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Major Assignment 2: Rhetorical Analysis and Redesign

Critique and Redesign of Apple's iPad Pro "Crush!" Ad (Video Formatted)

[Previous iPad Pro Commercials]

The year is 2024, and after several iPad Pro refreshes with only minor changes each year, Apple was under pressure to release a new iPad Pro that offered meaningful new features and felt like an actual upgrade worth buying. The result was the M4 iPad Pro, Apple's thinnest product ever, featuring an advanced OLED display, a powerful new chip, and updated Apple Pencil technology. To highlight how thin it was and showcase its creative potential, Apple launched a bold new commercial titled "*Crush!*" The ad was meant to symbolize how the power of countless creative tools could now fit into one impossibly slim device.

[Apple Ad]

In the ad, a large pile of beloved creative tools — such as a piano, trumpet, paints, books, a camera, and a sculpture — is placed beneath a hydraulic press. The machine descends, crushing and destroying the objects into colorful debris. When the press lifts, only the iPad Pro remains. The intended message was simple: all the tools of creativity, now inside one extremely thin device. However, the public perceived the message very differently.

[Public Reactions]

Instead of inspiring creativity, it came across as cold and destructive, leading many viewers to feel that Apple was portraying technology as something that replaces human creativity rather than enhances it.

[Apple Ads Geared Towards Creatives]

Apple has always advertised the iPad Pro as the device for creators, designers, filmmakers, musicians, artists, and students who use Apple products to express their ideas. With features like Apple Pencil support, advanced editing apps, and ProRes video capabilities [*Show these features*], many creative professionals use iPad Pros to enhance their creative experience.

[Quote]

As journalist Anuj Chopra notes, “Apple continues to add to the tools needed by its target demographic— professional users and creative workers.”

[Crush Ad]

As shown in the *Crush Ad*, Apple was advertising the product to creatives by showing the tools they use, but then Apple disrespected and destroyed those tools to emphasize the device's thinness. Instead of the iPad Pro being shown as a device to help enhance your creative experience, it was being advertised as a cold, soulless, modern replacement.

[News Stories]

In doing so, Apple contributed to the widespread public fear that technology is ruining art and stripping it of its soul and humanity. At the time the ad was published, AI was already a hot topic, and many creative professionals were afraid of their jobs being replaced by AI.

[AI Generated Art/Music]

Programs like ChatGPT, Midjourney, and Runway had become capable of writing, drawing, editing video, and even composing music—tasks that were once considered uniquely human. Artists were already seeing their work used to train AI models without permission, while

filmmakers and musicians worried that automation would devalue creative labor. In this cultural moment, many people felt that technology was beginning to erase the human touch from art.

[Crush Ad]

When Apple released an ad showing a giant machine crushing instruments, paint, and books—the very symbols of creativity—it unintentionally echoed those fears. To many viewers, the hydraulic press in the “*Crush!*” ad wasn’t just flattening tools; it was flattening human creativity itself [*Put a label saying “Human Creativity” on the stuff being crushed*]. The imagery reinforced the growing anxiety that technology was no longer supporting artists, but replacing them—an especially painful message coming from a brand long associated with empowering creativity.

[Public Reactions & Apple Response]

As a result, as soon as the commercial was published, artists and creatives flooded social media with criticism, calling the ad “tone-deaf” and “soulless.” Apple quickly pulled the commercial and issued a public apology, admitting that it had “missed the mark.”

[Quote]

The rhetorical situation surrounding this ad helps explain why it failed. According to Laura Bolin Carroll, effective rhetoric “fits the context it is produced in” and achieves its purpose with the audience it targets (Carroll 56).

[Titles to Support the Text]

Apple’s exigence, or purpose, was to persuade potential buyers—especially creative professionals—that the new iPad Pro represented the future of creative technology. The audience, however, consisted of people who value traditional forms of art and self-expression,

many of whom already worry about being replaced by artificial intelligence or digital automation. By releasing an ad that visually depicts the destruction of creative tools, Apple ignored the social context it was entering. Rather than fitting the cultural moment, the “*Crush!*” ad clashed with it.

