alongside the headings, anyone who looked at this page could clearly see the impact made by those participating in Noonday. On their Instagram profile, their “stories” were organized into categories so viewers could go back and look at them even after they had “expired.” These categories included: podcast, #noondaystyle, join+host, the jewelry, artisans, quotes, and travel. In their stories and throughout their page, Noonday used high-quality visuals to share the stories of Artisans and Ambassadors. Many of the photographs told the stories of Artisans who made the jewelry. In conjunction with compelling stories of those participating in their brand, Noonday used organization and visual appeals to show their audience how their purchases made an impact. This demonstrated relevance by not only having the compelling stories, but making them visible and accessible so their target audience could see the people serving and being served were people like them.

Similarly, Sseko used their website to tell their story. On their Mission and Impact page, Sseko clearly and chronologically told their narrative while addressing the issues they found in Uganda. They described four issues:

Female students in Uganda, due to lack of economic opportunity, are not able to continue on to university and pursue leadership positions in society; In patriarchal and male dominated societies, women are not afforded the same employment and economic opportunities as their male counterparts; Although charities and non-profits play a vital and necessary role in all societies, sometimes charity and aid can play a negative role by enabling dependencies and damaging the local economies. Like us, our friends in Africa need and desire opportunity, dignity, job creation and empowerment; and while women in East Africa need opportunity and encouragement, women elsewhere do too! Many women in the U.S. are unable to find work
that they are passionate about, that also allows them to support themselves and their families. 16

Each issue acted as a header, and below each Sseko described how they have begun to tackle that issue. They did this in a way that continued to elaborate on their mission and vision. On this page they also shared photographs both of the women in Uganda and of the Ambassadors in America. These photographs visually demonstrated partnership that was taking place and benefiting both parties, making it relevant to their target audience of American women interested in being agents for sustainable change. On the Sseko Graduates page, viewers could see each of the Ugandan women who had graduated out of the program. Each had a professionally shot picture that those visiting the website could click on to read about their journey and future plans. There did not seem to be any system to how the graduates were organized on the website (not in alphabetical order, possibly by graduating class). It would be helpful to have some sort of system for viewers, though it is not vital to how they have the page. Visually, the page was exciting to look at as it showed all of the graduates beaming smiles, knowing they have accomplished something great. This page did a great job of helping those interested in participating see the benefit of their purchase.

Clear arguments. Noonday wrote on their Impact page that “together we’re building a flourishing world where women are empowered, children are cherished, people have jobs, and we are connected.”17 This statement was then backed up by all the data, words describing the work, photographs for readers to see the effects of this work


clearly, from start to finish. This was what Noonday was working to build and create. The argument clearly tied to the goals the company was measuring, which made the outcomes of their goals accessible for their audience. On Noonday’s Instagram, the argument seemed to be “your shopping can make an impact.” It is true that when we spend, we cast a vote with our dollars about what matters to us. Noonday was encouraging its audience to think about that vote and the impact it had, not only on your wallet, but on the people who made the products. They argued this by sharing stories and testimonies of artisans and showing the impact that was taking place in their lives.

Sseko outlined four clear issues on their Mission and Impact page, saying that female students were not able to be leaders in their society because men are given these roles. These women, like all women, “need and desire opportunity, dignity, job creation and empowerment.” These four issues drove Sseko as they looked to create solutions. Each argument was then backed up with a story and an explanation of how the company was currently working on bettering the situation. For example, in discussing the problem of charities enabling dependencies and damaging local economies, Sseko wrote that instead of treating the symptoms, we aim to address the deeper, underlying issues of extreme poverty. Although Sseko Designs has been built for the purpose of impacting a specific social sector, we have chosen very intentionally to use a sustainable, self-sufficient business model to do this. Our hope is to help create industry and fair-trade with the belief that a large component of economic development lies in the business sector. We believe in the power of responsible consumerism. Instead of competing for limited donor dollars, we hope consumers think about the story behind their “stuff.” If we considered the impact that each product we consume has on the lives of those who produced that product and chose to see consumerism as a force and opportunity for positive social change, we believe the world would be filled with beautiful products with even more beautiful stories.19

As demonstrated by this example, each solution was clearly articulated and beneficial to readers looking to understand more about this effort.

On the Sseko Graduates page, the unstated argument seemed to be that this program gave these women hope for a better future. Each picture of the graduates was a girl smiling as big as smiles go. By clicking on her photograph, audience members could see the effect being part of Sseko had on her life. Not only did she have a useful skill, she had money to continue on to university and reach for new and exciting goals—goals that would not be there without Sseko. With each picture, Sseko was showing the audience this business model was more than a program, it was a sustainable way to empower women.

Pathos

Pathos, or emotions, are a vital part of persuasion and decision making. Rhetors can get a feel for an audience and guide them in certain directions if they are aware of the emotional state of the audience and how best to communicate based on this information. For the purpose of this analysis, I will analyze appeals using pathos on the basis of two components: (1) mood/tone and (2) motivation/reference to pleasure or pain.

