

Vegans vs. Meat-Eaters: PETAs Propaganda

An Analysis and View on PETAs Agenda

By Christopher Navarrete

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Figure 1. Original PETA Billboard

PETAs Controversial Billboard

In 2009, the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) erected a controversial billboard in Jacksonville, Florida. Entitled "Save the Whales," the billboard supported veganism and discouraged meat-eating through fat shaming.

Designed to catch the attention of passersbys, the advertisement caused a commotion among meat-eaters and vegans alike due to its insensitive use of images and choice of words. The comparison between the obese and whales garnered an especially strong reaction that ultimately lead to the advertisements replacement for a more subtle, and less offensive approach to supporting veganism.

History of Veganism and PETA

Although the debate between vegans and meat-eaters can be traced back to as far as 2000 years ago, the term vegan was coined in 1944 by Donald Watson. Similar to vegetarians, the term vegan describes individuals who not only refuse to consume meat, but do not eat or use any animal by products such as eggs, leather, and dairy.

In November of the same year, Donald Watson established the Vegan Society as a means to popularize the vegan diet. In the Vegan Societies own words, veganism can be defined as a way "to seek an end to the use of animals by man for food, commodities, work, hunting, vivisection, and by all other uses involving exploitation of animal life by man."

After veganism was popularized by the Vegan Society, the famous nonprofit organization known as PETA was formed. Founded in 1980 by animal activists Ingrid Newkirk and Alex Pacheco, PETA was created in order to protect the rights of animals and to promote the vegan diet word-wide.

In 1981, PETA would create history in their first court case, the Sliver Spring monkey's case. According to PETA, the case "resulted in the first arrest and criminal conviction of an animal experimenter in the U.S. on charges of cruelty to animals, the first confiscation of abused laboratory animals, and the first U.S. Supreme Court victory for animals in laboratories."

The Sliver Spring monkey's case would set an example for the future of PETA and other organizations throughout the world. Today, as a leading vegan and animal rights supporter, PETA is in the forefront of cases involving animal cruelty. They also continue to support and spread the vegan diet through various movements, albeit with controversial methods.

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Vegans vs. Meat-Eaters

There are a number of differences between vegans and meat-eaters.

Vegans first:

- Do not eat meat.
- Do not eat or use animal by products.
- Usually weigh less than meat-eaters (a lower body mass index).
- Have lower chance to contract cancer.
- Have a higher risk of developing nutritional deficiencies.

Meat-eaters, on the other hand:

- Consume meat.
- Consume and use animal by products.
- Usually weigh more than vegans (a higher body mass index).
- Have a higher risk to contract cancer.
- Have a Lower risk of developing nutritional deficiencies.

Analysis of PETAs Controversial Billboard

In their "Save the Whales" billboard, PETA appears to do a play on words so that a double meaning can be achieved. Although it may seem like they are blatantly fat shaming the obese, the addition of the female may actually be the cause of this thought as the gender creates more of an impact. This is due to the fact that females are often used as the victims of fat shaming throughout the internet, in various magazines, and in television.

Besides making the obese non meat-eaters, their other goal may be to increase awareness for whales. This can be seen in the way PETA uses blubber, a common term used to describe actual whales. However, despite this possible message, PETA clearly created this billboard to garner negative attention as quickly as possible so that their message can be spread faster.

After a few months of its construction, the controversial "Save the Whales" billboard was removed due to the numerous complaints sent to PETA. However, shortly after its removal, the billboard was replaced with another advertisement. Also created by PETA, the new advertisement titled "Gone" sends a similar message, but in a less offensive and hidden manner. Instead of comparing the obese to whales, it states its message more clearly and professionally.



Figure 2. PETA Billboard Replacement

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How and Why the Experts Differ

Disagreements between meat eating and vegan eating experts usually occur because of differing opinions regarding animal cruelty. For the most part, vegans consider eating meat to be animal cruelty because of how companies kill and produce their flesh.

Vegans and meat-eaters may also debate about the importance of animal lives over humans, how animals should be treated, why animals shouldn't be held captive, the use of animals in scientific research and experiments, and whether or not leather clothing and animal by products are necessary.

Political and Ideological Motivations for Disagreement

PETA, the largest vegan and animal rights organization in the world often debates against various companies because of opposing political and/or ideological opinions. PETA usually battles against forces in the clothing, entertainment, food, and scientific industries for several reasons, including:

- Animal cruelty.
- Animal by products.
- Animal experimentation.
- Animal breeding.
- Ethics.
- Health (obesity).
- Religion.
- Use of meat.

Possible Solutions to Improve PETAs Billboard

To remove the highly offensive nature of the "Save the Whales" billboard, it would be best to delete the comparison between whales and the obese. It would also be wise to remove the obese female as the gender combined with the billboards words would cause a strong negative reaction to ensue.

Because PETAs goal in the "Save the Whales" billboard was to encourage individuals to become vegetarian, they can include legitimate statistics that favor their side. It could show the pros and cons of meat eaters vs. vegetarians, or give some quick fact coupled with a source. They can also include testimonials by fellow vegetarians, inspiring quotes, or meaningful and emotional images associated with becoming a vegetarian.

How to Detect and Deal with Distortions of Truth

It can be difficult to detect distortions of truth in advertisements without the proper knowledge. To properly detect false and exaggerated information in documents, technical communicators must first understand the advertisement in question before doing anything else. This can be achieved by asking several questions to themselves, including:

- Who was the advertisement created by and for?
- What is the creator's history?
- What terms are bolded or emphasized?
- Why were those terms bolded or emphasized?
- Does the advertisement show sexism and/or racism?
- Does the advertisement show its source?
- Is the source legitimate?
- Is the advertisement objective or bias?
- Is the advertisement professional?

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Key Lessons for Technical Communicators

When creating advertisements and other forms of documents, technical communicators can be successful if they:

- Are objective/unbiased.
- Are professional.
- Are straightforward.
- Are organized.
- Are Using and showing legitimate sources.
- Show no signs of sexism and racism.
- Know what audience they are appealing to.