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Satire vs. Statistics: Comparing Argumentative Analyses of Social Media's Role in
Propagating Antifeminism

For nearly two decades, social media has been a prevalent platform for the sharing and consumption of information which has made it a hotspot for debate, activism, and campaigning for various topics, one of which is women's rights. Despite constant hardships and challenges they faced, feminists around the world have made great victories for the betterment of women's future. However, with the advent of social media, this same progress is also being pushed back, with many criticizing, demeaning, and ridiculing the activism of women's rights. The rise in more anti-feminist content, especially targeting people of younger generations, results in detrimental impacts on the change brought by feminists. Younger people, who are constantly exposed to social media, are more liable to form backwards opinions on women's rights and women themselves. As social media has a more direct influence on the harsh resistance against feminism, more attention is being cast on social media content designed to attack feminist stances that are throwing away decades of progress made in women's rights. Malala Yousafzai's "I am No Longer Feminist After Watching some YouTube Videos" and the article "How Algorithms, alpha males, and trad wives are winning the wars for kids minds" by Nadria Nittle and Mariel Padilla, are two such pieces that through different modes of writing address antifeminism through social media. The message, although the same for both, is delivered

through distinctly separate methods, hence resonating differently for their audiences. While Nittle and Padilla took the help of facts and rhetorical techniques to make a point, referring to multiple testimonies, statistics, and other evidence to show how damaging social media is on the youth and the misconceived perceptions they make of feminism as a result, Yousafzai took a different route by taking the help of satirical techniques to carry the message she wanted to present. Arguably, through her satirical stance, Yousafzai had a stronger effect on readers than Nittle and Padilla, through her purposeful usage of certain techniques to target the relevancy of the issue as well as appealing to pathos rather than logos to support her argument.

While Nittle and Padilla rely mainly on appeals to logos, Yousafzai's usage of more appeals to pathos makes her argument more relatable to the audience. Throughout Nittle and Padilla's piece there are multiple instances where the authors employ facts, data & statistics, testimonies, and other evidence they gather to exhibit the extent to which toxic content is being followed and its counter effects on the minds of the people consuming this content. Some examples include testimonies from multiple sources, surveys taken of students, reports such as the "State of American Men" in 2023, and other ways. Specifically, Nittle and Padilla spend a significant portion of their time talking about the experiences of Aarush Santoshi, a student from Stanford University who talked about his own interactions and perceptions with the negativity in social media and antifeminism (Nittle & Padilla). While Santoshi's testimony is relevant, as are the other examples used by Nittle and Padilla, they lack connection with the audience, which is important for the authors if they wish for what they write to make any impact on their readers. Along with that, the formal, impersonal, and critical tone that Nittle and Padilla carry throughout the writing makes it feel like a very distant problem not of much importance to the reader themselves. Apart from that much of the information that Nittle and Padilla use such as a survey

on the 19th from 2024, the 2023 report of “The State of American Men”, etc. is information that the majority of the audience are not aware of previously. The addition of so much new information and using a more formal, impersonal, and critical tone puts more focus on the information presented and less on the topic at hand making the piece come off more as a lecture or a presentation rather than a persuasive argument meant to sway over the readers. Yousafzai on the other hand, has far many implementations on pathos and ethos by using variation in tone and diction, thus making the focus of her article more centered around the issue at the forefront. Her piece focuses more on using the satirical format and incorporating in it the pain women go through and the misconceptions they have to face because of the lies supported by social media. In a short amount of time, Yousafzai points out the “education gap, wage gap, and sexual harassment” that women in today’s world go through as well as the frustratingly false statement that feminism is wrong since it oppresses this feminine instinct to be provided by men. Although they are not statements supported by fact, the jabs it makes at the tearing apart of feminism through social media, are far more direct and thus make a stronger impact on the audience. Whereas in the previous piece the overdose of facts numb the overall message presented, Yousafzai directly pinpoints the issue and so coupled with the sarcastic tone that Yousafzai possesses it has more of a punch on the feelings of the emotion. This in turn makes the issue feel closer to the audience, rather than making it feel distant as Nittle and Padilla inevitably do in their argumentative piece.

Yousafzai made a stronger use of satirical techniques, hence making her argument more relevant to the audience than the approach by Nittle and Padilla. While both authors made sure to use a variety of rhetorical techniques in order to enhance their argument, Yousafzai was able to more effectively manipulate her writing to bring the issue to the forefront. Yousafzai’s piece took

a more informal approach with large usage of overly sarcastic tone and satirical techniques. There are several instances of Yousafzai heavily using either situational irony, verbal irony, or caricatures in her writing to make a very obvious point. By posing as a person herself converted to antifeminism due to social media, Yousafzai uses this to make many jabs at people who base their ideologies on the content they see on social media platforms. For example, "...I can no longer in good conscience call myself a feminist after watching a couple of YouTube videos" (Yousafzai). For those aware of Yousafzai's work, they would also know this is a very extreme stance for a person who has spent a lifetime advocating for women, and in such a way they also realize that Yousafzai herself is trying to make a similar point by using this statement; how people make extreme judgements about a topic by the misinformation they get from other places. Her throwing away her life's purpose after seeing some random YouTube video is similar to how many people form negative opinions about a topic without making sure the information they are receiving is even correct, something that very commonly happens to feminism. Her usage of caricatures also furthers this notion of how people make radical opinions based on things they see online; "After logging onto YouTube and absentmindedly scrolling through a series of recommended videos...I, Malala Yousafzai, formally renounce my affiliation with the feminist ideology." (Yousafzai). Again the same message however with the addition of "absentmindedly scrolling" generates this caricature of making such a rash opinion from something that has very little basis to go off of. Nittle and Padilla's piece takes a different route by being formal and sticking to real life accounts in order to convey their message. Specifically in the case of this essay it meant that the authors relied mostly on real life testimonies and vivid imagery to paint a picture in the minds of readers on how social media was tearing down on the progress made in feminism. " 'This kid was engaging with content that promotes blatant misogyny, and he didn't

even realize how harmful it was, ‘ ‘ (Nittle & Padilla). This testimony by Aarush Santoshi in their paper, was meant to highlight a looming problem with how social media content is creating negative perceptions in the minds of children and then converts into derogatory behaviour over time. It sets a heavy tone of concern for the rest of the piece and shows how real and concerning a problem it is by using a real world instance and building on other occurrences like this one. In Nittle and Padilla’s argument the testimony highlights only one case making the issue seem very concentrated to one instance, however Yousafzai’s exaggerations and generality makes the magnitude of the issue more apparent, thus making it more relevant as well.

Through her satirical writing, Yousafzai establishes a connection with her audience thus making her message loud and clear for the audience. Yousafzai’s usage of satire was a demonstration of how when effectively used, satire is capable of delivering themes with great impact. By employing a satirical format rather than a traditional argumentative piece, she emphasized the message over the facts, so that readers would walk away realizing the importance of how feminism suffers because of misinformation and biases.

Works Cited

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