Mood/tone. Noonday’s Impact page used mood and tone to show audience members what it was like to be impacted by their mission. Each element of their webpage contributed to a feeling of joy and hopefulness. The first way they did this is through words. The page clearly stated their mission: “people have jobs, we are connected, women are empowered, and children are cherished.” This statement alone was powerful in setting a tone that demonstrated Noonday’s dedication to leaving the world better than

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they found it. Next, they enhanced this message by utilizing pictures and colors. All of
the photographs on this page were of people smiling. Some of the pictures showed people
hugging; there were many races and genders represented demonstrating community and
possibility when partnership was utilized. Colors on the page were bright; the background
of the site was white so everything popped from it. Each photograph was well lit to
emphasize the emotions of joy and hope found in the mission. Similarly, on their
Instagram, Noonday used photographs of smiles and hugs and community. These photos
again emphasized the value of partnership and the hope and joy found therein. Pictures of
jewelry or inspirational quotes always included bright fun colors, drawing the eye to read
the captions about the work being done by Artisan partners and Ambassadors. One
specific post from April 28, 2018, showed bright yellow earrings with other colorful
earrings around it. The caption read:

We believe that profit and purpose go hand-in-hand. By connecting Artisan
Entrepreneurs to a growing marking, we enable them to make a sustainable
impact in their communities. And we have seen that this is working! Businesses are being built where none existed before. Jobs are being created. Lives are being impacted. With every Trunk Show hosted, we’re creating a marketplace for change. World-changing pieces making a world-changing impact.\(^{21}\)

Here, through pictures and words, Noonday was sharing the impact of their mission. By
using bright colors, thoughtful pictures, and inspiring words, they were sharing a message
of joy and hope.

On Sseko’s Mission and Impact page, the company utilized words to demonstrate
hope and joy as well.\(^{22}\) Previously, I described the four problems they outlined on this

\(^{21}\) Noonday Collection (@noondaycollection), Instagram, April 28, 2018,
https://www.instagram.com/p/BiH1As8DNTC/?taken-by=noondaycollection.
\(^{22}\) “Mission & Impact.”
page. Under each problem was the solution Sseko was implementing to help women in Uganda. Problem two highlighted the fact that many societies, including Uganda, were mainly male-dominated and that women were not able to make the same strides in employment as men. Sseko worked to combat this by providing employment for women who have aged out of the education system and have no other form of income generation. We partner with a local non-profit in Uganda that works with young women who have recently come out of the commercial sex industry.23

Each of these solutions centered around empowerment and sustainability. Sseko was not interested in band-aid, short-term solutions but rather wanted these women to be able to graduate and be influencers in their communities and to provide hope for their future. Thus, they wrote about how these solutions were changing the trajectory of the life of each woman who came through their doors. Sseko also used photographs of these ladies smiling and being silly—showing the joy that came from not having to stress about where their money for university will come from. Some of the women were wearing party hats; others are holding glass bottles with straws like they were celebrating their accomplishments. There was also a photograph of Sseko Fellows on this page (the American women who sold the Ugandan-made products).24 These women were of different ethnicities and ages, smiling as to say “this is what sustainable partnership looks like—women of all races and backgrounds can participate in making our world a better place.” The Sseko Graduates page did this as well with few words (unless you click on a

specific graduate). The 87 pictures of the graduates holding their names and smiling wide showed website visitors the life change Sseko had given each graduate. By clicking on a name, anyone interested could read about the dreams each girl now had the hope to accomplish—things like becoming a doctor, public administrator, artist, or teacher! These pictures and stories showed the good coming out of this organization—the joy and hope coming from the sustainable mission that took place.

Motivation/reference to pleasure or pain. In all the artifacts I am analyzing—Noonday’s Impact page, Instagram, Sseko’s Mission and Impact page and their Sseko Graduates page—the motivation behind the pictures and words seemed to be the same. Though taking a slightly different route due to the country or their specific audience, both companies told the stories of individuals impacted by their mission. Each company told these stories to persuade those reading to get involved. By seeing the impact and life change for the participants, Noonday and Sseko invited their mediated audience to join in the story by purchasing products or becoming one of their on the ground salespeople. The companies motivated individuals to be involved because the companies were motivated to help create sustainable change for the people they were working with—not only abroad but also their Ambassadors and Fellows in America.

To motivate individuals to participate, Noonday used their Impact page and Instagram to show how they were working to create a better life and environment for all involved. Sseko, on the other hand, on their Mission and Impact page, outlined why this was such a big deal by writing out the problems they were helping solve with their

program. The Graduates page then showed how this solution was beneficial, demonstrating the hope previously described. Both companies utilized their words and photographs to demonstrate for audience members the impact made abroad and in their home country. The widespread impact was a motivator, showing that participants got to be part of something greater than themselves as they sought to better the world for themselves and others.

