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CDAE 195
Media Propaganda Case Study
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Introduction:

My name is Kayla Keefner and for my media propaganda case study, I chose SeaWorld and focused solely on their recent announcement to end all captive breeding and theatrical shows of orcas.

I chose this topic because it's a topic in which I feel very passionate about and it's a huge victory for animal rights activist, as well as for the people who have continually put pressure on this multi-billion dollar business to ultimately come to this decision.

Overview:

To overview, I'll be discussing the 5 W's, the three main controversies of SeaWorld, an interesting interview with John Hargrove, the propaganda techniques used in the commercial, the target audience and whether the commercial was a success or not.

Commercial:

To start off, I'll play the commercial that was released to the public following this announcement. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yr-6wqOjV9A>

5 W's:

So, SeaWorld released this commercial, which they titled the "New Future of SeaWorld," and it was released last month on March 16, 2016. The commercial was on national television, including all major TV networks, including their YouTube channel and their social media accounts. So, why? There's been years of controversy and you have to understand a little bit about the background of SeaWorld.

SeaWorld Controversy:

So their business has revolved around three main controversies: public dishonesty, employee safety and animal treatment.

Regarding public dishonesty—SeaWorld has notoriously been known to exploit research data for their PR. So for example, in 2004 they attempted to dupe the public into thinking that collapsed dorsal fins are a normal occurrence in killer whales, when in fact collapsed dorsal fins occur in less than 1% of wild orcas.

For employee safety, there have been two deaths of trainers and over 100+ incidents have been documented (which could include biting of trainers, pushing or pulling in the waters, swimming aggressively with, etc.). These orcas exhibit much stress-induced behavior due to their captivity, so this can be very life threatening for trainers.

Lastly on the topic of animal treatment, there's really so much I could cover here but to put it in perspective, these orcas are confined in 40-ft. deep cement tanks, which are less than 1% of their natural habitat.

John Hargrove Interview:

So after this announcement, I came across an interesting interview with John Hargrove, who's a former SeaWorld employee and trainer. And he talked about what it was like to work at SeaWorld, what led to his resignation and why he's cautiously optimistic about the future.

So SeaWorld hired John when he was only 20-years-old and he admitted that there was a certain lack of education. So he said that he "didn't understand what was normal or abnormal, healthy or unhealthy."

What ultimately led to his resignation was the death of his co-worker, Dawn Brancheau, in 2010 by the famous killer whale, Tilikum. And as he remembers it, SeaWorld blamed Dawn for her own death (or at least within the company) because the autopsy report and the trainers who were there—tell a very different story.

But even though John's optimistic about the future, he says that SeaWorld has made similar announcements in the past and nothing has come of them so he thinks that it may just be another possible PR stunt.

Propaganda Techniques:

Regarding the propaganda techniques, SeaWorld notoriously cherry-picks information for their PR as I previously mentioned and this is exactly what they did in this commercial.

The main propaganda technique used here was faulty analogy. They took the story of Keiko, who was a famous killer whale from Six Flags, and he was released back into wild after backlash with the public. Shortly after Keiko was released he did unfortunately die.

So SeaWorld took this story and made the false analogy that by looking at the outcome of Keiko that "nothing could be worse for the whales," and that "sending them into the wild wouldn't be noble."

But it was proved that Keiko died from fighting off illnesses that he had year's prior while in captivity. So SeaWorld took pieces of this story to persuade the public into thinking that by keeping these whales in their parks, they're basically saving them.

Target Audience:

For the target audience, families without a doubt contribute the most towards their revenue every year so they definitely wish to target a younger demographic. Even on their website, it states that their shows are "designed for both adults and children to enjoy themselves." So, SeaWorld tries to appeal to parents from an educational aspect—that not only will their kids have fun, but also they'll get educated in the process.

Was it successful?

So, was it successful? Time will tell. However, within one hour of the announcement SeaWorld stock was up by more than a point. On top of this, the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), which has been one of their main critics over the years, is now in partnership with SeaWorld to help shift their parks into a more conservation and rescue area for these killer whales.

Even though the HSUS is a very reputable organization, having their name now affiliated with SeaWorld's will possibly help them in building revenue and increasing turnout.

Ultimately though, SeaWorld has a very long road ahead and this is obviously not something that's going to happen overnight, the theatrical shows are "phasing out" until 2019 and one female orca in captivity is now pregnant. So we're looking at another possible fifteen years until these orcas are completely out of SeaWorld's hands.

Conclusion:

So I hope you all can walk away feeling a little more knowledgeable about the deceitfulness of SeaWorld and hopefully you'll think twice before buying an admission ticket. Thank you.

Sources:

<http://www.vox.com/2016/3/22/11275970/seaworld-orca-killer-whale>

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<http://careers.seaworldparks.com/Scripts/Home/Default.aspx>

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