TOMS Analysis
By Leah Boelkins

In this memo, I discuss the organization TOMS. I will identify the rhetoric used by TOMS, analyze it, and further explain how they try to appeal to their audiences.

Introduction to TOMS

History
The organization I chose to audit is TOMS. TOMS is self-declared as a “for-profit company with giving at its core.” Thus, the company’s central mission is to sell shoes, apparel, and more to consumers in order to make a profit, all while simultaneously giving back to others. The company serves both consumers and those in need. TOMS always ensures “one for one,” meaning with every product purchased, the company will help a person in need, whether it be providing shoes or providing water. Blake Mycoskie founded the company in 2006 after spending time traveling in Argentina. According to the TOMS website, Mycoskie “witnessed the hardships faced by children growing up without shoes,” and devised the business plan that was the foundation of TOMS. The company first began as a business much less complex than it is now—for every pair of shoes sold, one would be donated, and that was the extent of the business. However, today TOMS has expanded to selling a broad variety of products, from coffee, to prescription glasses.

Donations
There are five gifts that TOMS gives. The gift of shoes, sight, water, safe birth, and kindness. With every pair of shoes purchased, one is given to a child or person in need. With every pair of prescription glasses purchased, a person in need is provided with their own pair of glasses, or even so much as a “sight-saving surgery.” With each bag of TOMS Roasting Co. Coffee purchased, 140 liters of safe water is given to someone in need. With every TOMS bag purchased, the company works with one of their Giving Partners to provide the delivery of safe birth kits, training for birth attendants, and a healthy delivery for newborn children and their mothers. With every StandUp Backpack purchased, TOMS helps to provide training of school staff and counselors to help prevent bullying. Products are donated in five different continents and over 70 different countries like Haiti, Malawi, Guatemala, and the United States. TOMS appeals to many different consumers as they have products specifically for men, women, and kids.

**Demographics**

Although anyone is able to purchase from TOMS, it seems that their main age demographic consists of teens and young adults as their products have become trendier throughout the company’s years of existence. The company not only has many college events to attract students, but also, students on over 280 college campuses have started their own TOMS clubs. It’s likely that because of TOMS’ mission to of giving back, many teens and young adults are incentivized to buy the products as through that, they’ll be doing something good.

**Appeal to Charitable Audience**

TOMS frames their company in two different ways to appeal to their two most prominent audiences. The first audience I found them trying to appeal to was the audience with a cause. When you open the TOMS website, the first image seen is of a young girl smiling, and wearing a pair of TOMS shoes. This initial image gives the impression that TOMS is first and foremost a company that cares about others. Unlike many
companies merely working for a profit, TOMS shows that their company exists with a greater purpose. The image of the little girl undoubtedly garners strong emotions from the audience, contributing to TOMS' reputation. Furthermore, the text next to the girl reads “Give a Smile. Learn how your purchases help build confidence,” which tells the audience that they are the reason the young girl is smiling. TOMS makes it clear that the consumers are the generous and charitable as well. It's an approach that is personal. This phrase also draws those potential new customers in, as it implies that TOMS does much more than give shoes—they give the “confidence” that makes the young girl so happy. Just below the main image is their “one for one” message. This message is one that TOMS stresses greatly for their audience as it further enforces the idea in the audience's minds that with purchasing a TOMS product, they are doing a good deed and helping people less fortunate. Furthermore, I found that when you scrolled down on the main page, there is a collage of black and white photos with what looks like to be some of the TOMS staff with many different children that they help. The artistic photos, give off a happy, simple, and idealistic feeling to the audience, as well as provides a visual of the people that customers help when they buy TOMS products; it makes the giving back part more real and further appeals to the charitable audience.

**Blog**

Another significant feature of the website is the blog on the website. A wide variety of topics are discussed, like what it’s like to work at TOMS, features on some of TOMS Giving Partners, and features on some of the people in need that are receiving TOMS “one for one” gifts. Features on the children receiving the donations are especially appealing to TOMS’ audience as
it makes their contributions from buying a product more personal. The customer is able to see the faces and read the stories of a child like Tanawan, a girl in Thailand receiving her first pair of TOMS shoes, and creates profiles featuring mothers like Annie in Malawi who use water kiosks that were helped created by TOMS. The blog is a feature that reaches out to the audience’s emotions and helps them realize that they are helping real people when they purchase a product and that TOMS is dedicated to helping people all over the world in a variety of ways. If TOMS’ consumers are looking to stay informed about what the company is doing and what type of people they are helping, the reading the blog is an easy way to do so. The blog is a tool that TOMS uses to continue to frame themselves as a company with giving as its main goal, rather than profit.

**Appeal to Style-Driven Shoppers**

*Lookbook*

The second audience TOMS uses rhetoric to attract is the style-oriented and fashion-driven audience which typically consists of younger men and women. TOMS knows that their company has grown into a well-known name and fashion brand and they’ve utilized this image to their benefit. As they know that many of the company’s shoppers are trend and style-driven, features like the lookbook are easily accessible on their website. The lookbook shows both the men’s and women’s new arrivals for the current season. Models wearing the products and the products in various settings are shown. This aspect of the website is important for those wearing TOMS for fashion.

**Instagram**

TOMS utilizes the social media platform, Instagram, often as well. Presence on social media is an important aspect of a company like TOMS. This presence is another way for the young, fashion-oriented audience to connect with the company, and through Instagram,
TOMS frames themselves still as the company “with giving at its core,” but features images of their products in different artistic settings or styled differently that captivate the audience. The photos also spotlight young adults modeling a variety of styles that much of the younger audience could potentially want to recreate. On Instagram, TOMS still evokes the idea that they are a charitable company, but hones in on the fact that they’re a fashion-forward company with current styles.

The TOMS website as a whole also makes it easy to shop, which appeals to potential consumers, as it's organized by gender, age, and product type. Furthermore, the website as a whole is clean, sleek, and easy to maneuver which attracts any customer who wants a simple, quick, and easy shopping experience.

**Significance of Rhetorical Situations**

Through looking at a handful of the rhetorical situations that TOMS presents, I found that the reason they present the situations as they do is to simply attract shoppers and give to them the desire to purchase TOMS products. They frame themselves in two different ways, the charitable organization, and the fashion-forward business, to portray to different audiences that there is a purpose behind the purchase, whether it be for donation or style. Knowing that visual appeal is important, TOMS keeps their website simple, yet still visually stimulating with colors, and photos. Photos of the children to whom gifts are given by TOMS are posted throughout the website with the intention of tugging at many people's heartstrings and driving them to purchase TOMS products. Photos of employees in other countries giving TOMS shoes to children provides consumers with the idea that TOMS is a hands-on company, rather than a giant and impersonal corporation. Furthermore, they maintain an avid presence on social media to keep up with fast-paced consumers. TOMS provides an extensive amount of information on what the purpose of the company is, the history of the company, how the company works, and the process through which gifts are given throughout the world and to whom they are given which gives customers a sense of legitimacy, honesty, and trust of the company. TOMS knows the two major ways that their customers are
motivated by to purchase their products and because of this, the company successfully frames themselves as a stylish, trendy company, and a charitable company that provides customers with the personal reward of giving back.