

# **In Good Conscience: Fast food, greenwashing and advertising**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses a new style of green promotion in the fast food industry by critically analysing one advertisement from each of A&W's "Better Beef", McDonald's' "Your Questions", and Chipotle's "Back to the Start" campaigns. Three main questions are explored: whether these campaigns help incite high quality environmental change or merely perpetuate the unsustainable status quo; whether each company is taking real responsibility for change or continuing to push responsibility onto consumers; and whether these advertisements are providing opportunities for consumers to feel fulfilled or only providing short term gratification. Using greenwashing, public relations, and advertising theories to aid analysis, this thesis argues that green themes in fast food advertising should not be taken at face value as they hinder environmental change in the fast food industry. This thesis concludes that green fast food ads continue cycles of consumption, harming possibilities for future change in production and consumption practices.

**Keywords:** Fast Food; Greenwashing; Public Relations; Advertising

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## Introduction

“...[F]ood is the thin end of environmental awareness – a site where fundamental questions can begin to be asked, questions that often lead to challenging re-conceptions of our environments, our societies, and ourselves.” (Johnston & Wilk & Opel, 2010, p. 251)

In this thesis I will explore one television advertisement each from the “Better Beef” campaign from A&W, the “Your Questions” campaign from McDonald’s, and the “Back to the Start” campaign from Chipotle. Each of these advertisements is indicative of a new style of advertising in the fast food industry, the emergence of which is evidence of a change or the appearance of a change in the way the industry relates to its consumers. This change is in the level of interest and commitment fast food companies have to issues beyond the inside of their restaurant locations. These commitments are to the environment, ethical concerns like animal rights, and transparency that builds trust with consumers. Each of the campaigns I have chosen was primarily in circulation in 2014-2016 and so are very relevant to today’s fast food advertising scene.

I aim to discover whether these campaigns can help incite real change in these areas, or whether they only present the appearance of change to the detriment of real change. I also intend to discover, through critical analysis, whether the proposals in these campaigns show each company taking real responsibility or whether they are merely “reframing” responsibility for good consumption choices that ultimately rest with consumers. Finally, I plan to reach conclusions about whether these advertisements are truly providing opportunities for consumers to feel fulfilled or are only providing short term fulfillment as is common in consumer society. Ultimately, this thesis will critically examine, from a concerned environmental perspective, how these corporations frame ethical consumption and environmental responsibility in advertising by promoting health, citizenship, and ethical values to be attained by the consumer through traditional channels of consumption. This thesis will offer conclusions regarding the quality and permanence

of these corporate “solutions” to the environmental and ethical problems with the global food system, as they are depicted by these advertisements.

The three advertisements were selected for this study for a number of reasons, chief of which is the way all three attempt to build trust with consumers by framing their business practices, production chains, or products as honest, pure, and authentic, which runs contrary to traditional understandings and realities of the industry. These values have seldom been the principal focus in fast food advertising, so these ads are unique. Each of these advertisements is a specific example of how advertising can change the connotative meanings and mental associations of a product or company without presenting evidence of change. As in other similar studies on food advertising, I have selected these advertisements because they mark a shift in advertising strategy and subject matter. Studying this shift may help to create a better understanding of “how they contribute to a system of discourses that appropriate environmental messages and concerns in service of the corporate agenda” (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 213). A study of these ads will thus contribute to a better understanding of how the fast food industry and its consumers relate to one another through manipulative and exploitative stories and corporate public relations as told through advertisements. This study will shed light on the exploitative elements of these advertisements as they propose true consumer fulfillment, while problematically only providing the assuagement of decades of consumer guilt, particularly in the realm of environmental friendliness and ethical consumption.

The advertisements I have chosen for this study are noteworthy in that they represent the entry of environmental and ethical values into representations of the fast food industry, which has traditionally been free from values that directly relate to the production process and ingredients of particular menu items. As a portion of the food industry that contributes enormously to mass industrial farming and all of the environmental and ethical harms that come with it, such as crowded factory farms, it is with critical yet open-minded disbelief that these positive public relations messages should be viewed. The overall environmental impact of the ingredient and processing changes advertised by the three companies in this thesis is yet to be determined, and is outside of the scope of this study, but the consumer-facing advertising comes with its own set of effects and therefore will be addressed.

Each of these companies is choosing to advertise in a way that makes them appear relevant to a wider range of consumer interests. They are doing this by attempting to increase their social capital by anchoring themselves in new waves of popular culture trends. A&W, a Canadian burger chain incorporated in 1956 (A&W Trademarks LP, 2015) has tried to differentiate itself from other burger chains by promoting the “Better Beef” they use that is free of steroids and hormones. As will be examined in Chapter Three, this positive environmental and ethical claim suggests to consumers that eating A&W burgers is ethical and socially responsible. However, there are many hidden costs associated with this claim, such as the increase in fossil fuel consumption in transportation of this beef from Australia to Canada because North American farms could not meet the supply specifications for this initiative to be feasible (Amason, 2013). This can nullify the fulfillment consumers feel when stories like this reach the media or when they know on a connotative level that they are still contributing to the global cattle industry that pollutes significantly more than other agricultural industries<sup>1</sup>.

McDonald’s, an American burger chain incorporated in 1955 (McDonald’s, 2016), is currently promoting ingredient-purity and sourcing campaigns which are very similar in many ways to the A&W Better Beef guarantee campaign in the types of false promises of fulfillment. However, Chapter Four of this thesis will cover a more provocative campaign that broadens the reach of this thesis: the “Your Questions” advertising campaign that promotes the ideas of honesty and trust with the appearance of transparency. By showing the audience sanitized and carefully edited frames of the Cargill factory that processes its burger meat, McDonald’s attempts to foster trust in its consumers. Consumers may see the appearance of fulfillment because they think they know how their food is made, but the dehumanization of the meat is still intact, meaning that consumers are not seeing or understanding the entire process and are equally in the dark as to the true conditions of production.

The final case study, in Chapter Five of this thesis, will examine Chipotle Mexican Grill, an American Mexican fast food chain whose first location opened in 1993 in Colorado (Chipotle Mexican Grill, 2016; Chipotle Mexican Grill, 2011). The main ethical and

<sup>1</sup> For more information on cattle farming and pollution see Burt et al., (1997)



environmental message in its “Back to the Start” campaign turns on the premise that farmers began industrializing their production processes to keep up with the rapidly developing consumer market, but that subconsciously each farmer knows this is bad for the environment, the animals, and people. Therefore, the farmer that stars in the story in the Chipotle ad is turning back time to a better era of farming by literally pulling a lever to flip the switch. The ad is an animated short story and implies it is both simple and possible to flip a switch and abandon mass industrial farming. The idyllic pastoral animations in front of viewers suggest wholesome fulfillment, so it is extremely attractive to the audience as a source of doing good and reaching said fulfillment. However, it is simplified to the extent that the process of making this turn back is still heavily veiled from the audience, increasing the potential for the truth to be stretched and the audience to continue to reach only false fulfillment.

As mentioned by Johnston, Wilk & Opel (2010), food is the “thin end” (p. 251) of environmental awareness and activism, making the advertising for it the perfect gateway into understanding the relationship between consumers, corporations, and environmental and ethical concerns. The fast food industry is the central point where all three of these areas come together. This is partly because there is far less regionally and culturally unified food tradition in mainstream or “typical” North American society, given the multicultural composition of the population and the relatively new settlement. Perhaps because of this or because of the ideologies behind concepts like the American Dream – or even perhaps because of our deep-rooted belief in economic growth – consumerism has become the main conduit to experience North American culture. The fast food industry has certainly become one of the most consumption-oriented avenues to achieve these ideals and theoretically, the promised fulfillment associated with them. The fast food industry has even helped to create these ideologies and values that make up North American identity, through making the fast-paced multitasking of vehicle-friendly lifestyles both possible and necessary with inventions like the drive-through, drive-in movies, and the one-handed meal that is a burger.

Recognizable brands in the fast food industry such as A&W and McDonald’s hold large amounts of nostalgia for consumers today, as they hold the memories of family, drive-ins and the American Dream. This nostalgia is a key connection to feelings of rooted

tradition and national identity for much of the North American consumer population. However, brands like McDonald's and A&W find themselves in flux. They must stay rooted in their nostalgic realms, while continuing to hold creative power over North American culture and lifestyle to attract more customers. A change in the branding of these companies and the entrance of new companies like Chipotle Mexican Grill that abandons the traditional fare but still fits with the North American values of speed, product consistency and fast-paced lifestyles could wreak havoc not only on their bottom lines, but on the North American consumer consciousness. The large, historically powerful companies like McDonald's and A&W must change in other ways while continuing to carry and create and sell the tradition of the American Dream, cultural life and values. In addition, they must adapt to exist in an industry climate saturated with newer companies and brand images (such as that of Chipotle), with non-traditional fast food menu offerings, and with display of concern for positive environmental reputation. The most worrying factor for fast food companies from a corporate perspective is how to compete with other fast food companies by showing consumers they are serving up new elements of cultural life, while still holding onto the safe, comforting values the fast food industry is known for. McDonald's, A&W, and Chipotle are answering this question by advertising new, positive elements of their production process to fit with current environmental and ethical values, without changing very much of the direct consumer experience in their restaurants or on their menus.

Despite the timid approach to change in the fast food industry, it is important to note that North American views of food, health and culture have changed dramatically over the past few decades. A study by Nisbett & Kanouse (1969, p. 289) undertaken in 1969 (an era from which many of the scientific, quantum and nuclear studies and discoveries still stand) is underdeveloped by today's standards. Empirically, the study would, today, be barely passable, as much of the evaluation was left up to reviewers' feelings and subjective assessments (Nisbett & Kanouse, 1969, p. 290), and the breadth and depth of the subject matter itself was rather shallow. However, at the time, this study was cutting-edge and original, and also brought to light some ideas that had never been seriously considered worthy of academic research, or considered as systematic or predictable in any way. The authors of the study were confident of the substance and innovation of their results that showed "normal [sic] individuals bought more food if they

were deprived than they did if they had recently eaten. Overweight individuals actually bought more food if they had recently eaten than they did if deprived.” (Nisbett & Kanouse, 1969, p. 289). This study is limited and superficial compared to those performed today where food and corporations behind it are analysed in economic, social, and geographic context and micro-level ingredient content so as to provide a broader and deeper understanding of our relationship with this massive and important industry. However, the basis of our understanding of these relationships still relies heavily on our understanding of individual relations to food and individual shopping habits, as discovered and communicated by researchers like Nisbett and Kanouse (1969).

Now consumers experience a food industry more deeply connected to concerns beyond the end product going into a shopping cart or a stomach, so the study of food has grown. Food advertising and research has followed the trends of advertising and research in other industries where claims of social beneficence and responsibility have become commonplace. Because there is greater understanding of the globalized food economy and of consumption habits, food advertising and food research changed slightly to reflect much of what we see today in other industries’ advertising and consumer research. In the post war era much of the food advertising revolved around getting women back in the kitchen and around food technologies and processing. Then roughly when this 1969 study appeared, food research moved towards health, body size, and shopping habits (Nisbett & Kanouse, 1969). Today, these trends manifest themselves differently in research and in advertising. We see health in terms of invisible micronutrient contents and recommendations and as miracle cures for diseases, and we see advertising and research for technologies that help distribute food more widely and more ecologically. It is easy to see how our values have changed, become more precise, yet also broadened as we look at this evolution. Food was tied to nationalism and societal order, then to industrial production and capital and now it is tied more deeply to beauty, health miracles, the environment and unseen communities around the globe.

The analysis has moved from trying to atomize and control food production in order to produce maximum yields in the smallest area in the shortest time with the least seasonal variance. Now, industry consumer analysis calls for food production to achieve all of this while packing more nutritional value into food and harming the earth less. Somewhere

there is a paradox. The mass industrial food industry has been found to take more from the earth than it gives (Burt, 2013), and given the mediatized nature of the food industry and culture's need for solutions that do not disrupt consumerism, society is scrambling to find solutions in all areas, profit-oriented and idealistic. When everyone jumps in to try to save the world, it can be hard, especially for the only partially informed consumer, to differentiate the real solutions and pure motivations from the Band-Aid solutions and associated hidden interests that are often presented in food advertising.

Food advertising as part of the consumer goods industry is clearly a key part of the regulating institutions of our culture and of our time (along with political, religious, financial and social institutions). Eating is a necessity, and corporations exist to grow, therefore citizens are taught to consume as much and as often as possible. There is more abundance and variety in the food industry, and in particular in the fast food industry than at any point in history. This is made clear by the oversized portions and the questions of “would you like to make that a combo?” or “would you like to Supersize that?” by adding more food than what was originally ordered. In North America, most of the population does not depend solely on limited seasonal and regional diets – there is relatively abundant choice if one is an average middle class consumer – so food has become “one of life's most common hedonic experiences” (Gilbert, et al., 2002, p. 433).

As a result of this availability and abundance the production process, or food chain, has grown more complex and become somewhat longer (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 173), with seed manufacturers, farmers, processing plants, several levels of distribution and warehousing, transportation networks and grocery stores or restaurants all coming into contact with the food before it enters the home or stomach of an individual. As the food chain lengthens, advertising and marketing have grown too, to display and promote the nuances of the various products that all appear similar on the surface. In supermarkets, much of this hailing of consumers is done at point-of-sale on packaging (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 173), while for fast food restaurants, who cannot benefit from consumers wandering grocery store aisles, advertising becomes key to differentiate themselves and draw consumers in. As the food industry has become a behemoth in the North American consumer market, it has been in the spotlight more, which has led to increasing label appearances for claims of organic, ethical, natural and green benefits.

Labelling these greener, more positive aspects of food has brought these green ideas further into consumer consciousness. The push-pull of more companies calling out their green good deeds and more consumers becoming aware of these green elements of food has led to the growth of green production in the food industry as a whole. Depending which of many organic associations one looks at, the organic industry has now reached somewhere between USD \$43 billion (OTA, 2015, p. 1) and USD \$80 billion as of 2015 (IFOAM, 2016). 2014 and 2015 were the largest growth years yet according to most sources (OTA, 2015; IFOAM, 2015; Greene, 2016). In terms of the production process, “in 1992 935,450 acres of U.S. farmland were planted with organics, rising to 4,815,959 acres in 2008.” (O’Rourke, 2011, p. 16). This of course may be because the population is growing and therefore there are more plates for this food to reach, but it also suggests that there is greater awareness and desire for greener products. This increased interest has motivated more and more corporations to enter the green market, by creating green subsidiary companies and ethical lines of their already-existing products (O’Rourke, 2011, p. 16). Notably several of the large fast food companies, including A&W and Chipotle in this study, have followed this trend, leading to a more complex relationship between consumer and corporation.

The fast food industry has very little packaging available to the eyes of a consumer, so it relies heavily on the urban environment and the media to arrest the attention of passersby and turn citizens into potential consumers. Public space is turned into corporate communication to promote their new green initiatives. When consumers are principally exposed to advertising as the main informational point of contact, however, certain problems can appear. Because advertisements are embellished, creative communication rather than meticulously explained facts as appear on more heavily-regulated food packaging in grocery stores, consumers may be at risk of assuming standards that are not enforced, or neglecting to realize other potential problems associated with the fast food products in advertisements. Many fast food advertisements, especially all three in this study, avoid using recognized seals and certifications with official credentials from regulatory and ratings bodies when they make claims about their products. This is not necessarily a form of lying, as much of what they say could be true, but it might not be too, and omission can be just as misleading. This leaves viewers of these advertisements at risk of assuming higher standards than may truly be in place

“raises issues about the quality of information” (Johnston & Wilk & Opel, 2010, p. 252) in these advertisements when they function as the main source of information for the products. Analysis of this relationship between corporations, consumers, and the truth, therefore, is becoming more popular in many areas of scholarly study which is raising questions about how vertically integrated all-powerful corporations like A&W, MacDonald’s, Chipotle, and other fast food restaurants have become in determining food chains and total production processes (Johnston & Wilk & Opel, 2010, p. 252).

As these processes are often still shrouded in as much mystery as they were before becoming an issue in popular consciousness, many vocal activist groups and other interested parties have taken to various forms of media to vocalize their curiosity and demands regarding issues such as withholding of information, genetically modified organisms, fertilizers and pesticides, and even working conditions of those transporting the food (Johnston & Wilk & Opel, 2010, p. 252). Currently, what little information is available is distilled through “food communicators” (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 178) that include everyone from stay-at-home-mom-food bloggers to animal rights activist organizations to Red Seal chefs with their own television shows, all with varying levels of education and understanding. These “communicators” are of primary importance in translating trends, information, and issues from corporate and environmental science and policy levels to everyday consumer level. This is an evolution from when food media principally advertised new products and showed home cooks how to properly brine a turkey or make a soufflé that doesn’t sink.

This middle level of food communication is integral to building and strengthening a variety of values and practices that make up North American culture because it is often accompanied by lifestyle coaching and cultural formation (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 169-170). Because of the diverse sources that communicate about food, food has become the vehicle for discussion and negotiation around social and cultural conceptions of “health, economy, quality, culture and identity, fashion and lifestyles, the environment, new trends” (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 169-170), and fast food continues to be a central part of this. As mentioned by Johnston (2010), this means food has become the “thin end” (Johnston & Wilk & Opel, 2010, p. 251) of much activism and the gateway for real change, owing in large part to the nature of food-related media in North American popular culture.

