

An Analysis of Advocacy Methods of Animal Rights Organizations: Toward a Global Campaign for the Meat Tax

Kaitilyn Bestor

Faculty Sponsor: Bryan Kopp, Department of English Studies

ABSTRACT

As the high consumption of meat continues to take a toll on people's physical health as well as the environment, there has been discussion of implementing a "sin tax" on meat to decrease the level of production and consumption. Even with the abundance of scientific research that indicates that the reduction of meat would be beneficial to both people and the Earth, public awareness surrounding this global issue is very limited. This research studies the contributions of animal rights organizations, which is a key factor to understanding public awareness. The researcher analyzed the different advocacy methods used when communicating to the public, in order to determine which method(s) would be beneficial in the promotion of a meat tax. Due to the global nature of the issue, the research was enhanced by traveling to the Gold Coast, Australia where an animal rights organization was partnered with to better understand in-person outreach methods.

INTRODUCTION

The ever-growing amount of meat consumed around the world is negatively impacting our environment and our health. To combat this issue, a few countries have discussed proposing a sin tax. Although still hypothetical, the United Nations Environment Program has been researching the potential beneficial results. Like cigarettes, alcohol, and gasoline, a tax on meat would lower consumption and help pay for the environmental and health costs. The results of a sin tax have already been proven to work. After passing a sugar tax in 2014, researchers in Berkeley, California found that "sales of sugar sweetened drinks fell by nearly 10 percent while sales of water increased by 16 percent" (Falbe, p. 1865). A change in public perception on this issue was vital in order to get legislation passed. A critical question that should be asked then, is how can public perception be changed?

LITERATURE REVIEW & PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

A key finding in the preliminary research that supports the needed implementation of a meat tax, was a study conducted by *The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology*. They gathered information about public perception on climate change in Canada, China, Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. According to their results, "people are much more likely to be concerned about global warming if they understand its basic causes, such as human activities" (Shi). To help the public understand the basic premise behind the detriment of meat consumption, the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization exemplifies the harmful effects of meat product production and consumption. They estimate that the meat industry generates "nearly one-fifth of the man-made greenhouse gas emissions that are accelerating climate change worldwide – more than the entire transportation sector" (Agricultural Output). Even with the abundance of similar statistics, there is lack of public awareness on the detrimental effects of producing and consuming meat. Being a global issue makes efforts to change public perceptions more challenging, but not impossible.

Animal rights organizations work to change public policy both on a national level and global scale. They can gain real momentum in the process of policy change with advocacy, working closely with local and global leaders to increase education and inform the public of important issues. "Effective advocacy enables nonprofits to shape the public debate on important social issues and ensure that underserved communities have a voice in the policies that impact their lives. The term *advocacy* encompasses a broad range of activities (including research, public education, lobbying, voter education, etc.) that can influence public policy. Advocacy is the number one-way nonprofits can advance the issues they care about and help bring about systemic, lasting change" (Aseem and Gugerty).

A critical element of advocating is *how* it is done. The numerous techniques and methods that can be used vary greatly in effectiveness. For example, it is important that organizations broaden their audience base to those who do not already have similar beliefs as the issue in question. Understanding these methods fully, and their varying effectiveness, is important in changing the public's perception and awareness on animal rights topics and determining what the best course of action is to promote awareness about a meat tax.

The purpose of the research was to analyze how organizations use advocacy to promote their ideas, the methods that they use and why they use them. The focus was specifically on animal rights groups because of their expertise and missions that are in line with the meat tax. Alliance for Animals is an organization based out of Madison that takes on many of Wisconsin's animal rights issues. Some of their work includes "local campaigns advocating for animals, events, tabling, media and advertising, speakers, movie screenings, humane education, and leafletting throughout Wisconsin" (Alliance for Animals). Because this is a global issue, the lens of the research was broadened to the country that continues to battle the United States in having the highest meat consumption in the world, Australia (Kearney). One specific organization used as an international comparison enhanced the study by providing a hands-on experience. This group, Animal Liberation, located in Queensland, Australia, is an animal rights organization that has been a part of many successful policy changes in the past. The largest animal rights organization in the world, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) was analyzed as well. The global nature of their work allowed me to study how they advocate on a worldwide scale, versus organizations working at a state and federal level.

