

2021

Milked dry: A framing analysis of how mass media helped reframe the public's perception of the dairy industry

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Milked dry: A framing analysis of how mass media helped reframe the public's perception of the dairy industry

Abstract

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Degree Type

Open Access Senior Honors Thesis

Department

Communication, Media and Theatre Arts

First Advisor

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Keywords

Framing theory, news frames, dairy industry, plant-based diet, social media, documentaries

Subject Categories

Communication

MILKED DRY: A FRAMING ANALYSIS OF HOW MASS MEDIA HELPED REFRAME
THE PUBLIC'S PERCEPTION OF THE DAIRY INDUSTRY

By

Sequoia West

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

Eastern Michigan University

Honors College

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation
with Honors in Communication, Media, and Theatre Arts

Approved at Ypsilanti, Michigan, on this date 3-29-2021

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Chapter I

Introduction

The consumption of dairy products is deeply ingrained in American culture. Since the domestication of cattle in northern Europe over 8,000 years ago, dairy has been a staple in the diets of humans. Milk is the only food that mammals naturally produce to feed their offspring. The human species, however, is the only species that takes milk from other mammals and consumes it past the age of weaning (Wiley, 2014).

Further, milk was not a major beverage until the late nineteenth century when technological innovations and urban demand made commercial milk supply possible. Coffee, chocolate, and tea provided new ways of consuming milk and contributed to this demand. Rates of milk consumption continued to rise in the twentieth century when milk was identified as a nutrient-rich food. Consumption peaked during World War II and has steadily declined despite popular advertising campaigns that aimed to promote drinking milk. Additionally, the rate of dairy consumption among the population is declining due to high levels of lactose-intolerance in some populations and competition from the plant-based industry (Wiley, 2014).

In fact, lactose intolerance affects 75% of people and 25% of Americans. This group of people cannot digest the main sugar in dairy products – lactose. The enzyme that helps people digest dairy is called lactase. In the lactose intolerant population, this enzyme ceases its production between the ages of two and five (Northwestern Medicine, n.d.).

The National Institutes of Health states that, at birth, the digestive system is designed to survive only on breast milk. Infants produce large amounts of lactase in order to digest the milk. As the child is weaned off of milk, their digestive system changes and can be introduced to new foods. Because the child no longer requires breast milk to survive, their body slows down the

production of lactase and, in turn, can only break down small amounts of lactose. There are genetic and ethnic factors that contribute to this. For example, adults of European ancestry tend to produce more lactase than adults of Asian and African ancestry (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2018). Without this enzyme, the unprocessed sugar ferments in the colon and produces gas that causes symptoms such as bloating, diarrhea, cramping, etc. Due to these statistics, the terminology within the medical community has changed. Lactose intolerance is normal – those still producing the enzyme can be described as lactase persistent. Again, whether or not a person is affected by this depends on where they live. Many people live lives without dairy. In fact, there are many alternatives that are capable of supplying the human body with the nutrients in dairy (Northwestern Medicine, n.d.).

The Physician Committee for Responsible Medicine has addressed the dangers of dairy and suggests avoiding it through a plant-based diet. Dairy products are the highest source of saturated fat in the American diet. Saturated fat is proven to contribute to heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and Alzheimer’s disease. Other studies (Danby, 2009; McCann *et al.*, 2017) have also linked dairy to an increased risk of ovarian, breast, and prostate cancer (Northwestern Medicine, n.d.). For example, a 2020 study on dairy, soy, and the risk of breast cancer was funded by the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health, and the World Cancer Research Fund. They concluded that women that had higher intakes of dairy milk in their diet had an increased risk of breast cancer when adjusted for soy intake. They also reported that current guidelines for dairy consumption may be viewed with caution (Fraser *et al.*, 2020).

One of the most misleading claims is that dairy builds strong bones. Research actually shows that dairy has little to no beneficial effects on bone health. In fact, a 2014 study of more than 96,000 people found that the more milk men consumed as teenagers, the more bone

fractures they experienced as adults (Feskanich *et al.*, 2014). There has yet to be a clinical trial that provides sufficient evidence of the claim that dairy builds strong bones.

The negative effects of the industry extend past humans. The dairy industry has a history of using inhumane practices on livestock including, but not limited to, removing tails and horns without pain medication. Until recently, it was believed that removing cow tails helped to stop the spread of feces and bacteria. Numerous studies have proven that there is no hygienic benefit to removing the tails. The process of dehorning is said to be necessary to protect workers and other livestock from being hurt. Due to public outrage and promotion by scientists, there has been broad adoption of using pain medication during these procedures (Jacobs, 2020).

With new scientific developments becoming available in recent years, the public perception of dairy consumption has changed. Again, high levels of lactose-intolerance and competition from the plant-based industry are also reasons for this change (Wiley, 2014). The public has also had an increased interest in the effect of dairy on the body. This is illustrated by increased sales of plant-based dairy alternatives (Thorning *et al.*, 2016).

A potential factor contributing to this interest in plant-based dairy alternatives is a number of documentaries released between the years 2014 and 2017 including, *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret*, *The Milk System*, and *What the Health? Cowspiracy* (Andersen & Kuhn, 2014) focuses on the impact of animal agriculture on the environment. *The Milk System* (Pichler & Cherif, 2017) takes a critical look at the industry from the perspectives of farmers, dairy owners, politicians, scientists, and more. *What the Health* (Anderson & Kuhn, 2017) explores why leading health organizations promote the industry despite scientific studies showing the negative effects of the products on the human body.

One significant factor contributing to the prevalence of dairy products in the United States is the media and popular culture. The “Got Milk?” campaign will be used to illustrate dairy advertisements in the media. Launched in 1993, “Got Milk?” is one of the most awarded campaigns in marketing history. According to the Executive Director of the California Milk Processor Board, Steve James, the campaign emerged due to the decline of milk consumption in the early nineteen-nineties. The California milk processors decided to combat this decline by forming a board overseen by the State of California. They agreed on a framework that allotted them three cents for every gallon of milk sold in order to create a marketing fund to convince consumers to drink more milk. Since then, they report that household awareness of the brand is over 95% despite an ethnically diverse consumer base, changing diets and fads, competition, smaller households, and social antipathy toward agriculture (James, 2015).

The “Got Milk?” campaign is not associated with a particular brand, but with a category of food. This is known as primary demand advertising. For example, advertisements about drinking milk benefit all companies that produce milk (Weedmark, 2021).

A second factor contributing to the prevalence of dairy products in the United States is the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). *MyPlate* is an initiative that encourages healthy eating routines by organizing meals into food groups: fruits, grains, vegetables, protein, and dairy. The USDA website encourages the consumption of dairy products as a means to build and maintain strong bones (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2020).