**Ethos**

As previously described, I will analyze appeals with *ethos* on the basis of three components: credibility, image (reputation and appearance), and similitude. Credibility looks at how the speaker or rhetor demonstrates his or her trustworthiness to the audience; image (reputation and appearance) unpacks details such as the professional quality of the work produced and how these items are presented; and finally, similitude investigates how the information presented relates to his or her personal life.

**Credibility.** Users could easily see and understand Noonday’s credibility by accessing a few little icons in the bottom corner of the Impact page. In the bottom right corner of the page, viewers could see a symbol labeled “Fair-Trade Federation.” In addition to this, Noonday was a Better Business Bureau Accredited Business, a Certified B Corporation, and a member of the Direct Selling Association. All of these organizations were responsible for holding members to higher standards for paying employees, working conditions, and all sorts of other requirements. Many companies do not participate in these as programs, as their standards were very high; it is easier to do the minimum or cut corners to ensure low prices for Americans used to being able to buy whatever they want whenever they want. However, that has a price for those on the
production side of the industry. As I described above, recently many were seeing the ill impact of fast fashion and thus were using their dollars and voices to push for fair wages and working conditions. The Fair-Trade Federation, Better Business Bureau, Certified B Corporation, and Direct Selling Association all gave Noonday credibility that they are not only doing things “above board” but that they were going the extra mile to ensure those working with and for them were treated fairly—even treated well.

This gives buyers and those interested in their mission confidence that Noonday as a company was not just interested in sales but that they truly care about bettering the environments of those working for them. Being transparent with their audience gave them an advantage in all communication because their audience knew they were a credible organization. On their Instagram page, they demonstrated credibility by sharing photos and testimonies of their employees. As I mentioned earlier, Fermin shared that “we want to provide people with the tools to get ahead and ensure that they always have a place with us here.” Testimonies from employees such as this one effectively communicated that they wanted people to know Noonday was a place they can work for a long time, providing readers with confidence that the working conditions were excellent and the employees were making enough money to enjoy their lives.

In contrast, Sseko did not list any statements about being a fair-trade business or anything similar on their website. On their Mission and Impact page they relied on their solutions to give them credibility—they were helping Ugandans take ownership of a problem by creating sustainable solutions. However, with no credible organizations

verifying their work, they added a fair amount of about how their work was being accomplished. When asked in an email interview, Sseko’s Customer Service department replied, “we are currently not a part of the Fair-Trade Federation. We, however, hold high standards for where we source our products, that our workers are paid a fair wage and that they work in healthy, safe work conditions.”  

Sseko’s Graduate page was probably where readers gained the most confidence in their work. This was where Sseko showed photographs and told the stories of the 87 girls who had graduated from this program. Here readers could see the company’s efforts were working and clearly witness the faces of women who had gone on to university because of their time at Sseko. This provided a level of credibility for the company as they provided video testimonies and written dreams and goals for the women who graduated.

**Image: Reputation and appearance.** Noonday carefully curated their image by strategically posting photographs. Whether on their Impact page or on their Instagram, Noonday used professional photographs that contribute to their overarching message of sustainable mission and partnership. Professional yet relatable, the pictures were presented in a way that was accessible and inspiring to audience members. On Instagram, Noonday utilized trends in media and fashion to advertise its product and message demonstrating they were “in the know.” A post from April 15, 2018, read, “here’s to slow Sundays,” accompanied by hands holding a cup of coffee over a fuzzy blanket.  

The arms of the person holding the coffee bore one of the bracelets in a recent Noonday line. Instead of simply posting a picture of the bracelet, Noonday utilized current Instagram

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27. Lomax, email with author.  
culture of “slow Sundays,” coffee, and all things aesthetically pleasing to build their overall reputation and appearance as a company that was in touch with their consumers. The photographs they used were professional or look professional in that they were well lit and hold aesthetic value because they were structured and/or posed well. This also showed they were in touch with their consumers and audience members; it took a lot of effort to do Instagram well.

Sseko’s Mission and Impact page used its graduate participants as the face of the organization. This provided a great first-impression image by highlighting who they were all about and reminded website visitors “this is why we do this!” The image below this was a picture of American Fellows, the second group of key players in the organization and another great reminder of what Sseko was all about. On the Graduates page, Sseko used clickable images of the graduates to keep up with the company’s desire to see these students grow and prosper. The physical images of each graduate positively contributed to the image and reputation of the organization, demonstrating they were truly doing what they said they were doing. Each picture showed a student with her name; visitors could click and read more about each girl and her story and see videos of her talking about things like being brave and sharing her favorite part of Sseko. These images and videos contributed positively to the company’s image and reputation.