METHODS

A qualitative research approach was chosen for this study because it allowed a question (how do animal rights organizations advocate?) to be looked at from various angles, rather than testing a hypothesis. The information gathered is predominantly non numerical, but rather interpretive (Griffin). It was then analyzed to find commonalities to further develop understanding. The methods used were observations, interviews, and context analysis, generating non numerical results and thus aligning with a qualitative approach as well.

Observation analysis

The observations conducted were primarily of outreach methods. This includes grass-root work, events, campaigns, etc. The primary animal rights group that was used for observational analysis was Animal Liberation. The first outreach event that I observed was in February of 2019, and was Valentine's Day themed. It included creating paper hearts that had "Animal Liberation" on them. Members of the group set up tables in public spaces around Brisbane, Australia where they handed them out. Part of their technique was to locate themselves in areas where there was high foot traffic, such as near train stations and bus stops. When people were waiting to board, the members would have a chance to hand out the hearts and strike up a conversation about their cause. From this outreach method, I observed that there was a common reaction to ignore the outreach attempt, or take the heart and walk away without a discussion. There were a few people who were curious as to what the organization was, which led to short conversations. Lastly, but most rarely, did people sign up to join the email list or take a pamphlet with them. Roughly, for every 25 attempts to engage only one was successful in having any sort of reaction. Although engagement between outreachers and the public was rare, this method did create awareness by getting the name of the animal rights organization in the hands of the public. Another method that was utilized was called the "Cube of Truth". It involved members of the Animal Liberation teaming up with another animal rights group "Anonymous for the Voiceless" that works on a global scale. Together they held a few of these events in Brisbane, Australia. The "cube" consists of volunteers standing in a square, wearing masks which is used "as a unifying symbol against the forces that still promote discrimination, corruption, injustice and oppression in any form in our society today" (Animal Liberation). They also hold up iPads, tablets, and laptops, with videos of animal cruelty on repeat, ranging from agricultural practices to animals for sport. Other members and volunteers stand on the outside of the cube, allowing the public to view the images without interaction. The key element of this outreach method is that no member can approach a viewer, instead taking a passive approach and waiting for people to come up to them. I observed many different reactions during these events. Because they were located in central areas in Brisbane during rush hour, the amount of people that passed was tremendous. The footage tied with the masks created a unique scene, and curiosity played a large role in getting people to stop and look.

Interviews

The interviews conducted were one on one, either face to face or over the phone. The people chosen were individuals that were a part of one of the three animal rights groups, with various levels of experience. The questions that were asked were open-ended inquiries about personal experiences working with the group, as well as reflections

about their impact on the greater cause thus far. The interviews were recorded both manually on paper as well as through audio recording.

Content analysis

The data was gathered from three separate animal rights groups: Alliance for Animals, Animal Liberation, and PETA. When analyzing the content, there was a focus on word choice, imagery, and message that was displayed for each of the groups. For specification purposes, the material gathered was categorized into

1. Hard copy materials.
 - a. Pamphlets, posters, fliers, ect.
2. Social media presence
 - a. Websites, Instagram accounts, Twitter accounts, and Facebook accounts.

RESULTS

After analyzing the content and methods that each group used to deliver their message, a demonstrable theme emerged that the content constantly revolved around. In general, the basic method of Aristotle's rhetoric of argumentation was used, through ethos, pathos, and logos, which proved to be successful in some aspects but overall failed to be an adequate method of advocacy when considering the end goal for a reduction in the consumption of meat.

