ANALYZING DIGITAL PRESENCE

Okay, so after setting a team contract and working together to choose a client, the next big step in creating your presentation is to actually analyze your client's digital footprint, their web presence. This video will show you how to do just that.

RHETORICAL SITUATION

As with most things in our class, analyzing web presence comes down to understanding the rhetorical situation.

A quick review. We illustrate the rhetorical situation with a triangle, the points of which represent the three critical elements of the situation: the speaker, the audience, and the message. As you well understand at this point, if you change any part of this triangle, the rhetorical situation changes—that is, the conditions of success change.

For example, imagine that I want to convince my wife to watch a scary movie with me tonight. To convince her of my message, I need to carefully consider what I know of this rhetorical situation. In this case, I know my wife loves scary movies, so the conditions of success are very undemanding. I can just casually mention that I was thinking of watching [movie], and she's in. But now imagine we change the rhetorical situation: instead of getting my wife to watch it with me, I need to convince my kids (ages 4, 6, and 8) to watch it. Suddenly, the conditions of success have changed significantly—and this whole rhetorical situation has become a very bad idea. (Parenting tip: don't show your young children scary movies.)

Okay now that we remember how rhetorical situations work, we need to apply this understanding to our clients' internal and external sites to analyze how their digital footprint is succeeding or failing to draw in customers.

By **internal sites**, I mean the client's own website, which they have direct control over.

By **external sites**, I mean both the social media accounts that the client creates and controls and also the parts of the web that the client has less control over, things like Yelp reviews, Google Maps entries, TripAdvisor pages, and search engine results.

RHETORICAL SITUATIONS FOR INTERNAL SITES

For internal sites, the rhetorical situation is usually pretty straightforward. The speaker is the client, and the message is usually some form of "Come patronize our business or organization."

The audience, however, complicates things because most businesses and organizations have multiple audiences in mind. Let's look at an example to see what I mean.

Take Roxanne's Café, a quaint little diner in Parkville. Roxanne's doesn't have just one audience in mind—"people." To be effective with their rhetoric, they have to slice up the general population into segments and pitch to each segment in a slightly different way. When slicing up a population,

we typically use demographic categories to do so—you know, things like age, sex, race, economic status, etc. Now, not all of these categories matter to every client. In the case of Roxanne's, for instance, the ones that seem to matter most are age, family status, and residence. Let's talk about each one in turn and explore how Roxanne's website does or doesn't meet the conditions for success for each audience.

Age

First up: age. And I can tell at a glance who the Roxanne's website had in mind when it was made: senior citizens.

Senior citizens are often attracted to restaurants that remind them of old times and the nostalgia they might feel for their youth. A country diner like Roxanne's might highlight that old timey feel to draw in an older crowd. On Roxanne's website, the pictures seem to convey this both in their content and their form. Content-wise, the focus is on the building, and it is shown to be old-fashioned inside and out. Think about it—how any restaurants do you know emphasize their physical presence more than their food? Not many, but maybe Roxanne's is wise in appealing to the older crowd in this way. Format-wise, the blurred, rounded edges to the pictures help sell the old-timey atmosphere. We might look at these elements and judge that Roxanne's is doing a fair job meeting the conditions of success created by this particular audience.

But what about other audiences within the age demographic? These days, the younger crowd seems to be motivated by authenticity in food—after all, aren't millennials always posting to Instagram about how they just found some taco truck that is run by a real taco maven who immigrated from Mexico or something? Young professionals don't want to just eat "cinnamon rolls"—they are drawn to ultra-specific, ultra-authentic foods like "Grandma Bea's Brown Butter Cinnamon Rolls with Madagascar Vanilla and Single-Sourced, Fair Trade Sumatran Cinnamon. For this crowd, Roxanne's may not have much appeal, so we could make some suggestions on how they could improve their digital presence to better meet the demands of that rhetorical situation.

Family Status

Another demographic category that is important to restaurants is family status, loosely defined. People who are eating alone present a different rhetorical situation than those on dates and those with small children, so to convince each group that Roxanne's is the right place to eat, the website has to do different things. And it does—in small ways. One image caption points out the restaurant features a counter—I know that when I'm on my own, I feel sheepish about taking up a whole table in a busy restaurant, so that reassures me that Roxanne's is a place that welcomes single eaters, even at peak hours.

Of course, more often I'm eating out with my family, which includes three young, quite picky eaters. Now, I'm a millennial, so I'm all about that authentic experience. But when I'm with my kids, authenticity is always going to be trumped by one simple question: will my kids eat there? I can't tell you how many times I've *not* gone to a restaurant I was otherwise excited about because I couldn't tell from the website whether there was a kids menu or not. Does Roxanne's have one? It's a bit hard to tell at first. I mean, the overall aesthetic of the restaurant as portrayed on the site seems to be family friendly—this isn't some romantic, candles and low lighting, red wine and chocolate-dipped strawberries type place. And if I look around long enough I find there's a link to the menus. While no kids menu is listed, if I click into the lunch menu I can see that there's a section for "Little

Buckaroos and Senior Cowpokes." So yeah, Roxanne's is family-friendly, but the website could do a better job making that case. If I were on a road trip with my family, coming through Parkville at about lunch time and looking for a nice place to stop, my wife looking up restaurants on her smartphone while we cruise down the highway, we might not look closely enough at Roxanne's site to discover it is a good choice for kids—we might take one quick look and move on to another, more obvious choice.