**Similitude.** Noonday truly wanted its audience to be able to say, “she could be me!”—especially as they worked to recruit new Ambassadors to sell their products. On the Impact page, they used photographs of families, women of all skin colors, and different parts of the world, hopefully leaving viewers thinking someone in the photos is like them, that they had a part and a place in the story Noonday was telling. Their
Instagram page promoted this in another way, by re-posting pictures their Ambassadors had posted. By doing this, they were able to reach a broader audience of people thinking, “Hey! That’s my friend!” and seeing the company was honestly interested in global and individual impact.

To identify with their audience, they also used conversational captions. An April 14, 2018, post reads, “anyone else ready to come out of hibernation? Come on sandal weather. We believe in you!” Women came back in the comments saying things like, “I bought a pair of shorts yesterday and capris . . . it’s still snowing here. But it WILL happen. Maybe in June. But then it’ll be summer.” Or, “@gracestorm23 These shoes are so you.” From one caption, Noonday was able to spark conversation with and among its followers, creating feelings of similarity and community. Another picture from April 9, 2018, showed a woman’s hand holding a Starbucks cup resting on a Target cart with her Noonday purse visibly perched in the child seat with a caption reading, “Heaven, is that you?” The photo got over 65 comments and 1,445 likes. Noonday knew its demographic was primarily women heading out for groceries or needing coffee after a long day; thus, they used pictures to relate to their audience and show them that ladies like them use Noonday products.

Sseko aimed to reach its audience members by using pictures of women of all demographics. On their Mission and Impact page, the photographs Sseko used are not only of graduates but also of Fellows. These pictures related to a wide variety of audience


members. On the Sseko Graduates page, Sseko’s similitude could reach a variety of women. By clicking and reading about the goals and dreams of the graduates, women across the world could relate. Everyone had goals and dreams and could thus see the value in participating in Sseko’s mission. Though many viewing the testimonies and dreams had likely not experienced poverty in the way the graduates have, the viewers could relate to dreaming, wanting to reach goals, and working to better their lives. This may look different for everyone, but it was something everyone can relate to. In this way, Sseko reached a large audience and related to them by showing them every woman could dream.

**Ethical Storytelling**

Ethical storytelling plays an important role in missions reporting and persuasion. How missionaries report their work on the field is instrumental in how those viewing the content perceive the country, its people, and the audience’s relationship to the people. There are ways for individuals and organizations to report that provide dignity and partnership. For the purpose of this thesis, I will analyze ethical storytelling through the functions of characterization, point of view, and narrative progression.

**Characterization.** Noonday utilized words and images on their Impact page to demonstrate both local artisans and Ambassadors were agents for change in this story. Under the heading “People have Jobs,” the text read:

> We believe that dignified work changes lives and allows people to flourish. We empower Artisan Entrepreneurs to impact their communities by creating sustainable jobs. Here in the US, we have also empowered over 1400 women to launch their own flexible businesses as Noonday Ambassadors.³¹

³¹. “Discover Your Impact.”
Here Noonday outlined that there was not one group getting more opportunity or attention over the other. Both groups were winning in this situation. The pictures on this page also captured diversity—there were African Americans, Asians, and white Americans represented, male and female. This page aimed to demonstrate this effort that Noonday’s business practices were good for everyone. On their Instagram page, they communicated similar goals, using pictures of women of every race—some famous, some Ambassadors, some pictures of older ladies, some younger. One post from March 25, 2018, read:

Sisterhood is powerful. Being an Ambassador means leading a life of impact, creating sustainable income for Artisans and their families, being your own boss with your own schedule, product discounts, traveling globally to meet our Artisan Partners, and more! But along with all of that, you get this incredible sisterhood of women who are pulling for you, coaching you, inspiring you and running alongside you. You get a community that assumes the best in one another and believes that “her success doesn’t diminish mine.” We’re better together than we could ever be apart. Will you join us?32

This text was accompanied by a photograph of American Ambassadors with founder Jessica Honegger. While emphasizing the Ambassador Program, this post spoke to a characterization Noonday built throughout their Instagram feed: we are better together. The Ambassadors were without jobs without the Artisans, and the Artisans were without jobs without the Ambassadors. Both groups need each other, and Noonday emphasizes that fact through characterizing them as sisters.

Sseko used their Mission and Impact page to share words of empowerment and mutual benefit. The first three issues on this page talked about the problems Ugandan

women face and how Sseko addressed them. Then, issue number four specifically said, “while women in East Africa need opportunity and encouragement, women elsewhere do too! Many women in the U.S. are unable to find work that they are passionate about, that also allows them to support themselves and their families.” This page shared problems and solutions for both parties, not claiming one party was better off than the other, but recognizing that every demographic had problems that needed creative solutions and that life was better when we offered our strengths to help another’s weakness and vice versa. On the Sseko Graduates page, Sseko told the stories of the graduates outlining their successes and the benefits they gained from participating. This was a great motivator for people who wanted to participate in a company that was helping others; Sseko wrote at the top of the page, “if you are interested in playing a larger role in the Sseko story (and getting connected one-on-one with a Sseko Sister in Uganda), join the Sseko Fellows!” This was a reminder that this program was mutually beneficial. Those in the West could get to know these Sseko Sisters (and Sseko Sisters get to know friends in the West) and hear about their lives and interests—seeing the humanity in each person rather than viewing someone as a product.

