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Environmental Communication Dominated by Corporate Giants

Molly Powers

CJN 506AE Honors Seminar

Professor Carragee

Abstract

There are grave disparities between the environmental communication put forth by agribusiness corporations, and the extensive malpractice and abuse that actually occurs. Through their monopolizing power and wealth, corporate giants are able to continue to maximize their profits at the expense of animal, environment, and public well-being. Following a major shift from personalized farming to industrialized food production in the early 20th century, we have become increasingly dependent on what we see and hear in the news media discourse, largely controlled by these dominating corporations, to stay informed on industrialized agricultural practices. This creates an environment in which the connection between the food we consume and the suffering endured to mass-produce it, can be and is avoided, blurred, or lied about completely. In this paper, I provide a comprehensive look into the discourse surrounding the factory farming industry in the United States, specifically targeting how the related environmental communication, within the scope of top-selling farmed animals, is largely dominated by powerful agribusiness corporations.

Introduction

A trip to the supermarket for a \$1.99 dozen of eggs and a \$2.69 carton of milk does not typically result in uproar over the prolonged suffering and squalor farmed animals endure to mass produce such products. However by going beyond the major labels, idyllic advertisements, and vague assurances of public and environmental wellbeing, scholars, activists, and scientists alike warn that staple products in our grocery carts often harbor a sinister backstory.

Forms of agricultural practices have been a cornerstone for survival dating back 200,000 years, primarily in the mode of hunting and gathering. Clearly, more robust and successful methods have developed throughout this timeline into the systems in place today. Factory farming, therefore, burgeoned into the low cost, yet highly profitable industry where animals are bred, confined, manipulated, and slaughtered for the intensive, mass production of their bodies and products. This major shift from personalized farming to industrialized food production, which mushroomed following the Industrial Revolution and into the 20th century, removed the necessity of farming from standard daily life.

This same shift, however, also resulted in an increased reliance on news media discourse to stay informed on the industrialized agriculture practices that the public had been greatly distanced from (Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Freeman, 2009; Gardner, Prugh, Renner, & Mastny 2015; Glenn, 2004). Not only were intensive methods able to be kept out of the public eye, but news frames and the media, largely controlled and funded by powerful corporations with their own agendas, began to be scripted in favor of corporate profit. As a result, inherently brutal and ethically questionable practices are still masked by an eco-friendly and beneficial facade put forth by agribusiness. Farmed animals and their products have fallen into the competitive

business of mass food consumption that is largely dominated by corporate giants interested in maximizing their profits (Anomaly, 2015; Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Freeman, 2009; Gardner et. al. (2015); Glenn, 2004; Schmuck, Matthes, & Naderer, 2018; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Torelli, Balluchi, & Lazzini, 2020; Verhaag, 2010; Williams, 2008). While the financial cost of factory farming practices is considerably lower than small-scale family farming, the steep cost to the environment and public health significantly skews the cost-benefit analysis in a steep decline (Anomaly, 2015; Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Williams, 2008).

In this paper, I provide a comprehensive look into the discourse surrounding the factory farming industry in the United States, specifically targeting how the related environmental communication is largely dominated by powerful agribusiness corporations. This enterprise encompasses multiple important sectors impacting the environment, global sustainability, and public health. However for the purpose of this paper, I will be analyzing the industry and related environmental communication linked to factory farming, within the scope of top-selling farmed animals. Consistent with the practices of numerous scholars and the activists in their works, I will be using the term “farmed” animals as opposed to farm animals in order to recognize the forcible practices to which they are subjected. I also will use the terms “flesh” and “bodies” to refer to the killing of “nonhuman animals” to challenge the notion of farmed animals functioning simply as commodities (Anomaly, 2015; Freeman, 2009, Glenn, 2004, Williams, 2008).

Adhering to this perspective, the body of this paper is divided into three main sections. I first outline the negative consequences of factory farming primarily in regard to the treatment of the farmed animals. Next, I provide an analysis of the deceptive communicative tactics used by corporations to feign claims of sustainability and environmentally “green” practices in order to

conceal disturbing realities. This is followed by an overview of the gross abuse of power and profit utilized by agribusiness monopolies to influence governmental collusion, sway policy makers, and silence opposition. All of these sections are intended to highlight the grave disparities between public perceptions of the industry and the extensive environmental malpractice that is both hidden from sight and largely able to slip away from regulations and punishments. I conclude with a brief discussion of the necessity to become familiar with factory farming practices and the deceptive environmental communication put forth in order to become more informed consumers. The arguments, statistics, examples, and projections presented in this paper will be directly impacted by more conscious decision making and choices on behalf of the consumers of corporate products, that can benefit environmental, animal, and public safety. My conclusion also presents all limitations faced in the construction of the literature review and poses a call to action for individuals to learn how the factory farming industry built and maintains its empire, in order to become increasingly familiar with and better judges of grave environmental deceptions.