Residence

With that road trip example, I'm actually mixing family status with another category, that of residence. Restaurants often need to cater to both customers who live in the area and those who are passing through from out of town, two groups who approach dining from differing perspectives. Take a second and think about it—how do you think the rhetorical situation is different when convincing townies versus tourists? Do you think Roxanne's is doing a good job digitally appealing to both groups here on its website?

Thinking in Terms of Claims + Reasons

What we've done is actually identify several different rhetorical situations—one for each audience—and analyzed in each case whether the Roxanne's Café website meets the conditions of success to convince those people to visit the restaurant. For each of these rhetorical situations the message (a better word in this case might be the *argument* or the *claim*) is the same—"Come eat in our restaurant"—but the reasons given in support of that claim are different in each case.

- For senior citizens the claim is "Come eat in our restaurant" and the reason is "*because* we have the old-fashioned charm you're looking for."
- For millennials the claim and reason was supposed to be "Come eat in our restaurant *because* we're serving up authentic, one-of-a-kind food experiences that you can post to Instagram and make your friends jealous about #YOLO"—but Roxanne's isn't really making that argument effectively.
- For people eating alone, the claim and reason is "Come eat in our restaurant *because* we have a counter so you won't be taking up a whole table."
- And so on.

As you do your own analysis, it might help to think of all these rhetorical situations as containing their own individual argument, or a claim plus reasons that are specifically geared to the audience in question.

RHETORICAL SITUATIONS FOR EXTERNAL SITES

The rhetorical situation for external sites gets a little more complicated. We'll talk about two types of external sites: user-controlled social media and independent external sites.

User-Controlled Social Media

User-controlled social media refers to the social media accounts created and maintained by the client—their Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter profiles, etc.

On these sites, the rhetorical situation is much the same—the client is persuading their audience to patronize their business—but the message is filtered through the social network's usefulness. Social media's power is in allowing businesses to act as living entities—they can comment on posts to establish a sort of personality or create an image of being involved in the community or socially woke. They can push notifications to followers, subtly reminding them that they exist or that they are running a promotion of some kind or would be a great place to celebrate an upcoming holiday.

All of this functionality still serves the same purpose of getting customers to patronize a business or people to utilize a local organization's resources, but much of that argument gets hidden behind what might appear to be more natural or personal interactions. After all, they don't call it "social" media for nothing.

Now, I don't need to tell you how social media works. My generation invented it, but most of you grew up with it all around you. For example, you know that Instagram is great for sharing images but not so great for sharing links. In the case of Roxanne's Café, it seems to me Instagram would be a good way to convey how good the food is and how welcoming the environment is, two things that translate well into images.

But look at how Roxanne's usually uses Instagram. It's…um…not great.

You can walk through the same process when analyzing how your potential clients use other forms of social media. Just ask yourself "What is Facebook or Twitter or Snapchat useful for, and is my client using it effectively with that functionality in mind?"

Keep in mind the various audiences the client is trying to reach and how each might use the social media platforms—and don't fall for the myth that only young people use social media! Millennials, who invented most social media, are nearing their 40s, and their older Gen X siblings are heavy users. Even Boomers, now in their 60s and 70s, regularly carry smartphones, and they have the purchasing power that make them a tempting audience for businesses. These groups may not use all the same networks and not in the same way, but you shouldn't just count them out.

Independent External Sites

The most tricky rhetorical situations for businesses and organizations to navigate are the ones where they aren't really the speaker and they can't directly control the message, things like Yelp reviews, Google Maps entries, TripAdvisor pages, and search engine results.

For example, when a customer writes a review on Yelp, the speaker in that rhetorical situation isn't Roxanne's; it's the customer. That writer is hoping to reach the same audience that Roxanne's tries to reach, and if the customer's message is "Go eat at Roxanne's; I loved it!" then that's great. But if the customer's message is "Don't eat at Roxanne's; I had a terrible experience there," then that rhetorical situation is directly at odds with what Roxanne's wants to achieve.

How can Roxanne's influence this rhetorical situation indirectly? Well you first instinct might be to tell Roxanne's to make better food and treat its customers better so they don't write bad reviews, but, on the one hand, that's not really a part of what GroverCorp is selling its clients. We help our clients manage their digital footprint; we don't just tell them to be better restaurants. On the other hand, even the best restaurant leaves some customers dissatisfied some of the time—it's impossible

to please everyone all the time. And we know that people are most likely to leave a review when they are angry.