Point of view. Noonday did a great job of giving variety to their stories while exhibiting professionalism. Noonday wrote their Impact page from their point of view (first-persons). They used words like “We believe” to represent the brand as they talked about the mission and goals of the organization. On their Instagram page, the words may have come from a content coordinator or communication director, but their photos often came from Ambassadors. This gave Ambassadors ownership by allowing them to play a

33. “Mission & Impact.”
part in communicating the stories of their Artisan friends. By tagging Noonday in their image, any Ambassador’s picture could become part of Noonday’s larger communication story.

Sseko’s Mission and Impact page was also written from their point of view; they talked about the women, Sskeo Sisters and Fellows, who they worked to empower. They did so from a third-person point of view, referencing themselves as Sseko Designs rather than “we.” However, on the Sseko Graduates page, their communication was in first person, using the word “we” and talking about the women who had been able to go to school because of their work in Uganda. Within the student profiles, the written content was again in third person, making the student the central focus, not Sseko. Through their choice of point of view, Sseko aimed to demonstrate that they were a helper but that each of these women was powerful, smart, and able. Sseko wrote each of these sections in a way that contributed to the partnership language of the company, that graduates were fully known and loved thus the language was always terms that aid in empowerment and trust. The videos of the graduates telling audience members what it means to them to be brave or their favorite part of working at Sseko or what their hope is for the future of Uganda, were in first person as the graduates tell their own stories. These videos were beneficial as each girl shares what had been impactful in her own words.

**Narrative progression.** Noonday’s Impact page told a story of hope. They stated at the top of the page, “we believe that style can change world. See how you’re making a meaningful impact in communities across the globe—one necklace at a time.” This statement told a story of partnership, friendship, and sustainable businesses. One of the pictures on this page showed founder Jessica Honegger with a local Artisan. The two
were sitting side-by-side with arms around each other, looking in one another’s eyes and flexing the other arm in a “strong arm” pose. This picture represented the power of partnership and working together, which was exactly what Noonday aimed to communicate. Through their effort, Noonday had been able to help people change their lives. Noonday structured their Impact page to reflect this progression – a narrative that moved from the lack of dignified jobs, through their partnership, into a story of success and change for so many Artisans in these countries. Similarly, Noonday’s Instagram used photographs and narratives to tell a story of hope, partnership, and the change that had taken place through their business’ efforts. As described in other sections, by using photographs of invested Ambassadors alongside professional photographs or products and Artisans, Noonday demonstrated the widespread benefit of belonging to this tribe. This was the narrative that Noonday communicated throughout their Impact page—that through partnership, both parties were able to flourish. Instead of wondering where their next paycheck would come from or worrying about how to feed their family, both Artisans and Ambassadors had security and hope in a job that empowered them to participate.

Sseko’s Mission and Impact page told the story of problem and solution—that as members of the Earth, we had a responsibility to help create and maintain the quality of life for our neighbors. Every member of society, not just Westerners, played a vital role in seeing to it that neighbors had opportunities to use their skills in a way that did not diminish their dignity. This was done through highlighting problems and solutions. Through this, Sseko showed the beginning (the problems) and the progress they made through implementing solutions. Sseko highlighted this further on the Sseko Graduates
page where they told the personal stories of graduates. Each graduate had her own story, interests, and goals. She was an individual who, because of this partnership, could use her skills to provide hope for another person. By telling the stories of these girls, from their time before Sseko to the life they were living, many who without the partnership of this organization, would have had a much harder time reaching university and leadership in their country, Sseko communicated the progression of the partnership, friendship, and hope they had all found.

**Pity Appeals**

It is common knowledge that many mission organizations use pity to persuade audiences to give time or money. Many organizations use photos of small, impoverished children as a way to inspire concern or pity. These photos often inspire immediate contribution as those watching pity what will happen to the suffering people if they do not contribute to the cause. Noonday and Sseko have chosen a different route of inspiring people to participate through sharing testimonies of how their business models are creating sustainable change. I will analyze pity appeals by considering the photos used within Noonday and Sseko’s artifacts that included faces of those in need or situations that seem broken and in need of fixing.

Neither Noonday nor Sseko used pity appeals to move their audience to action. As previously described, both companies made their audiences aware of the threats their artisans faced, and even recognized the struggle for women in the United States looking to find flexible jobs; however, both companies talked about these problems and depicted these problems in photos in ways that were positive and not pity-inducing. Both companies spoke about empowering people through employment opportunities and
partnership. One scroll through Noonday’s Instagram page or Sseko’s website makes it clear that they were aiming to communicate dignity and truth in their advertising and storytelling. This was powerful in that it demonstrated a different way to bring audience members into the story in an ethical way.