This thematic analysis used framing theory to examine how milk and dairy consumption has been framed over the past decade by the media and how documentaries on the dairy industry and animal agriculture in the last several years have contributed to a shift in the public's perception and an overall decline of the dairy industry. In other words, this thesis looks at how

persuasive techniques coupled with a mass media and social media push have helped reframe the public's perception of dairy. Specifically, it addresses the following research question: What themes emerged after the release of several investigative documentaries on the dairy industry and animal agriculture between 2014 and 2017? In order to facilitate the exploration of the research question, the thesis will address the following sub questions:

- What are the arguments being made about the dairy industry, what evidence is being utilized and to what extent do human health concerns feature within these arguments?
- How were news frames utilized by documentary filmmakers to contribute to the shift in the public's perception and an overall decline of the dairy industry?

Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter will provide an overview of literature and important studies that have addressed the topic of advertising and communication strategies in the dairy industry, as well as framing theory in the media.

Persuasive communication has been the topic of a vast amount of research. According to O'Shaughnessy (2004), "persuasion is the process of trying to alter, modify, or change the saliency of the values, wants, beliefs, and actions of others..." (p. 5). Further, the author explains attempts at persuasion are conscious or unconscious, and forceful or tangential. In most cases, persuasive advertising is also effective. Moreover, there are several social attachments, both internal and external, that shield individuals from persuasion: culture, reference groups, social class, emotionally grounded experiences, beliefs, and values (p. 9). In other words, people aren't simple. Humans have unique experiences that shape how they view the world. People viewing advertisements have a guard that is raised when presented with persuasive messages. This presents a challenge: On a case-by-case basis, communication professionals have to determine whether there is a need to overcome guards to be influential. There are some people, however, that agree with sources they believe to be credible because it saves the cognitive energy associated with disagreement. (O'Shaughnessy, 2004, pp. 10–24).

Furthermore, advertisements that resonate with the emotions and concerns of an audience are more likely to persuade than a logical approach. Tony Schwartz, an American journalist and pioneer in the field of political advertising, made the argument that the role of advertising is to strike an emotional chord in the target. Doing so would impel the viewer to take action. Another compelling form of persuasion in advertising is the use of statistical evidence. Statistical

presentations, while influential, can be deceptive. How data is presented influences the meanings the viewer derives from it (O'Shaughnessy, 2004, pp. 27–30). These concepts, and more, can be applied to understand the marketing strategies of the dairy industry.

Persuasion, marketing, and advertising are virtually synonymous. The United States is a consumer society and persuasion can be found everywhere – especially in the media. A good way to understand the use of persuasion is to apply theories to the media (Shrum *et al.*, 2013).

Framing Theory

Framing theory says that the media focuses attention on certain events and places them within a field of meaning. In other words, how something is presented to an audience influences the choices people make about how to process the information (Davie, n.d.). The theory is credited to Erving Goffman. His 1974 essay titled *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* explored the idea that people interpret the world through their primary frameworks.

According to Goffman (1974), there are two distinct types of primary frameworks: natural and social. Natural frameworks identify occurrences that are completely physical and have no human influence to guide the outcome. Social frameworks provide background understanding for events and identify occurrences as socially-driven. For example, while the weather is a natural framework, a meteorologist reporting the weather is a social framework. We use frames every day to organize and make sense of life experiences.

Shaw (2013) said that frames can be understood as “culturally determined definitions of reality that allow people to make sense of objects and events.” To illustrate, car advertisements may seek to frame driving as pleasurable by associating it with symbols of leisure, such as a beach. Frames, Shaw continues, have been found to have a political role in mass communication;

frames can be used to lead audiences to a favored conclusion by highlighting certain features of reality while obscuring others.

Moreover, Fairhurst & Sarr (1996) described different framing techniques: metaphor, stories, slogans/catchphrases, artifacts, contrast, and spin. Metaphors are used to frame a concept through comparison. Stories are used to frame a topic via a narrative to make the topic more memorable. Slogans and catchphrases are used in framing to make a topic more memorable and relatable. The use of artifacts is the use of objects with a symbolic meaning to frame a cultural phenomenon. Contrast is used to describe an object in terms of what it isn't. Spin is presenting a concept in a way that conveys a value judgment that may not be immediately apparent.

Frame Analysis in the Media

Meyers and Abrams (2010) found that news frames can determine what becomes salient in conversations at home and in the government. Their study is titled *Feeding the Debate: A Qualitative Framing Analysis of Organic Food News Media Coverage*. The premise of their research is that national newspapers frame organic food as an issue through four major frames: ethical frame, health frame, production frame, and industrialization frame. Meyers and Abrams also found that the sources the journalists used were associated with a corresponding frame. The five national newspapers selected were: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Atlanta Journal & Constitution*, and *Chicago Sun-Times*.

The ethical frame was employed the most in the coverage of organic foods. The frame, they found, was created by describing environmentalism and social responsibility. Terms included “environmentally friendly,” “eco-friendly.” Organic foods were said to be better for the environment because their production doesn't involve the use of chemicals or pesticides. The print media placed emphasis on the idea that organic foods were ethically superior to

conventionally produced food. Further, buying organic foods was typically associated with supporting local farmers and sustainable farming practices.

Sources in the ethical frame included organic farmers and business owners, organic consumers, and organic proponents. The consumers and proponents often described their personal beliefs and values in relation to purchasing organic foods. Meyers and Abrams also found that organic business owners positioned their companies with values that aligned with the industry (i.e. environmental sustainability).

The Health Frame

The health frame was used to describe organic foods as a source of nutrition and a possible solution to the United States's obesity epidemic. Words such as "safe," "natural, authentic, and health," and "real food," were used to describe organic foods. Also noteworthy is that these articles didn't cite any specific benefits. Rather, the food was framed as healthy in a holistic sense.

Sources in the health frame included consumers, researchers, an advocacy organization, and nutrition experts. Health and safety were large motivators for consumers to eat organic. In a *Chicago Sun-Times* article, a mother expressed her concern about pesticides and the number of chemicals her child was consuming. The advocacy group, the Environmental Working Group, was also used as a source in the *Chicago Sun-Times*. They provided a guide on which types of produce have high or low levels of pesticides – a widespread concern for consumers. Lastly, pediatricians, doctors, and nutritionists were used to attest to the nutritional value of organic foods. These sources were used conservatively and no explicit claims were made to assert organic foods as better than conventionally produced foods.

The Production Frame

The production frame was used to discuss the production practices that influence the supply and demand of organic food. Production practices include cost and regulations. Keywords included “labeling,” “cost,” and “shortages.” An article in the *Chicago Sun-Times* said that organic milk was moving quickly off of the shelves and that the increased consumer demand requires the recruitment of more organic dairy farmers. The *Washington Post* published an article about the organic certification process and the extensive USDA requirements for milk to be certified as organic. The *New York Times* ran articles explaining the issues organic farmers are facing and the difference between labeling food as “natural” versus “organic.”