Having food awareness and activism in the popular media spotlight is positive in many ways, as it brings constructive and positive values to the public in ways that make them easy to digest for the average consumer. However, like all things fashionable in media, trends come and go. Putting food in the spotlight for much of this activism puts food values at risk of being forgotten when a new trend comes along that is a better conduit for achieving the aspirational life. It also invites everyone with an opinion to the table regardless of qualifications or level of logic, which can sometimes give rise to misleading information that diverts focus from real issues.

Despite this potential for dilution of constructive information, however, much of the food media does hold the positive values of better sourcing, smaller footprints, and more ethical production chains. This style of food media is often presented as “a fantasy world” that one should attempt to achieve (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 170) through “pure” living via understanding the whole food chain prior to the first bite. This emphasis on fantasy has grown from food blogs and Food Network cooking shows into advertisements, too. The entire food advertising industry has evolved beyond simple “buy this/eat here, it tastes good/is affordable” and is now about status, lifestyle and perception and in some cases even the hundreds, if not thousands of farmers and workers that go into each bite. Food and eating are no longer confined to the kitchen or to restaurants, but have become conduits for fulfilling aspirations and curating or flaunting a particular lifestyle (Goop, 2017). As fast food is perceived as holding aspirational connotations of fun and happiness, with newer ideas of more ethical production and environmental friendliness appearing, fast food advertising provides the appearance of a road map to achieving these aspirations.

These changes to North American conceptions of food have clearly found a strong foothold, for now at least, as the ideas have started to appear in advertising for large corporations like those of McDonald’s, A&W, and Chipotle because they are no longer as controversial as they once may have been. Potentially controversial ideas generally only reach advertising for large corporations once the images and ideas have become somewhat “sanitized” (Wodak, et al., 2008, p. 19). When particular themes or ideas become commonplace enough for large corporations to adopt, it generally suggests that the cultural references are easily accessible in consumers’ minds and run lower risk of

alienating portions of the corporation's target consumer market (Wodak, et al., 2008). This is not a rule for all industries of course, but for the food industry, in particular fast food, it is the case, as many newer ideas and concepts can appear too political if included in advertisements before they become widely accepted, running the risk of confusing or alienating part of the audience. In North America, despite a relative shortage of deep rooted and unified cultural traditions, food consumption remains a key form of cultural connection and expression, whether it be in the form of Thanksgiving turkey feasts or of supportive parents drinking Tim Hortons coffee during youth hockey games. Therefore alienating consumers from a product has deeper repercussions on the overall relationship between corporation and consumer. Advertisements are both evidence of recent cultural production and forms of further cultural production in that they document changes in the public consciousness of consumption while pushing for more consumption by increasing the intensity and broadening acceptance of those trends.

Two key elements in supporting and promoting any particular ethical or environmental perspective to popular enough acclaim to become suitable and advantageous content in advertising are activism<sup>2</sup> and advocacy for these social changes. In the case of the style of advertising studied in this thesis, “red” (social justice) and “green” (environmental)” (Johnston, Wilk & Opel, 2010, p. 252) forms of activism have come together to question the production chains in the global food industry, and have been brought into mainstream media through food communicators mentioned above. Some of these food communicators have advocated for increased awareness and changing regulations for long enough that some scholars now frame current levels of corporate advertising-assisted consumer activism as the “alternative consumption” phase that began in the 1980s (Johnston, 2007, p. 236-237). The alternative consumption phase has included various levels of awareness and activism for transparency, ethical treatment of animals, people, and the earth, as well as fairness at the level of global trade and corporate power (Johnston, 2007, p. 238). It is clear there has been much success in these areas in the ever-increasing numbers of community initiatives and cooperatives that grow and distribute food (Johnston, 2007, p. 238). These organizations would not have

<sup>2</sup> A discussion of activism would be outside of the scope of this thesis. For a definition and analysis of relevant activism, refer to Johnston (2007); O'Rourke (2011)



proliferated to such an extent if these issues and the associated values were not becoming firm and regular parts of consumer consciousness.

Along with this growth in activism, however, comes an attempt by corporations to coopt the values and imagery of this activism in order to capitalize on these desires and beliefs in the consumer population. This corporate involvement is often framed as pure benevolence but it is often merely the way that concerns for the bottom line can fill the void left by retreats of the state in a neoliberal political regime (Johnston, 2007, p. 256)<sup>3</sup>. This creates power imbalances in the industry between corporations and consumers. It is a strange cycle between giving consumers what they seek and providing consumers with a limited number of options so they only conceptualize desires that are already on the corporate menu.

Companies like McDonald's and A&W have been leading the fast food industry for decades, giving consumers a menu of options that is always changing, yet is finite on any given day. The core of each menu remains the same, while peripheral elements change. The entrance of new fast food brands like Chipotle is evidence that the "underlying values of their target audience have changed" (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 221) making it difficult or impossible for each company to rely on traditional fast food attractions of convenience and consistency of product (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 221). In the era of green capitalism, corporations now must listen to consumer preference closely and incorporate some values of 'consumer health, quality and socially responsible initiatives" (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 221) in order to answer to the whims of the vocal portion of the consumer body. In this way, consumers exercise power over corporations, though it is not always in an organized or coherent way.

Of course, as the appearance of action is provided in advertisements, the desire for change may be appeased in consumers despite the changes advertised often being neither deep nor lasting solutions. This facade can prevent consumers from seeing beyond the new offerings to the larger changes that could occur. This cycle of power can

<sup>3</sup> For more information on government interaction with activism in the food industry, see Johnston, (2007)

exist because individual consumers seem unable and often unwilling to shop even partially outside of the current food manufacturing and sourcing models or consumption ideologies enough to entirely change the system. This allows corporations to provide part-way solutions by, for instance, providing "better beef" (A&W, 2015) but still providing beef, which is commonly known to be one of the most fossil-fuel guzzling parts of the food industry. Therefore, the power is in constant tug-of-war between consumers and corporations, yet corporations have the clout and organized will to seize it. They do so in a way to maintain and grow consumer bases by only partially redefining brand images and values (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 221).

These power imbalances exist not only between consumers and corporations, but also between consumers with economic clout and those without. The particular green and ethical desires and changes, the appearance of which exist in the three advertisements in this study, have filtered down to the fast food industry from the traditionally higher-income social identities and whims of middle and upper-middle class consumers. The retail grocery industry, from where these values originate most recently in North American food markets, are distinctly segmented along lines of "social class along with race, ethnicity, education, neighborhood, and all the many factors correlated with divisions of income and wealth" (Johnston, 2007, p. 257). Emphasis on concepts like "quality" and "discerning taste" validate the unequal relationships between high priced "ethical" consumption and low priced mass production in traditional industrial forms.

Preference for ethical and green food is often framed as a choice in advertising in the retail grocery sector, but this entirely ignores groups of consumers who have less education or income, or who live in areas with only one easily accessible grocery store. This issue may or may not be equally great in the fast food industry, as the portion of the population who can afford a \$3.50 Teen Burger (A&W Canada, 2016) is much greater than those who can afford an \$8 chicken breast and the time to cook it. Still, some studies have shown that these elite preferences only extend to products that are somewhat visible. For instance, a study on various levels of income and a variety of products found that products like bread and coffee awoke the ethical and environmental preference in the consumer more than a less visible product like flour (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009, p. 857). Despite the difficulty in determining the depth of consumer commitment to green

initiatives and the true power inequalities within the fast food consumer body, it can be determined that these values are traditionally fostered by food communicators who cater to the more elite classes and may alienate some consumers in lower income brackets as much as they attract others.

This alienation of many consumers may harm the depth of changes in the food industry, as corporations can still accumulate control in a divided consumer market, but it seems not to be preventing change entirely. This is clear in the emergence of green values in fast food advertising. The concept of “voting with your dollar” is not without problems, but it does have a certain degree of effect on corporate advertising and product development strategies (Johnston, 2007, p. 244-245). Though this strategy is often cited in the green economy by activist groups proposing boycotts, it is an idea that ultimately stems from classical market economic theories as early as the nineteenth century (Johnston, 2007, p. 244). Despite its origins, it appears to be an excellent lens through which to look at the relationships between activist groups, consumers and corporations. This core economic belief in North American society that has become the back bone of green capitalism views consumers as the wedge or crucial leverage that turns the tides of environmental activism and corporate interest in economic growth (O’Rourke, 2011, p. 15). The current of consumer spending ebbs and flows according to whether it is activist groups or corporations who are currently dictating values, and this is often determined by the group that has the most engaging and accessible advertising. The proliferation of food communication that takes place through infomercials, commercials and advertorials and the like has led some scholars to suggest that we are currently living in a period of “democracy oriented to consumers” (O’Rourke, 2011, p. 15).

This democracy may exist, but to vote in an informed way one must be educated. Consumers need guidance to continue to function as a body unified enough to make major market shifts. Some scholars suggest that the interplay between activist organizations and corporate interests has created a “sovereign citizen-consumer” (O’Rourke, 2011, p. 15) who can incite change by voting with their dollars. However, though the consumer body is sovereign in some ways, its advisors do not fully disclose all relevant information. This leads to voting that is susceptible to emotional appeals and runs the risk of blindly following calls to action that are not entirely corroborated by proper investigation. This is

not real voting; it is pleasure spending disguised as a real vote. This harms the credibility of the idea that every dollar spent is a vote for the purchased item and company. It also conceals the fact that much of what appears as positive change in fast food advertising is not disinterested or selfless, but is merely shifting the costs to less visible areas while mainly contributing positively to the bottom line. Further analysis in this thesis shows that this citizen consumer may not be sovereign and also may be sleeping (O'Rourke, 2011, p. 15) at the wheel. This leaves the driving up to corporate interests with concerns for bottom lines as the mouthpiece of activist groups becomes blind and docile.

The main theoretical concepts that will support my analysis revolve around food advertising theories, greenwashing theories, and public relations theories. Public relations theories are important to the critical analysis of advertisements because the ads in this thesis are somewhat of a fusion between the traditional informative and communicative role of public relations and the promotional role of advertising. A brief discussion of truth and omission will take place in Chapter Two, but for the present, public relations theories are helpful in this analysis because they define how particular ideas of business practices, production information and other non-promotional elements of products and corporations are communicated to the public (Chrysochou, 2010, p. 74). The three advertisements under scrutiny in this thesis are perfect examples of "communicating functional claims [of the product or company] to consumers" (Chrysochou, 2010, p. 74), which, according to Chrysochou (2010) is normally a function of public relations rather than advertising. A fusion of the two forms of corporate-to-public communication can lead to new types of relationships being built between individual consumers and consumer groups formed around hopes of furthering "individual consumer rights, preferences, safety and protection" (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 167) eventually leading to networks of individuals and activist organizations growing to levels where they can effect incremental changes in the massive food industry. By applying public relations theories to this analysis, it will be possible to understand how these networks can be catalysts for change and how this style of advertising-public relations message hybrid is contributing to further problems while appearing to solve others.

Along with public relations theories, greenwashing theories are crucial to the analysis in this thesis. Greenwashing, the idea of framing products as environmentally

friendly when only certain elements are so, is a complicated concept in the scope of this thesis. Recent media in many consumer goods industries have committed greenwashing acts for products and practices, so green ideas have come into popular consciousness. This is excellent for raising awareness with certain sectors of the consumer market that may have difficulty obtaining information otherwise. O'Rourke (2011) found that "information-based strategies work best" (p. 19), so on the surface this appears to be good for consumer understanding. However, I argue that all three of the advertisements in this study commit greenwashing in the more popular and accurate negative definition of the concept: they present their products as green in some way while ignoring the associated negative environmental or ethical impacts of the topic or practice presented in the ad. This hybrid of public relations announcement and advertisement that exists in the three ads in this study fall under the greenwashing subcategory of "promotion orientation" (Sengupta & Zhou, 2007, p. 298) where there is "greater emphasis on positive outcomes and ideal benefits [yet] a corresponding insensitivity to negative outcomes and ought-related benefits (e.g. safety, health)" (p. 298). In the fast food industry there is little accessible information that is unbiased and/or outside of advertisements like the three in this study, so when a corporation commits greenwashing it is difficult for all but the most interested, research-oriented consumers to evaluate in an educated manner. Therefore, applying greenwashing theories in this thesis will provide a crucial perspective on the ways that each of these advertisements appeals to consumers while hiding darker motives and costs.

In greenwashing-oriented portions of my analysis, it will be important to explore the phenomena of green capitalism and citizen consumers. Both of these ideas, which will also be described in greater detail in subsequent chapters, are consequences of between one and two decades of greenwashing in media. The concept of the citizen consumer is a hybrid of the citizen, an individual who is "part of collective struggles to reclaim and preserve the social and ecological commons," (Johnston, 2007, p. 243) and of consumerism, "an ideology suggesting a way of life dedicated to the possession and use of consumer goods" (Kellner 1983 as cited in Johnston, 2007, p. 242). Green capitalism is the corporate answer to increased portions of the consumer population identifying as or aspiring to be citizen consumers. Green capitalism largely revolves around the concept of the voting-with-dollars philosophy described above.

Both citizen consumption and green capitalism are reactions to activism throughout the late 1990s and early millennium. Some scholars have found that a distinct cyclical relationship exists between activism and buying green products. More accurately, “making necessary (and sometimes unnecessary) product choices each day can be a critical entry point to deeper engagement with global labor and environmental issues and to further action” (O’Rourke, 211, p. 29). In essence, activism called for green product choices, green capitalism emerged to provide them, then more consumers bought into the green product philosophy, increasing the numbers of those who count themselves as citizen consumers. However, much of this activism is only superficial and stops at consumption choices, and the consumption choices presented are still contributing to bottom lines more than saving the environment, citizen consumerism is dramatically curtailed. This curtailment causes citizen consumption to stay at a superficial level, with very little potential to create real, sustained change.

One problem with both the citizen consumer and green capitalism is that they are still rooted in consumption, rather than in promoting ways for citizens to consume less. O’Rourke (2011) suggests that “to purchase better products is a step in the right direction, but it alone will not bring about ...systemic changes” (p. 27). The changes O’Rourke means are those that are required to halt the environmental degradation that is the result of excessive consumption and unfriendly production in all areas of consumer goods. O’Rourke continues by stating that “buying better products doesn't alter the underlying patterns of consumption in advanced economies that drive unhealthy and exploitative business practices” (O’Rourke, 2011, p. 27). For this reason it is important to analyse the appearance of positive advertising imagery critically with these concepts so as to avoid succumbing to an uncritical appeasement by the fast food advertisements in this thesis.

Despite citizen consumption being inadequate, it has caused food choices to no longer be a private matter, as now, proper citizen consumption frames food as “a politicized, gendered, and globalized terrain where gendered labor and households intersect with states, capital, and civil society in varying balances” (Katz, 2003 as cited in Johnston, 2007, p. 239). Evidence of these intersections exists in facts like Michelle Obama starting a vegetable garden in the White House grounds and in such a significant proportion of social media images centering on food. This does suggest citizen

consumption is a move in the right direction, which is why it is an important lens through which to look at the fast food advertising under scrutiny in this thesis.

Often when an issue becomes so politicized as the centre of activist attention, it is because the guilt stemming from decades of abiding with the industry status quo of individualism and environmental degradation (Farre, 2013; O'Rourke, 2011) has reached a tipping point where action can be taken at less cost than inaction. With corporations latching onto change-oriented perspectives, "the corporate market-place increasingly appears to provide citizen consumers solace for the social perils and ecological risks of capitalist globalization processes" (Johnston, 2007, p. 262). This guilt appears to be finding retribution in new green products found in advertisements like those studied in this thesis. However, these advertisements and greenwashed initiatives from corporations merely represent the privatization of these ecological concerns (Johnston, 2007), which may end up just as harmful to the environmental and ethical goals of citizen consumption philosophies. On top of greenwashing, the solutions promoted by these corporations promote the same individualism and self-interest that were the cause of the ecological issues in the first place. According to O'Rourke, corporations and government bodies, with these proposed product-based solutions are encouraging "consumers to become 'responsibilised' amidst the atrophying of wider social safety nets" (O'Rourke, 2011, p. 15) that would otherwise provide fulfillment in consumer populations.

The mediatization of consumption is helping consumption practices increasingly become framed in consumer consciousness as cultural fulfillment. Farre et al. (2013), aptly note that various forms of media and food communication and marketing are causing a cyclical relationship to occur: "the economy gets culturalized, cultural life gets commercialized" (Jansson, 2002, as cited in Farre, et al., 2013, p. 174). The constant reinvention of every product or company and the push by the economy for consumers to constantly reinvent themselves through food and fashion and other forms of consumption suggests that fulfillment has not been and cannot be reached through consumption. This could be because many of the target populations for particular types of advertising: North American populations, though richly multicultural in many ways, are often so diverse that a consistent relationship to food and understanding of food consumption can be difficult. A lack of consensus causes citizens to be easily influenced by consumer society and

corporate communications that provide easy routes to achieve current, if fleeting, desires and values. This rationale for the success of corporate consumer guidance, of course, is an explanation of any sector of the consumer society, but in the food industry it is even more connected to lifestyle curation and values because food manages to marry so many slices of ideology and collapse so much space on the political spectrum.

