

Jacob Morse

CAS 137H: Rhetoric and Civic Life I

Professor Kramer

October 12, 2017

### **The Most Powerful Force in Nature is Love**

Imagine America's fourth largest city of Houston completely underwater. Imagine the over 2.4 million residents taken off-guard by the copious amounts of water and the city unable to evacuate everyone to safety ahead of time (U.S. Population 2017). Imagine over 200,000 homes damaged or completely destroyed, leaving entire neighborhoods unrecognizable (Reuters). This was the unfortunate reality when Hurricane Harvey unleashed its wrath in late August 2017, dumping twenty-seven trillion gallons of rain on southeast Texas and Louisiana in a matter of six days with some locations receiving a record fifty-one inches of rain (Griggs). Highways were turned into rivers with waves and white-caps instead of traffic jams. Houses were destroyed by the power of the water and the wind leaving people with no option but to retreat to their roofs, waiting anxiously to be one of the over 72,000 people rescued from the flood waters (Griggs). Once these flood waters finally receded, an estimated \$150 billion in losses was uncovered, and a long road to recovery was ahead of the people of Houston and southeast Texas (Reuters).

After Hurricane Harvey, the first category three or stronger hurricane to strike the United States in over twelve years, the American population was called to come together and donate money to assist those who were desperately in need (Erdman). The world's largest company, Walmart, and star defensive end for the Houston Texans, J.J. Watt, both reacted quickly after Hurricane Harvey to acquire funds from the American population to go directly to those affected by Hurricane Harvey. Walmart partnered with the American Red Cross and called for Americans to contribute money by promising that they would also donate their own money and supplies to help the people of Houston and Texas recover. J.J. Watt called Americans to donate to his online crowdfunding campaign through social media posts, causing the size of

his campaign to grow exponentially, gaining more popularity and fundraising more money than Watt or anyone else thought was possible. Walmart used a series of television advertisements to convince people, mainly through the use of pathos, to donate and support those impacted by Hurricane Harvey. On the other hand, J.J. Watt fed more off of the ethos that he possesses and utilized more logical appeals to persuade the American population to donate to his hurricane relief fund. Walmart and J.J. Watt both convinced Americans to donate millions of dollars to support the people affected by Hurricane Harvey using different rhetorical appeals; Walmart used a series of advertisements driven by pathos to acquire donations while J.J. Watt counted on his ethos and logos to gain donations to his relief fund, but both were widely successful in obtaining supporters and money that went directly to help the people of southeast Texas recover, rebuild, and get back to their everyday lives.

In order to knowledgeably analyze Walmart's advertisements and J.J. Watt's crowdfunding campaign, it is essential to first understand the background surrounding each. Houston resident and defensive end for the Houston Texans, J.J. Watt, saw the extensive damage left by Hurricane Harvey and the entire city in shambles, struggling to find hope. Watt acted quickly, utilizing kairos, to set up an online crowdfunding campaign a mere two days after Hurricane Harvey made landfall. He also spoke to his over four million followers on Twitter, asking them to donate to his hurricane relief fund. He provided video updates a few times a day on his Twitter account, letting people know how the fund was progressing, any new goals that had been set for it to reach, and how the money that was donated would be used. Watt built off of the ethos that he had already possessed and used logical appeals to attract donors to his hurricane relief fund.

Similarly, Walmart aired a series of four emotional advertisements on August 31 and September 1, only five or six days after Hurricane Harvey began to devastate the coast of Texas. These advertisements aired nationally, appearing on Sunday Night Football and during other big market television events. One of the advertisements in this campaign was aired nationally almost two thousand times, each time capturing the viewers' attention through pathos (iSpot TV). Each advertisement promised that for every dollar people donated to the American Red Cross, Walmart would match twice its

value (YouTube). Walmart figured they could help out the people of southeast Texas in this dire time of need by donating their own money and their own supplies, while also building their reputation as a company. People would remember this act of kindness that Walmart did, hopefully turning more people into Walmart customers after seeing the “good” that this company does. It made complete sense for Walmart to create this advertisement series that called for Americans to donate money, so that more people could be assisted that needed help and so that Walmart could enhance its company image as a whole.

