

Activity: Analyzing Corporate Mission Statements

Overview

Mission statements are important ways in which organizations build ethos and appeal to a specific audience. They are brief and public, often readily available and highlighted on organizational websites, and are meant to reflect the organization's values, goals, and practices. Mission statements tell us quite a bit regarding not only what an organization *believes*, but also regarding what an organization *believes about its target audience*.

The target audiences for mission statements, in this case consumers, investors, or potential employees, are often concerned with an organization's values, priorities, and commitment to social justice. Mission statements may not explicitly address civic engagement, but they state values and signal a commitment to social justice at an organizational level.

What You Need to Do

Working with your group, find a mission statement for an organization or corporation that you wish to analyze. Consider our readings and class discussions on ethics and social justice as well as our discussions of the rhetorical situation. Additionally, pay attention to how graphics and images work alongside text.

Once you have chosen an organization and located its mission statement, reflect on the following questions:

1. Based on the mission statement, what seems to be the organization's core values?
2. What are the key words or phrases deployed in the mission statement, and how do these words align with certain values?
3. How easy was it to locate the mission statement? Where is it located?
4. How are images used alongside the text, and what values do those images evoke?
5. How would you describe the ethos that this mission statement constructs?
6. Based on your analysis of the mission statement, how has this organization constructed its target audience? Who is their audience, and what does this audience care about? Who is considered and who is left out?

After analyzing the mission statements, do some basic research on the organization. You can search the rest of their website, or search for articles about their practices and ethics. After doing some cursory research (nothing in-depth, just what you can find in 10-15 minutes), reflect on the following questions:

1. Do the organization's actions seem to align with their mission statement? Why or why not? Try to be as specific as possible.
2. Does the organization seem to value civic engagement? What led you to this conclusion?
3. Are there any instances in which the organization seems to be acting in direct opposition to the ethos its mission statement constructs?
4. Does the organization donate to any other organizations that do or do not reflect their stated values?

5. (Please note that you may not be able to answer each of these questions: it is still useful to discuss these questions even if the answer is “we don’t know” because it was difficult to find this information.)
6. After each group has completed parts 1-3, share what you’ve discovered with the class. Were there any major conflicts among organizational mission statements and organizational practices? How did the mission statements you analyzed construct a target audience? What values were you able to identify?

Looking ahead: the last major assignment for this course is a collaborative business proposal. As a group, you not only have to develop this proposal, you also have to construct a clear professional “identity” or “voice” based around shared values. Now that you’ve had some practice analyzing mission statements, construct your own group mission statement for your imagined organization. As you draft your mission statement, consider how the values expressed in it will guide your business proposal and your research.

As a group, consider:

1. What things do you value?
2. How will your proposal AND the way that you work together as a team actively reflect those values?