So if we can't prevent bad reviews from being written sometimes, what can we do? One idea is to help Roxanne's get more good reviews posted so that at least the good outweighs the bad, so the overall score remains as high as possible. How can we do that? We could suggest that Roxanne's servers say "If you liked your meal, won't you consider leaving us a review online?" to tables when they deliver the check. Or Roxanne's could offer a promotion like a free dessert for customers who leave reviews online.

As you explore the independent external sites that may affect your client's reputation, do some research about how those sites can be affected by your client.

ADVANCED ANALYSIS

So far we've been thinking of rhetorical situations from the perspective of the speaker, our clients. But is that really how the internet works? One of the key ways the internet (what we sometimes call *new media*) differs from traditional media is that it empowers the audience to drive the experience.

Think about it. When you pick up a novel, you pretty much have to read it as the author intended, starting from the first page and going page by page, in order, to the end. The author is mostly in charge of the experience. But on the internet, no one is forcing you to read in order. On the contrary, most websites are laid out as independent webpages that are interlinked so that a reader can visit the pages in any order he or she wants.

For example, some users may come directly to Roxanne's Café's homepage and begin there, but other users will Google "Roxanne's Café Parkville menu" and follow a link directly to the menu page, skipping over the home page altogether. Roxanne's has no power to force the reader to do otherwise.

So while an okay analysis will consider the rhetorical situations that the client has constructed for itself, an advanced analysis will consider the rhetorical situations that the customers construct as they interact on their own terms with the client's digital presence. Here are two things to guide your analysis: kairos and modality.

Kairos

Kairos is a Greek word—like *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*—that Aristotle used in his explanations of rhetoric. It has to do with time, and it roughly translates to "the opportune moment." It conveys the idea that the rhetorical situation is dependent not only on the speaker, audience, and message, but on the moment and context in which the rhetorical situation occurs.

In the case of Roxanne's customers, you might think about how the moment they choose to interact with Roxanne's digital presence may determine how they interact. For example, if a potential customer is hungry right this minute, he or she will interact with Roxanne's differently than someone scouting locations for their next book club meeting or someone planning a date.

Modality

Modality refers to the means of access. The two main ways people interact with the internet today is by computer or mobile device.

So far we've only been looking at Roxanne's digital presence as it shows up on a desktop or laptop computer, but what about how it looks on a smartphone screen? Is it as usable? Does it soak up cell data? These are real concerns.

Imagine the Audience's Use Narrative

With kairos and modality in mind, we are prepared to analyze things from the audience's perspective. I like to imagine a particular audience's use narrative, that is, the story of how they access the client's digital presence.

As an example, let's imagine that I'm new to the Parkville area. I work down on Main Street somewhere, and I've already tried the restaurants right by my work. It's 10 on a Tuesday morning, and I'm hungry because I skipped breakfast, and I'm bored with my work, so I start thinking about where I might go for lunch. I pull out my phone (don't want my boss seeing me goof off on my computer), and what's the first thing I do?

I could go to Google and type in "parkville restaurants," but, more likely, I'll go to my Google Maps app and type in restaurants so that I can see what's close. When Roxanne's pops up, I immediately can see that it is highly rated, with an average of 4.5 stars over 300+ reviews. I can also see that it is cheapish. Scrolling through the pics, I get the distinct impression that this place only serves breakfast food—do I want to eat breakfast for lunch? I decide to check the menu, see if there are sandwiches or something—no, not pictures of food, an actual menu. Ugh, not an unreadable photo of someone holding the menu, the *actual* menu. Hang on, let me go to Roxanne's actual website—that'll have a menu. Wait—ugh, there's no mobile site? I hate resizing sites like this on my phone. Is my boss watching? No? Okay, let's pull this up on my compy. Alright, where's the menu? Where's the menu? Oh, here it is. No wait. Is that the menu for just the Platte City location or…no I think it's for both—the website is just arranged strangely. Okay, lunch menu. Yeah, this looks like what I want. But is it one of those places where they only make good breakfast food and the lunch stuff is only okay? Better check the reviews, read more closely. I always like the reviews on Trip Advisor best for some reason.

See, that's how a user might actually use Roxanne's digital presence to make a decision about whether to go. You could easily see the ways that aspects of that presence were effective or ineffective at helping one user make the decision to visit the restaurant—there were definitely times during that interaction where the user might've gotten frustrated by Roxanne's poor functionality or distracted by another site.

CONCLUSION

Okay, well that's what I have to tell you about analyzing a digital footprint, or at least what I would've planned to show you in a face-to-face class. Of course, I have no idea what parts of that didn't make sense to you or what questions you might have. Remember, I'm relying on you to speak up and let me know what more you need. Don't be afraid to ask a question on Slack. Or, if you have

an idea of something I missed, or advice on how else you can do this well, share that on Slack too, the same way you would if we were in class together.

One last suggestion: Because your client likely has multiple audiences accessing their digital presence across multiple modalities and in multiple kairos, that makes it easy to split this analysis work up among your team members. Assign everyone an audience, or a site, or a use narrative, and have each team member do their own analysis on their assigned part. Then write it up in a Google Doc together, or meet and talk it through together, or whatever works best to get all your separate ideas to coalesce.