Literature Review

The Treatment of Farmed Animals

American agriculture in particular has undergone drastic alterations since the mid 20th century in rapid movements away from the typical family farm. By the latter half of this period, the food-agricultural industry had claimed second place amongst the most profitable trades in the U.S., only lagging behind the pharmaceutical industry (Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006). The nation's food production index, a measurement of all food crops considered to be edible, increased 45% from 1992 to 2012 (Gardner et. al., 2015), by which time only 3% of the country's farms were

responsible for the production of more than 60% of overall agricultural output (Drake, 2012). Tyson Foods for one, reached \$26.4 billion in consumer sales and Smithfield Foods reported \$9.3 billion in consumer sales in 2004, which is made possible by their colossal levels of production. Furthermore, these immense earnings do not even account for the gross profits, net incomes, and production revenues secured by these giants annually (Drake, 2012). Thus, raking in tens of billions of dollars in sales each year, top corporations such as Tyson, Smithfield, Monsanto, and Perdue dominate the industry and set the stage for profitability over safety and morality (Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Verhaag, 2010).

As such, nearly 46 billion of animals are confined, mutilated, and slaughtered every year for human consumption (Anomaly, 2015; Drake, 2006; Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Williams, 2008). On average within U.S. slaughterhouses, grown farmed animals are killed at around 400 bodies per hour (Williams, 2008), and when stretched to include aquatic animals, and the hundreds of millions executed prior to the slaughterhouses, this statistic skyrockets to one million farmed animals killed every hour (Freeman, 2009). The remaining deaths can be attributed to the farmed animals who die of disease, injury, and stress-induced behaviors while living in such harsh conditions. While it is apparent that hamburgers on the menu and roast chicken suppers required the killing of a nonhuman animal, in the case of intensive farming products the slaughtering methods are characterized by suffering and preceded by a life of misery that is unbeknownst to most of the general public (Anomaly, 2015; Drake 2012; Freeman, 2009; Williams, 2008). In addition, in the aftermath of this mass production nearly 2.7 trillions pounds of feces is produced each year, which has become one of the top reasons for the contamination of drinking water and fish population reduction (Drake, 2012; MacDonald &

McBride, 2009). Further severe environmental consequences of this industry include, hefty deforestation for farming locations, rapidly mounting greenhouse gas emissions, and an unsustainable demand on water supplies (Gardner et. al., 2015; Glenn, 2004; MacDonald & McBride, 2009; Williams, 2008). Needless to say, these harsh truths diverge from the idyllic pastures and smiling animals pictured on corporate products.

Females cows are kept perpetually pregnant to increase milk production which is further impacted by the use of intensive hormones and antibiotics incorporated into their feed. The level of antibiotic inclusion in fact is so drastic that of all antibiotics used worldwide, almost half are fed to farmed animals to expedite growth and ward off diseases from horrid conditions (Anomaly, 2015). Subtherapeutic antibiotics (STAs) in particular are used to suppress the production of organisms within the body of cows that compete for nutrients during digestion, therefore, speeding up growth. These exact drugs, however, develop drug resistant bacteria that is passed from farmed animals to humans after consumption, which has led to the transmission of numerous deadly viruses (Gardner et. al., 2015; Macdonald & McBride, 2009). In recent years, technological advancements have provided such factories with a mechanical milking machine which forcibly extracts milk with automated pumps, leaving painful sores and gashes (Freeman, 2009; MacDonald & McBride, 2009). While cows are naturally expected to live up to thirty years on average, cows in this industry typically only last about 5 years (Glenn, 2004).

Pigs are confined in cages that are not wide enough for their unnaturally large bodies, commonly resulting in wounds and infections from rubbing against the metal bars. These farmed animals are also kept impregnated, adding to the discomfort of extreme confinement. Without the ability to stand up, turn around, or fully stretch, the pigs cannot nuzzle their young after birth.

They only are able to lean to one side and allow the piglets to feed on their nipples, often torn and covered in sores from the metals bars, before they are taken away less than two weeks later (Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Macdonald & McBride, 2009).

