

The Effectiveness of Advocacy and Advertising: A Comparison between Veganism and Climate Change

Abstract: This paper compares the ways people react to different information regarding veganism and climate change. It analyzes the factors that influence people's reactions to unpleasant information, and establishes that not everyone will respond to the same information in the same way. People can be determined not to believe certain information due to their religious or political backgrounds, or the amount that individuals could be affected by changes they are asked to make. Different suggestions are made for convincing people to take actions towards issues such as veganism and climate change: appealing to emotion as opposed to intellect, removing disassociation between individuals and these issues, and providing achievable steps so that people feel encouraged to make a difference. Overall, through analyzing veganism and climate change, this essay establishes that it is not always the message being conveyed that is most important, but rather the way in which that information is conveyed.

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Introduction

How a message is framed is crucial for connecting with an audience. Through analyzing how people react to different forms of information regarding veganism and climate change, this essay will illustrate that the framing of a message plays a crucial role in an audience's willingness to believe in an issue. This paper will analyze the ways in which different methods of advertising for a vegan lifestyle have worked to convince people to decrease or eliminate the use of animal products in their daily lives. It will also explore methods that effectively motivate people to take action against climate change. The suggestions proposed within this essay can be extrapolated to relate to other uncomfortable truths that need to be communicated to the public, but focuses on these two particular concepts – veganism and climate change – for the sake of simplicity. While studies have explored the information people receive about climate change with how they interpret it, this essay will compare climate change awareness with the way veganism is advertised, as a way to compare the effectiveness of different forms of advocacy.

This essay compares people's reactions to information on climate change with reactions to information on veganism because of similarities in the way that people choose to acknowledge or dismiss information about these concepts. This reaction relates to the implications that information carries for their daily lives. People may have different reactions based on their backgrounds and beliefs, and it therefore takes a range of advertising styles to reach all members of an audience when advocating for these themes. Similar to when people are faced with negative information about climate change, people use various arguments to oppose the idea of becoming vegan, and it can take varying techniques to convince them to make a lifestyle change. Scientists and activists have a difficult time convincing people to take action, even though there is a great deal of evidence supporting their theories. Through analyzing these concepts in relation to one another, this essay will introduce different ways to approach climate change advocacy.

Clarifying the Issues being Discussed

Climate change is one of the most important environmental issues of today's society. The potential impacts of climate change will likely cause devastation to our health, our economy,

and the landscape around us (Government of Canada, 2014). As illustrated in the National Wildlife Federation's National forum and research report, the extreme weather seen in the summer of 2011 exemplifies how climate change will affect the United States and the rest of the world. There will be increasingly frequent severe droughts, more heat-related deaths, raging wildfires, severe flooding, an increase in tornadoes and hurricanes, along with other weather extremes (Coyle & Van Susteren, 2011). Yet despite the overwhelming evidence of this threat to society, most citizens do not feel a pressing need to take action against global warming. A great number of people do not see how global warming will affect their daily lives, and consider it a distant issue in both time and place (Coyle & Van Susteren, 2011). For some time, the phenomenon of climate change has been common knowledge, and yet measures are not being taken to prevent it from happening. While one theory is that people are not taking action to prevent climate change because they have not been provided with enough information, an important factor is the way in which the information is advertised and portrayed.

There are many documentaries, books, magazines, articles, and websites that present information about vegan lifestyles. These media boast that veganism helps prevent animal cruelty, provides health benefits, and is more environmentally sustainable than a diet that includes animal products. According to a study conducted by the Vegetarian Resource Group, roughly one percent of the American population identifies as vegan, and four percent of the population identifies as vegetarian (Stahler, 2012). The amount of environmental devastation wreaked by livestock shows that if more people were to transition to a vegan diet, factors contributing to climate change could be reduced. Steinfeld, Gerber, Wassenaar, Castel, Rosales, and de Haan (2006) point out that livestock activity contributes 18% to total greenhouse gas emissions from the five major sectors of greenhouse gas reporting (p. 112). Along with 9% of global emissions of carbon dioxide and 35-40% of methane (2006, p.12), livestock account for 64% global emissions of ammonia, and 65% global emissions of nitrous oxide (2006, p. 112-114). Despite this, many people continue to have a diet that consists primarily of animal products. The purpose of this essay is to examine the forms of advocacy for veganism; not to try to convince readers that veganism is the solution to global warming. However, it is interesting to see the ways in which this information is sometimes avoided or ignored in people's conception of actions to take against climate change.