It was no surprise that J.J. Watt and Walmart were the leaders of the Hurricane Harvey relief effort, with Walmart raising over \$25 million and Watt obtaining over \$37 million for the victims of Hurricane Harvey, since both Watt and Walmart have strong histories of giving back. J.J. Watt is well known for his talents on the football field, but he has also gained a reputation as one of the best players off the field, for instance, starting up his own charitable organization, the Justin J. Watt Foundation that provides after-school opportunities for children to get involved in athletics (J.J. Watt Foundation). Walmart also has a long history of giving back and providing aid in times of disasters, helping communities prepare and recover by donating emergency necessities, and contributing more than \$60 million in cash and supplies in response to disaster events since 2005 (Walmart). The reputations of both Watt and Walmart help build their ethos, convincing more people to donate to their respective hurricane relief funds. However, the approach that J.J. Watt and Walmart each used to persuade the ordinary American citizen to donate funds to help the people of Houston and southeast Texas were drastically different.

Walmart heavily relied on pathos in their advertisements, causing the viewer to feel sorrowful for what the people of Texas went through, and making the viewer want to help these people out in any way that they can. In many of the advertisements in Walmart’s campaign, the song “Lean on Me” by Bill Withers is played in the background with no words spoken for the entirety of the advertisement. This song has a powerful message which is to work together to help those who are struggling and in a time of need, thus being the perfect song choice for Walmart’s advertisements. It is a very well-known song, and

by being the only thing playing as the audio of the advertisement, it captures the viewers' attention by being so simple. Many of the advertisements show still images of the extent of the damage in Texas caused by Hurricane Harvey, further touching on the emotional side of the viewer by showing them what these people are going through and that they really do need help from others quickly. Additionally, during the advertisements on a simple, white background, sentences such as "those affected by Hurricane Harvey need someone to lean on," and "the strongest force in nature is still love" were displayed (YouTube). These words mean a great deal to the viewer as a demonstration that America needs to come together and contribute money to help those in need, since the residents of Texas are counting on others to support them in this crucial time of need. Walmart does not promote any of their stores or any of their products during any of these commercials, but instead uses the valuable airtime that they paid for in front of a national audience to raise more money to help the people of Texas recover. Walmart utilizes simplistic, however highly pathos-centric, advertisements to show the American public just how bad the damage is in Texas, and that they need to donate money to alleviate some of the problems that Texas residents are dealing with.

J.J. Watt approached his hurricane relief fund in a slightly different way, by drawing more on the ethos that he already has as an NFL player and using more logical appeals to convince people to donate money to his relief fund that will assist the people of Texas. J.J. Watt is a name that every sports fan should know, as he has been a prominent player in the NFL since 2011. Therefore, when J.J. announced his relief fund, many people knew who he was already and he was quickly able to bring his fund to the national news level. As large corporations and famous celebrities, such as Jimmy Fallon, Ellen, and Drake, began donating large sums of money to Watt's fund, more people were made aware of its existence and were more likely to donate to it when they saw some of their favorite athletes and celebrities also helping out in the cause. J.J. Watt also establishes a connection with his followers on Twitter by posting daily video updates that allow people to see that Watt is highly involved in this fund and truly cares about making it successful to help the people of Houston and Texas. Through these video messages on Twitter and written updates on the crowdfunding website, Watt also uses logic to tell

prospective donors where the money will go. Normally, people do not want to give up their hard-earned money without knowing exactly what it will be spent on. Although Watt never explicitly says he has a complete plan for where all of the money will go, he mentions multiple times that he will make sure that every penny will go to helping out the people of Houston and southeast Texas. In whatever way this may be, the people who donated to his relief fund obviously trusted Watt, his credibility and ethos, and the logical appeals that he presented as what he would do with the donor's money.