Moreover, chickens often are viewed, by critics of factory farming, to be of the worst treated farmed animals in the industry (Drake 2006; Williams, 2008). They are crammed into “battery cages stacked tier upon tier in huge warehouses” without the ability to spread their wings or walk around (Williams, 2008, p. 375). In order to cause “induced molting,” a practice that confuses the hens into laying eggs year round to increase profits, the hens are starved and dehydrated in a pitch black setting between two to ten days at a time. These harsh conditions and crude confinement leave the birds featherless and near death (Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Williams, 2008).

It is customary of factory farms to pack the farmed animals into the smallest spaces possible without the possibility of any exercise. This tactic simultaneously fattens the farmed animals while minimizing costs and maximizing profits for corporations. Cows and pigs are castrated, branded, and severed from their extremities such as tails and ears, using rudimentary methods without any form of anesthesia. Genetic modifications to their bodies also leave their limbs hopelessly mangled under the extreme weight. Broiler chickens in particular are bred and forcibly fed for extreme fattening that leave 90% of the industry population struggling to walk (Williams, 2008). Their sensitive beaks also are severed using a hot knife in order to quell the cannibalistic tendencies that often occur due to extreme stress (Freeman, 2009). Additional facilities, daily clean-up, and veterinary treatment would all cost money that the corporations have but do not want to spend, so the farmed animals are kept in this constant squalor and pain as

long as they provide for the farm. Once the “usefulness” of the “product” dwindles, ergo the intensive production of eggs, milk, and offspring, these farmed animals are carelessly transported to the slaughterhouses and subject to a particularly vulgar demise (Glenn, 2004; Freeman, 2009). Cows, calves, pigs, and chickens are positioned upside down through metal contraptions or strung up by one limb to a rope, before their throats are crudely cut and they are left to bleed out (Anomaly, 2015; Glenn, 2004; Freeman, 2009).

This does not include the piglets, chicks, and calves that are subject to brutal slaughter practices, which are notoriously poor at delivering a quick, painless death. Undesirable piglets are slammed into the ground at the hands of farmworkers until dead or fatally wounded, or stunned in the head with a brute electric shock that averages a 10 minute long period of suffering before death (Williams 2008). Possibly even more brutally, unwanted chicks at a rate of hundreds per hour are tossed into a rotating grinder turning them into a sludge of mangled bodies (Glenn, 2004).

The average American, however, has never set foot on an egg “factory,” hog farm, or intensive feedlot, all of which are deliberately stationed as far from densely populated areas as possible (Williams, 2008). In the 21st century, these locations frequently have been designated in research and legislation as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) which have burgeoned in the U.S. despite being banned in many other countries (Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Macdonald & McBride, 2009; Williams, 2008). These operations, for clear marketing purposes, do not publicize the brutality discussed above. They also recognize the inherent value in appearing more eco-friendly than their competitors. Therefore, industry discourse hides these horrific truths of factory farming to avoid public scrutiny and continue the status quo (Anomaly,

2015; Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Maier, 2011; Schmuck et. al., 2018; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Torelli et. al., 2020; Verhaag, 2010; Williams, 2008).

Deceptive Communication Strategies Used by Corporations

Many scholars emphasize that communication cannot be separated from environmental matters since communication patterns and behaviors influence how we perceive and understand this subject (Cho, Patten, & Roberts, 2006; Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Maier, 2011; Schmuck et. al., 2018; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Torelli et. al., 2020; Williams, 2008). Language is a communicative tool and powerful instrument through which corporations can mold lies and deceptions, possibly sailing undetected by society as a whole. The use of euphemisms, or words and phrases that function as substitutes for potentially unpleasant or undesirable language, is used as a marketing tactic by factory farming corporations (Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Williams, 2008). The calves, piglets, and chicks noted previously for the brutality of their deaths are said to be “euthanized,” which falsely infers the more sterile practice used on household pets such as dogs and cats (Glenn, 2004). The very words used on packaging, such as poultry, beef, veal, and pork objectify nonhuman animals and present them as an item made for purchase and consumption which influences the public policy and opinion that ensue. This post-mortem approach to industry products focuses on the ‘deliciousness’ of farmed animals and their products rather than discussing aspects of the life they were forced to lead while alive. Additional terms such as “livestock” commodify farmed animals so that they are nothing more than a product even while alive in the factories (Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Williams, 2008).