Conclusion

Noonday and Sseko did a remarkable job of demonstrating how to communicate ethically about the work they are doing abroad. By utilizing or withholding use of logos, pathos, ethos, ethical storytelling, and pity appeals, both companies show the benefit of using ethical language to communicate and promote sustainable missions. First, through logos, Noonday and Sseko use data of both company’s success, relate to their audience members, and use clear arguments to articulate their messages. Then, by pathos, Noonday and Sseko utilize mood/tone and motivation to demonstrate the impact of their efforts. Noonday and Sseko employ ethos (credibility, image, and similitude) by inviting audience members to participate in the larger story and be agents for change; this is particularly beneficial as the way they use this element is unique to the two companies in this analysis. Through the use of ethical storytelling (characterization, point of view, and narrative progression), Noonday and Sseko share the hope-filled opportunities each company offers to the communities in which they are working; this uniquely involves their ambassador/fellow partners and artisans abroad. Finally, Noonday and Sseko both do a truly exemplary job of demonstrating how to communicate ethically about work abroad. With the use of pity appeals (but really the lack of pity appeals) Noonday and Sseko show audience members that messages can be compelling and hopeful without using photographs or communication that elicits pity. Both of these artifacts do a great
job of showing audiences how groups can communicate about places in need of resources in a way that empowers and demonstrates sustainable, ethical missions.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Within the sphere of short- and long-term missions, rhetoricians struggle to communicate ethically about their work abroad. In many cases, their photos communicate messages that are unethical by exploiting the poor and not showing the full picture of life in foreign countries. The lack of awareness from those producing this type of communication is troubling as it signals a “savior complex” and perpetuates the stereotype of seeing missions as “us” helping “them.” To understand how communication can be done ethically through promoting the language of partnership, I examined artifacts from three rhetors—Experience Life Church, Noonday, and Sseko—through the lens of logos, pathos, ethos, ethical storytelling, and pity appeals. Within each chapter, I was able to understand the rhetorical elements that fostered a language of togetherness and discovered what elements encourage the “us/them” mentality. In the following pages, I will summarize each element and explain how it was used by Experience Life Church, Noonday, and Sseko, before specifically answering my research questions: how can churches and individuals use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions? And how can ethical businesses use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions? In doing so, I hope the case studies I analyzed in this thesis will act as a resource for others to use when considering how to communicate about mission work. The answers to my research questions are in no way definitive answers, but
intended to provide thoughtful guidance about various elements rhetors should consider when communicating.

### Problematic Missions Reporting

As I described in Chapter I, there are many problems with the way rhetors currently communicate about mission work. In her video “Ghana Mission Trip 2017,” Annie Ryan described the mission trip that she and a team took to Ghana, Africa. The video, however, depicted a trip of mostly fun and relaxation, presenting a picture of “voluntourism.” The major problems with this video and the many others like it were the lack of communicating a “big picture” for telling the audience the “why” behind the trip, a lack of contextual information about the country or trip, and ethical issues surrounding how/what this video communicated about the team and their relationship to/with the locals they were visiting. These videos feed into the larger narrative of white Christians from the West dominating, assuming power, and seemingly caring little about how their choices affect others. Thus, it is important to understand how to promote language that softens this type of thinking and rather build on language of partnership and sustainability.

### Logos

For this thesis, I defined *logos* as how rhetors structured their arguments using three elements: data, relevance to the audience, and clear arguments. Experience Life Church and Austin Wideman utilized *logos* by using data to prove their success. They talked about the numbers of people who participated in their mission trip and those who came to know the Lord through the work in the villages. Experience Life Church and Wideman made sure the information was relevant to their audience by using multiple
voices and perspectives to tell their story. Finally, they used clear arguments to communicate how and why the trip was successful—that God worked in the partnering of these churches to change many lives. Overall, Experience Life Church and Wideman did a great job of using *logos* to outline their successes and how the Lord used the locals and missionaries to demonstrate His love.

Noonday used data on both their webpage and Instagram to show the impact being made by their work. In doing so, they proved to their audience the work they are doing is positively affecting those involved. They stayed relevant to their audience by using organization and visual appeals. Each element of their Impact page and Instagram were clearly categorized for audience members. They were also visually appealing and “on trend” making their information attractive to the eye and relevant to those coming to view it. Lastly, they used clear arguments backed up by stories and testimonies of artisans to show the impact of the work being done in the lives of those involved in this organization. Through each of these elements, Noonday is positively using *logos* to promote sustainable mission and language of partnership in their communication.

Sseko continued the trend of using *logos* well by utilizing data to support their claims about the impact they are having in Uganda. They continued by making this information relevant to their audience by telling a story on their website. They used their Mission and Impact page and Sseko Graduates page to highlight how change has taken place in the lives of so many over the years they have been working together. Lastly, Sseko outlined four main issues and their proposed solutions—providing clear arguments for their audience to understand why this work is necessary and beneficial. Overall, Sseko used *logos* well to provide their audience with details of how this partnership is
benefiting all parties involved. For those looking to apply this research, a practical way to incorporate logos in a persuasive text is to use numerical data to support any claims the individual or organization wants to make. The rhetor should make sure these claims are clear and that the data he or she presents will impact audience members.