It is clear that Walmart and J.J. Watt used different approaches to convince Americans to donate money to support those impacted by Hurricane Harvey. Walmart used a series of advertisements driven by pathos to acquire donations, while J.J. Watt counted on his ethos and logos to gain donations to his relief fund. However, both were widely successful in obtaining supporters and money that went directly to help the people of southeast Texas recover, rebuild, and get back to their everyday lives, with Walmart and Watt raising over \$60 million combined. Walmart and J.J. Watt demonstrate the power that individuals and singular companies possess to drastically alter the outcome of a situation. Without Watt and Walmart stepping in to immensely assist in the fundraising effort for the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, residents of southeast Texas would probably not have been able to recover as quickly as they were able to do. It can also be seen as a testament to the power that our great country possesses when we work together towards a common goal. Watt and Walmart were the catalysts to spark Americans working together to contribute money to the relief funds, and it was through this collective giving that it was possible for so much money to be raised. As J.J. Watt recently said, "the world is a better place when we all take care of each other."

## Works Cited

- "#BetterTogether." *YouTube*, uploaded by Walmart, 31 Aug. 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZ9HZgAUAPo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZ9HZgAUAPo). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.
- Erdman, Jon. "Hurricane Harvey's Eye-Popping Stats." *The Weather Channel*, Weather Company, 28 Aug. 2017, [weather.com/storms/hurricane/news/hurricane-harvey-by-the-numbers](http://weather.com/storms/hurricane/news/hurricane-harvey-by-the-numbers). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.
- Griggs, Brandon. "Harvey's Devastating Impact by the Numbers." Edited by Lansing Cai. *CNN (Cable News Network)*, 1 Sept. 2017, [www.cnn.com/2017/08/27/us/harvey-impact-by-the-numbers-trnd/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2017/08/27/us/harvey-impact-by-the-numbers-trnd/index.html). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.
- "Harvey Relief: That's Texas." *YouTube*, uploaded by Walmart, 1 Sept. 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhUIIfXmm90](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhUIIfXmm90). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.
- "Houston Flood Relief Fund." *You Caring*, 27 Aug. 2017, [www.youcaring.com/victimsofhurricaneharvey-915053](http://www.youcaring.com/victimsofhurricaneharvey-915053). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.
- "Hurricane Relief: Love." *YouTube*, uploaded by Walmart, 11 Sept. 2017, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEEgegOoqLw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEEgegOoqLw). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.
- Justin J. Watt Foundation*. [jjwfoundation.org/](http://jjwfoundation.org/). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.
- "Population of Houston 2017." *U.S. Population 2017*, Population of America 2017, 18 Dec. 2016, [uspoptation2017.com/population-houston-2017.html](http://uspoptation2017.com/population-houston-2017.html). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.
- Reuters. "Hurricane Harvey Damages Could Cost up to \$180 Billion." *Fortune*, Time, 3 Sept. 2017, [fortune.com/2017/09/03/hurricane-harvey-damages-cost/](http://fortune.com/2017/09/03/hurricane-harvey-damages-cost/). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.
- "Walmart Announces a New Customer Campaign to Assist with 2017 U.S. Hurricane Relief." *Walmart*, Wal-Mart Stores, 10 Sept. 2017, [news.walmart.com/2017/09/10/walmart-announces-a-new-customer-campaign-to-assist-with-2017-us-hurricane-relief](http://news.walmart.com/2017/09/10/walmart-announces-a-new-customer-campaign-to-assist-with-2017-us-hurricane-relief). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017.
- "Walmart TV Commercial, 'American Red Cross: Better Together' Song by Bill Withers." *iSpot.tv*, uploaded by Walmart, 31 Aug. 2017, [www.ispot.tv/ad/wTmi/walmart-american-red-cross-better-together-song-by-bill-withers](http://www.ispot.tv/ad/wTmi/walmart-american-red-cross-better-together-song-by-bill-withers). Accessed 12 Oct. 2017