Organic farmers, organic industry representatives, and scientists were cited the most in the production frame. The farmers described the production process and the dedication they place on yielding high-quality food. *The New York Times* interviewed farmer, Mr. Navarro, who said that if he couldn’t farm organic, then he wouldn’t farm at all. Further, he went as far as burning corn in his field upon learning that it was genetically modified. He said that he wouldn’t be able to sleep at night if he sold the corn. Moreover, Dr. Henry I. Miller, co-author of “The Frankenfood Myth,” spoke to the safety of the process in an interview with *The New York Times*. He said that genetically modified foods have not made anyone ill or disrupted any ecosystem.

The Industrialization Frame

The industrialization frame demonstrated how the portrayal of organic food is changing as larger corporations are entering the market. This frame was identified through its focus on how big businesses, like Whole Foods Market, threaten organic ideology. Terms such as “family farm,” and “small or local farms/farmers” were used to describe what organic farming should be and the negative effect industrialization would cause.

Corporate spokespeople, sustainable agriculture groups, organic farmers, and organic advocacy groups were cited the most in this frame. Wal-Mart spokesperson, Karen Burk, defended the corporation entering the market in an article by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Wal-Mart's position was that they were making organic foods more accessible and at a lower price than their competitors. In opposition, Ronnie Cummins, national director of the Organic Consumers Association, was cited in an article by *The New York Times*. On the topic of Wal-Mart, he believed that the corporation would likely end up outsourcing to a country with lower organic standards and poorer labor conditions than in the United States.

Conclusions

The newspapers examined by Meyers and Abrams (2010) characterized organic food production as a moral and ethical responsibility for the environment, society, and consumers' health. Articles using the ethical frame suggested that consumers buying organic foods care about the environment, sustainability, local farms, and business. Articles using the health frame presented organic food as having superior health benefits, quality, and safety. Articles using the production frame discussed how organic foods are produced, why farmers choose to grow organic foods, and how they meet consumer demands. Articles using the industrialization frame discussed the need for larger companies to help meet the growing demand. At the same time, they characterized big business as a threat to small farmers.

Meyers and Abrams reported that national news media stressed the ethical and moral reasons to buy organic food. Additionally, there was a limited presentation of scientific evidence for the claims of superiority in quality and safety. This contributes to the consumers' reliance on personal and moral ethics. In general, the media they examined supported the organic ideology and failed to balance their articles with scientific evidence or other perspectives. By doing so, the

media perpetuated organic ideology instead of presenting objective facts. They avoided pointing out the uncertainties regarding the alleged health risks of conventionally produced foods, and the supposed health advantages of organically produced foods (2010).

These findings are important because the media is a trusted source for consumers seeking information about food purchasing decisions. How the media covers the topic can influence the perception of the consumer. The researchers posit that communication practitioners need to continue providing factual information on both conventional and organic foods while addressing the concerns of consumers. A challenge still remains for how to promote both types of agriculture without criticizing the other unfairly (Meyers and Abrams, 2010).

Advertising in the Dairy Industry

The dairy industry represents one of the largest advertising programs in the United States. According to Nicholson and Kaiser, dairy farmers are mandated to pay 15 cents per hundred pounds of milk marketed in the continental United States. Most of the money supports the generic advertising of fluid milk and cheese. They cite the “Got Milk?” campaign as an example. The purpose of the advertisements is “to increase the consumer demand for fluid milk and dairy products, enhance dairy farm revenues, and reduce the amount of surplus milk purchased by the government under the Dairy Price Support Program,” (2008).

Mandatory assessments in the dairy industry date back to the Dairy Production and Stabilization Act of 1983. In more recent years, fluid milk processors began a generic advertising program funded by the assessments. This includes the Milk Mustache print media campaign that falls under the “Got Milk?” campaign. This program raises \$370 million per year, making it one of the largest generic advertising programs in the United States. This has resulted in various studies on the impact of generic dairy advertising on the economy (Nicholson & Kaiser, 2008).

Generic advertising is a collective effort of all the firms within an industry. This is also referred to as primary demand advertising (Weedmark, 2021). Generic advertising is different from traditional branded advertising in multiple ways. While traditional branded advertising seeks to set its products apart from its competitors, generic advertising is not focused on this differentiation. Rather, it focuses on products with similar characteristics. Where traditional branded advertising seeks to increase market share, generic advertising seeks to increase the overall demand for a product. Lastly, the goal of dairy generic advertising is to increase the price and quantity of milk through shifts in the demand curve (Nicholson & Kaiser, 2008).

Nicholson & Kaiser, ironically, highlighted the challenges for researchers that want to model the impact of generic dairy advertising. While these challenges are mostly for modeling economic impact, the information is still applicable. They explained how vastly regulated the United States dairy industry is. Milk pricing, government safety nets, import tariffs, etc. should be considered when evaluating advertisements. Their analysis found that permanently doubling the expenditures for generic advertising would increase the cumulative net revenues of dairy farmers by between \$1.3 and \$2.2 billion. Elimination of the expenditures, however, would reduce net revenues for dairy farmers by between \$2.2 and \$3.3 billion (2008). Simply put, generic advertising is highly profitable.

Chapter III

Documentary Case Study

Between the years 2014 and 2017, several documentaries were released on the topic of the dairy industry and animal agriculture. This thesis will examine how three documentaries contributed to a shift in the public's perception of and an overall decline of the dairy industry. The documentarians used a variety of news frames to achieve this shift.

Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret

Cowspiracy (Andersen & Kuhn, 2014) focuses on the impact of animal agriculture on the environment. Released on June 24, 2014, the documentary follows the journey of an aspiring environmentalist, Kip Andersen. He seeks to uncover why leading environmental organizations won't comment on the role of animal agriculture in deforestation, water pollution, topsoil erosion, ocean "dead zones," and more. Further, Andersen offers potential solutions to reach global sustainability.

Andersen and videographer, Kuhn, open the film with a startling statistic. Bruce Hamilton is the Deputy Executive Director of the Sierra Club, an environmental organization with chapters in all 50 states, Washington D.C. and Puerto Rico. Hamilton explains that leading climate scientists say the highest safe level of emissions would be 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. In 2014, this number had already reached 400 parts per million. Based on this evidence, he reasons that the Earth is rapidly approaching a mass-extinction. Right from the beginning, it is made clear that there is a pressing issue that requires immediate attention.

Cows, Andersen cites, create more greenhouse gases than driving cars. Further, he found that the UN reported that livestock plays a major role in global warming and is the leading cause

of environmental degradation and resource consumption. Andersen believes that major environmental groups are ignoring the issue. Finding out why is the motivation for the film.