**Pathos**

When communicating with an audience, rhetors must consider how their audience will react to the message they are presenting. *Pathos*, or emotions, are valuable for rhetors to understand and utilize when attempting to connect to their audience member. Thus, for this analysis, I described *pathos* as mood/tone and motivation/reference to pleasure or pain. Experience Life Church and Wideman used *pathos*, specifically mood/tone to communicate hope, compassion, happiness, and inspiration. Their motivation was for others to see this video and the positive outcomes of the trip and be inspired to join in. Experience Life Church and Wideman communicated both of these messages well.

Noonday and Sseko communicated messages of joy and hopefulness through the words and photographs on their webpages and Noonday’ Instagram. This tied directly to each company’s overall motivation. Both companies aimed to tell the stories of individuals impacted by their mission to get more people involved in the story. Through their social media and direct sales, they encouraged their audience to participate in the change they were seeing in lives because of the business opportunities they were creating. Noonday and Sseko both excelled at using emotion without manipulation. They told the stories of real people with real struggles in a way that still left them with dignity and worth. Both companies are excellent examples of how to use *pathos* well in
communicating about missions. When looking to apply this element, rhetoricians should decide what motivation they want to communicate, and then incorporate elements of the mood/tone they want to portray. As described above, hope, compassion, happiness can be depicted in these promotions and still tell a true story—the key is to inspire the audience to want to be involved through the message.

**Ethos**

*Ethos*, or trustworthiness, is vital to how the audience receives the message the rhetor is trying to portray. For the purpose of this analysis, I defined *ethos* as credibility, image (reputation and appearance), and similitude. Experience Life Church and Wideman both had credibility with their audiences; for the most part, they were trusted by audience members who opted in to watch what the rhetors produced. Both were able to boost their image and reputation by using high-quality footage and videography. This helped to capture the audience’s attention fully; they were not distracted by poorly taken photos or hard-to-hear audio. Unfortunately, Experience Life Church and Wideman did not do a great job of capturing a wide net of team members to include in this video, thus similitude took a bit of a hit as likely many audience members could not identify with the images of those captured. However, they might have been able to relate to the emotions or experience of these people. Overall, Experience Life Church and Wideman built and communicated *ethos* well in their video.

Noonday proved to their audience that they were a very credible company by the assortment of accreditations they possessed as members of the Fair-Trade Federation, Better Business Bureau, Certified B Corporation, and the Direct Selling Association. Customers could see for themselves Noonday cared about doing business well. Noonday
continued to build their credibility by carefully and strategically caring for their image. On their website and Instagram, they were intentional in the photographs they used and the stories they told. This carried over into similitude where Noonday truly wanted audience members to connect with the words and images they put out. They were quick to use images of a wide variety of people to increase the number of people who could connect with their message. Noonday did an excellent job of communicating their status as a credible organization.

Sseko demonstrated the most credibility on their Graduates page by telling the stories of young women who moved on to university through their partnership. These testimonies portrayed success in mission for audience members. Sseko aimed to build credibility by reminding their audience of the “why” often. Within their image, they were eager to repeat their mission, who they are, and what they do. They used the graduate participants as a reminder of not only the success but the hope each participant now had because of this partnership. They used many pictures of women from different backgrounds to achieve similitude across multiple demographics. Overall, Sseko did a good job of setting themselves up as a credible company. For those looking to implement this element, credibility is key. Having other credible corporations or individuals endorse an organization can help them gain credibility. Then, continuing to think strategically about what messages are put out, by whom, and how are all imperative to maintaining credibility with stakeholders or prospective supporters. The more those promoting the organization have in common with those potential supporters, the better.
Ethical Storytelling

When considering ethical communication, rhetoricians must consider that audience members’ perspective on the mission work is largely affected by how it is reported by the rhetor. For the purpose of this analysis, ethical storytelling was defined as characterization, point of view, and narrative progression. Each of these elements helped those creating the message consider who, how, and what will be compelling yet truthful. Experience Life Church and Austin Wideman used these elements of ethical communication well. First, within characterization, the rhetors showed both cultures positively and working together. Much of the footage and audio described them working together and how it shaped the way the missionary team saw God working. Next, in point of view, the rhetors used a first-person narration but allowed multiple voices to tell their perspective of what was taking place. Through these voices, the rhetors communicated about the progression of their trip’s narrative by describing how the local community was before they knew God and how much it changed since the partnership between the church and this community began. Experience Life Church and Wideman used ethical principles well to tell a story that was empowering to both communities.