Stauber and Rampton (1995) point out that public relations has always been “an industry designed to alter perception, reshape reality, and manufacture consent” (p. 2) and even more

recently, Gardner et. al. (2015) states that we still “find ourselves in an era of ‘sustainababble’” (pg. 4). This can be seen in part by identifying meaning and reality as social constructions (Drake, 2012; Drake 2006; Freeman, 2009; Gardner et. al., 2015; Glenn, 2004; Katz, 2011; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Williams, 2008). A social construction is an idea that does not exist naturally, but is rather created as a reality and accepted, to some extent, as a norm. This creation of meaning, whether in support of or diverging from the truth, often becomes the mainstream understanding and guidelines for a certain subject. The communication between factory farming corporations and the public therefore plays an influential, symbolic role in the meanings that emerge and the subsequent attitudes and actions that surround them. Since the public often use mainstream discourses to make sense of the world and stay informed on select topics, then, their realities will likely be skewed to whatever information they absorb (Drake, 2012; Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Maier, 2011; Schmuck et. al., 2018; Stauber & Rampton, 1995). When the deceptive, misleading, or false claims are the extent of a consumer’s knowledge on the factory farming industry, this has a significant impact on the meaning and perceived reality of farmed animals. The modern convenience of grocery and retail markets fulfills a one-stop shopping desire, but eliminates the visualization of the current industrialized farming practices. This creates an environment in which the connection between the food we consume and the suffering endured to mass-produce it, can be and is avoided, blurred, or lied about completely.

A key component in the creation and maintenance of such constructed meanings are the frames in which news media and advertisements present factory farming (Anomaly, 2015; Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Stauber & Rampton, 1995). Frames are visual and verbal discourses, in this case within news media, that set the tone for what is discussed,

attitudes towards the subject, as well as suggestions for who or what is responsible, and possible solutions. The act of framing itself is the process of how that discourse is presented. Frames can be selected to convey a desired imagery that form certain constructed realities, including that the factory farming industry strives for eco-friendly practices favoring animal well-being. Although this is clearly not the case, without actually visiting a factory farm it would be difficult to know otherwise solely from corporate environmental communication.

In an additional explanation of how corporations exert control over communication, Drake (2012) cites numerous scholars in her assessment of the “webs of subsidies” and “webs of impediments,” which are produced by public relations experts typically funded by corporations or related governmental agencies. (p. 230). Subsidies are the informational resources that corporations, such as Tyson, Smithfield, Perdue, and Monsanto, store at the ready for the news media at a lower cost and, therefore, have a higher likelihood of being used in press coverage. Respectively, these tactics work to decrease the cost of sharing information in the news media by preparing staged narratives and penalizing or discrediting other sources who deviate from this calculated framing. Webs of impediments, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, serve to stop oppositional views from contending with the media output by creating obstructions which challenge or discredit the opposer. In essence, the corporate-funded public relations experts use carefully crafted communication strategies to make it difficult to release sensitive information or appear credible if such information reaches the public. Therefore, under the crushing power and control exerted by powerful agribusiness corporations, it can be extraordinarily difficult to challenge this status quo.

Furthermore, Freeman (2009) points out that when framing social justice movements, news media outlets have a tendency to support more powerful, dominant groups in order to avoid controversy. In her analysis of 100 news sources containing factory farming discourse, she found that even the articles that included snippets of opposition severely understated the level of objection and resistance, keeping the public “comfortably detached” (p. 98). Within this social justice perspective, frames critical of factory farms have been largely kept out of the public eye since the shift from individual food production to industrialized CAFOs. In one a case study of Buckeye Egg Farm in Ohio, Drake (2006) reported the frustrating passiveness of the acting governor, who avoided the heated debate over the practices of this factory farm. In doing so, activists critical of factory farming struggled to attract news coverage that could have revealed more about the farm and potentially garner greater opposition to Buckeye.

Corporations rely upon socially constructed meanings and deceptive tactics to sell ethically and morally problematic products, resulting in detrimental greenwashing tendencies. Greenwashing is the use of deceptive environmental communication to promote favorable public relations and successful green marketing despite the fact that the claims are not supported by the corporation’s active ideologies, products, and practices. The misleading information is designed to feign a “green” relationship to nature for the sake of marketing, although this is not the case in actuality (Cho et. al., 2006; Glenn, 2004; Maier, 2011; Schmuck et. al., 2018; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Torelli et. al., 2020).

The two most common forms of deception in greenwashing are “vague claims” and “false claims” which respectively include either general statements of eco-friendliness or completely fabricated accounts about factory farms (Schmuck et.al., 2018, p. 127). Torelli et. al. (2020)

further categorizes greenwashed claims into the four core levels: company, strategic, dark, and product. At the company level, greenwashing falsely promotes corporate-wide responsibility for positive environmental interactions, while at the product level, advertisements focus on a specific good in a deceptive and untruthful way. Strategically, the companies put forth deceptive environmental communication on their current and future practices and goals. Furthermore, the dark level concerns greenwashed claims that hide illegal actions. At any stage, carefully calculated language in advertisements and other forms of communication can offer the public a different, and more desirable constructed reality.