As the title of the film suggests, the filmmakers believe that environmental advocacy groups are a part of a conspiracy to protect the agricultural industry. Andersen interviews the heads of Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Surfrider, and Oceana, as well as local government officials to understand why there doesn't seem to be any concern for the impact agriculture has on the environment. To get other perspectives, he also interviews ranchers, factory farm owners, and a representative from a pro-beef lobbying group.

One of the most compelling interviews in the documentary featured Howard Lyman, a former cattle rancher that spent 45 years in the industry. He faced a five-year legal battle over remarks he made on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* regarding the industry and Mad Cow Disease. He was later found not guilty and maintains that telling "the truth" about the industry makes you guilty under food-disparagement laws. He even tells the documentarians that they're putting their necks on the chopping block by making this film. This interview revealed that there are systems in place that protect the industry. A subsequent interview with journalist and author, Will Potter, revealed that animal-rights and environmental movements are domestic terrorism threats, according to the FBI. Although Potter is a non-violent activist, documents he obtained from the counter-terrorism unit via the Freedom of Information Act, showed that his lectures and media interviews were being monitored. Fear, Potter believes, is the industry's main tactic. Andersen concludes that these groups are ignoring the issue because the industry is too powerful to challenge. Lack of legal resources, alone, is enough to scare people away from talking about the issue.

Andersen's proposed solution, or call-to-action, is that everyone should adopt a vegan lifestyle. Doing so would prevent cruelty against animals, have a net positive impact on the environment, and solve issues of food insecurity. To illustrate this, he interviews outspoken vegans that live sustainably by growing their food (Andersen & Kuhn, 2014).

The filmmakers make it evident that a huge issue is being suppressed by the industry and the government. The use of startling statistics creates a sense of urgency and fear in the viewer. By inviting viewers to adopt veganism as the solution to global sustainability, this documentary employs the ethical frame. A plant-based lifestyle, according to this film, is the most powerful thing one can do for the environment. This implies that consuming meat and dairy makes people complicit in the system they identified as destructive. Moreover, Andersen and Kuhn position the industry as an entity that cannot be trusted.

The Milk System

The Milk System (Pichler & Cherif, 2017) takes a critical look at the industry from the perspectives of farmers, dairy owners, politicians, scientists, and more. The film is directed by Andreas Pichler, a German-born man whose childhood involved herding cows through the mountains. Despite his connection to the animal, he never thought to take a critical look at the industry. Pichler's goal was to hear from industrialists, farmers, and scientists about the effect of dairy production on the environment, animals, politics, and the human body.

A key aspect of this documentary is the contrast between family farms struggling to survive and large corporations that make up the billion-dollar dairy industry. One family, the Geigers, have four generations living under one roof. Their family business has 250 cows and no employees. The industry, one family member tells us, has pushed them to the wayside. Milk

prices are fluctuating, suppliers are demanding higher yields, and new technology is a large and necessary expense. They simply cannot keep up.

The modest, family farm is juxtaposed with a bright, modern office building. Here, the filmmakers implement the industrialization frame, in which family farms are being used to show the negative effect that the industry has on small operations. Arla is one of the top five dairy companies in the world. The spokespeople from Arla explain how they've had to globalize to grow their company. Their fastest growing product category is infant formula, which is sold all around the world.

The filmmakers also use the production frame. Just like in Meyers and Abrams's (2010) study, family farmers in the documentary describe their production process and the dedication they place on yielding high-quality dairy products. Part of that process is artificial insemination. One farmer explains that cows need to have one calf per year. If they aren't producing calves, then they "have to go." The implication is twofold: 1.) Family farms do not have the money to feed and house livestock unable to produce milk. 2.) Once a cow can no longer sustain a pregnancy, they are no longer of any use to the industry.

The industry isn't always kind to animals and the viewer is offered a first-hand account of this reality. While cows can live up to 20 years, dairy cows barely live to 5. Coupled with a melancholic soundtrack, the filmmakers use the ethical frame to confront the viewer with the consequences of a system that many benefit from at the expense of animals.

Also notable in this documentary is the health frame. A large question this film seeks to answer is whether or not milk is healthy. In Meyers and Abrams's (2010) study, sources used in the health frame included consumers, researchers, an advocacy organization, and nutrition experts. In *The Milk System*, Pichler interviewed a researcher that has spent 40 years conducting

a longitudinal study on milk consumption and health. The study involves over 300,000 subjects of different sex, age, and ethnicity. The researcher suggests people limit the amount of dairy they consume as milk is not as healthy as the industry claims.

The documentary concludes with potential solutions. One farmer suggested smaller and more diverse production units with less technology. Another farmer says that organic farming has a significantly lesser environmental impact compared to industrial farming. Many in the industry, however, are unwilling to spend the money and the labor to farm organically. The pressure placed on small and family-owned farms to make a profit has led to negative and heartbreaking outcomes. While some have become inconsiderate or unethical with their farming practices, others have become victims of a disproportionately high suicide rate among farmers.

To conclude, Pichler found that the milk system inflicts grave damage on animals, people, and the environment. The system, he concludes, seeks only to protect itself (Pichler & Cherif, 2017).

What the Health

What the Health (Andersen & Kuhn, 2017) explores why leading health organizations promote the industry despite scientific studies showing the negative effects of the products on the human body. *What the Health* is another feature-length documentary by Andersen and Kuhn. Similar to *Cowspiracy*, Andersen begins this film with a shocking finding. Research from the World Health Organization (WHO) classifies processed meats (e.g. cold cuts, hot dogs, bacon) as a group one carcinogen – the same group as cigarettes, asbestos, and plutonium. Immediately, the viewer is confronted with the health frame. Andersen was shocked to find that the American Cancer Society (ACS) had not featured this information anywhere on their website, but instead encouraged the consumption of processed meats despite the WHO definitively linking this food

to cancer. A representative from the ACS agreed to sit down for an interview with Andersen, only to cancel when she learned the topic of the interview was the role of diet in cancer. He spends the rest of the documentary interviewing physicians, professional athletes, and more.

Similar to *Cowspiracy*, Andersen's proposed solution is to adopt a plant-based diet to create a profound change in the health of the nation and the environment. Again, we see Andersen employing the ethical frame to persuade viewers to change their lifestyle; The end of the documentary places a large emphasis on the individual impact one can make by eating plant-based. One interviewee says that a plant-based diet can provide a greater sense of well-being and happiness because it's healthier and it doesn't require you to participate in animal cruelty, environmental degradation.

As was mentioned in Meyers and Abrams's (2010) study, health and safety are large motivators for consumers. Their study found that sources used in the health frame included researchers and medical professionals. In this documentary, Andersen uses these sources to discuss the link between the standard American diet and disease. Lastly, the health frame is employed through personal testimonies from vegan athletes. One athlete says he never thought he could feel as good as he does at his age and that he wants everyone to feel this way. All in all, the documentary positions veganism as the solution for the long-term, collective health, and wellbeing of the human species and the planet.