The Relationship between One's Identity and One's Environmental Stance

While many experts believe that skepticism regarding global warming exists due to a lack of understanding of complex information, the reality is that people form “cultural cognition” in which group values influence a person's related beliefs (Kahan, 2010, para. 5-6). To illustrate why information about climate change needs to be communicated in more than one way, Kahan (2010) states that:

The prevailing approach is still simply to flood the public with as much sound data as possible on the assumption that the truth is bound, eventually, to drown out its competitors. If, however, the truth carries implications that threaten people's cultural values, then holding their heads underwater is likely to harden their resistance and increase their willingness to support alternative arguments, no matter how lacking in evidence. (para. 19)

Nyhan (2014) argues that people usually are informed about climate change, but they are unwilling to believe the concepts that are in opposition with their cultural views. This is supported by a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, which found that 33% of the American public does not believe in evolution, and 26% believe that there is no solid evidence that supports global warming (as cited in Nyhan, 2014). These beliefs are divided along religious and political lines – 46% of Republicans do not believe in global warming, whereas 11% of Democrats share this view (as cited in Nyhan, 2014, para. 2). While the theory of evolution is not identical to the theory of anthropogenic climate change, Nyhan (2014) establishes parallels in the public's response to these theories based on beliefs associated with one's political views or religion. To determine if these views were brought about by a lack of information, Kahan conducted a test about whether respondents knew the theory of evolution or not, and avoided any association with individuals' “beliefs” within the test. The result was that people had the same level of knowledge about evolution regardless of their religion (as cited in Nyhan, 2014, para. 4). This suggests that “more people know what scientists think about high-profile scientific controversies than polls suggest; they just aren't willing to endorse the consensus when it contradicts their political or religious views” (Nyhan, 2014, para. 5).

Kahan (2010) reiterates that climate change activists need to establish a way to structure and present scientific information in a way that will be agreeable and acceptable to diverse groups, avoiding extremism for one side in contrast with another. Kahan (2010) states:

We need to try to break the association between identity and factual beliefs on high-profile issues – for instance, by making clear that you can believe in human-induced climate change and still be a conservative Republican like former Representative Bob Inglis or an evangelical Christian like the climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe. (As cited in Nyhan, 2014, para. 6)

Nyhan (2014) notes that it is possible for institutions to help people engage with science and set their political or religious identities aside in situations at the local level (para. 8). Nyhan (2014) argues that it is important to try to loosen the connection between one's identity and one's stance on climate change and willingness to take action. Similarly, Kahan (2010) states that:

Science needs better marketing. Unlike commercial advertising, however, the goal of these techniques is not to induce public acceptance of any particular conclusion, but rather to create an environment for the public's open-minded, unbiased consideration for the best available scientific information. (para. 18)

In other words, rather than simply using more scientific facts and then relying on the public to make the connection between these facts and the action that needs to be taken, the framing of the issue needs to be changed.

Willingness to Act When Livelihood is at Stake

The next element of advocacy that will be analyzed is the willingness of people to believe in a concept when it does not have a profound effect on their daily lives. In the case of veganism and animal rights advocacy, the film *Blackfish* has been very successful in creating awareness about the cruelties of practices at SeaWorld. People are willing to boycott SeaWorld because this decision usually does not have a large impact on their everyday lives. On the other hand, people are potentially less likely to watch films centered on veganism, because they do not want to hear about the negative effects of consuming animal products – the North American

diet integrates so many animal products that to eliminate them would mean a large shift in lifestyle. In his article “The persuasive power of film?” Jed Gillen (2014) depicts how *Blackfish* has major intrinsic appeal. The movie itself is not presented as a nature film or a lecture, but instead as a movie with a firm storyline in which a captive orca has killed a number of people (Gillen, 2014). This film is careful not to position humans as the enemies to whales (which would put the audience on the defensive); instead, it makes a select group of authority figures at SeaWorld the only villains (Gillen, 2014). People have taken action against SeaWorld as a result of this film, particularly in the form of social media (Zimmermann, 2014). Through Change.org petitions, people have been able to convince nine different musical acts to back out of performances at SeaWorld including the Barenaked Ladies, Willie Nelson, and Tricia Yearwood (Zimmermann, 2014). However, Gillen (2014) accredits a large part of the success of this film to the fact that many people do not consider boycotting SeaWorld to be a significant personal sacrifice. He observes that “just as many nonvegans find it easy to oppose fur, hunting, or even veal – simply because they don’t partake of these things anyway – finding out that SeaWorld is evil and saying they will never patronize it again is a relatively inconsequential cost” (Gillen, 2014, p. 51). People are often willing to stand for something when it does not inflict great inconvenience on them personally. While many people are willing to fight against SeaWorld after having seen this film, many are still not willing to watch films that state that consuming animal products is wrong; this stance would force them to confront an extremely dominant aspect of the American lifestyle (Gillen, 2014).