In a recent study, Schmuck et. al. (2018) assessed 786 respondents, varying significantly in levels of environmental involvement and knowledge, on their ability to detect greenwashing advertisements. The researchers hypothesized that participating consumers with increased involvement in environmental issues would be more likely to recognize deceptive advertisements and penalize or criticize the organizations accordingly. Relying on two experimental studies, 486 respondents in the United States and repeated with 300 respondents in Germany, this hypothesis was unsupported on both accounts. They instead found that greenwashed claims were effective overall when false claims were juxtaposed with an image or video of nature, creating a “virtual nature experience” where negative perceptions were overridden by the “positive affective persuasion mechanism” (Schmuck et. al., 2018, p. 136). In these studies, this mechanism refers to a consumer’s positive attitude shift towards a brand after it displays an emotional connection towards nature. In essence the consumers, regardless of their level of involvement in environmental issues, could not distinguish a truthful claim from a false claim when either were accompanied by pleasant views of the environment. Public perceptions of the natural world are

influenced by both verbal and visual discourses since deceptive imagery induces a simulated experience with nature in which consumers can invest their emotions (Freeman, 2009; Glenn 2004; Maier, 2011; Schmuck et. al., 2018; Torelli et.al., 2020; Williams, 2008).

In support of this claim, Glenn (2004) analyzed a series of “Happy Cows” advertisements, a popular campaign commissioned by the California Milk Advisory Board. All of the ads take place in a grassy valley with spacious, stereotypical red barns pictured in the back as well as other ‘farm’ animals happily depicted in the sun. A dialogue typically ensues between a few of the cows expressing how great their lives are in the hands of factory farm workers. In one section of playful banter, one bull asks another how all of the cows in the nearby field can look so attractive, to which the other bull replies “All the sunshine, I guess. Clean air, good food, something. They just really take care of them” (p. 73). Despite the obvious disparities between these advertisements and actual factory farm conditions, the campaign won numerous advertising awards and gained an audience of over 500 million viewers in its first four years of running. After launching in 2000, the campaign was supported by a \$33 million budget that allowed the board to broadcast the ads on billboards, the radio, and national television. The campaign even began to release brand-name clothing, books, games, and other merchandise featuring smiling cows (Glenn, 2004). The immense popularity and success of this campaign emphasizes that the harsh reality of factory farms has been concealed by an alternative, constructed reality. In these commercials, the animals are being involuntarily represented in a script written by the corporations that exploit them, while being voiced by consumers who eat their products and body parts. Clearly, the ads are completely dependent upon greenwashed claims to feign environment and animal wellbeing.

In giving a name and face to the “happy” animals, consumers feel a sense of connection and stronger desire to protect them. This phenomenon is concretely seen in the public’s reaction to the rumors of famed pig-actor Babe, from the movie *Babe*, meeting her demise in a slaughterhouse (Freeman, 2009; Williams, 2008). Although the information was ultimately proved false and Babe was indeed alive and well, there was tangible public distress over the perceived untimely death of the sole pig. A *Time* article was even released labeled, “Babe lives! World Sighs” (Freeman, 2009, p. 94). This insight that consumers may scrutinize the slaughter of farmed animals if an emotional connection is created, emphasizes the efforts of corporations to keep industrialized farming victims out of the news.

In extension of this argument, agribusiness giants also may take part in affected ignorance, or corporations’ desire to alleviate their moral responsibility to the environment by choosing not to acknowledge, investigate, or debate the aftermath of their malpractice. In turn, corporations engaged in factory farming shield themselves behind verbal and visual disguises as an “active refusal to admit how one’s actions contribute to insurmountable and unnecessary suffering” (Williams, 2008, p. 373). Although scholars from various disciplines have been able to publish accounts and criticisms of intensive factory farming (Anomaly, 2015; Cho et. al., 2006; Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; MacDonald & McBride, 2009; Verhaag, 2010; Williams, 2008), monopolizing industries take great strides to ensure that sensitive information does not surface. This makes it significantly more difficult for consumers to envision the lifelong abuse that brought the products to their kitchen tables. In accordance with deceptive tactics within news frames, many scholars have attributed the distressingly low level of public outcry over factory farming practices to governmental collusion and a drastic lack of regulation (Cho et.

al., 2006; Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Schmuck et. al., 2018; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Torelli et. al., 2020) and various attempts by corporations to silence opposition (Drake, 2012; Verhaag, 2010).