Chapter IV

Research Questions

This thesis asserts that the documentaries *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret*, *The Milk System*, and *What the Health* assisted in shifting the public's perception of the dairy industry. Theoretically, this thesis can contribute to existing research by applying the framing theory to documentaries. Further, analyzing social media posts about the three documentaries can provide insight regarding the overall shift in public perception as well as the decline of the dairy industry. Therefore, I propose the following research questions:

- What themes emerged after the release of several investigative documentaries on the dairy industry and animal agriculture between 2014 and 2017?
- What are the arguments being made about the dairy industry, what evidence is being utilized and to what extent do human health concerns feature within these arguments?
- How were news frames utilized by documentary filmmakers to contribute to the shift in the public's perception and an overall decline of the dairy industry?

Chapter V

Method

This thematic analysis uses framing theory to examine how dairy consumption has been framed over the past decade (2011 to present) by the media, and how the aforementioned documentaries contributed to a shift in the public's perception and an overall decline of the dairy industry. This thematic analysis consists of primary data (three documentaries) and secondary textual data from 45 social media posts culled from Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook.

The primary data used in this analysis are three documentaries on the topic of animal agriculture and the dairy industry. The documentaries were chosen based on their popularity. For example, when searching for documentaries on a certain topic, Google provides millions of results related to the search. In this context, searching “dairy industry documentaries” led to multiple articles that included a comprehensive list of recommendations. Additionally, Google's algorithm provided a list of recommendations based on factors such as popular content in one's region. It's worth noting that the chosen documentaries have been the subject of a great deal of criticism regarding the use of statistics. Articles from critics have likely contributed to the high placement of the documentaries in the search results. Framing theory was used to understand how the documentarians presented information to the viewer.

Meyers and Abrams's study, *Feeding the Debate: A Qualitative Framing Analysis of Organic Food News Media Coverage*, was core to this analysis. To recall, the premise of their research is that national newspapers frame organic food as an issue through four major frames: ethical frame, health frame, production frame, and industrialization frame. Meyers and Abrams also found that the sources the journalists used were associated with a corresponding frame (2010). For the purposes of this paper, the three feature-length documentaries were closely

examined for the use of these four frames based on keywords identified by Meyers and Abrams (e.g. “environmentally friendly,” “eco-friendly,” “safe,” “natural,” health,” and “real food”). Words with similar connotations, “vegan,” “healthy,” “sustainability,” etc. were also noted. To summarize, each documentary was analyzed to discover reoccurring themes, the sources that were interviewed, and the frames used to explain the industry.

The secondary data used in this analysis consist of social media posts culled from Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit. The title of each documentary was typed into the search bar of the respective social media platforms. The results were then filtered by “top” or “most popular.” This filter was necessary because it compiled social media posts from over the years; without filtering the results, the social media posts are sorted by “most recent.” Only examining posts from recent months would provide too narrow of an understanding of the public’s perception.

Alternatively, one can search the title of the documentary followed by the name of the social media platform on Google (e.g. Cowspiracy Reddit). When necessary, advanced search features were used. For example, Twitter didn’t offer many results by just searching the film title. Adding keywords like “documentary” or “Netflix” helped to narrow down the results. Further, the advanced search feature includes filters for the minimum number of likes, retweets, and comments. This feature was used to view older tweets that had high levels of interaction.

Due to the amount of social media posts that exist surrounding this topic, the posts were chosen based on their relevance to the research questions. The following criteria were also considered when choosing posts:

- The posts must directly mention the title of the documentary. This required reading through many posts to ensure that the user had watched the documentary

- Posts that directly cited the film as the reason for a change in their perception of the industry or dairy consumption were given top priority
- Posts with high levels of interaction (posts with a minimum of 100 likes, comments, and/or shares) were given higher priority than those with one or two likes
- Posts that criticize the films should not be excluded

For each documentary, five posts were gathered from Reddit, Facebook, and Twitter. In total, 45 relevant social media posts were gathered. The links to each post were then sorted by the platform on which they were posted and the title of the documentary that the post was in reference to. The links were put in a spreadsheet for easy reference.

Chapter VI

Results

Social media posts were examined to gauge potential emerging themes following the release of the three documentaries. Social media offers a wide range of data that comes directly from the minds of the poster. The data was only collected from public accounts to maintain the privacy of the individuals. As was stated in chapter five, for each documentary, 15 social media posts were sourced from Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook. This chapter will be divided into four parts – one for each of the documentaries that were analyzed, and one to review the information as they relate to the research questions. Each post can be accessed through the references section.

Part 1: *Cowspiracy*

Reddit Posts

- I. Reddit user *CubeHound* (2020) posted a statement on the forum r/veganism. This forum has 580,138 members that discuss different topics related to veganism. In their post, this user says, “I watched *Cowspiracy* and *What The Health* and I am 100% converted. I have zero inclination to ever eat meat again.” The post is multiple paragraphs long and can be accessed via the references section.
- II. Reddit user *njsully* (2021) watched two of the documentaries (*Cowspiracy* and *What the Health*) and said “It’s like my whole world had been turned upside down.” The user was skeptical about adopting a plant-based diet. They mention that their girlfriend is a vegan and that they never understood why. It wasn’t until watching the aforementioned documentaries that they decided to make a change.

- III. Reddit user *Infinity* (2015) shared a news article about a restaurant in Arlington, Texas that pledged to go completely vegan after the owners viewed the film.
- IV. Reddit user *mikaxu987* (2019) shared their excitement about their boyfriend becoming a vegan. The user also says that they and their partner watched the film together.
- V. Reddit user *sanfoale* (2020) said that they became a vegan immediately after watching the film.

Twitter Posts

- I. Twitter user @stephaniequilao reported that after attending a 2016 event that screened both *Cowspiracy* and *What the Health*, they made the decision to go vegan (2021).
- II. In 2016, Twitter user @LaurenCohan said “An absolutely stirring, riveting and mind-blowing documentary. @Cowspiracy. On Netflix. Please watch! #cowspiracy.”
- III. Twitter user @liberationage (2019) shared how to go vegan in three easy steps – each step was the title of a documentary on the topic of the dairy industry and animal agriculture. Step two was to “Watch Cowspiracy.”
- IV. In 2019, Twitter user @simon_sig3 said that they were going to try veganism after watching *Cowspiracy* and *What the Health* They say that it might not last forever, but as a cancer survivor, they’re open to change.
- V. In 2018, Twitter user @kaysho12 said “I’m watching a film called Cowspiracy on Netflix for class. I have never been more stressed, and it makes me want to go vegan for the environment.”

Facebook Posts

- I. Alessandra Rugar-Weber uploaded a status (2021) about her place of employment hosting a public screening of *Cowspiracy* in 2017. The event was sold out and she claimed “A lot

of people turned vegan that night, a lot of hearts were opened and minds changed.”