Logos

The first step in the group's advocacy was to destroy the currently held beliefs surrounding the animal industry. According to Maxim Fetissenko in his analysis *Beyond Morality: Developing a New Rhetorical Strategy for the Animal Rights Movement* published in the *Journal of Animal Ethics* "reasoned argument remains the best tool available to the animal liberation movement" (Fetissenko, p.107). Each of the groups enacted the idea that the public deserves to understand the truth about the exploitation of the animal industry, indicating that the previous idea of what animal welfare consisted of, is to some degree, false. For example, the meat and dairy industries have done a remarkable job cultivating their own "truth" by using such images as a frolicking cow in a lush pasture. Animal rights groups aim to correct that distorted image to ensure the consumer understands the true conditions in which the animals live. In order to dismantle the previously solidified and established "truth" of the large corporations, the animal rights groups turned to statistics to generate a credible basis to work off of. This was done as part of the first interaction the public had with the activist, which could be an initial conversation or done with a piece of hard copy literature such as a brochure. According to Tara Jenkins, an animal rights activist for Animal Liberation, successful advocacy starts with an individual "asking questions" which was followed up by general information to adhere to one's logical thought process. Once people start to question their previously held beliefs, they will be more willing to listen to and furthermore, accept that conflicting ideas hold truth. On the Alliance for Animals website, they include a "kill count" that showcases a continuously increasing number of animals that are being killed in real time (Alliance for Animals). This staggering statistic, approximately 2,000 per second, further builds on the notion of truth by perpetuating a sense of urgency of the present situation as it's happening in real time. Although effective in some instances, if the cognitive awareness in the audience is already present, the justification of the "truth" does little to persuade or change their perception. Headings such as "What's Wrong with Dairy?" and "The Ugly Reality Of Pig Farming " on hard copy leaflets, although appeals to logic, insinuates (Animal Liberation) that the public does not know of these problematic aspects of their everyday lives.

Pathos

The next step which is arguably the most notorious for animal rights is the use of emotional appeal. Through graphic imagery and disturbing word choice used to describe the fates that animals face, the violent nature of the animal industry is clearly exposed. According to Fetissenko, the dominant presence of this strategy being used can be attributed to the activists' own reasoning for involvement "not surprising, then, that they would use the kind of logical appeal they personally have found to be irrefutable" (Fetissenko, p.158). Taking it a step further, this emotion provoking tactic can fall under the category of "moral shock" which was clearly demonstrated in the "Cube

of truth". According to Jasper and Poulsen's research *Recruiting Strangers and Friends: Moral Shocks and Social Networks in Animal Rights and Anti-Nuclear Protests* (Jasper and Poulsen) moral shock works to recruit strangers to a cause through the use of rhetorical devices while displaying their message in order to generate an emotional reaction. They explained that moral shock has the greatest impact when done in a highly publicized location, is generally unexpected, and most importantly has a common symbol or theme that the audience already has an emotional connection to. In Jasper and Poulsen's study in the case of animal rights, they found that moral shock was a highly influential method of advocacy because of what animals symbolize in society. "In all societies, animals are repositories for cultural meanings... they have enormous potential as condensing symbols."(Jasper & Poulsen, p.505). This notion provides explanation as to the automatic reaction of the public when shown a graphic image of animal abuse. There is already a predisposed emotional connection between animals and humans. Although their study proved that moral shock can provide efficient results, society has changed drastically since 1995 when it was first published. In an updated study, Elizabeth L. DeCoux suggests that effectiveness of moral shock has been diluted due to the increase in its use. Constant exposure to violence, from not only animal rights groups but from a majority of mass media, has led the public to be desensitized, "We live in a society in which people are used to seeing extreme violence and gore all the time. . . . We should not overestimate the impact of videos and materials that we think are shocking" (DeCoux).