This concept of avoiding information that would result in substantial and inconvenient lifestyle changes can be applied to climate change. According to a report by the United Nations in 2002, youth are demonstrating a growing interest in environmental issues (as cited in Hickman, Lynes, & Riemer, 2013, p. 553). As stated by Quiroz-Martinez, Wu, and Zimmerman (2005), “young people are more likely to take risks because in most cases their jobs and livelihoods are not being directly threatened, and they tend to have fewer time constraints than employed or working older adults who often have work and family commitments” (as cited in Hickman et al., 2013, p. 555). Youth do not yet have careers, and therefore their sense of livelihood has not been built around industries such as fossil fuels or other climate change perpetuating jobs. For people who have incomes dependent on fossil fuels, however, the idea of society reducing the use of fossil fuels threatens their livelihoods.

A person's reaction to scientific research and evidence may not actually be a reaction to the science itself, but to the policies presented as solutions (Campbell & Kay, 2014). Campbell and Kay (2014) conducted a series of experiments to examine whether American people's skepticism regarding climate change would be affected by what course of action was suggested for reducing climate change. Part of the basis of this experiment was the understanding that free markets and limited government intervention are important ideological principles for many Republicans, whereas these concerns are less important for Democrats (Campbell & Kay, 2014, p. 811). In one study, American Republicans and Democrats were asked their views on climate change; one half of the interviewees were given information that linked preventing climate change with implementing restrictive emissions policy, and the other half were provided with information suggesting a free market friendly solution in which the United States would profit from green technology (Campbell & Kay, 2014, p. 813). As the authors predicted, Republicans reported a higher belief in the role that humans play in creating climate change when the policy solution was free market friendly (2014, p. 815). These findings support the view that, in fact, the willingness of Republicans to believe climate change science is linked to their preference for certain solutions. Generally, republicans were less skeptical of climate change evidence when the proposed solutions favoured a free market policy approach, but were more skeptical of climate change evidence when a restrictive policy approach was suggested (Campbell & Kay, 2014, p. 817).

It is important to have a range of possible solutions for climate change not only for diverse political groups, but also for individuals with differing personal values. Kahan (2010) argues that people often resist scientific evidence that could limit activities valued by their group, but if they are presented with information that aligns with their commitments, they react with a more open mind. Kahan uses the example of people with individualistic values, who could potentially resist believing in climate change because they think that industry-constraining carbon-emission limits are the only solution (2010, para. 16). He states that if these people are made aware that possible responses to climate change include nuclear power and geoengineering, which represent resourcefulness, they might be more inclined to take action towards preventing climate change (2010, para. 16). It is crucial to suggest solutions that will take a wide variety of personal values into consideration. When presenting to a crowd, it is important

to try and suggest solutions that will please the greatest amount of individuals through proposing solutions that will highlight their personal values.

The Connection between Emotion and Intellect

A potential tool in advocating for both climate change and veganism is the appeal to an individual's emotions as opposed to his or her intellect. Dolan (2002) writes:

The importance of emotion to the variety of human experience is evident in that what we notice and remember is not the mundane but events that evoke feelings of joy, sorrow, pleasure, and pain. Emotion provides the principal currency in human relationships as well as the motivational force for what is best and worst in human behavior. Emotion exerts a powerful influence on reason and, in ways neither understood nor systematically researched, contributes to the fixation of belief. (para. 3)

We as humans think that our personal belief systems are always formed through logical reasoning and solid facts, and we are confident that if our beliefs and emotions were in conflict with one another, our beliefs would dominate these emotions (Gillen, 2014). In reality, our emotions often control our beliefs; how we feel is much more likely to affect our rational thought than vice versa (Gillen, 2014). When people's belief systems are challenged, they usually defend these systems and create justifications for their reasoning, as opposed to considering the fact that their belief systems may in fact be wrong (Gillen, 2014). The psychologist William James states that "people have strong emotional attachments to the overall edifice of their belief systems but are relatively indifferent to the particular bricks out of which they are constructed" (as cited in Gillen, 2014, p. 49). While it is true that, eventually, enough evidence could be presented that someone could be persuaded to change his or her rational views, it is potentially more effective to appeal to an individual's emotions instead of his or her logic. While everyone forms their decisions in different ways, and some people may be more motivated by factual information than by emotional images, it is important for information advocates to keep in mind the potential ability of appealing to emotion to cause a reaction with their viewers.