They also hoped to spread awareness about a new film, *Seaspiracy*, that will come to Netflix on March 24, 2021. This film is by the same director as *Cowspiracy* – Andersen.

- II. Sarah Jane Web uploaded a status to the Facebook group “Netflix Bangers.” The post reads, “Please watch What the health? And Cowspiracy...both documentaries taught me a lot and made me so much more aware, they completely changed my mindset” (2021).
- III. Mick Eraserhead uploaded a post saying that this film is a “must-see.” They then summarized it in their language – Dutch. “Samenvatting : geef je een reet om de planeet? Zet jezelf dan op een vegan dieet !” Since this was a short phrase with a clear translation, it was included. The English translation says, “Summary: Do you give an ass about the planet? Then put yourself on a vegan diet!”
- IV. Ida-May Jones posted a status to the Facebook group “What F.A.T. Vegans Eat.” The day before making this post, they watched *Cowspiracy* and decided to adopt a vegan diet. They shared photos of a vegan meal and said it was one of the most delicious meals they had eaten in a long time (2015).
- V. In 2015, Jane Birch shared a post to the Facebook group “Word of Wisdom Health Challenge.” They shared a link to the Cowspiracy website and said that they highly recommend it. In their own words, they describe what the film is about. They end their post by saying, “Considering that nutrition from animals is not only not necessary but also detrimental to human health, this is clearly a win-win-win for the earth, our bodies, and the animals!”

Part 2: *The Milk System*

Reddit Posts

- I. Searching for this film on Reddit had unremarkable results. If there were any posts, it was someone sharing a link to watch the film or a photo of the film poster. The film was originally made in German, so that could be an explanation as to why there was a lack of results when searching the title. Additionally, the title of the film is close to the phrase “milk the system,” meaning to take advantage of a system; There are multiple posts with this phrase that are unrelated to the film. When searching with its German title, Das System Milch, there were some results. Due to their being only simple translations available, these posts were not included. Not being able to understand the subtleties of the language prevents one from truly gaining a well-rounded grasp on the thoughts of the user.

Twitter Posts

- I. Twitter user @ostrutka told their followers that if they wanted to continue consuming dairy products without any guilt, then they shouldn't watch this film (2018).
- II. Twitter user @itsemilyarnett was already a vegan but was struggling with eating dairy. To remind themselves why they choose this lifestyle, they decided to re-watch this film (2021).
- III. Twitter user @cutanddried watched this film and said, “Watching "The Milk System" on Netflix. What a racket. Unsustainable insanity. Insist dairy farmers overproduce do as to keep milk cheap and so that big corporations can "dump" the stuff on Chinese and African markets, pricing out local farmers. That's an EU fail. 7/10 for EU” (2020).

- IV. Twitter user @beetham_k said that this film was an eye-opener and a “great watch.” Further, they mentioned that as people grow up, they’re told that milk will make them stronger, taller, and healthier. Now they believe that those claims are “total crap” (2020).
- V. Twitter user @mravas05 said that after watching this film, they learned that the amount of dairy society is taught to consume could increase the chances of developing cancer.

Facebook Posts

- I. Lorenzo Del Moro uploaded a post with a recipe for homemade pesto (2019). Along with photos of their pesto, they said “I didn't use cheese because milk production is no longer sustainable for the planet today (I recommend the viewing of the documentary The Milk System)”
- II. Lisa Vives posted a status to the Facebook group “HILLSDALE, NY Community Forum.” They called the film “incredible.” In their own words, they summarize the film, highlight what parts were most shocking to them, then ask for the feedback of others in the group (2021).
- III. In 2020, Lois Lorraine Koontz posted a status reading, “I’m watching The Milk System on Netflix. I’m glad I’m not a cow.”
- IV. In 2020, Sea Holly Farm Cochrane posted a status saying that this film was a “really good” documentary on the dairy industry in the European Union. They said it mirrors the United States dairy industry. They end their post by saying, “Buy local!”
- V. Jen Armstrong posted a status in 2020 reading “Watching 'The Milk System' on Netflix. The farmer dude just said "if she can't get pregnant anymore, she has to go. That's the

way it is" This is the norm. A life time of having babies taken away from you and then when your body can't take anymore, you get killed. #DairyMeansDeath”

Part 3: *What the Health*

Reddit Posts

- I. In 2020, Reddit user TheMexicanJuan posted that “What The Health is one of the most misleading documentaries ever made and Netflix should pull it. It's loaded with misrepresentations of science, misquoting the WHO and countless conspiratorial statements. Joaquin Phoenix should be ashamed of himself for producing this heap of BS.” They then list out some of the claims they found to be inaccurate. Additionally, this user linked multiple news articles and videos that debunk the claims made in the film. They end their post with the following statement: “Disclaimer: I have no qualms with vegan diets, in many ways they can be beneficial to well being, but spreading misinformation and garbage science to promote veganism is not the way forward, and as evidenced by this documentary, it can prove detrimental to the health of people who buy into it.”
- II. Reddit user relljr posted on a forum called IsItBullshit. Their post asked for comments regarding whether or not this film was “bullshit.” It received 29 comments where other users discussed. Many provided links to articles that debunked the claims made in the film. Some users suggested better options such as *Earthlings* or *Forks Over Knives*.

- III. In 2018, Reddit user JMeyers666 shared a photo of an elderly woman seated with a plate of vegetables. The title of the post reads, “This is Anne. She went vegan 3 weeks before her 96th birthday after watching *What The Health*.”
- IV. In 2021, Reddit user BeFuckingMindful uploaded a post titled “Can we talk about how 'What the Health' sucks big time?” This user believes that there are plenty of reasons to adopt a vegan diet, but that this film failed to make a sound case. They found the film to be filled with pseudoscience and that if any information is presented in a documentary format, anyone will believe it. They worry that this film is detrimental to the plant-based diet movement and say, “I guess I'm bothered that when people choose to be vegan for the wrong reasons, they often leave for the wrong reasons, too. Or maybe that this movie will give people the wrong info and be detrimental to activism or conversations vegans may have to persuade others to become vegan, especially if they're using bad info to try to educate people with. Part of me feels like pushing back against stuff like this can help prevent that.” They end their post asking for the thoughts of others.
- V. Reddit user fallenhope1 says that this film (and another titled *Game Changers*) inspired them to go vegan.

Twitter Posts

- I. In response to a tweet asking what documentaries made them want to go vegan, Twitter user @JesikaVaylen cited both *Cowspiracy* and *What the Health* in their reply (2021).
- II. In 2021, Twitter user @salinadelarenta said, “I never thought about this but I watched the Netflix documentary “What The Health” and that’s it. I’m going vegan. I will not

disrespect this earth any longer, our animals can't live in full harmony with us if we keep eating them + America IS TRYING TO KILL US. Plz watch it !”