Corporate Tactics and Governmental Collusion

Due to the complexities and varying degrees of tactics and relationships utilized by corporations to protect their empires, it is beneficial to further divide this section into various categories. The discussion begins with the involvement of corporations in the political and public policy orientated debates which concern the factory farming industry, followed by a look into how regulations and a lack thereof influence factory farming and related environmental communication. This section concludes with specific, distressing examples of how agribusiness giants have attempted to keep corporate realities out of the public eye.

There is a growing concern about the involvement of corporations in constructing public policy as this tends to produce relationships and regulations that favor corporate endeavors and interests. Larger, and subsequently more powerful organizations, possess influential resources that are simply not found in smaller organizations or groups. It is important to note that in our capitalist society it is becoming increasingly difficult for marginalized groups, in this case small-scale, rural farmers, to resist the mainstream status quo (Katz, 2011) or stay afloat if they choose anti-industrial methods and wish to remain in operation (Anomaly, 2015; Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Schmuck et. al., 2018; Torelli et. al., 2020). A scholar and environmental activist, Drake (2012) insists “all reality is produced through an ongoing symbolic contest; however, the playing field is grossly skewed by asymmetrical power relationships among political and social actors” (p. 229). Corporations have been shown to dominate the legislative playing field when active

public policy debates concern their business operations, and most importantly their potential profit (Cho et. al., 2006; Glenn, 2004; Schmuck et. al., 2018; Torelli, et. al., 2020).

In support of this claim, Cho et. al. (2006) investigates the relationship between environmental disclosure and political expenditure, in part by reviewing the political contributions of 119 U.S. “environmentally sensitive firms” (p. 139) throughout the election cycle in 2001-2002. Large corporations are able to form political action committees (PACs), which essentially function as legal lobbying groups that support specific candidates. In identifying four congressional committees which specifically overlook environmental policy-making, the researchers concluded that members of these committees received \$20,644 in average PAC contributions compared to \$13,063 on average to other representatives. Furthermore, average PAC contributions to leading figures within the environmental policy-making committees, jumps to \$42,600 compared to \$19,698 for other committee leadership. Needless to say, efforts are made by corporations with the ability to exercise power and influence to sway relevant environmental policies and regulations to their benefit.

Various corporate and federal obstructions have also been utilized to stifle citizens from expressing criticisms. Public policy debates have been purposely scheduled around Christmas and other major holidays to decrease civic engagement. Other meetings have even been held in decisively small rooms that could not accommodate for all who wished to attend (Drake, 2012). While these particular efforts are indeed legal, smaller groups and a majority of individuals do not have the same expense of wealth and resources to sway governments and public policy makers away from multi-million dollar campaigns and contributions.

Both money and power, however, play a central role in shaping regulation and policies through more illegal methods (Drake, 2012; Stauber & Rampton, 1995). Facing potential complications in the promotion of a growth hormone for farmed animal feed, rBGH, Monsanto gained the support of the former executive director of the Consumer Federation of America through a substantial offering of money. With her necessary aid, the company was able to persuade both the FDA and Congress to allow their products to hide the use of the growth hormones from labels. Moreover, in order to protect the reputation of their empire, Monsanto threatened smaller dairy retailers who wished to label their products as “rBGH-free” with potentially detrimental, high-cost lawsuits (Stauber & Rampton, 1995). Drake (2012) presents examples of webs of impediments that are used to attack critics and active opponents in order to prevent their oppositional stances from influencing factory farming frames. In one example AgriGeneral, a high-end insurance company, asked Ohio township trustees for a vote in their favor in exchange for hefty payments. The threats, bribery, and other forms of coercion are obvious attempts by factory farming corporations to abuse their power and wealth to their advantage. Adding to the vast extent of corporate control, industry giants are typically not confronted with substantial regulations which would moderate their power.

The factory farm industry has frequently been exempt, decisively ignored, favored, or not found at fault in major federal regulations, which has majorly influenced agribusiness practices and related environmental communication. This lack of regulation can be seen in part by the complete absence of a uniform standard for environmental claims that corporations must adhere to within their advertisements. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC), along with other major federal agencies, such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States

Department of Agriculture (USDA), also are not required to explicitly screen for misleading advertisements, and a growing number of scholars have argued that these organizations do not adequately protect the public or the environment (Cho et. al., 2006, Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Schmuck et. al., 2018; Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Verhaag, 2010). The FDA, for example, allows companies like Monsanto to take part in “voluntary regulation” giving them near total authority to self-monitor their business operations (Verhaag, 2010, 22:18). Voluntary regulation is a government-sponsored alternative to state regulations which mandates that Monsanto, for one, need only alert the FDA of problematic practices if they choose to bring these practices to the FDA’s attention. Under the self-imposed restrictions, these agribusiness giants are allowed the freedom to focus on profit maximizing practices despite ethical, environmental, animal, and public safety concerns.