The hybridization of the concepts of citizenship and of consumption, as explained above, suggest that there are new strategies being employed by the economic drivers to provide fulfillment through. The two definitions of consumerism and citizenship come together to create the appearance of a solution to the anomie and alienation felt by individuals in a capitalist economy with few social or government safety nets. The greenwashing that occurs in much consumer-facing media insists it is both possible and necessary to be both citizen and consumer, but there is tension involved with marrying these two concepts.

This tension has led to the birth of corporate social responsibility campaigns and the concept of ethical consumption. These are attempts to hybridize consumer and citizen in order to further the consumer economy in ways beneficial to particular corporations, while also suggesting an interest in fulfilling citizenship needs. The tension appears when the modes of production and distribution of the products in the capitalist economy are at odds with the goals of citizenship. Human rights, environmental responsibility, sustainability, human health, and more are all put at risk through certain traditional parts of the capitalist mode of food production and the reliance of the global capitalist economy on constantly producing more goods more quickly. Solving or alleviating these issues are also necessary parts of citizenship. Therefore, in order to further the capitalist economy without alienating consumers through physical, moral, or ethical channels, it has become the job of corporations to provide options for consumption of goods that appear to be conscious of these citizenship issues, if not to claim to solve them entirely.

It is the purpose of this thesis, then, to critically analyse the way three prominent corporations in the industry present solutions to various environmental and ethical problems through the specific ads to be studied in this thesis. To do this, I will first briefly note relevant production-related factors for each advertisement, such as changes in



business practices, locations of advertisements (both physical, virtual, and social), compatible online campaigns via corporate source website or social media channels, and will follow this with a consideration of the circulation of the advertisements. I will also follow the suggestion of Lister & Wells (2006) that part of a preliminary analysis should explore the experiences of viewers of the images and the context of production (p. 64). I will estimate potential viewer experiences and perspectives in order to build a hypothesis around the social conditions of audience reception. This will help ground the analysis of individual advertisements in their environmental and social contexts which will lend broader understanding to the theoretical analysis in the later parts of each case study. In particular, this introductory portion of the analysis of each advertisement will provide a backdrop of information regarding target consumer populations and the quality of each campaign in fostering positive changes in consumer consciousness for environmental and ethical improvement in fast food consumption.

Each advertisement in its entirety, with all audio, text, and visuals considered will act as a unit of analysis. This will be most appropriate because a viewer often takes an advertisement as a unit of information or a single visual artifact. I will break down each advertisement in the principal part of each case study chapter using public relations theories, advertising theories and greenwashing theories which will be elaborated upon in Chapter Two. In my concluding chapter I will bring together each of these advertisements so they can work as one larger unit of analysis that can illustrate the changes in consumer consciousness and the entry of corporate interests into the moral concerns of the global food system. Analysing each advertisement individually allows for the discovery of slight variations in the way ethical and environmental values and messages are presented, as each company promotes something slightly different. However, by bringing all three together to conclude the analysis, I will be able to explore the commonalities and relative strengths and weaknesses of each style of advertising.

This style of loosely structured critical analysis is best suited for a study of this kind, where the aim is to ask preliminary questions on how fast food advertising functions as a tool for corporations wishing to privatize and capitalize on the prevailing cry for environmental and ethical improvement in the consumer population. Hypotheses surrounding my research questions are not the type that can be indisputably confirmed or

proven incorrect. There is a large amount of grey, undefined space for analysis. Consumers, especially in their food purchasing, operate in less empirical, formally logical ways because the food industry now exists for pleasure, not sustenance, as does any necessity-based industry once it becomes saturated enough with options and choices to support an advertising industry. This critical approach will also help this thesis avoid drawing the common but somewhat easy conclusions that suggest “a simplistic dichotomy between consumer dupes versus consumer heroes.” (Johnston, 2007, p. 234) and will enable me to point out contradictions or inconsistencies in these forms of advertising and the philosophies or outlooks they convey. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I hope to identify the major issues with this form of food advertising, while determining if the types of ads in this thesis may also have a positive, if microscopic effect on long term environmental and ethical improvements in the fast food industry.

## **Framing Fast Food Advertisements**

In the previous chapter I argued that organic and ethical food consumption are important goals for many food shoppers, especially if financial and locational constraints are not present. I plan to discover whether the various styles of advertising campaigns presented by certain seemingly green-minded corporate giants are high quality, useful conduits to help certain consumers achieve their goals to green their bellies and their world. There are three areas that are key to this analysis: food advertising as its own field, the presence of greenwashing in this advertising, and how this advertising can be seen as a form of public relations for communicating positive business initiatives in a more engaging format. Below I will critically review some of the literature surrounding these three key concepts in order to ground my theoretical analysis and direct my case studies of each advertisement.

For this study I will focus on one television advertisement from each of A&W, Chipotle, and McDonald's. Each of the three advertisements are illustrative of shifts in consumer consciousness towards greater interest at most levels of income and styles of consumption and that have been harbingers for a new style of food advertising. They have been pivotal in adjusting the field of food advertising to current consumer consciousness because each of McDonald's, Chipotle, and A&W have enjoyed solid reputations for consistency of their fare, yet never harboured a hint of environmental sustainability and very few connotations of health or ethicality. The fact that these advertisements communicate social responsibility and production improvements is important because it suggests a shift by which advertising has moved from distinctly separate corporate public relations and advertising of products, to coordinated campaigns for social responsibility and the product all at once.

Ultimately, the major issues in food advertising are truth, omission, ethics, responsibility, and the selling of an ideal. These are issues that occur in all fields for all advertising. What makes fast food different is that it has traditionally been perceived as a fun yet unhealthy industry that has found success with a large swath of the population of consumers in all economic brackets. Food of course, is an essential industry, and people generally take an interest in what they eat. Economic conditions force people to buy

against their values or for values to be beyond consideration because there are other things higher on the list of daily priorities. Nevertheless, the level of interest customers take in their food is unique to the fast food industry, as is the greenwashing that occurs in the industry's advertising. When one looks at the cocktail of health concerns, production concerns, ethical concerns, and audience composition concerns, it is clear the fast food industry deals with the widest range of typical challenges. The agglomeration of issues makes for a field ripe for critical analysis that funnels all of these issues into single campaigns. At the outset it is important to understand the current theoretical landscape of each of the three major analytical components of my study: public relations, food advertising, and greenwashing.

## **Public Relations**

Until recently, public relations was a field separate from advertising, as advertising promoted a product, while public relations performed the “management function that [dealt] with the relations between an organization and its audiences” (Petrovici, 2015, p. 52). This “management” was often direct to shareholders, or direct to consumers in the form of press releases and interviews where messages were meant to appear less coded than in advertisements. The reason behind this segregation of management and advertising is supposedly that the messages were presented in “face-to-face” format (Petrovici, 2015, p. 52) instead of relying on special effects, graphic art, and other artistic strategies often used in more traditional advertising. These messages were also presented to precisely “the desired audiences in exactly the desired phraseology” (Hill, 1958, p. 4–5 as quoted in Supa, 2015, p. 409), instead of as slightly coded cultural references shown to a packaged, homogenous audience sitting down to view a particular television program, or those inputting particular search terms on Google. As he formulated the contemporary theory of public relations, Edward Bernays argued that the work of public relations and advertising “do not conflict with or duplicate each other” (Bernays, 1928, p. 39 as quoted in Supa, 2015, p. 409). Adherents to this perspective suggest that the terms “public relations” and “publicity” or advertising are often “erroneously equated due to their semantic ambiguity” (Petrovici, 2015, p. 52) because of historic definitions of

advertising stemming from the idea of “announcing”, while public relations should hold property rights to this idea. This perspective sees public relations as comprised of announcements whose air time is not paid for.

Other scholars have defined public relations much more broadly as any form of air or visual time, donated or purchased, even including advertising (Newsom et al., 2003; Grunig & Hunt, 1984, all as quoted in Petrovici, 2015). This newer perspective brings advertising and public relations together because both involve building and maintaining good relationships with various publics (Smith & Zook, 2011; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994; all as quoted in Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016). Each of these scholars suggest that the defining feature is that any form of public relations, including advertising, “maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its various publics on whom its success or failure depends” (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994 as quoted in Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016, p. 397). This definition appears somewhat vague in that any group with the power of consumption could contribute to the future success of a consumer goods company, especially in the fast food industry. The wide regional and economic availability bring most of the population into the fast food industry’s potential consumer market. However, to narrow this definition, some scholars state that the public relations label can be applied when the message from a corporation is communicating a policy or particular piece of information that will contribute to a stronger relationship between consumers, shareholders and the company, while advertising relies on distribution by air, time, or space that is purchased (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016, p. 397; Supa, 2015, p. 409).

This narrowed definition makes sense in the context of the fast food advertising I have chosen to analyse because each of the advertising campaigns appear to have the aim of informing the public of new policies that contribute to the positive perception of the corporation as a whole. Potentially, this could help consumers increase their loyalty to each of these companies in the future.

This conflation of the two traditionally separate categories may be necessary in a media consumption environment where consumers have become more active and in control of the marketing-related media they consume than formerly due to ad-blocker and

recording technologies, and programs like Netflix that are free from advertisements for outside products. The ability for consumers to skip ads means corporations must make their public relations more engaging on multiple platforms. In general, it is easier to engage consumers with quick, hard-hitting images and narratives, like those of advertising, than it is with bland “face-to-face” messages or advertorials, because calls to action and framing of aspirations can be displayed in more unique and interesting ways (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016, p. 396).

The three advertisements I have chosen to analyze show precisely this evolution of style and purpose. Using different strategies, each strengthen ideas that traditionally might have been presented in press releases alone by expanding the audience and encouraging more active engagement with the messages. These ads accomplish this by formatting the messages into ads filled with stories and interviews and peeks behind the scenes (Chipotle, 2013; A&W, 2015). Also, by allowing the audience to see “real people”, behind-the-scenes angles, as well as romanticized versions of each new policy or value, the messages are enriched to become more alive to a broader audience than what would interact with a press release.

Overall this bridging of categories shows these advertisements are part of a societal shift that has been growing recently in North American consumer markets, and in the food industry. Specifically, this shift appears as a growing interest in improving our relationships with food and the earth through improved chains of production. This message is one that fares better in the advertising format today because it avoids sounding preachy and fits with familiar brand elements of these companies. Also, because these values have become prevalent in consumer consciousness, the advertising format allows more consumers to make the necessary value-product connections on their own, without need for the messages to be presented in the informative yet dry form of a press release or advertorial. However, the messages in these advertisements still fulfill the public relations function of communicating policy changes and new parts of each brand to their consumers. Some scholars (Balaban, 2008 as cited in Petrovici, 2015, p. 54) suggest that public relations enjoys credibility while advertising does not, yet now it could be argued that neither is entirely trusted by the average consumer. If there is to be a healthy scepticism in either format, a message is more likely

to be heard if framed in an entertaining and animated way, as in an advertisement as opposed to a press release.

Put simply, public relations is the public arm of management for a corporation (Petrovici, 2015, p. 52) and exists to guide the public and link multiple publics across various “spheres of action” (Franzosi, 2008, p. xxxiv) to build a consumer group with brand loyalty. When this purpose is implemented in advertisements, it displays and builds connections between particular “concepts, thoughts, images, [and] ideas” (Franzosi, 2008, p. xxxiv) which can even cross barriers that traditionally separate these ideas. These connections are built particularly well in the advertisements I have chosen as all three connect multiple publics and contain calls to action, such as McDonald’s’ appeal to those who want a Big Mac, as well as those who want to know how the patty is made. The linking of ideas that Franzosi (2008) mentions is also well illustrated in all three campaigns in this study. Each advertisement under scrutiny in this document links concepts and images of ethics and transparency with recognizable products traditionally associated with grease, mass industrial production and hidden production methods. In the case of all three advertisements, they directly build connections between achieving values through shopping for food.

Formerly, food was something that was commonly promoted to reflect values that were created in other areas of North American life such as the nuclear family or fast-paced lifestyles. This style of advertising has taken on the brand building function, making these ads the vessel for linking the product and the brand to a positive image in the eyes of the audience. Framing the product as something that fulfills consumer values of taste, economy, consistency, and perhaps family, fun, and “cool” is required, but advertising of this style must also involve positive ethical qualities of the product or company such as any current Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives undertaken by the brand. Corporations all view public relations differently, so certain corporations may view corporate social responsibility initiatives as “relating only to reputation, whereby it is then delegated to the public relations function” (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 172). However, in the newer, more flexible view of advertising and public relations as two pieces of a whole, CSR can be a marketing opportunity to fill advertisements with positive brand

information and in turn imbue the spotlight product with related positive values (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011).

Placing CSR initiatives in front of consumers directly, however, also puts the brand at risk of inviting public pressure and scrutiny from organized groups like Greenpeace or PETA (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 172). This happened to A&W when it was made public that in order to make their burgers from beef free of hormones and steroids they had to buy beef from Australian cattle farms instead of from much more local North American farms (Amason, 2013). Interactions of this kind can cause brands to risk becoming the object of “consumer disappointment” for not providing real solutions and “raising false expectations” (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 172). This risk means there is still a place for public relations separate from advertising, but advertising may be a more efficient way of convincing the target consumer groups to act according to corporate needs when less controversial CSR initiatives are promoted. Budinsky & Bryant (2013) suggest the types of beliefs that fit this criterion are “ideological in nature, as they appear to be “common sense” but are not actually universal beliefs or truths.” (p. 213). Because of this framing, communication of belief-based initiatives may be more easily accepted when communicated in the format of an advertisement.

This framing often involves positioning the product as the epitome of the brand, or the brand as the poster child for the positive or responsible idea being promoted (Petrovici, 2015). Though done through advertising, this is a form of public relations that builds notoriety and lays the groundwork for positive receptions of new elements of a brand or product by the audience. The advertising differentiates the product or brand from others in the industry, thus fulfilling in a short thirty-second clip full of cultural references and symbolism what it takes minutes to explain in a much drier manner in a press conference or paragraphs to describe in a press release (Petrovici, 2015, p. 54). As some scholars have pointed out, “it is not enough to have a better product or service. It is not enough to have a better price. In order to be successful nowadays, you have to build a better brand. And, what is a brand? It is a perception in the mind of a potential consumer.” (Ries & Ries, 2005, p. 112 as quoted in Petrovici, 2015, p. 55). Advertising’s ability to add otherwise unrelated elements such as ideas of fun or family to fast food brands and products helps conjure this positive perception in the audience in a much more efficient



and lasting manner than paragraphs of emotionless public relations of the traditional kind. In the case of these brand-building policy and social responsibility initiatives for the three fast food brands I have chosen to study, advertising is a far more effective vessel for the public relations messages than traditional forms of public relations.

Because of the nature of advertising in its ability to reach segments of the public of predictable composition, a fast food ad can draw on cultural references and values that are a natural part of the social world of that audience segment, helping the audience see the product or brand as a natural part of their lives and shopping baskets (Petrovici, 2015). According to Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner (2016), designing advertisements around public relations strategies and messages like this can also help corporations control the content, connotations, and method of distribution. Often public relations without advertising can be scooped up and taken by journalists and activist groups who parse messages for their own purposes (p. 398). Packaging public relations into advertising allows companies to employ the cultural capital they have earned over decades of business and “break through the barrier of the public selectivity” to catch the eye of the public and potentially hold their interest (Petrovici, 2015, p. 56) long enough for them to make a purchase. When one corporation must compete against numerous others, it is easier for a creative advertisement to catch the eye of a target consumer group than for unadorned public relations. This shows that creativity has become the competitive currency that allows corporations to distribute their public relations messages and make certain the audience’s attention is “stimulated to the maximum” (Petrovici, 2015).

Some of the ways for advertisements to flag and hold the interest of the audience involve language choice and type of offer (Wodak & Meyer, 2008; Lee & Nguyen, 2013). By using terms such as “we” and “us” and other collaborative language, corporate advertising can present itself as more personally relatable to the consumer (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 12). For example, the spokesperson in the A&W advertisements in the campaign chosen for this study often begins his public relations message with “More and more people are coming to A&W. *Let’s find out why...*” (A&W, 2015, 0:04, my italics) as though he is speaking to the audience, who are his friends. Similarly, in other McDonald’s advertisements from the campaign I have chosen, the factory workers often use “we” to describe the manufacturing processes that go into making the chicken nuggets or the

burgers, and in the particular advertisement for this study “we” is used as a personification technique to make the company real and relatable (McDonald's, 2015, 0:01; 0:10; 0:25) In terms of the choice type, or “Thematic Frames”, as they are called by Lee & Nguyen (2013), many advertisements roll their public relations message in with offers for gifts, tantalizing descriptions of the eating experience, or, particularly for the fast food industry, claims of value for money (Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 229). This is clear in one of the more recent A&W ads often found on Instagram and Twitter for the \$3.50 Teen Burger that is made with beef free of hormones and steroids (A&W Canada, 2016). The public relations message is the “Better Beef Guarantee” but the temptation that attracts and holds the audience is the picture of the big, perfect, steaming Teen Burger and the exciting diagrams detailing the price. This example also touches on how public relations is having to adjust to social media in order to attract the same large audience for an ad or message, as media consumption patterns are changing (Livingstone, 2017).

New, more open rules for paid content on various types of social media, like Sponsored Posts on Instagram and Twitter, have allowed companies broader reach but have moved the audience further from the traditional passive viewers that once had no choice but to watch a public relations message prior to a television program or a YouTube video. Now, with opportunities for paid content camouflaged as regular news feed posts, the public relations practices have been forced to change (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016, p. 397) in order to continue existing. This blending of social content with advertising is in tandem with public relations morphing into advertisements that blend corporate policy messages with attractive product presentations.