- III. Twitter user @YungLion_Heart said that *What the Health* was one of the documentaries that helped them decide to adopt veganism. They claim that it was the best decision they've ever made (2021).
- IV. In 2020, Twitter user @angie_karan tweeted a list of documentaries and speeches that they say will inspire one to go vegan. Among the list were *Cowspiracy* and *What the Health*
- V. Twitter user @chinese_kool says that this film twists the facts to make people believe that animal products are bad (2020).

Facebook Posts

- I. Olga Vargas posted a status to the Facebook group “Canadian Vegans.” They share that she and her two children watched the film (after bribing them for \$30). Their spouse also joined them at no cost. Part of the post reads, “For my surprise as soon the documentary was over my daughter asked me to help her go vegan. My son said " I want those \$30 first then I go vegan." Dad said " I need to process this" and asked me if we can re-watch some sections of the documentary and took notes of the studies. Next morning we all were primary plant base.” After further research, each family member decided that they would continue with veganism. Vargas notes that information is powerful, but that most of it “was inaccurate.” It is unclear whether or not they were referring to the contents of the documentary in this statement.

- II. Camille Phillips posted a status to the Facebook group “Plant-Based on a Budget Support Group.” Phillips shared that they watched the film with their son and both decided to adopt veganism. The post ends with Phillips asking for advice on where to shop and what to buy (2021).
- III. In the “Canadian Vegans” Facebook group, Ashley Colbey shares that they have been dairy-free for a year. It wasn’t until 2021 that they watched What the Health, but Colbey said that watching it justified her choice to stop consuming dairy products (2021).
- IV. In a 2021 post on the “Vegan Massachusetts” Facebook group, Sylvia Rocha said, “I’m a recovering meat-aholic. I just watched "What the Health" last night and just like that... I’m vegan. I want that vegan cancer killing blood!!! I want to help the environment. I don't want to be part of the animal injustice problem. Thanks to my vegetarian/vegan wife Natalie Rocha for adding me to this page. She's so happy! Wish me luck! I hope I can do this!”
- V. Neil Burton uploaded a status on the Facebook group “Just Vegan Food.” They said that at the age of 61, they decided to try veganism after watching the film. They hope to receive some of the benefits outlined in the film such as weight reduction and getting off hypertension medication. They ask for tips and suggestions (2020).

Part 4: Research Questions

Research Question 1: What themes emerged after the release of several investigative documentaries on the dairy industry and animal agriculture between 2014 and 2017?

A consistent theme found on social media was an adoption of a plant-based diet after viewing at least one of the films discussed in this thesis. Based on the social media posts above, personal health and animal welfare were convincing aspects of the documentaries. On Facebook, many of the posts were made to Facebook groups about veganism. Posts to these groups often asked for suggestions on how to navigate this lifestyle. Lastly, out of the chosen films, *Cowspiracy* was cited most often across social media platforms as the reason people adopted a plant-based diet.

Another theme was the use of statistics in the films. *What the Health* was subject to the most criticism across all social media channels. Critics believe that the filmmaker, Andersen, cherry-picked data to fit a sort of “vegan agenda.” Furthermore, Reddit was the platform that people used the most to share criticisms. Even individuals that already practice veganism had many criticisms. As was noted above, Reddit user BeFuckingMindful believes that veganism is a good thing, but says that the misinterpretation of information in *What the Health* is detrimental to the plant-based community because a Google search will provide numerous articles that debunk the claims made in the film.

Research Question 2: What are the arguments being made about the dairy industry, what evidence is being utilized, and to what extent do human health concerns feature within these arguments?

The main arguments made by the documentarians are that the dairy industry and animal agriculture cause immense harm to the environment, to animal welfare, and to the health of humans. The claims never went without substantiation from statistics or expert interviews. Social media users and journalists, however, have heavily criticized filmmaker Kip Andersen for misrepresenting statistics to set an agenda against the industry. The evidence used to support the claims made in each film were sourced from medical professionals, researchers, advocacy groups, organizations such as the WHO, dairy farmers, and personal testimonies.

Human health concerns were often featured in these arguments. For example, in *What the Health*, medical professionals included physicians, bariatric surgeons, and cardiologists. Important to note is that the medical professionals interviewed were also advocates of plant-based diets. One physician, John McDougall, is also the owner of a vegetarian food company. Further, human health was the main focus of this film. Andersen begins the documentary by sharing his family medical history – he even admits his own history of hypochondria. He then seeks to form a connection between multiple ailments and the consumption of meat and dairy products.

Further, although *Cowspiracy* and *The Milk System* discuss the industry from the perspectives of the environment and industrialization, they still make claims that appeal to human health concerns. For example, in *The Milk System*, Pichler interviewed a researcher that has spent 40 years conducting a longitudinal study on milk consumption and health. The researcher suggested that people limit the amount of dairy they consume as milk is not as healthy as the industry claims.

Research Question 3: How were news frames utilized by documentary filmmakers to contribute to the shift in the public's perception and an overall decline of the dairy industry?

The news frames and corresponding sources outlined in Meyers and Abrams's study, *Feeding the Debate: A Qualitative Framing Analysis of Organic Food News Media Coverage* (2010), were utilized by the documentary filmmakers. The four major frames and their corresponding sources are:

- The ethical frame. Sources included organic farmers and business owners, organic consumers, and organic proponents.
- The health frame. Sources included consumers, researchers, an advocacy organization, and nutrition experts.
- The production frame. Sources included organic farmers, organic industry representatives, and scientists.
- The industrialization frame. Sources included corporate spokespeople, sustainable agriculture groups, organic farmers, and organic advocacy groups.

The Ethical Frame

In *Cowspiracy* and *What the Health*, Andersen invites viewers to adopt veganism as the solution to global sustainability, thus employing the ethical frame. This ethical frame is created by describing environmentalism and social responsibility. A plant-based lifestyle, according to these films, is the most powerful thing one can do for the environment. This implies that consuming meat and dairy makes people complicit in the system that they positioned as being unfavorable. In *The Milk System*, the filmmakers use the ethical frame to confront the viewer with the consequences of a system that many benefit from at the expense of animals. The sources used by the filmmakers were primarily proponents of the vegan lifestyle.

The Health Frame

In *What the Health*, viewers are immediately confronted with this frame when they are informed that research from the WHO classifies processed meats (e.g. cold cuts, hot dogs, bacon) as a group one carcinogen – the same group as cigarettes, asbestos, and plutonium. The frame is also employed through personal testimonies from vegan athletes and interviews with nutrition experts. Andersen also uses medical professionals to discuss the link between the standard American diet and disease. In *Cowspiracy*, veganism is positioned as a potential solution toward food insecurity, which adversely affects one's health. *The Milk System* used the frame by interviewing a researcher that has spent 40 years conducting a longitudinal study on milk consumption and health. The researcher suggested that people limit the amount of dairy they consume as milk is not as healthy as the industry claims.