[Titles to Support the Text]

From a rhetorical standpoint, the ad’s main failure lies in its appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos:

- Ethos refers to credibility, and Apple’s credibility with creatives has always come from being a company that celebrates art and individuality. *[Think Different and Shot on iPhone Ad Examples]* Ads like “*Think Different*” and “*Shot on iPhone*” established Apple as a champion of creativity. The “*Crush!*” ad, however, damages that credibility by symbolically destroying the very objects that represent artistic expression *[Crush Ad]*. Instead of honoring creativity, it appears to flatten it *[Pixar Intro Crushing Creativity]*.
- Pathos, the emotional appeal, also fails. The ad tries to evoke awe and amazement at the iPad’s thinness *[Ad Showing thin iPad Pro]*, but the slow, mechanical destruction of cherished instruments and books generates discomfort and sadness *[Stock Footage of Disturbed Person]*. Rather than feeling inspired, the viewer feels uneasy.
- Logos, the logical appeal, is flawed as well. The message—that all creative tools can exist inside an iPad—is undermined by the imagery used to convey it. Destruction does not logically communicate empowerment. If Apple had shown the tools integrated into the iPad *[Show This with Apple Ads]*, the claim might have been persuasive, but by showing them being crushed, the logic of the metaphor collapses.

[Crush Ad with Visual Aid]

The tone and design choices of the ad amplify these rhetorical problems. The lighting is harsh and sterile, the soundtrack is industrial and metallic, and there are no people present—only machines. Without any human presence, the ad feels impersonal and dystopian. *[Show Viewer Comments]* Viewers described it as cold and unsettling, saying it looked more like a scene from a science fiction movie about machines taking over than an inspiring tech commercial. It suggests that creativity is being absorbed by the machine rather than guided by it.

[Quote]

In Carroll's terms, the ad "asks you to believe a certain way" (Carroll 56), but the belief it promotes—that technology can or should replace the physical experience of art—conflicts with the values of its intended audience.

[Show Artists Making Art]

For artists and musicians, creativity is as much about the physical process as it is about the final product. By erasing that human element, the "*Crush!*" ad undermines its own persuasive power.

[News Stories & Public Reactions]

The audience's reaction demonstrates the consequences of ineffective rhetoric. Within days of its release, Apple faced a wave of negative publicity, forcing the company to publicly apologize and remove the ad from circulation. Critics argued that the ad portrayed creativity as disposable, and many online comments reflected disappointment in a company that once prided itself on empowering artists. As one creative director wrote in *The Verge*, "Apple, the company that once celebrated creativity, has now symbolized its destruction." The controversy shows how failing to understand audience context can damage even the strongest brand reputation.

If Apple wanted to achieve its original goal—to show that the iPad Pro condenses the power of many creative tools into one device—it could have used a very different rhetorical approach. Rather than focusing on destruction, Apple could have shown various creative professionals using the iPad Pro to help them achieve their goals. This version of the ad would preserve Apple’s original message but communicate it in a way that feels inspiring and human. The new ad would look a little something like this: *[Video]*

[Titles to Support the Text]

This redesigned concept also restores Apple’s rhetorical balance.

- Ethos would be strengthened by showing that Apple respects the creative process rather than replacing it.
- Pathos would shift from shock and discomfort to excitement and inspiration.
- Logos would become coherent because the visual metaphor would now match the message: creativity evolves, it doesn’t vanish.

[Clips from Reimagined Ad]

Including human creators in the ad—artists, musicians, and students using the iPad alongside their traditional tools—would further connect the device to its intended audience and reinforce Apple’s image as an ally to creativity.

[Sumerative Clips from Earlier in the Video]

Apple’s “*Crush!*” ad demonstrates how even a company with a strong marketing history can misread the cultural moment and its audience's emotions.

[Quotes]

As Carroll reminds us, media texts “ask you to believe a certain way,” and when that belief conflicts with audience values, persuasion fails (Carroll 56).

[Clips from Reimagined Ad]

In 2024, Apple’s audience of creative professionals didn’t need to be shown that technology was powerful; they needed to be reminded that technology still values human creativity. If Apple had focused on the harmony between art and innovation instead of portraying destruction, the ad could have succeeded in celebrating what makes its products truly meaningful—the people who use them to create.

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