Yet another reason why advertising has become the vessel for much of the public relations from corporations is that advertising takes very little time to disseminate. Public relations, such as publicity through newspaper coverage in articles, require building relationships between corporate-media liaisons and journalists or broadcasters. Newsom and Scott (1985 as cited in Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016) even suggest a series of steps for building this relationship between journalists and corporate public relations liaisons. This is complicated, while advertising only requires money, which is not complicated. The close relationships required for organic publicity to occur require give-and-take over time (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016, p. 398), while advertising, though some relationships are

necessary, primarily requires the ability to pay for space and to contract an advertising firm for the creative content. Despite advertising being the easy route, however, it is still necessary for corporations to build relationships with media outlets if for no other reason than to have a list of allies in case there is backlash to a particular public relations campaign that has taken place through a set of advertisements. This was essential for A&W when it was discovered that their beef was being sourced from across the globe in order to fulfill their Better Beef Guarantee, as very few news outlets seemed to cover this story, though the ones that did (Smyth, 2015; McKenna, 2013; Amanson, 2013) framed it as one of the bigger scandals in the fast food industry in recent years.

The fact that public relations are wrapped in advertising for the most part, but still use fall-backs of more traditional public relations strategies when a bottom-line-threatening issue occurs suggests that there are still some important relations of power to look at in this field. The fact that advertising is used until it must be reined in for the corporate cronies and business relationships to solve issues suggests that the real power still lies with traditional business relationships that are built away from public view. Advertising is the socially acceptable mouthpiece for these corporate strategies; that is, the promise of achieving the dream that entices consumers to act on the will of advertisers and corporations. Further, the fundamental advantage of an analysis of advertising in the manner of my study is that it helps to uncover “structural relationships of dominance...power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 10).

In the advertising campaigns I have chosen, these relationships of power are mostly embedded structural relationships that exist naturally and traditionally in the fast food industry. They are evident in the way that particular issues are highlighted and others are ignored or made to seem insignificant when they might harm the cause of a public relations initiative in an advertising campaign. The way that A&W highlighted the hormone and steroid-free beef they use, while ignoring the fact that this beef is sourced from across the world somewhat harmed the cause overall, at least temporarily. If framed purely as traditional public relations, it would be unlikely that this issue could have been deemphasized to the same extent without distracting advertising images to take the spotlight with the positive message. This type of investigation should result in the

discovery of unequal power relations between corporate entities and the generalized consumer body. After all, public relations advertising campaigns like those I have chosen work to “legitimize relations of organized power” (Habermas, 1967, p. 259 as quoted in Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 10) by attempting to reaffirm that these fast food corporations can be the ones to make the changes to consumer society and the world.

Despite the way that the constellation of public relations-advertising-publicity reaffirms power relations, there still can be issues of trust that cannot be solved by good relationships with media alone. As the audience for fast food advertising and public relations messages is wide and diverse, fast food companies can be major targets for activism. This activism can be vocal and can incite public outrage to varying degrees, especially when there is real evidence of corporations misleading the public. Some public relations organizations or sections of corporations have formulated codes of ethics to “gain social recognition” or to “win a sort of “stamp of approval”” (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016, p. 399) from these activist groups or from the public. These codes address issues that include “truth, accuracy, fairness, social responsibility, boundaries of the organization/client and PR practitioners, public right to know, public demand for transparency, and accountability” (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016, p. 399). Addressing these issues is key in becoming culturally relevant as ethical, transparent, and green corporations. Despite acknowledging these issues, however, trust is still an issue in some portions of the fast food consumer market, as in many other industries.

In the last two decades many scholars have focused studies on ideas of truth in advertising. Lee & Nguyen (2013) revisit a study by Baker & Martinson from 2001 to attempt to explore this concept further. This style of study is important to ground a more in depth and currently relevant analysis of the perceived intentions, responsibilities and outcomes of advertising, though it is no longer a sophisticated enough framework for analysis on its own. Baker & Martinson (2001 as cited in Lee & Nguyen, 2013) have developed an evaluation system to address this new style of public relations advertising and the lack of public trust, called TARES: “Truthfulness of the message, Authenticity of the persuader, Respect for the person being persuaded, Equity of the persuasive appeal, and Social responsibility for the common good.” (Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 227). Now almost two decades old, this strategy cannot stand alone as an evaluative technique, but

the checklist it provides is an excellent first step for understanding how advertising is often studied in terms of assignment of responsibility for ethical advertising and relationship between audience and corporation.

Each of these elements is a necessary ingredient in creating an ethical public relations message, especially when it is presented in the form of an advertisement. Their model even addresses the omission of information to an extent, in the Truthfulness, Respect, and Social Responsibility sections. They feel a message is not truthful and lacks respect for an audience if it does “not provide sufficient information for the audience to make good food consumption decisions.” (Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 238). The major question that consideration of this evaluation criterion raises, however, is that it automatically assigns responsibility, especially moral responsibility, to the corporation for whom the advertisement was built and distributed. However, Lee & Nguyen (2013) only go so far as to suggest that these guidelines require an advertisement or public relations message to be “evaluated in itself, not based on the consequences” (p. 228). Unfortunately, their perspective does not challenge the notion that this style of public relations is a product of the economic and social systems in which it exists.

As mentioned earlier, public relations has changed because the main ways of viewing media have changed for the vast majority of the public. Changes in media consumption habits require public relations and advertising to fold into one media artefact. As an added difficulty in this merger, the new advertising unit must adhere to similar time and space restrictions to when it was only there to advertise a product, not so much to build a brand. This evaluation system, though useful in some ways, neglects to question whether the results of this evaluative strategy will cause most advertisements to be graded as unethical simply because they exist and do not promote ideas that will harm their bottom line and business as a whole. In some ways, each of these public relations ads is merely performing the role of helping corporations stay in power in a system that makes this corporate self-interest survival strategy necessary. When a deontological approach is taken, virtually every corporation and every advertisement looks unethical, especially when omission is considered, because omission is almost always deceptive (Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 230). However, when each ad or corporate entity promoting the ad is

considered as part of a system, the issues of ethical promotion and ethical consumer relations lie with the system not with individual companies.

With this issue in mind, corporations are not always free of blame either. One study (Laufer, 2003, as cited in Budinsky & Bryant, 2013) found that “many familiar Fortune 500 companies engage in greenwashing strategies, such as publishing false health and safety reports, which work to shift the focus from the firm, create confusion, undermine credibility, criticize valuable alternatives, and deceptively promote the firm’s objectives, commitments, and accomplishments” (p. 209). It is actions like this that fan the flame of distrust with the public and make an analysis of ethical responsibility in advertising and public relations difficult.

Difficulty in ethical evaluation is intensified by the fact that consumer awareness and education is not always at a level high enough to flag misleading messages. As public relations no longer requires the natural checking and rechecking that occurs when public relations information flows through multi-layered relationships between corporations and journalists, the lines between fact and embellishment becomes blurred (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016, p. 399). Not all consumers are aware enough or educated enough to pick out when distractions are laid in front of them, especially in the fast food industry, where food is cheap and therefore available and enticing to most socioeconomic levels, and by extension, education levels of society. It has been found that, especially in the fast food context, many “consumers assume a minimum acceptable (statutory) standard present in all commercially available foods” (McEachern & Schroder, 2002, as quoted in McEachern & Schroder, 2005, p. 221). According to McEachern & Schroder (2005) this untrue assumption is held particularly in relation to animal welfare (p. 221) because, obviously, very few consumers wish to think about a dead cow when they purchase a burger. As calls for transparency and ethical production processes grow, it will be increasingly important for corporations to adhere to ever rising ethical standards and promote this truthfully in their public relations, even if currently consumer education has not necessarily reached a high enough level for misleading advertisements to be caught by the average viewer.

Considering the current state of public relations and of viewer understanding, it is unclear whether viewers are ill-equipped to understand these messages, or whether public relations firms create purposely misleading material. Certain scholars blame some consumers for being “dupes” (Johnston, 2007, p. 234) and refusing to educate themselves as to the real state of environmental harm and ethical issues because they feel the consumer “heroes” (Johnston, 2007, p. 234) will shoulder the burden of responsible consumption. However, it is clear that until a majority of viewers can begin to “separate out ‘what is said’ from ‘how it is said’”, which Lister & Wells (2006) say is not possible (p. 89), it is difficult to lay blame entirely on producers of public relations advertising. On the other hand, until corporations and advertising firms demonstrate a willingness to take full, open, public, and personal responsibility for the message” (Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 230) blame should not be laid entirely on the consumer either. A deeper understanding of food advertising and common strategies of deception are necessary before conducting an analysis of the quality of these advertisements in changing the ethical and sustainability elements on the fast food industry as it currently exists.

## **Food Advertising**

In the food industry, disparities in means cause widely different consumption patterns as in most other industries. What is unique to food, however, is that many of the values and aspirations consumers hold are more unified across income levels and geographic groupings. If one assumes that fast food advertising for large successful companies like those chosen for this study reflects consumer desires in large degree, it is clear that consumers want good taste, reliability, familiarity, and to feel as though they have agency in their food choice or in the impact they make on these companies. Fast food can cut across class distinctions, to a large extent, as one can eat a Big Mac in a Mercedes or while sitting on a curb. It is curious that fast food has managed to gain some prestige recently with ethical and sustainable ads and the promotion of positive values like transparency. Recent fast food ads seldom reach for the “gourmet” label, or present themselves as appealing to those who believe they are of discerning taste, as Nicolosi and Korthals (2008) suggest is required in “perspectival” (p. 66) advertisements, yet these

companies have managed to gain a foothold in a higher status category than their bombastic relatives like Dominos and Burger King. This new style of fast food advertising now holds some appeal to those aspiring to higher status because of the activation of values traditionally associated with higher social classes. Ironically, this has also caused the levelling of status badges by making this set of positive and progressive values accessible to those traditionally unable to attain them.

Fast food has become an enabling piece of North American identity because it is the epitome of a consumer society that runs on a time-is-money economic and social order, while also being one of few consumer goods that is attainable at most socioeconomic levels. This new style of values-oriented advertising in the fast food industry injects the traditional class-bridging elements of these restaurants and their food with a set of values that are quite often, and problematically, associated with only the middle and upper classes. These values include caring for the earth, animals, and long term health. These advertisements are able to influence their audience to take on these newer, positive values because of the decades each company has spent accruing cultural capital. This cultural capital has grown through decades of consistency in product, creation of and subsequent congruence with North American lifestyles, and a history of promotion that hoists these values and qualities onto a broad customer base. By analysing both the enduring branded elements of these ads and the call for and illustration of change, it will be possible to discover how the framing of ethical consumption and environmental responsibility are growing into a natural part of citizenship in the consumer food market.

As advertising is almost never viewed objectively, critically evaluating these advertisements for the presence of particular green, ethical and health phenomena will produce a more subjective or “impressionistic” (Franzosi, 2008, p. xxii) evaluation of these texts. Though many contain scientific facts, there has been so much scepticism in the constantly-changing science surrounding sustainability and health in the food industry that even science-based food advertising today is often viewed subjectively. Fast food advertising appeals to science far less than the health food industry, as the temptations and values of the fast food industry are not thought to require critical evaluation and educated viewing by many consumers. Therefore, fast food advertisements often use



informal logic to appeal to viewers causing these viewers to evaluate them subjectively and emotionally, and paving the way for other styles of earnest appeals.

Food advertising, like all advertising has evolved over the years to fit constantly changing and prevailing target markets. With contemporary approaches to the design of evocative advertising, food companies are increasingly advertising feelings, ideas, lifestyles, and ideologies that occur off the plate. As the fast food market becomes saturated with burgers and fries, the traditional fare is also having to compete with new styles of fast food from companies like Chipotle Mexican Grill, and grab-and-go health food companies like Jugo Juice. Despite what seems to be a dilution of the market for traditional fast food corporations and food styles, and therefore customer bases, it has been found that the entire fast food industry is growing more powerful and popular in the public consciousness (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 213). As these new styles of menus appear in the fast food market, it is bringing new agendas to fast food consumers' consciousness, especially in terms of sustainability, ethics, and health.

Broadly, this new emphasis on lifestyle and health appears in fast food advertising as greater emphasis on "the common good and favourable public opinion (Breeze and Cairns, 2003 as quoted in Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 213), which, though vague, appears in many advertisements, particularly the three I will examine. In the case of the three advertisements chosen for this study, this emphasis on the common good comes out in process-related claims and transparency initiatives.

For McDonald's and A&W, as with many traditional fare fast food restaurants, their menus are "are mainly centred on meat, [which] introduces a further issue associated with CSR, namely, animal welfare" (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 213). Animal rights activism and interest from pressure organizations often targets large fast food companies because revealing their hidden production processes and somewhat frequent animal treatment issues has made them easy targets that also are easily recognized by the majority of the population (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 213). The fact that animal rights activism and other types of organized outrage have become much more mainstream makes it less surprising that these ideas and desires for solutions have made their way into many corporately-controlled food chains. A chorus of other health, sustainability, and

ethical leanings of the public have also filtered into the advertising and production processes of these large corporations. The appearance of these values into the promotion and production chains is likely occurring because of past actions of larger corporations in the fast food industry. Companies like McDonald's and A&W have played a key role in the systematic descent that occurred from the post-war era to the present towards industrial, earth-and-animal-harming food production practices. The improvements that are increasingly cited in promotional material are returning positive connotations to the fast food industry and to fast food itself. Many companies like McDonald's, A&W and Chipotle are wearing these changes on their sleeves as badges of honour. They have created narratives in their advertising to pass these positive messages on to their consumers.

These narratives are crafted with references and images of various pieces of the production processes, or of the consumers who experience these new positive pieces of the production process (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 63). Forming these ideas into a narrative tends to enable the difficult process of introducing new ideas and values into a reasonably traditional industry. It also “renders social action/social relations at the linguistic level,” (Franzosi, 2008, p. xxxiv) so big ideas can be distilled into something understandable for consumers. A narrative format is important because these narratives can “intermingle with personal life stories” (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 63) in a way that gives the companies and their images of customers relatable personal identities ((Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 63) instead of merely appearing as faceless companies. In the case of the advertisements for my study, these narratives are carefully edited yet candid interactions of ordinary people with the brand or the product (A&W, 2015), or at other times are elaborately built fictional stories that create characters with happy endings for them (Chipotle, 2013).

The images in these types of fast food advertisements “oscillate between evocative and mythical images, such as nature, naturalness and tradition, as a representation of a ‘healthy’ and ethically ‘right’ order” (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 63). In some cases, as Nicolosi & Korthals, (2008) found, these same food advertisements appeal to consumers by including “scientific images in which the main role is played by information” (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 63). These scientific images, in the case of my sample, do not always

appear as a clear list of scientific facts, however. In the McDonald's and the Chipotle advertisements these scientific images appear as carefully constructed background images of industrial and technological development, such as conveyor belts with meat or pigs being moved along with a variety of connotations. These connotations range from ideas of positive progress in the McDonald's ad to negative disconnections from the earth in the Chipotle ad. In the A&W advertisement these scientific references appear in the language with words like "steroids" and "hormones" that suggest a scientific production process. The breadth of connotations associated with scientific imagery and references in food advertising illustrates for viewers the particular "relationship between food, body, society, and nature" (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 64) that each company wishes the viewer to see. Though their narratives further an agenda, all of these advertisements have a benign, mass-appeal quality that is not controversial enough in its messaging to alienate any average non-critical consumer group. However, these narratives do act as a form of education for the uneducated viewer and help to actively or passively (depending on the ad) frame how these relationships are seen by many groups of viewing consumers.

By framing these relationships as ethical and sustainable, and helping the audience feel educated, these corporations can hail new consumers traditionally outside of the already large target group, while also nurturing these beliefs and perspectives in those consumers already loyal. This builds trust with employees and shareholders similar to that which is cultivated by more traditional CSR campaigns (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 214).

Unfortunately these narratives in food advertising are not always as straightforward as they appear to be. Sometimes a "metaphorical 'slippage'" (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 68) occurs to distract consumers from the true issues in favour of emphasis on the intention rather than reality, or a small improvement rather than a more pressing large one. This can take the form of a story packed with romanticized and sanitized pictures of "reality" (Chipotle, 2013) or of one improvement in quality being the focus of an advertisement while the associated and unavoidable cost of this improvement is omitted (A&W, 2015). For instance, in a Grana Padano advertisement analysed by Nicolosi & Korthals (2008), the focus on milk as the source of the cheese instead of the cow distracted consumers from recent outbreaks of mad cow disease (p. 68). This

metaphorical slippage can also take the form of a discussion of compromises (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 64) that seem to find the way to balance “apparently irreconcilable needs like taste and physical fitness, quality and savings.” (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 64). In a way, balance helps these advertisements fulfill the popular strategy of framing their product as a “convenient and effective solution capable of solving even complex problems” (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 64).