The Production Frame

The Milk System uses the production frame heavily. Family farmers in the documentary describe their production process and the dedication they place on yielding high-quality dairy products. This documentary has a large focus on family farms and how they're being affected by the dairy industry. The sources used by the filmmaker were owners of small and/or family farms. Production practices include cost and regulations. A large issue one family faced was fluctuating milk prices and suppliers demanding higher yields.

The Industrialization Frame

The Milk System also uses the industrialization frame heavily. The industrialization frame is used to show how the dairy industry has changed as larger corporations enter the market. *The*

Milk System interviews members of family farms and corporate spokespeople for large corporations such as Arla. Family farms are being used to show the negative effect that the industry has on small operations. In contrast, the spokespeople from Arla explain how they've had to globalize to grow their company. As a consequence, small and/or family farms are struggling as they are priced out by large corporations.

Chapter VII

Discussion

This chapter examines the meaning and relevance of the results in relation to the research question. To review, this thesis asserts that the documentaries *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret*, *The Milk System*, and *What the Health* assisted in shifting the public's perception of the dairy industry. Theoretically, this thesis can contribute to existing research by applying the framing theory to documentaries. Further, analyzing social media posts about the three documentaries provides insight regarding the overall shift in public perception as well as the decline of the dairy industry.

This thesis found that the investigative documentaries *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret*, *The Milk System*, and *What the Health* assisted in shifting the public's perception of the dairy industry. This is illustrated via social media posts. The culminated social media posts revealed that 1.) individuals that had a positive experience viewing at least one of the documentaries posted onto forums or groups centered around veganism. 2.) Critics of the documentaries were found mostly on Reddit and were often in the context of debunking the claims made in the films.

Furthermore, veganism can be a polarizing topic. Those on the outside of the plant-based community often feel judged for consuming meat and dairy products. This could be one reason

as to why there were so many negative comments regarding *What the Health*. Those within the plant-based community can be defensive of their beliefs and seek support from others in the community (i.e. vegan Facebook groups). Both ends of the spectrum use statistics to support their claims. Regardless of what one eats, there will always be someone that thinks their diet is better, healthier, etc.

Regarding social media, many of the posts discussing the films were from 2020 and 2021. It is speculated that the COVID-19 pandemic may have reignited interest in these films. This could be due to people having more leisure time to watch films. A second possible explanation is that the filmmaker Andersen released another documentary titled *Seaspiracy*, which came to Netflix on March 24, 2021. In anticipation of this release, fans may have watched the other films by Andersen and posted about it on social media.

An unexpected finding was how heavily the documentarians implemented frames and how closely they aligned with the findings of Meyers and Abrams (2010). The newspapers examined by Meyers and Abrams characterized organic food production as a moral and ethical responsibility for the environment, society, and consumers' health. Similarly, the films examined through this thesis characterized plant-based diets as a moral and ethical responsibility for the environment, society, and one's health.

In Meyers and Abrams's study, newspapers using the ethical frame suggested that consumers buying organic foods care about the environment, sustainability, local farms, and business. In this analysis, it was found that films using the ethical frame suggested that people following plant-based diets were happier and healthier; it was also suggested that these individuals cared more about animals and the environment than someone that consumes meat and dairy. Articles using the health frame presented organic food as having superior health

benefits, quality, and safety. Films using this frame positioned plant-based diets as a potential solution to chronic health concerns, food insecurity, etc.

Articles using the production frame discussed how organic foods are produced, why farmers choose to grow organic foods, and how they meet consumer demands. Films using this frame described their production process and the dedication they place on yielding high-quality dairy products as well as how the cost of production is becoming a problem for small and family farms. Articles using the industrialization frame discussed the need for larger companies to help meet the growing demand. At the same time, they characterized big business as a threat to small farmers. Films using this frame showed how the dairy industry has changed as larger corporations enter the market. Family farms were used to show the negative effect that the industry has on small operations.

Additionally, Meyers and Abrams found that journalists failed to balance their articles with scientific evidence or other perspectives. In line with this finding was that the filmmakers failed to provide a breath of other perspectives. The films, however, used plenty of scientific evidence to perpetuate plant-based ideology (although many critics believe that the scientific evidence was misrepresented by the filmmakers). In the discussion of sources the filmmakers used in their interviews, the findings were directly in line with previous findings.

These findings are important because the media is a trusted source for the public seeking information about lifestyle decisions. How frames are used on a topic can influence the perception of the public. This thesis states that filmmakers need to provide factual and transparent information on the environment, animal welfare, and health. Different perspectives should be included so that viewers can receive a well-rounded understanding of the topic. Criticisms of the dairy and animal agriculture industries should be fair. Lastly, viewers shouldn't

be led to a particular conclusion. Instead, they should be able to make an informed decision based on the evidence presented.

Chapter VIII

Limitations and Recommendations

This chapter will discuss the limitations of the research and the recommendations to account for said limitations. To summarize the findings of this paper, a consistent theme found on social media was an adoption of a plant-based diet after viewing at least one of the films discussed in this thesis. This suggests that the information presented by the filmmakers was influential enough to persuade multiple individuals to make a significant lifestyle change. The documentarians used news frames to support the argument that the dairy industry and animal agriculture cause immense harm to the environment, to animal welfare, and to the health of humans. This analysis found evidence of the documentaries to be a large, contributing factor in the decline of the dairy industry.

A large limitation of this thesis is measuring perception. Due to time and resource constraints, this thesis used social media posts in place of a study – a recommendation would be to conduct an experiment to retrieve standardized data. Perception is a psychological phenomenon; It's the awareness, comprehension, and interpretation of stimuli. The most common ways to measure self-reported perception are Likert-type scales (Ho, 2017).

An interesting point found while analyzing social media posts was the idea that if information is provided in the form of a documentary, people will believe it without further questioning. Another concern is whether or not documentaries are a reliable source of information. While the filmmakers use plenty of expert testimony and statistics, many critics

were wary of the data due to potential bias. Research on the role of documentaries and the public's decision-making process could be conducted. A survey would be a suitable method to gather information about the public's perception of information in documentaries.

While social media is a powerful tool, it also presents several limitations. It offers millions of posts and countless opinions; when choosing posts to analyze, one must carefully consider what is to be included or excluded. When a post is excluded, be objective and ask why it is being left out. Additionally, not all of the population uses social media and fake accounts exist. Using data from social media eliminates the opportunity to retrieve the demographics of the individuals posting.

Lastly, given that the dairy industry continues to decline, it is recommended that further research be conducted on the rise of the plant-based food industry as well as its communication strategies. Further, the effect of the decline on small and family farms should be considered.

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