Noonday used characterization to show the benefit of working together. Through their communication on their webpage and Instagram, Noonday highlighted partnership by characterizing each person’s part in the story as valuable. Noonday added variety by speaking not only from their point of view but by using content generated by Ambassadors. Within their narrative, they told a progressive story of hope and partnership. Each of these elements contributed to the ethical communication Noonday exhibited.
Sseko depicted the main characters of their story, the Sseko Graduates, as empowered women ready to change the world. Through the point of view, they explained to audience members the impact and change that has taken place in the life of each student by being able to partner with Sseko. This took place through their narrative progression—a story of problem and solution. Sseko outlined the problems they saw from the beginning, of women not getting many opportunities, to now where these women had become agents for change in their communities. Through all of their communication, Sseko did a great job of ethically telling the stories of the partnership created through their work. Implementing this element comes down to telling stories well and as fully as possible. The more the rhetorician can involve details about the lives of those on the other side of the camera, the bigger and more real the story becomes to their audience members. This helps supporters know that these are not just faces, but real people who they can help.

**Pity Appeals**

As mentioned before, within the world of missions rhetoric, it is not uncommon for organizations to use pity appeals to communicate about their work. This is often done to prove the work is needed and to persuade audience members to contribute or participate. Pity appeals, for the purpose of this analysis, were made up of the use of photographs that depicted those in need or those in situations that needed “to be fixed.” Even though they used footage of impoverished communities, Experience Life Church and Austin Wideman did not communicate messages grounded in pity to their audience. Rather, they used this footage to convey hope and share a message of partnership. Experience Life Church and Wideman did an excellent job of commanding the
audience’s attention about a hard situation without othering the locals they served alongside.

Noonday also did not use pity appeals in their communication with their audience members. Though they made the audience aware of the serious issues facing the locals they partner with, they did so in a way that communicated dignity and empowerment. This was instrumental in crafting the overall positive nature of their communication. In communicating with their audience, Sseko also did not use pity appeals to gain traction. Instead, like Noonday and Experience Life Church, they used the language of partnership and dignity to show their audience the power of the work being done together. Overall, Sseko did a great job of helping audience members to see the benefits of positive partnership language.

As mentioned above, the key to the ethical implementation of this element is conveying hope and partnership, rather than pity. None of the organizations whose rhetoric I examined used pity, highlighting the fact that rhetors can tell stories about people facing hard times without conveying a sense of destitution through showing the capability of the locals and emphasizing the partnership groups around the world can share with individuals or organizations engaged in mission work.

**Conclusion**

In Chapter II, I examined Experience Life Church to answer the question: how can churches and individuals use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions? As I described above, Experience Life Church and Austin Wideman utilized most rhetorical elements well; however, they truly excelled in their use of ethical storytelling. Through ethical storytelling, the rhetors not only described what was taking
place in the field, but did so in a way that honored both those who were going on the trip and those who were local. This element was key in promoting sustainability; neither relied on each other for survival, but both parties benefited from working together. These stories showed the power of working together, which in turn showed audience members the value of mission work and how it can be done well.

In Chapter III, I examined Noonday and Sseko to answer the question: how can ethical businesses use their platforms to persuade by promoting sustainable missions? Surprisingly, I found similar success in both of these companies’ rhetoric as I did with Experience Life Church and Wideman. The power of the stories these businesses told, in a way that promoted partnership, was persuasive. What was even more beneficial in Noonday and Sseko’s communication was the interaction audience members could have with the company and their ability to be part of the story easily. By making an ethical purchase, anyone could partner in changing the world and the rhetoric of missions.

All three of these rhetors took ethical storytelling seriously and did it well. However, in order to grow, they could learn from what each of them did best. Experience Life Church and Wideman would largely benefit from how Noonday and Sseko used audio from the locals with whom they partnered. This would be a great addition to the story they told about the power of working together. Noonday and Sseko could have in turn learned from Experience Life Church and Wideman by showing more of the day-to-day stories of their artisans. Experience Life Church and Wideman showed a significant amount of footage in their story that helped the audience really understand the context; this would be a great addition for Noonday and Sseko to adopt to tell and even larger, fuller story to the community.
While all three of these rhetors demonstrated great ethical communication, it would be beneficial for future researchers to look at larger churches and companies to see how this works on an even larger scale. For companies with larger audiences, how does this impact those viewing it? What is their perception of the role they play in the story? It could also be interesting to interview those producing these videos and websites to understand their process in creating these messages.

Despite the problems with many examples of missions rhetoric today, Experience Life Church, Wideman, Noonday, and Sseko all set great examples for organizations to understand how to communicate about mission work well. Each offered a unique perspective on how to tell the stories of work being done abroad in nations considered to be impoverished in a way that was sustainable, ethical, and demonstrated partnership. While each of these rhetors acknowledged the problems each country and community faced, they all also communicated the message that each country and community were valuable to God and that any work they did was partnering with Him. In doing so, they were able to release the pressure to “fix” or “save” the world and rather join in the mission of restoration.
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