All of these new appeals and frames are in stark contrast to some of the problematic and enduring issues associated with fast food. Issues such as health and production transparency have largely been ignored in fast food advertising until recently, as have issues of economic inequality. These ethical and sustainability values that form the umbrella over health and production transparency seem to come from higher economic status groups. The presence of these values is problematic, as it may alienate those of lower economic status who have traditionally been excluded from these concerns. In the case of some vulnerable groups fast food advertising’s new emphasis on environmental sustainability and ethics is of no advantage or may even cause further damage to health and wellbeing. Numerous studies have found that fast food advertising of any sort, when aimed at children and youth, is “the most insidious environmental influence on dietary choices and obesity” (Adreyeva, Kelly, & Harris, 2011; Harris, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2010; Swinburn et al., 2008 all as cited in Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 225). Other scholars have found that “children who saw fast food ads consumed more food than usual and gained more weight than their peers who did not see food ads.’ (Harris, Bargh, and Brownell (2009) as cited in Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 226).

Many of these studies find that the effects of fast food advertising are detrimental to health because they are framed, especially to children, as “fun” (Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 238) without providing proper education regarding the unhealthy food with its high fat and high caloric count. This is certainly problematic, but performing an analysis specific to children would require research and analysis outside of the scope of this thesis<sup>4</sup>. However, adults are also susceptible to “fun” or “cool” framing for many of the same

<sup>4</sup> For research and analysis on fast food advertising and children, see Baylis, 2011; Chou et al., 2008; Boylan et al, 2015.

reasons such as lack of education, low income, or little spare time for cooking healthier meals. Lee & Nguyen (2013) raise the question of where the moral responsibility should lie (p. 227) in the way fast food is framed. These points of responsibility cannot be considered separately from economic status, however. Regardless of whether proper nutritional education takes place, when an unhealthy meal is the only full meal one can afford, it will be chosen more often than healthier, more expensive options. With fast food fulfilling these economic and taste-related values, a fast food meal becomes rich with meaning, even if poor in nutrition.

In addition, one very important part of this discussion is how food advertising integrates new values, such as environmental responsibility, with the existing brand image. Upholding the relationship that has existed historically with their customers requires that fast food companies continue to deliver “convenience, cheapness, consistency and reliability, the character of a filling snack or meal and a fun-context” (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 220). One study found that 77% of fast food consumers were motivated by speed and convenience and 61% by value for money (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 218). As Schroder and McEachern (2005) found, in order to introduce new values to capture new target markets without alienating existing ones, the offering of these new values can successfully be woven into an ad only if there is still “particular emphasis on convenience, reasonable prices and quality products” (p. 220). These ideas must be emphasized primarily because, according to the same study, these new or added values of animal welfare or organic and sustainable production are usually perceived as expensive, and consumers of fast food are unwilling to pay higher prices (p. 220). Despite this, the same study by Schroder & McEachern (2005) found that 61% of fast food consumers are motivated to purchase fast food for the quality of the ingredients (p. 218). This means there is room in the current target market for new values that are sometimes considered under this umbrella, such as animal welfare and process-related claims (A&W, 2015; Chipotle, 2013), as well as full disclosure of production processes (McDonald’s, 2015).

To reconcile all of these pieces, fast food advertising has implemented these values in a less literal, more symbolic way. In several cases (McDonald’s, 2015; Chipotle, 2013), the images associated with the scripts in each of the advertisements I have chosen

suggest values beyond those mentioned in the script. The new style of fast food ads, like those chosen for this thesis, use mixtures of symbolic and iconic signs to associate their brands to these new values of ethics and sustainability (Lister & Wells, 2006, p. 72). By implementing these new values symbolically, without saturating the entire advertisement with green and ethical values to the detriment of traditional values, these fast food companies do not harm their relationships with the more traditional target consumer group for their industry. This means the takeaway messages of the advertisements are more subtle, allowing these ads to operate on multiple levels of viewer consciousness, desire, and aspiration, which helps the product appear more fulfilling and appealing.

### **Greenwashing & Misleading Ethical Claims**

Despite these strategies for weaving positive ethical and environmental values into fast food advertisements, in some cases these values can be presented in a misleading way, classified as greenwashing. In the most context-free sense, a message can be classified as greenwashing if the statement gives “the impression that a product or an activity of a company has a less detrimental effect on the environment or the climate” (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 169). Sometimes a statement of this type may come in the form of a claim that a production process has been improved (see Chipotle, 2013), or that particular rumours of environmental harm are not, in fact, being committed by the company (see McDonald’s, 2015). In advertising, these claims are meant to gain audience support and ultimately to attract more customers by making the company appear virtuous.

Ethical claims often go along with environmental claims, especially in food advertising, but are slightly harder to define, as the minutiae of ethics vary from industry to industry (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 169). Ekstrand and Nilsson (2011) do manage to roughly define ethical claims as “the use of statements that give the impression that the product or production process has been made under generally recognised and accepted factors such as concern for children and the workers, protection of nature, health, welfare and initiatives in the context of corporate social responsibility” (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 169). In the case of my study, ethical claims are not so clearly stated as this definition would suggest, but are implied by the imagery and connotations of some parts of the

verbal and textual elements of the ads. Taken together, these advertisements can present a rosy picture of the product being advertised and the associated company.

For consumers, these claims often appear to distract from other less positive elements of the product or corporate practices. Such claims can be understood as greenwashing, that is, “the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service” (TerraChoice, 2009, pp. 1 as cited in Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 209). Budinsky and Bryant (2013). More specific “sins” have been added to this list, as outlined by TerraChoice, such as “hidden trade-offs, no proof, vagueness, irrelevance, fibbing, the lesser of two evils, and... the worshipping of false labels” (TerraChoice, 2007, 2009, 2010 as cited in Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 209). For example, in the A&W advertisement, the company claims to use hormone-free beef, but omits the fact that this beef is from Australia because there are no North American farms with the right economic scale to supply the burger chain. In the advertising, the relative costs of hormones in the product versus the potentially larger carbon footprint from transportation and preservation are not debated in the public eye unless the discussion is taken up by journalists later on (A&W, 2015; McKenna, 2013; Amanson, 2013). These types of claims appear in a variety of different forms in food advertising, and I will address them in detail in subsequent chapters.

In general greenwashing is one of the key strategies in advertising that polishes the appearance of new environmentally friendly initiatives to minimize audience perceptions of the associated costs or larger problems that have not yet been addressed. Though this is sometimes seen as an issue that stands alone as merely another entry on the list of advertising crimes, it is only a small piece of the broader economy that is built upon the consumer population’s relationship with themselves and corporations. Greenwashing succeeds in large part because it has a tendency to superimpose itself over real green initiatives and diverts focus to benign inaction framed as action. Because this advertising is forever upbeat, optimistic and welcoming, it eventually usurps real informed values by creating more accessible and effortless opportunities for fulfillment, thus becoming the new popular form of cultural consumption. It is also without moral boundaries because it is perceived as good. In capitalist North America, despite the

“customer is always right” mentality that suggests culture defines consumption, it is a cycle where consumption has come to define culture too.

That greenwashing techniques in advertising cause informed values to fade from viewers’ attention, is problematic. Worse, however, argues Sut Jhally (2000), is that this leads consumers to become more attracted to emptier messages and easier forms of environmental consumption, replacing deeper and more wholesome values. Sut Jhally (2000) states that there is “simply not enough time” to inform oneself about food products enough “to make truly rational purchasing decisions” (Jhally, 2000, para. 21). Because greenwashing techniques give positive qualities to products with little bearing on the real green impact of the product, these ads provide “some justification for [consumers’] purchasing decisions, however irrational” (Jhally, 2000, paragraph 21). Consumers are vulnerable to advertising that provides this justification, even in slight amounts, because of the constant search for meaning that exists within individuals in consumer society. Jhally (2000) claims that goods in industrial society have had their meaning “emptied” out of them” (para. 11) and that it is the job of advertising to “refill this void with its own meaning” (para. 11). In terms of fast food, this emptying is clear: the relationship between consumer and ingredients or eater and source has been severed with the industrial farming production chain to the point where most consumers would be unable to describe the production or cooking or even preparation process for any item in their Happy Meal.

I shall argue that the three advertisements under scrutiny in later chapters craft the appearance of meaning, mostly green meaning, by assigning unique properties to the food and to the brand image. These unique properties work as that small amount of justification Jhally suggests is all that is needed to incite a purchase. Even before greenwashing techniques entered the fast food advertising industry, this justification was provided in the form of national identity and traditional North American values which have been instilled in fast food through advertising since McDonald’s became the cornerstone of the fast food industry in the 1950s, bringing it and fast food overall into North American consciousness. Just as historical fast food advertising showed the achievement of the American Dream, greenwashing techniques in current day fast food ads reflect “the desires of the individual...[and] show the fantasized completion of the self” (Jhally, 2000, para. 17). By framing fast food products and their associated brands as the key to completion or



fulfillment gives that small nudge or justification that pushes consumers towards a purchase when consumer society does not make more information about the products accessible enough.

The way that this justification occurs is a key part of greenwashing, and therefore must be addressed in the case studies in this thesis. An analysis that unpacks the relationship between language and culture in these ads is essential, as advertising is, like any form of widely disseminated language, “determined by social structure and contributes to stabilizing and changing that structure simultaneously.” (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 7). The advertisements selected for this study were chosen because each communicates with an emerging consumer conscience while appeasing existing customers and the system in which they function. However, these advertisements were also created to grow respective consumer bases by gaining new audience members who may then choose to adhere to these new conscious buying strategies in their selection of fast food.

This is a critical angle from which to approach a study of these advertisements, because fast food is traditionally a “low-involvement” (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009, p. 845) product type, that is, “consumers do not search extensively for information or evaluate...product characteristics” (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009, p. 845). This is somewhat similar to Jhally’s (2000) ideas, but Jhally assigns responsibility to the economic and social system, while Tarkiainen & Sundqvist assign responsibility for this to the consumer. Despite these differences, it is clear that these advertisements cater to this trend of low involvement, while shrouding it in connotations of activism and deep values. The main ways advertisers do this is by drawing connections between the product or brand and various higher involvement issues or personal situations, triggering emotional responses that connect with values, or by “adding an important product feature to a low-involvement product” (Kotler 1997 as cited in Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009, p. 845).

The triggering of emotional responses and addition of extra features are clear in the advertisements I have chosen. For instance, in the Chipotle (2013) ad that begins and ends with a picture of a family, there is a strong link to values of family, the home, love, tradition and security. These are commonly held values that can often inspire more active desires when deciding where to purchase goods. Advertisements like this often promote

lifestyles too, either alongside or instead of the food products (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 63). Lifestyle values are also clear in the Chipotle (2013) advertisement, as the viewer watches the farmer get further from his roots before having an epiphany and returning to his idyllic pastoral lifestyle that Chipotle labels as a “better world” (Chipotle, 2013). This connection to values forms a relationship between Mexican grilled fast food and family happiness, though the material qualities of each are almost entirely independent from one another. Building these connections has little to do with the product, but spurs the consumer into buying action by perfecting their image of a desirable lifestyle only to be attained through the product (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008).

These connections that create symbolic relationships between the products and completely unrelated values work overtime when converting new consumers because trust is often an issue. However, with consumers who already see themselves as green, these connections are relatable because they reflect their “deeper environmental values” (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009, p. 846). In a sense, the reason fast food advertising can bring in these green values is because they exist in popular consciousness, yet the reason they exist in popular consciousness is because they are constantly present in popular media. Wodak & Meyer, (2008) describe this dialectical relationship as discourse that is “socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned” (p. 6). This cycle of influence between green popular culture and green messages in media “reproduce the social status quo, and...contributes to transforming it” (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 6). This transformation occurs by honing the audience’s ability to make connections between things like family and fast Mexican food grown in animated green fields (Chipotle, 2013), and see this as green even though it is not stated as so. Theoretically, companies capitalizing on active consumer imaginations means that their relationship will one day build green values directly into popular consciousness at all socioeconomic levels and into all fast food products, thus changing the environmental status quo. However, these green values may be somewhat futile and diluted in the form in which they are currently growing because consumption is still recommended as the solution.

This relationship appears positive in these fast food advertisements, as it gives those of low socioeconomic status an opportunity to be green. However, these same advertisements give rise to unequal relationships of power (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 6).

For instance, almost all of the faces in all three advertisements I have chosen are still white, which fits with the general colour of the green movement, as it has traditionally been costly to be green, leaving it available for the usual power group: upper or middle class white North America. The stereotype of the “granola” family fits with green values and ethical food values, and fast food tends to not be part of this picture. This can cause other economic groups in society to feel alienated from the fast food products and companies<sup>5</sup>. Ignoring traditional economic relations reproduces a traditional power relationship despite bringing the movement to the masses. Also, as consumption of the products advertised is the action recommended to attain the solution, those with more means to consume are still going to come out on top. This is certainly a form of greenwashing, as one solution to a problem is promoted while other associated problems are ignored.

Flaws in fast food advertisements often lead to trust issues with some groups of consumers. Those who do not identify with green values are less likely to be swayed by greenwashing, of course, but those who want more than to see pretty pictures of happy pigs and happy children are also not greatly swayed by advertisements of this type. Various scholarly opinions exist regarding the effects on particular audience segments. These include lack of “concrete measures” and “vague and ambiguous statements about commitment to values” (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 172), or the fact that “customers don’t believe what you tell them. They believe what you do.” (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 215). This scepticism and thirst for accountability shows some immunity to greenwashing in the consumer community, and the greater these trust issues become with companies who promote ideas, such as Chipotle, the more likely consumers are to flock to competitors, like McDonald’s who has become more transparent in its production processes in exchange for increased trust from its consumers.

Despite some appearances of transparency, this scepticism goes so far in some groups that focus groups facilitated by Schroder & McEachern (2005) found that “a significant theme from the focus groups was one of scepticism about the motivations

<sup>5</sup> For more research and analysis on economic composition of environmental values groups and of fast food consumption groups, see Schroder & McEachern, 2005; Flemmen & Hjellbrekke, 2016; Black & Bilette, 2015; Atkinson & Deeming, 2015.

underlying McDonald's and KFC's CSR initiatives" (p. 217). Their respondents felt these initiatives were "no more than marketing strategies aimed at increasing company profits" (p. 217). As discussed above, the relationship between culture and media is dialectical, in that fast food advertising reacts to cultural trends while also having a history of creating American culture. This scepticism has the potential to fuel the culture-influencing-advertising direction of this relationship so that companies can make real changes to their products and practices and the advertisements can promote real changes that have been made.

However, fast food advertising such as the three cases analysed in this thesis comes closer to creating and promoting real change than most historical attempts, and I will suggest even these three ads are still dripping with questionable elements. One major strategy that is popular in advertising and that commits greenwashing is "presupposition" (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 212), where the presentation of information in advertisements takes particular ideas or values for granted as though the ways these things are presented are the only way they can exist. This presupposition exists in all three of the advertisements on a variety of levels, but common to all is the assumption that the fast food market that relies on fast, cheap food transported over long distances regardless of regional or seasonal differences, can be made green and ethical. An alternative that is entirely ignored, however, is that the fast food production chains shrink, localize, or even cease existing at least on an international industrial scale. It would be unpopular with stakeholders in the fast food industry however, to promote these alternatives as they would most likely run counter to the interests of the bottom line. Due to this opposition of interests, these positive alternatives that would eradicate the industry as it exists now, are obscured in fast food advertising.

A possible form of Budinsky & Bryant's (2013) "presupposition" would be for an advertisement to display a scenario where the advertised product is the lesser of two evils. Often, this appears as an argument in favour of purchasing one supposedly environmentally friendly product over another conventional product (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, 208). By applying only positive or ethical qualities to these promoted products, these ads could give the impression that they do not break with other ethical or green values (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 172). Advertisements of this style take for granted

that one must buy the advertised class of product in the first place. This style of product framing is not inherently bad, as there are many necessities, such as recycled toilet paper, that are going green, but often this style of advertising is used for non-necessity products like soft drinks (Canada Dry, 2012). This problem again can be extended to the idea of green capitalism being the best economic model, without questioning consumption more broadly. Budinsky & Bryant (2013) challenge this idea too by suggesting that this “lesser of two evils” strategy “merely focuses on the representations of products and does not go far enough to critically interrogate the dominant power structures that undermine collective interests and environmental emancipation” (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 208). They argue that this leaves the current economic system untouched by criticism, when it is the real cause of these problems through the inequality and environmental degradation it creates.

Despite the fact that some of the advertisements may be promoting truly green or ethical products, the saturation of the advertising environment with greenwashing is extremely problematic, regardless of whether groups of consumers blindly flock to the nearest vendor or sit at home stewing in scepticism. Many scholars have forcefully suggested reforms and self-checks to improve the truth and quality of these advertisements. These suggestions range from sets of rules that, if followed, prevent ads from deceiving the “average” consumer through fact checks, and specifically listed characteristics a product must possess (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 168), to pushing through anti-greenwashing legislation in progressive countries like Denmark and Australia (Jones, 2007).

One productive guideline from Ekstrand & Nilsson (2011) is that the highlighted green quality of the product not be “a common characteristic of the other equivalent products on the market.” (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 169). This proposal opens up yet another common greenwashing technique for discussion. Many of the products advertised as green bear no difference from their competitors, yet the companies merely had the creativity to select one element and frame it as progressive and an anomaly. The success of this strategy relies on the ignorance of the public of the production processes, which is regrettably quite pervasive in our North American and global economies. McDonald’s (2015) has used this strategy to a degree in their “Your Questions” campaign by building their advertising images and scripts entirely on telling the audience how honest

the entire production process is. Their newfound desire for transparency is positive, but they are capitalising on promoting something that is or should constitute bare minimum standards in food production (i.e. “we don’t use pink slime” (McDonald’s 2015)), and already exists in many other, smaller scale production chains.