Gillen (2014) applies the idea of emotions in contrast with intellect to the effectiveness of various documentaries. Depending on how these documentaries are put together, they can

either inspire people enough to cause change, or they can enable people to dismiss the theories presented. Rosser (2007) states that “there are many advocates who believe that the use of film is the most effective teaching tool available because a movie enhances the learning process in ways unavailable in other media. Having an emotional connection with something is the best way to remember it” (p. 249). Gillen (2014) argues that the documentary *Forks over Knives* (2011), and the film *Speciesism: The Movie* (2013) are not the most effective tools at promoting veganism because of their application to intellect and statistics instead of emotion; these films do not fully utilize the ability of films to emotionally connect a reader to the issues discussed. In *Speciesism*, the filmmaker is supposedly a skeptic of veganism, and sets out to prove vegans wrong in their defense of animals. However, he “surprisingly” finds that people are constantly able to counter his arguments. The documentary is one-sided, because it constantly depicts interviews with vegan experts (Gillen, 2014). The only views that the documentary presents that are against veganism are those of supposedly uneducated farmers, and a handful of passers-by from the street. Regarding *Forks over Knives* in particular, Gillen states that:

Whereas the facts and statistics that it presents may seem overwhelmingly persuasive to those who are emotionally receptive to the vegan message already, it is simply too easy for those who are emotionally biased against veganism to write it off as the same old, tired vegan propaganda...in catering almost entirely to our intellect rather than our emotion, it fails to take advantage of the audiovisual medium’s outstanding potential to persuade. (2014, p. 49).

While *Forks over Knives* relates to how eating animal products affects human health, it does not show any footage of animal cruelty or other inhumane acts that could be considered emotionally jarring. In contrast to this, the documentary *Earthlings* (2005) consists namely of violent and graphic footage. It depicts foxes being skinned alive for their fur, geese being forced with a tube stuffed down their throats, and cows being cut and left to bleed to death (*Earthlings*, 2005). This documentary has turned many people into lifelong vegans, including celebrities such as Ellen Degeneres and her wife, Portia de Rossi (Castoria, 2014).

The concept of appealing to emotion instead of logic can be related to the information that has been released about climate change. The solution may not necessarily be to add more

information and facts, but to pay attention to the ways in which the information is delivered. In the National Wildlife Federation's national forum and research report, Coyle and Van Susteren (2011) state that "this report aims both to fill in the gap in our awareness of the psychological impacts of climate change, and by exposing the emotional side of the issue, to find the place in our hearts that mobilizes us to fly into action, forewarned, determined, relentless" (Preface). They go on to illustrate the fact that:

The language of science is, admittedly, not a stirring call to action. Scientists are by nature cautious, and restrained. While this report does not aim to present the forum participants as flame throwers, for this work to accomplish a primary goal, the reader will need to feel something in reading it. The language used here, and some of the questions asked, may feel uncomfortably probing, as they pierce our armor. After all, most of us want to be patriotic, to be optimist about the future. But we need to fully confront certain realities. (2012, Preface)

This quotation is one example of how more panicked and urgent language can potentially make people feel that climate change is imminent, and something that will affect everyone, as opposed to something that is just being theorized about. By appealing to emotion rather than only presenting logical and scientific information, there might be more of an inclination for people to be motivated to make changes.

Removing the Disconnect between Issues and Individuals

A key step in activism for both veganism and climate change is removing the disassociation between people and the issue at hand. An example of this disassociation can be seen through considering how people think of the animal products they eat. Many people have removed the connection between the food on their plate and the animal that it originated from. The meat bought in a store looks nothing like the living animal it once was, so people may not form an association between the meat and live animals they see. In the book *Vegan for Her*, Fields (2013) describes how she was presented with a goat on a trip to Kenya. The goat was then killed, butchered, and cooked in front of her. Fields states that she became vegetarian the next day, and later became a vegan after exploring a farm animal sanctuary (Messina & Fields,

2013). A large part of what triggered her lifestyle change was seeing the connection between a living creature and the meal she was presented with.

