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Humanities

An Analysis of Criticisms of Taylor Swift's Private Jet Usage

Many celebrities make significant contributions to the ever-growing amount of carbon emissions through their tours and lifestyles, yet most of their fans turn a blind eye when it comes to this issue and continue supporting the actions that are detrimental to the planet. One celebrity that has recently come under fire for their excessive production of carbon emissions is Taylor Swift, following her year-long Eras Tour around the world and many flights on her private jet. Two articles, a satirical piece written by *The Onion* and an article from the *BBC News* aim to tackle this issue and expose Swift's frequent use of her private jet that contributes to the ongoing climate crisis. Both articles target members of her fanbase, also known as Swifties, as well as all major celebrities that use resources excessively, including Swift herself. The *Onion* article, titled "Taylor Swift Under Fire For Leaving Idling Plane Double-Parked Outside Store," takes a satirical standpoint and uses devices such as reduction, reductio ad absurdum, testimony, statistics, and appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos. The *BBC News* article by Lola Mendez, titled "Taylor Swift claims she offsets her travel carbon footprint - how does that work?," takes a more serious and fact-based standpoint with use of statistics, expert testimony, and appeals to logos. Because of the nature of the sources, *The Onion* being a well-known outlet for satire on current events, and the *BBC* being a well-regarded source for trustworthy and accurate news, the piece from the *BBC* was a more effective way to criticize Swift and affect change.

Overall, the article from *The Onion* is an example of reductio ad absurdum, which serves as an appeal to logos and demonstrates the excessiveness of her private jet usage. They use examples of things that Taylor Swift and many other celebrities normally do, such as taking a trip on a private jet, and they reduce it to a level where it is so outrageous that it could never happen. In this situation, taking a trip on a private jet is not something that most people can relate to because they are costly and inaccessible for most, meaning that it is something that they already see as slightly absurd or extravagant. When it is then satirized, like when *The Onion* claimed that Swift left “her idling plane double-parked outside a Manhattan store,” it becomes humorous (“Taylor Swift”). Most readers would know that landing a jet on a Manhattan street is nearly impossible, never mind the absurdity of taking a private jet just to visit a store. The article uses other examples reductio ad absurdum, such as when they state that she took a “30-second trip from her Tribeca home” with no other purpose “than to flaunt her wealth,” (“Taylor Swift”). Additionally, these examples are both appeals to logos. They show that Taylor Swift’s use is excessive with all of the trips that she is taking, even shorter ones; however, these techniques are not the most effective when dealing with an issue like climate change, especially up against a die-hard fanbase, because their ridiculousness makes them lack authority.

Both of the articles also used a significant number of statistics in their writing to appeal to logos, although the article from *BBC News* does this more effectively due to the reliability and accuracy of the statistics. In the *Onion* article, they began by stating that Taylor Swift “burned over 200 gallons of fuel traveling to a nearby Burberry” and that she used “13,000 liters of California’s limited water supply to hose down the 20 Hummers in her Beverly Hills driveway” (“Taylor Swift”). Because this article comes from *The Onion*, known for its satire and novelty, it is not seen as a reliable source that one can believe what is written. And although these statistics

are not outrageously exaggerated, they may not seem realistic to the reader because the authority of their source is questionable. Readers may believe that these numbers are complete overexaggerations, much like everything else in the text, and think ‘it cannot be that bad.’ They would fail to recognize the severity of the issue at hand, which makes this an ineffective use of statistics. Similarly, the *BBC News* article uses statistics on Swift’s flight data, but in a more effective way due to their reliability. They state events that truly happened, such as the “12-hour, 5,000-mile flight this weekend from Tokyo, Japan, to Las Vegas, Nevada” that Swift took “to watch Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce win the Super Bowl against the San Francisco 49ers,” (Mendez). Rather than stating she only took a flight to “flaunt her wealth,” they provide the actual purpose for her trip (“Taylor Swift”). This use of statistics appeals to logos, where the reader can see how exactly Taylor Swift is contributing to carbon emissions and the climate crisis. Likewise, they cited “a study from UK marketing agency [sic] Yard to claim she was the #1 celebrity CO2 polluter in 2022, with emissions claimed to be 1,100 times the amount of the average person,” which shows the magnitude of her actions (Mendez). This quote can also serve as an appeal to pathos, as most readers will be ‘the average person’ and can feel anger or shock towards her excessive use. When using this quote, they also noted that the data in the study came from Twitter, now known as X, and they cannot guarantee reliability or accuracy. This disclaimer further contributes to their credibility as a source.

Testimony was another device used across both articles that serves as an appeal to ethos and logos, as it shows the reliability and trustworthiness of the sources. The *BBC News* article brought in Leah Thomas, author of the *Intersectional Environmentalist*, who criticized Swift, stating, “[her] carbon emissions are extreme and are polluting the atmosphere,” (Mendez). Thomas also stated that “Carbon emissions are one of the leading causes of the climate crisis, as

carbon in the atmosphere warms the planet, which contributes to extreme weather events,” which appeals to logos as it establishes a cause-and-effect relationship between Swift’s private jet use and global warming (Mendez). Thomas, being an author of a well-regarded book, demonstrates authority and establishes reputability for the article and facts used. Similarly, they brought in Scott Keyes, a travel expert and founder of a flight finding business, to address the carbon offsets that Swift had purchased. He stated, “Carbon offsets can counteract otherwise hard-to-eliminate emissions. Many carbon offset projects are highly valuable – money to plant new forests or grow carbon-capturing algae – while others are practically worthless,” explaining some context behind Swift’s actions (Mendez). She has purchased carbon offsets to counteract her many flights, but as Keyes stated, they do not always actually contribute to reducing the effects of carbon emissions. This information serves as an appeal to logos as it allows the reader to understand why Taylor Swift’s positive actions are not enough. In the article from *The Onion*, they quoted environmentalist Ned Lawry, who stated, “Taylor Swift’s reliance on gas-guzzling private jets continued today when she burned over 200 gallons of fuel traveling to a nearby Burberry,” (“Taylor Swift”). However, this quote does not tell the reader the rationale behind why her use of a private jet for a short trip is harmful to the climate, as was done in the *BBC News* article. The *BBC News* article more effectively utilized expert testimony to address criticisms of Swift’s jet usage.

In addition to testimony and statistics, the *BBC News* article used an allusion to appeal to many readers’ love for popular music and the climate, which increased the overall effectiveness of their message. They alluded to “artists such as Coldplay and Billie Eilish who make sustainability mandatory on their tours by minimising single-use plastics and having composting bins on site,” which appeals to logos by showing that other artists are taking positive steps

towards reducing the climate crisis, so Swift can as well (Mendez). It also serves as an appeal to pathos, because many readers who are Swifties may also be fans of Coldplay and Billie Eilish. Their love for the latter two artists may make them more inclined to force Taylor Swift to make some lifestyle changes.

Although both the *Onion* article and the *BBC News* article used similar devices, such as statistics and expert testimony, as well as some additional devices, such as reductio ad absurdum and allusions, the non-satirical approach from the *BBC News* article was more effective in criticizing Taylor Swift for her extreme carbon emissions and use of her private jet. The articles used appeals to logos, pathos, and ethos with those devices; however, the authority and trustworthiness of the *BBC* and their information is more convincing to a reader that Swift's actions are problematic. Because climate change is such a pressing issue in today's world, it makes sense to take a serious and fact-based approach to address it, like the *BBC*.

Works Cited

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