All of the strategies and issues with greenwashing share one bigger problem already mentioned: they naturalize consumption and fail to question whether green capitalism is truly a solution or whether it is merely a strategy to provide fulfillment and promote complacency in consumers. Greenwashing in advertising hides the fact that a hormone and steroid-free burger still relies on a beef production system that is one of the most polluting industries on the planet. It does this by creating the illusion that we can live “harmoniously” (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 220) without changing anything except the name on the paper bag at the Drive-Thru.

Advertising of this style acts as a pacifying façade hiding the fact that externalities are only shifting and moving to other areas of the production process and other parts of the world. A perfect example of this type of pacification is the supposed transparency that McDonald’s gives to their consumers in the “Your Questions” campaign. Allowing for consumers to appear to have a voice and view the production process of fast food opens the door to future developments in communications about production chains, but when one looks closely the transparency is in fact opaque, as will be discussed further in Chapter Four. It is easy for viewers to be lulled into believing this small piece of transparency can be the beginning of a trend that this openness and the associated appearance of education will possibly lead to greater consumer awareness and activism.

However, ads like this should not be seen as the new and innovative solution that the companies frame them as, because consumers still think of “commodities only in their present state, with no regard for the effects of extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal.” (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 223-224). Though in some ways these ads may appear to be promoting a new era of ethical fast food production, they are not inciting any real or sustained changes because they do not help consumers continue to struggle for future improvements. Optimistically, Budinsky & Bryant (2013) hope that one may view these ads as creating deeper connections to products (p. 210).

On the other hand, this does not address the social and economic reasons for why consumers must consume fast food products at all (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 210). These greenwashed advertisements may lead to some developments in consumer understanding and may one day lead to conditions in which consumers no longer are motivated to or feel required to “consume more and more products in the pursuit of being fulfilled.” (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, 210). Unfortunately, it is unlikely that these advertisements alone will perform this role as they still foster deeper connections to an industry that is to blame for a long list of environmental and health issues in the North American economy.

Prior to analysis of the advertisements in this thesis, transparency and making information available to consumers appears to be virtually the only hope for these fast food ads to become a positive force and aid environmental and ethical changes. Ultimately, these ads do not provide solutions to the real problems of gross overconsumption, at least on preliminary analysis, because they still intentionally fail to address that “our earth cannot sustain these continued levels of growth and...the massive amount of waste produced as a result of our excessive consumption.” (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 211). While McDonald’s might attempt greater transparency revealing certain dimensions of its production process, the company is not training its staff to stop asking “would you like to supersize that?” with every purchase.

This understandable lack of concern with overconsumption shown by companies is aggravated by the fact that the rallying cry of capitalism is that consumers “vote” with their dollar” (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 209). Calls to vote with dollars suggest a democracy in the field of consumption, but the issue of economic inequality is rarely addressed. When it is, it is often to suggest that those without means cannot consume or achieve the American Dream. These ads do very little to change the underlying structures and attitudes of consumers and viewers, which is what is needed for real long term change. This is a paradox as the advertisements that seem to promote green products frame themselves as shouldering some responsibility for creating real change, while this is not usually the purpose of advertising. The purpose of advertising is usually to build demand for a product and sustain a brand in the marketplace. However, until activist groups stop promoting green capitalism, which treats “the environment as an externality”

(Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 209) and begin shifting the focus of responsibility away from bad products onto bad systems and bad ideologies, consumers will never realize their agency.

Until green advertising abandons greenwashing for true green education, this is a process that will stay in its infancy. However, despite advertisements that are rampant with green and ethical symbolism that incorrectly suggest that positive changes have already been made to products and consumption practices, many advertisements are at least moving the right direction. The presence of any form of green values in advertising at the very least helps consumers to realize that an issue exists. Advertising is the most persuasive and powerful means of spurring consumers to action. Progressive and sustained change in advertising depends on the presence of ideas of community relationships at all levels of production and on true information being presented to viewers, as well as on greenwashing strategies subsiding. This may even eventually lead to consumer fulfillment. This does not mean that consumption can be eradicated, but that it may be curbed by decreasing total volumes of products consumed and also decreasing consumption of environmentally harmful products.



## **“No Hormones and Whatnot”**

This case study will cover one ad from A&W's Better Beef Guarantee campaign that circulated primarily in 2015 (A&W, 2015) on television and YouTube. This ad is part of a larger campaign of A&W's new Guarantee ads including one line of ads for antibiotic free chicken, one for eggs from cage-free vegetarian hens, and one for hormone- and steroid-free beef. The campaign itself breaks from traditional fast food advertising, as the main message draws attention to the production process behind the ingredients with this ad working to make the green and ethical ingredient alteration part of common sense everyday knowledge. This ad detours from traditional fast food frames of the food being cheap, fast, and consistent in favour of advertising an intangible quality such as invisible manufactured compounds in the chicken or burgers. A&W capitalizes on its existing brand image with the same spokesperson they have used for years, Allen Lulu, and promotion of family values and simplicity. This is important because it has been found that brand name and advertising are the most important factors influencing consumers' food purchasing decisions (Chrysochou, 2010, p. 77).

One of the possible reasons for A&W forging a new, environmentally-driven advertising path is to appeal to younger generations, as the baby boomer market is starting to age and shrink. According to a spokesperson for VIA Agency, who created some of A&W's advertising initiatives, “evolution is necessary in the restaurant business, and a brand refresh that touches all aspects of a concept can propel growth” (Duncan, 2014). While A&W was well established with the baby boomer market, that market is aging, and the A&W name no longer resonates with those living fast lives in need of quick, convenient meals: the children and grandchildren of these baby boomers. One analyst concisely put it that “now that A&W has a grasp on the boomer market, it makes sense they try and “pick up the kids,”” (Laird, 2010). In today's market of competitive authenticity in all industries, A&W also has an advantage, on which they capitalized in this campaign: “brands with a storied past should also be proud of their heritage... it doesn't mean that they're old and tired...it means they're authentic.” (Duncan, 2014). This suggests that the A&W Better Beef campaign is holding onto the traditional branding while also embracing newer ideas that appeal to younger generations.

A&W has almost half a century of advertising in its history: once the Root Bear was the mascot, with his orange sweater and friendly face, then the Burger Family entered the spotlight and eventually grew to multiple generations (Grandpa Burger to Baby Burger). Now Allen Lulu is one of the most recognizable fast food spokespeople guiding the consumer through various A&W advertising campaigns. These ads, full of family values and memories of the perfect burger and Root Beer, have built a brand image for A&W that is slightly more wholesome than many other fast food restaurant chains. This puts A&W in an interesting position for creating greener products because it affords the company more social capital.

Because A&W is a burger joint, it will only continue to hold its authenticity by continuing as a burger joint. The company has not deviated from traditional burger-joint fare by adopting breakfast menus or salads or café style baked goods to the extent of other fast food brands such as McDonald's or Wendy's. The Better Beef, Chicken, and Egg Guarantees stay within these traditional burger-joint boundaries, which keeps the abundance of traditional social capital and authenticity available for A&W to use in promoting new product initiatives. A&W has opted to change its production process instead of its end product, which means the uninterested consumer will continue to experience the cheap, fast and consistent service A&W is known for, while the green-aware consumer may feel A&W is a more attractive fast food option than formerly. Now that the Better Beef Guarantee has been firmly established as part of the A&W product range, A&W can build ads like this one that draw on the brand image and social capital of family, simplicity, and great taste that the brand has established over fifty years. This sets the company up for success in terms of customer retention, attraction, and sales.

The advertisement opens with Allen Lulu breaking the fourth wall and speaking directly to the camera, that is, to the viewer. As the first person the viewer sees, his appearance and words are extremely important. He is the "food communicator" (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 178) facilitating the corporate message, so he must engage the viewer enough that they will continue watching. As it is possible to fast forward television, this ad must hook its audience immediately, and therefore his first words and his appearance are of the utmost importance.

The way Lulu opens the ad is engaging but not complicated. He is recognizable in an instant due to his role as the A&W spokesperson for as long as many audience members can remember, though very little in his appearance is particularly notable. He is middle aged, somewhere between 45 and 55, of short to average height, and of medium to jolly weight. His appearance, combined with his nondescript black A&W corporate shirt and jacket, and striped tie make him fit the mold of the very average white male that is neither intimidating, boring, nor difficult to relate to for the average viewer. From this ad alone, the audience can discern little about his social status, but if one has watched A&W ads evolve over the past decade or two, one will remember that he was once cast as an employee and a manager (A&W, 2010) before he rose to spokesperson status. This rise in rank potentially makes him more relatable to the average Canadian audience member, as many Canadians have watched him grow and advance and feel familiarity when they see him.

There is no music at all in the advertisement, so his voice is the first sound the audience hears. He speaks directly to the viewer in an enthusiastic, yet calm tone, which is neither falsely upbeat nor too practiced. In a way, his tone of voice awakens ideas of solving a mystery or getting to the truth to support his initial claim that “more and more people are coming to A&W” (A&W, 2015, 0:01/0:04). He strikes a tone of familiarity with whomever he is speaking, whether it be the audience or the other customers in the ad. This decreases any feeling of tension or of the ad being staged and choreographed. The way he throws his hand up to point at the camera as he turns to walk towards the restaurant door also aids in making it feel like the viewer is really there having a casual and collaborative conversation with Lulu.

It is clear that his first question to the first customer (A&W, 2015, 0:07) is slightly too formal, and too closed a question, as Customer 1 gives an awkward and embarrassed one word answer followed by a nervous giggle. “Do you come to A&W a lot?” (A&W, 2015, 0:07) is a casual version of the most basic small-talk in history: “so, do you come here often?” Though a perfectly reasonable conversation opener, there is no way to make it seem natural in any way. However, just as two strangers in conversation relax as a conversation unfolds, the customers and Lulu relax into friendlier, less forced tones and body language as the ad progresses. The thumbs up in the moment with Customer 5

(A&W, 2015, 0:20) and the open laughter in the conversation with Customer 6 (A&W, 2015, 0:27) are far more candid than the awkward laughter of the first two customers. This theoretically could reflect the way the viewer feels on being introduced to all of these people and ideas in such a short time.

The way that the conversation unfolds is important to note as well. As each customer interaction becomes increasingly familiar and relaxed, the amount of speech and information increases. The order in which the customers are shown to the viewer is in smallest verbal speech to largest, so it plants ideas in the viewer's head slowly in a way that is easy to adjust to, despite the camera cutting from customer to customer extremely quickly. The first customer says only one word before laughing awkwardly (A&W, 2015, 0:07) while the fifth and sixth customers say the most, with the seventh customer ending the ad with a good simple, takeaway message that acts as a review. When one takes all of the verbal communication as one, the questions from Lulu are in a logical order. He slowly asks more open ended and complicated questions, so the viewer learns about the brand in the same way they would if the viewer were the one in conversation with Lulu.

It is clear the ad is filmed at an A&W, from the window decals on the outside of the building in front of which Lulu stands when he opens the ad. From the reasonably uniform lighting and attire of the customers as well as the occasional glimpse of orange wallpaper, it is reasonably certain that the entire ad is filmed in one A&W restaurant. All of the customers look reasonably healthy and happy, and none look overweight. The light in the restaurant and lack of background noise also makes it look like a pleasant place that is not loud or busy. One cannot imagine the fast food burger smell that usually permeates everything in any fast food restaurant. All three of these elements give the viewer a positive feeling towards the space, the lifestyle, and the corporation itself. By providing this more sterile vision of the restaurant than typically seen in burger chains, this ad raises its potential for turning viewers into customers.

The restaurant also feels spacious and tidy. The small amount of restaurant that is visible behind the customers looks clean, in particular because there is no debris on the tables in any scenes. There are no other people in the background seated at tables behind the speaking customers and their companions. This creates the feeling that this is not a

frenzied restaurant and perhaps the eating experience is not as “fast” as in other restaurants, making it potentially a more inviting place.

There is very little food that appears in the ad, as the ad is mostly centred on people. The most food in one shot is when Lulu is speaking with Customer 6 and her children (A&W, 2015, 0:24). There is a glimpse of a few fries sticking up in the foreground and another very brief glimpse of a burger in one corner of the screen. Customer 1 and her dining partner have root beer and paper packaging (that looks full) on their table, but it is impossible to see the product (A&W, 2015, 0:07). Customer 2 looks like he is eating (A&W, 2015, 0:09), but no one else interacts with food in any way. The best shot of any beef is the camera pausing on the cardboard Better Beef Guarantee table card on which there is a picture of a burger.

From this absence of food, it is clear that the advertising strategy is to build a people-based relationship rather than a food-based relationship. Furthermore, as the meaning of “no hormones or steroids” is not defined in the advertisement, this ad clearly relies on the audience already having some knowledge of unethical or unnatural animal feeding practices prior to watching the ad. This assumption suggests that A&W is an aware corporation in that it understands that viewers are not entirely in the dark when it comes to production. In the Better Beef campaign, as well as the Chicken Guarantee campaign running in tandem in 2014-2016, A&W uses technical terminology by mentioning the beef is free of Hormones and Steroids and the chicken is raised without the use of antibiotics. It is becoming more and more common for these words to appear in media, which means that these words are moving from esoteric scientific technical terminology to everyday popular language. These terms will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, but for now it is important to note that Customer 4’s paraphrasing (A&W, 2015, 0:16) of the folded cardboard tabletop ad is the only use of informative, technical terminology and requires no educational explanation. In a sense, by only communicating positive and candid customer testimonials instead of explaining the technical aspects of the Better Beef pledge, A&W shows a confidence that viewers are aware of the series of ads while avoiding a preachy or contrived tone. Having the conversation in the ad flow naturally without inserting a stilted PR announcement keeps the ad from sounding condescending and assumes a more informed viewer or customer. Also, by showing that their customers

already believe in their product enough be able to recite the ad tagline or even to switch fast food restaurants, as in the case of Customer 6 (A&W, 2015, 0:21) and Customer 7 (A&W, 2015, 0:30), A&W is painting itself as an authentic burger joint with a solid reputation.

A&W capitalizes on historic authenticity and instructs viewers by example on how they should feel towards the campaign and towards A&W's menu offerings. Promoting by example rather than explicit instruction allows the ad to operate on multiple levels of viewer consciousness by appealing to audience desire for pleasure in taste, guilt-free consumption choices, and achieving the level of happiness and fulfillment portrayed by each of the customers in the ad.

As there are so many customers interviewed in the ad, this data can be used to speculate as to the target market of this campaign. It would appear that the customer demographics have range in terms of race, gender and age, though socioeconomic status seems somewhat homogenous. Customers 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 are younger adults, while customer 5 is a youth and customer 6 is bordering on the young side of middle age. With the background companion customers included, this age range grows from zero to solidly middle aged. That is an incredibly large portion of the population with spending or decision-making power. In terms of gender, of the speaking customers, numbers 1, 5, and 6 are female while 2, 3, 4, and 7 are male. When peripheral customers are included in the count, 8 are women, including the baby girl, and six are men, excluding Allen Lulu. On the final screen when the frame is divided into nine squares with a customer in each, the two squares containing customers that were not in the ad contain women (A&W, 2015, 0:30). In terms of race and ethnicity, the customers in the ad seem to represent the multiculturalism of Canada, as three of fourteen people appear to be of visible minority, though all sound very Canadian when they speak. This wide variety of demographic data help make the customers in the ad relatable for most viewers of the ad. This relatable element helps create a sense of personal connection, thus helping A&W's message gain traction.

Though attire varies from customer to customer, it is important to note the large number of hoodies and toques. The toque in particular is a very Canadian clothing item,

and appears to cross the majority of socioeconomic classes. This suggests a casual and cozy environment, though none of the customers are poorly dressed, which makes the restaurant seem approachable. This uniform would align with the majority of Canadian viewers under fifty, especially the younger adult viewers. Choosing customers that are casually dressed like this also makes the ad seem more real in that each customer looks like they really did just come in out of the cold to enjoy a burger. These visual cues from the customers are meant to suggest that not only are their insides warm from the temperature, but their conscience is warm too, because they know they are eating better beef. This approachable environment and the aesthetic of candid happiness set the stage for viewers to become more amenable to the suggestion of an environmental solution that simply makes the beef better.

On the surface, it appears that A&W is presenting a solution for many of the ethical and health woes that come along with consuming fast food. However, it has been found that when there are only certain healthy items on a menu, customers lack the self-control to choose these healthy items on a consistent basis and are more likely to indulge in unhealthy menu items because they feel virtuous enough merely by shopping somewhere with green offerings (Wilcox et al., 2009, p. 390). A&W is promoting the Better Beef Guarantee, the Better Chicken Guarantee, and the Better Egg Guarantee in tandem, so by presenting all core proteins on their menu as slightly greener than formerly, A&W has eliminated the ability for the customer to choose what Wilcox et al. (2009) classify as the “indulgent” or environmentally unfriendly choice. Unfortunately, as will be covered later in this chapter, this elimination of the indulgent choice may cause or hide other issues, like tempting consumers to purchase more fast food because A&W has framed it in a positive way (Wilcox et al., 2009, p. 390) or diverting customers’ focus from attempting to create real environmental and ethical change, as these Guarantees come with another whole set of new problems.