The disassociation between issues and individuals can be related to climate change. Al Gore's speech at the 2008 TED conference addresses the disconnect that exists between people's willingness to accept the concept of climate change and their sense of urgency about it. While 68% of Americans now believe that humans are responsible for global warming, and 69% believe that Earth is heating up in a significant way, dealing with global warming is rated as the second-lowest priority for the President and Congress in the United States (Gore, 2008). This could potentially imply that, as willing as people may be to believe in climate change, there are still not enough of them that consider this as an issue that needs to be acted on immediately. In Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), he uses images of coastal parts of the world that will be completely flooded if layers of ice in Greenland and Antarctica continue to melt at an alarming rate. Seeing large portions of America such as Florida, San Francisco, and Manhattan under water led audiences to see that climate change is an issue that will affect them directly (Gore, 2006).

Creating Manageable Goals for Veganism and Climate Change

The approach that advertisements take to promote the adoption of a new lifestyle is crucial. This can be seen in the ways people advertise veganism. The people who have adapted this lifestyle have done so for a variety of reasons, and made the transition in a number of ways. Elizabeth Castoria (2014) states, "for some people, watching five seconds of video footage from a factory farm will do the trick; others will start by cutting out certain products and then gradually expand that list until they're fully vegan" (p. 15). The definition of veganism encompasses giving up every form of animal product possible: from meat to dairy; honey to silk; and leather to animal-tested makeup. When vegan advocates criticize people for absolutely every animal product that they use, it is easy for people to feel overwhelmed and tune out the message completely. But some resources, such as Elizabeth Castoria's (2014) book *How to be Vegan*, act as tools to encourage those who want to make positive changes, and emphasize that every change can help make a difference in the fight against animal cruelty. People are potentially more likely to pay attention to resources such as these, and not to simply shut out the idea of veganism altogether.

Similarly, when dealing with climate change, an important factor to enable action is to encourage any level of contribution that people can make. In the film *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), Al Gore observes that once people are convinced of the reality of climate change, they often transition straight from denial to despair, without pausing on the intermediate step of actually doing something about the problem. Caldwell (2010) states that “all the polls and marketing specialists tell us that people will tune us out if we shriek about the fact that the sky is falling and that people want to hear about solutions” (para. 10). In other words, people are much more likely to be receptive to information about climate change if it is presented in a way that shows their actions can make a difference. If climate change activists overly emphasize the daunting task of trying to confront this issue, people may tune them out. A research report prepared by Gina Hickman, Jennifer Lynes, and Manuel Riemer (2013) outlines strategies for encouraging youth to become involved in environmental engagement programs. In this report, Kaplan (2000) argues that participants “need to be able to see small measurable outcomes through the development of realistic goals” when actively engaging in activities addressing climate change (as cited by Hickman et al., 2013, para. 12). An influential part of climate change is enabling people to feel as though they can make a difference on an individual level. If people feel that their contributions do not make a difference, then they will likely give up; but if people are led to believe that they can help control issues like climate change, and can see measurable results, then they will feel encouraged.

In Al Gore’s 2006 speech at the TED conference, he emphasized the actions that people can take to prevent the worsening of global warming, and constantly reiterated the fact that it is easier to make a difference than people think. He listed clear steps that people can take, and pointed out positive economical side effects of making these changes (Gore, 2006). Some of his tips included reducing emissions within the home (which he pointed out would also be economically beneficial), buying a hybrid car, and becoming a better consumer through environmentally friendly purchases (Gore, 2006). While Gore’s presentation also incorporated statistics on the devastating effects of global warming, a large part of what made his presentation so successful was his encouragement for people to take whatever steps they could to improve the environmental situation.

Conclusion

Through comparing advocacy for veganism and climate change, this essay has established that the framing of a message is a crucial aspect of influencing an audience; this theory can be extrapolated and applied to other uncomfortable or unwanted truths that need to be communicated to the public. It is not enough to just assume that with more knowledge, people will be more inclined to take action. Several issues have affected how people see climate change: people associate their environmental stance with their religious or political identities, and they see the actions required to mitigate climate change as being detrimental to their livelihoods. A few recommended ways to frame advocacy are to try and remove the connection between environmental beliefs and an individual's political identity, appeal to emotion as opposed to intellect, remove the sense of disassociation between individuals and the issues, and provide achievable steps for people so that they can feel encouraged to make a difference. While keeping these ideas in mind, it is important to acknowledge that an audience may be of mixed thinking, and some may react to a method positively while others react negatively. It is crucial to implement a range of techniques when reaching out to people, in order to effectively influence everyone within an audience. By understanding how different people acknowledge and interact with information, we can create a better sense of how best to communicate the issue of climate change to the public, and effectively motivate people to take action.

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