On May 26th, 1992, Dan Quayle, the Vice President under President George Bush, addressed the nation on granting biotechnology agencies the freedom to use new, industrialized methods of food-agricultural production. In this speech, he assured the public that, “We will not compromise safety one bit. However, as a result of these reforms, the consumer will enjoy better, healthier food products at lower prices” (Verhaag, 2010, 23:34). In the early 2000s the Bush administration explicitly loosened federal regulations on CAFOs so that such operations would not be held to air pollution standards (Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006). In addition, most state-regulated anti-cruelty standards do not include farmed animals (Drake, 2012) and the 1966 Animal Welfare Act, although amended in 2006, still exempts the protection of animals in the food-agricultural industry (Anomaly, 2015; Drake, 2012; Williams, 2008).

By allowing giants like Monsanto, Tyson, and Smithfield the leeway to run large-scale farming operations in ways that capitalize profit, such as using minimal amounts of space and resources to raise billions of animals, governments in turn can use this to their benefit. Gardner et. al. (2015) for example, contends that major governmental institutions have been seen to act in support of factory farming empires, despite the negative environmental consequences because the current structure of factory farms capitalizes on small portions of land for large-scale operations leaving more land for investment purposes. “Since 2000, agreements have been concluded for foreign entities to purchase or lease more than 36 million hectares,” (p. 70) a majority of which is open agricultural lands throughout the globe utilized for a variety of purposes. While the U.S. mainly functions as a lead investor in such land abroad, approximately 6.9 million hectares of such, land within the U.S. is capitalized for future industrialized farming sites, foreign investors, and forestry, to name a few (Gardner et. al., 2015). So while disclosure requirements and environmental regulations would strip power from corporations with hideous sustainability and animal well-being performance, the corporate giants that sail past regulations relatively unscathed, can continue to fuel their capitalist ventures.

Furthermore, in an attempt to keep corporate realities out of the public eye, agribusiness giants have taken intensive measures to protect their carefully constructed images in the news media. For example, individuals and groups who have attempted to bring evidence of environmental malpractice to the public eye have often suffered at great lengths to do so (Stauber & Rampton, 1995; Verhaag, 2010). In the documentary, *Scientists Under Attack: Genetic Engineering in the Magnetic Field of Money*, Verhaag (2010) provides numerous examples of actions taken by those in power to silence and instill fear in individuals trying to reveal the truth.

For instance, Professor Arpad Pusztai, a biochemist in animal and human nutrition of 35 years, warned the public of his unsettling findings on GMO products in a 150 second long televised interview with *World In Action*, a British investigative program focusing on current affairs. Less than 48 hours later he was stripped of his job title, removed from the Academy of Sciences, suspended for life from his research laboratory, and shunned by many partners in the field out of fear they would suffer his same fate. On a less severe note, Ignacio Chapela, a microbiologist and professor at the University of California Berkeley warned, from his own experience, of corporations' ability to hire public relations companies to discredit information that already has been released in a publication. In this case, a company calling itself *The Bivings Group* created the profiles of two people, Andura Smetacek and Mary Murphy, in which the fictitious characters indicated to the public that Chapela's findings were false and should not have been published. Posing as doctors and experts in their field, the profiles successfully influenced public opinion without revealing that *The Bivings Group* was in fact a propaganda agency hired by powerful corporations to silence threatening information (Verhaag, 2010).

Stauber and Rampton (1995) also highlight federally-funded efforts by the government and corporations to discredit unfavorable discourse concerning the degree to which agribusiness giants dominate American agriculture. In 1985 when Dave Steinman began writing a book titled, *Diet for a Poisoned Planet*, he projected that he would complete a five year investigation into the harmful toxic waste dumped in public areas by his home, to be released in 1990. A few months before publication, the White House had been warned by leaders of health councils that the contents of the book were "threatening to the U.S. standard of living" and a potential "threat to national security" (Stauber & Rampton, 1995, p. 9). Not long after, the USDA introduced an

anti-book campaign attacking the upcoming release of the book and discrediting Steinman's investigation. Similarly, after publishing *May All Be Fed* promoting vegetarianism, John Robbins was targeted by a public relations firm funded by the National Dairy Board in yet another anti-book campaign, clouting the contents with doubt and confusion in the public eye (Stauber & Rampton, 1995).