Along with the appearance of health and ethics on the A&W menu, this new menu has the potential to satisfy a broader range of customers than in former decades by appealing to green-minded consumers as well as those craving a simple burger. This is one of the qualities that makes this ad a hybrid of public relations and advertising. A hybrid like this ad has the potential to link multiple publics across various “spheres of action”

(Franzosi, 2008, p. xxxiv), namely those who are passively activist and those who are not activists in any way. This hybrid ad has the ability to build a consumer group with brand loyalty to the greener, “better” burger. The call to action is simple and direct, if flimsy under scrutiny, and fulfills A&W’s object of holding onto current customers while increasing the breadth and loyalty of their target market.

Perhaps one reason for the Better Beef Guarantee emerging as the reigning campaign from A&W is that it is difficult to introduce new values into established brands, especially in the fast food market. Fast food brands generally promote traditional values like great taste, familiar recipes, low cost, and simplicity which decreases the risk of pushing away existing customers. According to a study by Schroder & McEachern (2005, p. 218), 61% of fast food consumers are motivated by the quality of the ingredients in the food, so A&W theoretically has a relatively large portion of its existing customers that will support this green campaign, while A&W also strives to collect more loyal consumers with the carefully curated set of values shown in this ad.

To attract new loyal customers, A&W presents a multilayered ad with a variety of meanings for viewers to take away. On a denotative level, this ad merely suggests that A&W customers come to A&W for the beef, because it tastes good. However, when Customer 4 quotes the “no hormones, no steroids” (A&W, 2015, 0:13) campaign slogan, more complicated positive connotations appear. By including this statement in the ad, it implicitly suggests that A&W has taken a certain level of responsibility for the environmental degradation and the ethical crimes their industry has committed over decades by creating a product that appears to be healthier for people, animals, and the environment. The possibility that some viewers may absorb positive ideas of this nature is supported by research findings that show consumers assume a particular level of ethical standards when there are none actually promoted (McEachern & Schroder, 2005, p. 221). By illustrating how great A&W beef is, without hormones and steroids, there is potential for viewers to falsely assume A&W has broken away from the old model of beef production, and eating there is a relatively green option, though it is an inadequate environmental solution when taken in full context.



This ad succeeds at reframing A&W as a more ecological and healthier company, for a number of reasons. Lee & Shavitt (2009) suggest that an ad will only be successful at assigning new values to the company if ideas can be made to seem “conceptually fluent” (p. 223) in viewers’ minds. In this ad, the first three customers who provide answers to Lulu’s questions talk about how great the beef tastes and how often they already come to A&W (A&W, 2015, 0:07; 0:09; 0:14). Opening the ad in this way helps the audience begin their viewing experience with familiar, simple claims that a large portion of the viewers may already understand, because the beef has been a large part of A&W’s history and brand for decades. It is only twelve seconds into the ad, with the fourth customer, where the information begins to change into more ethical ad slogans. However, the “no hormones no steroids and whatnot” (A&W, 2015, 0:15) become less radical because the audience has been primed with a review of what they already associate with A&W.

The interesting part in all this is that a different study by Chrysochou (2010) suggests that brands are more successful at acquiring healthier or more ecological connotations when they apply these qualities only to new products. A&W has done exactly the opposite of this by promoting changes in their entire line of beef products. However, because the larger campaign slogan uses “better” rather than “healthier” or “greener”, the campaign, and especially this ad, do not suggest A&W is attempting to become a green brand, merely that they are improving their products. Though this ad does mention “no hormones, no steroids” (A&W, 2015, 0:16) and does not explicitly mention the “better beef guarantee” in these exact words, the undercurrent of the entire ad is that the beef is better than everywhere else. As A&W seems to be going through each major protein on their menu and adding green and ethical connotations, eventually it may not be inconceivable for them to promote themselves as a greener brand, but for now, they are taking cautious steps which seem to be successful.

As discussed briefly in the previous two chapters, the larger campaign in which this ad is situated is a hybrid of a public relations campaign and a traditional advertising campaign because it communicates clearly in a non-artistic manner using clear scientific technical terms. The particular ad chosen for scrutiny in this thesis communicates the main campaign message only once when Customer 4 loosely quotes the cardboard foldout of the ad (A&W, 2015, 0:16) that the Beef is free of hormones and steroids. This mention of

the campaign tagline is very close to as-written on all of the ad copy, so it is not creatively augmented by symbolic claims that are usually found in advertising. The viewer also learns that people come to A&W because of the beef (A&W, 2015, 0:09; 0:21). The only moment where there is definitive praise of the beef is that it is “good” according to Customer 5 (A&W, 2015, 0:19). As these customer testimonials are reasonably candid, this ad moves further into hybrid territory between Public Relations and Advertising.

Departing from Bernays’ ideas that advertising and public relations have traditionally not overlapped, this is a new style of ad, as it communicates one message clearly (no hormones or steroids in the beef) like a public relations announcement, and gives audiences a suggested reaction to the changes in product as a traditional advertisement would do. The change communicated is also one that is a change in production, which is something that traditionally would have fallen under Bernays’ definition of public relations (1928 as cited in Supa, 2015, p. 409). It goes beyond the realm of traditional advertising that merely gives the command to buy, and details qualities of the product. On the other hand, this details a quality of the product that has traditionally fallen outside of consumer interest and outside of what a corporation is willing to reveal. At least, it would have in 1928 when Bernays formed his theory. The informative and candid element of the ad provides the management function of this promotion hybrid (Petrovici, 2015, p. 52). The ad also gives information as to why other consumers buy, which is usually classified under the advertising umbrella. This ad, with all the consumer reactions included avoids “semantic ambiguity” (Petrovici, 2015, p. 52) by clearly giving viewers coaching on how to react. Customers 2 and 7, for instance (A&W, 2015, 0:09; 0:29), give clear, positive responses to the Allen Lulu’s questions and suggest the beef is the reason they come to A&W. This mitigation of semantic ambiguity traditionally falls under the purview of public relations, though it does not traditionally take the form of customer testimonials managed by a somewhat theatrical spokesperson.

The hybrid of the two styles of promotion helps A&W toe the line of health without entirely rebranding and shocking existing customers. In this case, there is less real information communicated to the viewer than in a traditional advertisement or a PR campaign, but the positivity conveyed in the ad does help A&W get viewers on board with their beginner green step. This could be classified as A&W communicating a “value

universe” (Chrysochou, 2010, p. 71) to their consumers and viewers to accompany any factual information and steer interpretation. Including images of family and suggestions of traditional ideas like great taste and simplicity alongside the green message of hormone and steroid free beef dictates to viewers how they should understand the campaign as a whole, as well as the particular change in the beef product line while diminishing the probability of the audience exercising their critical instincts. This ad works to place A&W firmly in the positive value universe so the link between happy satisfaction and A&W beef grows and strengthens.

This is a noteworthy function of the ad, as A&W is providing promotional material that makes viewers feel as though the corporation is doing a good thing for their cows and for the environment, while, in reality, the responsibility still lies with the consumer. Because the critical impulses in each viewer are tamped down by the overwhelming positivity in the ad, consumers still run the risk of falling for the usual inconsistencies in choice, forgoing a healthy meal that may take longer to prepare and ordering A&W when they are hungry (Read & Leeuwen, 1998, p. 189). When consumers are pulled into the positive value universe where “Better Beef” is the best option and not eating beef is not an option, broader global food system or environmental concerns are not considered, nor are they meant to be. A&W builds this value universe in a simple and effective way. Upon first watching the ad, it is clear: A&W beef tastes great, it is also healthy and environmentally friendly, and it is even enjoyed by families; therefore, it is a logical and straightforward choice to head to A&W next time one craves a burger. By keeping everything very simple, A&W leaves little room for “metacognitive difficulty” (Lee & Shavitt, 2009, 223), which often incites a viewer’s critical impulse upon viewing an ad. This simplicity increases the likelihood that the ad message and campaign message will be accepted with fewer or no questions. In fact, by avoiding any sort of direct exhortation to call viewers to the restaurant, A&W lives up to their decades old tradition of simplicity and their inviting demeanour. This helps the audience feel good about eating A&W burgers.

This simplicity makes the main message of “come to A&W for a better burger” essential for A&W’s sales fulfillment, as consumers generally make their decision very quickly and impulsively, especially when fast food is the object (Chrysochou, 2010). A&W’s unspoken emphasis on simplicity in this ad is key to building the brand further and

contributing to the overall positive aura of the ad. According to several scholars, these quick and impulsive decisions are steered by heuristics as much as by any real claim or fact presented in an advertisement (Bettman, Luce, and Payne 1998; Malhotra 1982, as cited in Chrysochou, 2010, p. 70). As consumers often take brand image as a “proxy for product-related characteristics, such as taste, quality, convenience, origin and so on” (Chrysochou, 2010, p. 70), A&W presents the new values of ethical sourcing ensconced in familiar brand characteristics. A&W is building the brand and furthering only “the beef” (A&W, 2015, 0:09) in this ad. This is public relations as much as advertising, though heuristics are usually built through advertising and not public relations. The simplicity and straightforward element of this ad makes it function as a form of public relations.

Part of the reason for this ad so easily presenting a persuasive message with very little real information, almost entirely relying on heuristics and the social capital of the brand is because food is seen as a low involvement category by many scholars (Cobb & Hoyer, 1985; Smith & Bristor, 1994; Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979 all as cited in Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009). This translates to consumers spending very little time evaluating and searching for food (Tarkiainen & Sunqvist, 2009, p. 848) and being more likely to choose what is accessible and promises immediate gratification. A&W fits this bill with their fast preparation and proliferation of franchise locations. Scholars assign responsibility for this phenomenon differently, as scholars like Sut Jhally (2002) blame broader political and economic determinants, and “propagandistic” advertising systems for offering limited choices that force us to choose the best of the bad, while Tarkiainen & Sunqvist (2009) assign responsibility to the consumer for choosing to expend energy and critical thinking elsewhere. One thing all scholars agree on, however, is that this impulsive consumer behaviour can be tempered and food can become a higher involvement category if “contextual factors” (Mishra & Mishra, 2010, p. 1130) such as generational popularity or locally-based and immediate awareness can become more common. A&W is coopting this idea by showing their new target market in the ad speaking to this younger demographic through the television. Showing numerous happy customers on screen “stabilize[s] impulsive behaviour” (Mishra & Mishra, 2010, p. 1130) by coaching viewers on how they should react. A&W is giving the appearance of creating a higher-involvement form of fast food, yet is still causing virtually all of the problems that large meat-based companies generally do.

The relationships needed in order for PR to be successful usually are corporate and journalistic, however, A&W bypasses these and speaks directly to and through consumers in this ad. Though it appears different on the surface from much traditional PR, this ad fulfills the traditional role of PR by maintaining good relationships with various publics (Smith & Zook, 2011; Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994; all as quoted in Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016) in order to stay relevant with the ever growing target consumer market. Instead of spouting staid public relations messages to the new target demographic of 25-40 year olds (Laird, 2010), A&W conveys the authenticity often reserved for PR in this ad by having customers in this generation speak to their counterparts in the audience. This is a more active consumer market that is more difficult to reach through traditional public relations, because they have more control over their media and consume more of it. Therefore A&W has managed to hybridize the two categories of promotion to tailor their message to the new target demographic.

Along with difficulties in reaching this younger demographic, there is class-related tension associated with this ad. This tension is between seeing the environmental and ethical values of A&W's ad campaign becoming popular class-bridging issues, yet also causing rifts between classes as it forces green values traditionally belonging to more affluent classes into an industry that has traditionally appealed to less affluent classes for its simplicity and affordability. In bringing green values, often reserved for more affluent portions of society, to their burger line-ups for the same prices and taste, A&W has the chance to unify broad sections of the population. However, because these green values are traditionally associated with and available to those of higher income, forcing these values into ads for a company with a long history of mass appeal may cause confusion or discomfort for those who feel these values have traditionally been exclusionary. However, A&W frames its products in the same way as it always has in terms of cost and flavour and consistency, and in so doing, lowers the risk of causing rifts in their target market.

One could argue that by putting green values in front of a larger portion of the population by buying ad space on, say, sports channels (as is the case with this ad), A&W attempts to loop all of its audience into the group of consumers who are usually seen as having discerning taste and green values. Being part of an industry that touches far more socioeconomic levels of society than many other food vendors gives A&W a unique

position that they appear to be attempting to leverage for the greater good. This denotative display of corporate social responsibility is more typical of public relations campaigns than of advertising (Petrovici, 2015, p. 53), however the multilayered element of the ad and the campaign as a whole are more typical of advertising. A&W appears to be trying to leave behind the general reputation fast food has as the epitome of a consumer society that runs on a time-is-money economic and market imperative by inserting values of quality into their food and acknowledging that they have some degree of control over the production process and sourcing of their ingredients. However, despite all of these positive appearances, A&W is still shrouding much of the social and business processes behind the smiles and unqualified approvals of the customers shown in this ad.

The way the customers speak to Allen Lulu and the camera builds authenticity, which can be found both in public relations campaigns and in advertising. This style of honest authenticity through “announcing” good qualities of the product or corporation, (as opposed to lifestyle framing as authenticity) is unique to documentary style public relations (Petrovici, 2015, p. 52). This style of direct-to-camera honesty makes every line spoken in the ad seem more truthful, which gives more weight to the positive, if environmentally ineffective, green claim that is the crux of the advertising campaign: that the beef is free of hormones and steroids.

Because the viewer is introduced to the customers in the ad slowly, the flow of information is controlled. As the amount each customer says increases as the ad goes on, the viewer may find the ad more relatable and will suffer less confusion because they are not bombarded with facts until they are warmed up. This is extremely important when what would normally take minutes to explain in a press conference or paragraphs to explain in a traditional press release takes only thirty seconds (Petrovici, 2015, p. 54). Conveying a feeling like this ad does through the happy supportiveness of the customers in the ad is also virtually impossible in traditional public relations, yet is an essential part of building positive brand images.

The ad builds trust with consumers by showing testimonials in more of a face-to-face manner by giving snippets of interviews with Lulu. The ad does not rely on special effects, graphics or artistic flourish as traditional advertising does. The main message of

the ad campaign is given in a brief camera frame of a cardboard tabletop poster that is professionally designed and is the only moment in the ad where there is a feeling of A&W selling something. The principal time portion of the ad however is dedicated to building trust and giving viewers examples of how they should react to this change or reinvention of the product. Even the woman with the baby (A&W, 2015, 0:25) seems candid and truthful in her reaction to the interviewer's questions. The ad builds trust by showing "viewers just like you" eating A&W and clearly enjoying it. The hybrid of relatable, candid messages from easy-to-identify-with consumers communicates a message in which the call to action is easy to understand: come to A&W because the beef is better. Health, ethical positivity and great taste all exhort customers to come eat at A&W because they can find others like themselves there. By eating at A&W you too, can feel great about what you put in yourself, what you put in your baby and what you take from the earth and from animals. The diversity in the customers inside the restaurant should make the ad and product appealing to the same vast array of the population to whom the pre- "Better Beef Guarantee" beef appealed.

What differentiates this message from traditional public relations, however, is that the message is not directed to shareholders, and was accompanied by press releases that were aimed at shareholders (A&W Income Fund, 2016; Campbell, 2015). The press release is still an even less coded level of communication from A&W to the public, suggesting that this ad still can be classified as advertising, not a substitute for public relations. This is a problem, as the straight-forward element of this ad makes A&W's initiative seem true and simple, when it is not. Just because the beef is now free of hormones and steroids and these customers are happy with the taste and with the ad campaign does not mean the green initiative has come without costs. The smiles, laughter and general mood of positivity in the ad make the ad a vessel for values rather than real information. The costs of this incongruence between presentation of the green initiative and the real costs of it are actively ignored or diminished by such candid positivity in this ad-public-relations hybrid that disguises surface meaning and legitimizes customer feelings as truth.

Showing people in this way, giving their opinions about the product and why they like it, allows viewers to make more value-product connections because they hear the

positive emotion and approval in the customers' voices in the ad and relate. It also seems that by presenting so many opinions about the product, it helps consumers form their own opinions. However, when one looks closely, it is basically a reiteration of the same opinion in different words, bombarding the viewer with so much blind positivity that it is difficult to get through the ad without finding oneself considering buying an A&W burger next time hunger strikes. For instance, Customers 2, 3 and 7 all say different things, but the message they all project is that they come to A&W because they like the beef (A&W, 2015, 0:06, 0:11, 0:26). In a way this seems to give the ad the credibility usually enjoyed by public relations and not advertising. Showing real people giving their supposedly real opinions helps make the advertisement relatable and allows it to become alive to a broader audience as there is potential for any audience member to somehow identify with someone they see on the screen such as the mother with her children, or the young bearded man. Becoming relatable in this way draws more people in than does a bland press release.

Showing reactions that appear so candid suggests that A&W is secure in its popularity and that their green initiative is pure in its motives. The organic and unforced feel to the ad suggests A&W feels there is no need to curate the message into "exactly their desired phraseology" (Hill, 1958, p. 4-5 as quoted in Supa, 2015, p. 409). This is traditionally not found in public relations but can be found in advertising. The appearance of extraordinary honesty may build trust with employees and shareholders for a similar outcome to traditional public relations and corporate social responsibility campaigns (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 214). With this in mind, however, A&W still uses slightly coded terms, as they keep the actual process of production heavily veiled, which is often a quality of advertising.