Ethos

The last area of rhetorical strategy is ethos, in which the credibility of those advocating and the message being perpetrated is called into question. Although from personal experience, it was found that the information that is used in advocacy is heavily backed up by reliable sources, the groups lack credibility as a whole. This area of rhetoric is where the animal rights groups seem to fall short. "In Empty Cages: Facing the Challenge of Animal Rights," Tom Regan acknowledges this by explaining that "the two most pressing challenges facing the movement for other animals are, first, its small membership and, second, its lack of public credibility" (Regan, p.32). This can be attributed to its direct opposition to the current norms in society, its apparent "extremism", and its lack of diversity in the animal rights community. Chay Neal, president and executive director of *Animal Liberation*, explained that "Most people won't change their ways because they feel judged into it" when discussing the personal understanding of what makes an individual change their beliefs. In attempts to avoid an individual from feeling judged, one tactic the organizations used was by placing the blame on large corporations which shifts the focus from a personal to societal problem. According to Corey Wrenn, who studied the *Resonance of Moral Shocks in Abolitionist Animal Rights Advocacy: Overcoming Contextual Constraints*, "Creating an 'Other' for participants to rally against increases group solidarity, affective ties, inclusivity, and reciprocal emotions, and motivates participation"(Wrenn). Unfortunately, this inclusiveness can create an "all or nothing" concept where individuals feel they must adhere to the "extreme" of eliminating all animal products out of their life if they want to participate. The "extreme" notion is further perpetrated by the vigorous efforts of well-known groups such as PETA using previously mentioned "moral shock". Some of their campaigns lead to public backlash because of their radical messages. In one video posted on their twitter page, women were showcased explaining violent sexual encounters with the words "no mother should have to go through this" as a way to compare rape victims with cows in the dairy industry (@peta). In another notable campaign, that has since been removed from their website, PETA drew similarities between concentration camps and the animal industry when it posted a photo of Holocaust victims locked in cages next to a photo of chickens also in cages. The text read "To animals, all people are Nazis." While some people in the animal rights movement understand the similarities drawn, these campaigns along with many others have been increasingly offensive to the public. The consequences of this go beyond just creating controversial discussion, it has led to revoked support of the overall animal rights movement.

DISCUSSION

While animal rights groups are continuously growing, the methods that are utilized consist of beneficial tactics as well as elements that should be reconsidered based on updated research as to what drives success. As stated earlier, the use of reasoned argument or logic, is a profitable method available for animal rights groups. Because of

the wavering moral and ethical opinions of individuals regarding rights of animals, prompting the environmental and health benefits may lead to greater success, instead of only focusing on just the rights of animals (Fetissenko). The Aristotelian concept of Kairos can provide an explanation of this, and why animal rights groups should use the mainstream “trendiness” and relevance of health and being environmentally friendly to their advantage. With the end goal of reducing the consumption of meat in mind, a shift in the focus of animal rights groups would be warranted. Instead of the seemingly unattainable elimination of animals for human benefit, the advocacy for *less* could lead to more success because of the higher rate of attainability. Coming into this project I was under the impression that animal rights groups were on the front line for the fight towards a sin tax on meat. However, their own agenda is threatened by such actions because of the “fear that human health and environmental arguments take away from the importance of the movement’s core claim: animals are sentient beings and are not ours to use as we please” (Fetissenko, p.158). After my extensive research and in depth analysis, I have found that in fact animal rights groups and their overall standpoint on abolishing animal use may be hindering the work that is being done by various legislators and advocates of the meat tax, and therefore other advocacy groups may be more vital in this movement.

FUTURE STUDY

As this project developed, I found that there were many different avenues that could have been carried out. For example, to further this research, the demographics of animal rights groups would be beneficial to consider because of the lack of representation of certain groups, and how this deters some individuals from the movement. Another area to develop further is the presence of animal rights groups in mainstream media, and how their portrayals affect their success. Lastly, as I have concluded that animal rights groups are not the leading advocacy group to promote a sin tax on meat, looking into other types of groups such as various environmental nonprofits would be beneficial.

LIMITATIONS

There are limitations to my study that have to be established and addressed because of the possible impact on the results. First, I had time constraints and therefore I could not analyze and observe all aspects of the three groups I chose to look at. The organizations had a tremendous amount of content as well as numerous in-person outreach events, and therefore I had to pick and choose between what information I felt was the most relevant. I also could not consider all animal rights groups, limiting the representation, because there are thousands and thus the time constraint led me to choose only three. Location was a factor as well, because these groups advocate on a worldwide scale, and therefore in some instances I had to use online tools to gather information instead of direct in-person interaction. Future research could and *should* be done to understand these methods further in efforts to successfully advocate to the public. This study was *just* one component of a complex equation, as there are many factors that play into the success of societal change that go far beyond the organizations.

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