Clearly, animal welfare, product safety and quality, environmental sustainability, and public health are not at the forefront of factory farming practices. When questions, comments, or concerns arise which threaten the factory farming empire, swift and intense actions are taken to remove the problematic discourse and ensure profitability. In this context, it is imperative that consumers are able to be more informed judges of the communication to which they are exposed.

Conclusion

This paper supplies a comprehensive look at the adverse effects of factory farming, perpetuated by the communication tactics utilized by the organizations that monopolize the industry. The extent and quality of consumers' environmental knowledge, which guides their beliefs and actions, is impacted directly by leading environmental discourses. The messages put forth by agribusiness giants, however, preserve a broken system.

In an increasingly industrialized and globalized world today, it is crucial that consumers scrutinize the origins, platforms, and tactics through which information is mediated to avoid deception and prolonged harm. My hope in this paper is to have some influence on consumer behavior, which, in turn, affects corporate behavior more so than the governmental legislation and regulations currently in place. The negative effects of factory farming on the environment are exponential "but political hurdles to stopping them are even higher" (Drake, 2012, p. 228).

When the cost-benefit relationship between corporations and major governmental agencies prioritizes profit over well-being and sustainability, it becomes essential that the public take informed actions which could threaten the success of the industry. If we are able to better identify and understand ways in which we are being deceived daily, this would significantly weaken the protective veil corporations have used to shield themselves from public scrutiny. Furthermore, without a large, supportive consumer base, agribusiness giants would not be able to uphold their mammoth levels of production, regardless of governmental protection.

This literature review is limited in its inability to be exhaustive, although the body of literature to choose from also demands the commitment of more scholars, scientists, and activists for additional evidence to sway consumers and strive for social justice. Many scholars in fact acknowledge this lack of sufficient coverage critical of factory farming and call upon communication scholars in particular to participate in the movement against industrialized farming, as more frequent reliable communication will threaten its seemingly unstoppable empire (Drake, 2012; Drake, 2006; Freeman, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Maier, 2011). Additionally, common limitations faced by the studies presented in this literature review, are a relatively small sample size and limited period of analysis due to funding and timing (Cho et. al., 2006; Schmuck et. al., 2018; Torelli et. al., 2020). As mentioned briefly, there are severe environmental consequences such as contamination, deforestation, and dwindling water supplies, which were not directly researched for the purposes of this paper but nonetheless must become a part of the overall conversation to acknowledge the severity of the situation we are facing. This paper, due to time constraints and selective research, only skims the surface of the negative consequences of factory farming in regard to farmed animals. Future research must account for factory farming as

it impacts farmed animals, the public, and the environment as it stands today. The state of the world in 1995, 2004, or 2012, and so on throughout the literature will not be identical to 2020 and the future, and further literature therefore must keep consumers up to date on industry ventures and how to act responsibly, if so desired. Considering the lengths that corporations have gone to in order to keep unfavorable information out of the news media, it is imperative that scholarships continue to expose hidden truths of the factory farm.

The adverse effects of the industry are only a sector of misleading environmental advertising, albeit a leading sector in both impact and destruction. In the current state of the factory farming empire, billions of animals suffer at the hands of corporate greed capitalizing on the high demand for farmed animals' body parts and products. While the overall expectation is not for the entire world to voluntarily alter all food-related manners and customs, we face a moral duty to become increasingly familiar with factory farming practices, deceptive communication, and how this impacts the foods we eat, the products we use, and the future we are creating. I propose a call to action for more conscious consumerism and civic engagement as well as a dedication to credible insight and investigation, all without which animal well-being, environmental sustainability, and public safety face deadly consequences. In light of federal and corporate efforts to protect profitability, changes on the individual level, however minor, are crucial to influencing and altering the status quo.

On a final note, it is important to emphasize that time is of the essence for significant change. As water, viable land, and naturally existing plant and animal sources are depleted at alarming rates to mass produce farmed animals and their products, the aftermath of such processes have devastating consequences on the sustainability of the planet. At the current rates

of respective production and destruction, the earth cannot sustain life as we know it, unless significant changes can be made to the current status quo. By taking a look at the development of the factory farming industry and how its discourses have been constructed throughout history, it becomes easier to recognize the current state of the world today, and possible steps we can take towards a less dire future.

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