Despite focus group results and other research suggesting that consumers feel sceptical towards initiatives like the one in this ad (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 217), this may not always be the case, as consumers are pulled out of their everyday life in focus groups and their critical response is less restricted or buried. In North American society, a large amount of the meaning in food and our connection to food have been emptied out due to corporatization and regional removal of production from our everyday lives. This creates rifts in our critical response that can easily be filled by positive feelings



and pseudo-truths of advertising and public relations, as in this ad. Ads like this, providing a life raft of honesty and the appearance of positive values is extraordinarily appealing and even more deadly.

This dangerous combination of truth and concealment with alluring positivity make any form of critical defence difficult from the viewer's perspective. In briefly applying TARES, an evaluative framework from Lee & Nguyen (2013), one can create a summary of the quality of this ad in terms of persuasive value and truth. For the Truthfulness of the Message (p. 227), A&W presents a general aesthetic of truth through the candid presentation of customers' opinions. However, like many companies would, A&W also has chosen to omit particular associated costs of the campaign overall, such as its increased carbon footprint and the fact that it is possible that they interviewed hundreds of customers to find seven with the correct positive opinions of the company. In terms of Authenticity of the Persuader (p. 227), A&W has built a reputation over decades of being a simple and authentic burger joint, and they are without doubt sticking to their roots in this ad. The third part of TARES is Respect for the Person Being Persuaded, or the audience. This ad is relatively respectful in that it presents a variety of positive opinions without being condescending or insulting to the audience's current beliefs or habits in any way. In terms of Equity of Persuasive Appeal, the fourth element of this evaluative framework, the audience need not be unusually well informed to understand the ad on its surface level, but in order to see past the positive veneer to the underlying inadequacies of the green and ethical claim in the middle of the ad (A&W, 2015, 0:13) the customer must have above average knowledge of global food distribution practices. Finally the Social Responsibility for the Common Good is the fifth portion of this framework (p. 227), and is less straightforward than the preceding portions. Though the broader Better Beef Campaign would bring tomes of material for this portion of TARES, this particular ad does not because the ethical and environmental claim of change is so minor in this ad. However, this ad does fall low on the scales of Social Responsibility for the Common Good because it builds positive audience perceptions, allowing A&W to continue doing business in a way that harms the environment and exploits vulnerable populations while hindered by less public discontent. Having a corporation take the lead in eliminating harmful substances from their menu offerings is important, but the greater global impact of this corporate decision and of their production practices as a whole are being deemphasized

because of this positive campaign, therefore they score extremely low on the Social Responsibility and Common Good scale.

On the surface, this ad does not appear brimming with greenwashing techniques, like many other green ads, which makes it even more of a potential greenwashing threat to viewers. It frames the green claim as a common sense assumption; Customer 4 says “Oh, I’ve heard that it’s got the no hormones no steroids and whatnot” (A&W, 2015, 0:13/0:16) suggesting the commonly-held belief that scientific terms equal credibility. The familiar tone and language this customer uses contributes to the uncritical satisfaction portrayed by the customers, making it appear as common sense. This is the only overt mention of anything related to the environment or ethical elements of the product, and the lack of explanation suggests A&W already expects customers to be aware of this initiative. This assumed awareness means many things, chief of which is that A&W can resort to more subtle forms of greenwashing persuasion. A&W’s ability to use more subtle forms of greenwashing can be more dangerous and persuasive to a viewer simply because, when framed as common sense, a claim incites less critical responses from viewers (Chrysochou, 2010, p. 70).

An important element of the persuasiveness is the casual manner in which the entire ad is conducted. By showing each customer indicating it is common sense to come to A&W because of the beef, the viewer is inclined to feel the same way (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 213). This is called “presupposition” and is a popular strategy in advertising when complicated concepts are being “dumbed down” to fit thirty second ad spots (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 212). The way Customer 4 represents the Better Beef Guarantee slogan in such casual terms yet so close to the exact campaign wording makes the campaign seem even more familiar and acceptable. However, on closer attention, his folksy “and whatnot” (A&W, 2015, 0:16) and improper grammar suggest he probably has no clue what a hormone or a steroid truly does in the production process, nor could he paraphrase the slogan into his own words. By providing a small amount of awareness of the existence of hormones and steroids and the general feeling that removing them from production is good, A&W at least begins to bring the production process into the foreground of viewer consciousness. Unfortunately, this is something that ultimately helps

the corporate agenda more than the earth or consumer fulfillment, as it operates on the assumption that A&W can go green while still serving beef.

A&W's presentation of its Better Beef Guarantee as common sense partly stems from the fact that the campaign has been popular and that A&W already has a strong and loyal customer base. Showing a pre-existing, organic customer relationship helps A&W avoid viewer resistance and diverts the critical eye of the audience. According to Chrysochou (2010), when an ad too blatantly communicates health claims, "consumers may often show resistance to what they perceive as efforts to manipulate them" (p. 70). A&W takes the softer, less obvious approach and avoids overloading consumers with information, thus simplifying the decision-making process surrounding where to eat (Chrysochou, 2010, p. 70). Also, because the campaign is firmly established, this does not need to be full of overt persuasion via green facts or images. However, though consumers can probably recite the campaign slogan flawlessly, most are unaware of the hidden trade-offs or vagueness of the campaign (TerraChoice, 2007, 2009, 2010 as cited in Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 209). For instance, though the beef may be healthier, though this is debatable, as scientific proof appears inconclusive for a number of reasons<sup>6</sup>, the cattle may or may not still be subject to the same harsh conditions of crowded factory farms, and the beef is now transported from across the world, which is a problem only brought to light by investigative journalism after A&W made this change (A&W, 2015; McKenna, 2013; Amanson, 2013). Viewers have no way of finding this out without extensive research, which virtually none will do after seeing an ad so filled with positivity and common sense values.

As there is an absence of direct green or ethical images and speech in this ad, this "better beef" claim could be seen as both environmental and ethical. The average audience member may not have specific industry production knowledge, however, so they may only understand the negative connotations that these two terms have accrued through food media over the last decade or so. According to Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner (2016) audiences often assume ethical standards that are not really there, as positive ads

<sup>6</sup> For more information on hormones in beef see Fritsche, Meyer & Steinhart (1999), Kitts, et al (2007), and Balter (1999).

like this make it difficult to see past the implied care or unspoken code of ethics the corporation has taken in their new green initiative (p. 399). Regardless of the extent of audience knowledge, a slight awareness of the negative connotations of the words “hormone” and “steroid” will, however, place the audience in a position to fall victim to the unqualified positivity presented in this advertisement. The increased probability of the audience unquestionably believing that this ad presents a real solution to environmental and ethical problems stems from the issue of consumption being promoted as the solution for consumption-related problems. For instance, A&W is tempting more viewers to consume A&W burgers, yet the reason hormones and steroids first came into use was to grow bigger cattle faster to keep pace with beef demand. This ad also glosses over the fact that just because the cattle are not pumped with hormones or steroids, they may still be filled with antibiotics. Assuming this is not the case suggests the average viewer is taken in by the ad and assumes particular standards are in place when they are not (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016)

This ad is guilty of the common greenwashing tactic of holding a promotion orientation (Sengupta & Zhou, 2007, p. 298), in which the ad places far greater emphasis on the positive elements or ideal perspectives of the product in a way that diverts any negative focus. This is, of course, a common practice of product promotion, but it appears in the A&W ad particularly strongly. The questions that Allen Lulu asks of the customers promote answers that communicate very little real information and frame inaction as action. For instance, several of the customers (A&W, 2015, 0:06, 0:11, 0:18, 0:26) specifically mention that they choose A&W for the beef, though their logic and beliefs are not explained in any way. The only moment when the ad borders on showing action is when Customer 6 (A&W, 2015, 0:21) mentions that she and her family have switched fast food restaurants to become patrons of A&W and it is implied that this is because of the Better Beef campaign. These two examples suggest a pre-approval of this Better Beef guarantee, despite the fact that the beef is still filled with unhealthy elements like saturated fat and that it is still snuggled into a sugary white bread bun, making the food affect health just as negatively as any other burger chain. However, this overwhelming positivity with no suggestion of associated negative elements makes it less automatic for an audience’s critical instincts to surface.

In a sense, this Better Beef Guarantee is merely a reinvention of an identical burger, though it is framed as radically fresh in the ads aired prior to this one in the campaign. This fits certain theories of branding, especially in the green advertising sector (Chrysochou, 2010; Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008), capitalizing on the fact that consumers often latch onto branding and slogans and other surface level elements of a product instead of evaluating whether the product is really new or as sensational as an ad portrays. As this strategy is becoming more common, however, A&W opts for simplicity, one of the key elements of its brand over decades. By surrounding this campaign with positive values and with a tone of familiarity and common sense, the ad begins to even disguise that it is a reinvention. In a sense, this ad is an evolution or subsequent step after the reinvention portion of the campaign. A&W assumes the audience knows the commonly used greenwashing trope of the “relationship between food, body, society, and nature” (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 64) so much so that there are no surface level references to this idea at all. A&W does however imply this relationship by having a baby and a young girl in the ad, munching fries, as this implies that their mother sees A&W food as healthy enough. This general absence of scientific and green imagery is significant, as most ads for green or ethical initiatives go out of their way to appear different. A&W commits greenwashing by simplifying the environmental and ethical imagery and embracing and accentuating the familiarity of their product.

Part of this simplification process functions as a distraction technique for the fact that A&W is still promoting consumption of fast food and purchasing of products from a massively damaging industry. Despite the overwhelming support by the customers in this ad of this Better Beef Guarantee being a step in the right direction, clearly this advertising campaign still promotes consumption of mass-produced and fossil-fuel heavy processed beef that is devastating for the environment. One small green value is being promoted to raise awareness, but this tiny change alone will not help the environment or human or animal health in any tangible way<sup>7</sup>. It is not the biggest or most harmful element that is being changed, just the one that potentially has had the worst media reputation recently.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on antibiotic and hormone sustainability, see Cervantes (2015), Morris et al. (2016), and Ronquillo et al. (2017).

A&W uses a mixture of green claims and overwhelmingly positive customer testimonials to help it continue on the path of least resistance. This is often a major quality of greenwashing, where a corporation makes one small change that appears large in advertising, but in reality it is basically a reframing or reinvention of the existing product. In making this change to hormone- and steroid-free beef, A&W has alienated Canadian farmers and is doing very little to shrink its carbon footprint. This is deceptive green capitalism at its most obvious. Beef is a problem for numerous other reasons beyond the potential effects of hormones and steroids on the human body. The other problems of fossil fuel consumption and land use have far greater effect on the earth and on the global population than humans ingesting hormones and steroids in a burger they perhaps only occasionally. However, the way this change is presented in such a familiar and entirely positive way causes consumers to feel as though they are making positive decisions instead of being critical of their decision to eat fast food in the first place.

Drawing on values surrounding simplicity, family, and great taste, and presenting the beef in such a positive way discourages critical thought. This mixture of public relations and advertising strategies helps keep enough of the old target market while attracting the young, especially by presenting A&W beef as a way for customers to find fulfillment without sacrifice of pleasure. A&W creates the illusion that people can live “harmoniously” (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 220) with nature without changing consumption practices, which helps the current economic system continue on the path of least resistance. However, ultimately A&W does not provide a real solution; rather it just shifts the problem with this initiative. The appearance of responsibility is a diversion from the fact that the company has not truly taken responsibility for its carbon footprint or ethical animal treatment, so responsibility still lies with consumers. Finally, as the costs of fast food and beef production are only shifted, not solved, it is virtually impossible for consumers to attain fulfillment by heeding this ad’s call to action to go buy a (not-so-) “better” burger.

## “Wow Those are Huge Chunks!”

The second case study in this thesis is a four-minute McDonald's ad from 2015. This ad details a documentary-style factory visit to the Cargill burger factory in Fresno, California by Grant Imahara, an electrical engineer best known for his role on *MythBusters* (IMDB, 2017). The camera and various people in the ad lead the viewer through a factory and tasting tour to display the McDonald's beef burger production process. This ad shows McDonald's and the Cargill factory as the pinnacle of segmented industrial production, often referred to as McDonaldization<sup>8</sup>, through images and descriptions of hundreds of beef patties passing the camera lens in a mere four minutes.

This display of speed and consistency fits with some of the popular themes in traditional fast food advertising, yet the transparency of process in this ad makes McDonald's appear as a trustworthy and progressive corporation. On closer analysis, however, this ad hides more than it shows, and these omissions highlight the strategies and machinations of McDonald's' self-interest and its less than compelling sense of ethical and green values.

As discussed in earlier chapters, many of the fast food advertisements that appear socially, environmentally or politically progressive aim to combat the growing negative connotations surrounding McDonaldization in the food industry, both in terms of employment roles and in terms of the cultural significance of food manufacturing and consumption (Frost & Laing, 2013). However, in this ad, McDonaldization appears to be something the company is proud of, as the extreme mechanization and systematization of the burger production chain is celebrated as a state-of-the-art method for producing reliable and pure burger patties. By framing the entire production process in this way, McDonald's distracts from the negative elements of this style of impersonal, morally questionable, and environmentally harmful production.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on McDonaldization, see Ritzer (2013) *The McDonaldization of Society*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition.

This ad is a sequel to the initial “Your Questions” campaign ads that enticed consumers with bright colours and a new website interface (McDonald’s Your Questions, 2017) because McDonald’s has clearly realized that a shift in consumer understanding and education has taken place. Rumours and stories of worms and wood pulp in burgers (Taylor, 2016; Harris, 2014) have caused McDonald’s to harbour negative publicity, apparently to the point that the company has felt it on the bottom line enough to dedicate its marketing budget to combatting these rumours. This ad could be seen as a partial redefinition (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, 221) of the McDonald’s brand image by adding transparency and clinical sterility to its repertoire of connotations (for instance, the air of mystery around McDonald’s’ Special Sauce – the mystery used to be fun and enticing, but is now a cause for alarm). Furthermore, by answering questions in such expensive and expansive detail, McDonald’s appears to be doing something to answer activist consumer calls for information. However, by giving viewers this intimate glimpse into the production process, McDonald’s actually implicates itself further in several ways, if not in terms of sanitary production and ingredient purity. McDonald’s shows it is even less connected to the animal and has very little respect for the environment in the way the people in the ad toss the meat around, failing to acknowledge the part of production that takes place prior to the beef arriving inside the sterile facility. The issues of transparency and greenwashing will be further analyzed in this chapter.

The ad is delivered in four major portions: Imahara introduces himself and his mission to the viewer; Imahara tours the Cargill factory production area; Imahara taste tests a patty in the Cargill factory; and Imahara and Crane go to McDonald’s to test an assembled Big Mac. The ad does begin with a quick sequence of clips of the McDonald’s logo, the Cargill logo, and some highlights from the ad, but these all occur in the first ten seconds (McDonald’s, 2015, 0:00). This quick-cut introduction followed by Imahara’s introduction (McDonald’s 2015, 0:11) is reminiscent of an investigative documentary that will give viewers the inside scoop. This is perhaps a good strategy to change the restless YouTube audience from ad-skippers to alert audience members so they stay tuned in for the entire ad. Keeping the imaging and messages almost entirely separated from the familiar shots of assembled burgers or restaurant interiors also gives the ad an air of investigative reporting. This is a unique packaging method for a public-relations-advertising hybrid.



Despite the non-traditional elements of the delivery of this ad, there is still one piece that has become an essential part of traditional fast food advertising: the customer testimonial and close up picture of the product. Imahara bites into a Big Mac (McDonald's, 2015, 3:46) in the final portion of the ad and grunts his surprised approval of the taste. Imahara prefaces his bite with the key persuasive piece of information that he has not had a Big Mac in 15 years (McDonald's, 2015, 3:43). This is a subtle form of persuasion that clinches all of the truthful appearances throughout the earlier portion of the ad.

Having this message of approval come from a person like Grant Imahara makes the entire ad even more persuasive. He is the perfect food communicator (Farre, et al., 2013) for this ad because he is educated, healthy-looking, and funny, making him a trustworthy spokesperson. His celebrity role is also one that inspires trust because he investigates and rigorously tests myths, rumours, and legends on television to find what, in MythBusters, is framed as "truth". When he begins his investigation of McDonald's beef with "I really don't know what to expect in there" (McDonald's, 2015, 0:33) Imahara gives the audience the impression of unbiased wonder and a search for truth, thus fostering trust from the audience. His celebrity status is unique and therefore the ad becomes more believable than it otherwise would be, which is essential for its success when larger issues such as farming and slaughter are ignored.

Another influential part of the delivery of the ad that builds trust is the array of titles and roles held by each employee of McDonalds and/or Cargill that flash across the screen beside each name. Rickette Collins is a "director" (McDonald's, 2015, 0:39) on the production side of McDonald's, and Jimmy Rendon is a "supervisor" (McDonald's, 2015, 0:51) for Cargill. Each of the people in the ad brings with them a certain level of authority stemming from their professional position, which lends trustworthiness to the ad.

Having the credentials of the people in the ad lend authority to the message is key when this is an advanced hybrid form of PR-advertising-damage control. The fact that Pink Slime, or "lean, finely textured beef" (McDonald's, 2015, 1:30) is mentioned colloquially, technically, and not entirely seriously means McDonald's understands that this term has in some substantial way entered the lexicon of the average YouTube audience member. Though mentioning disturbing concepts like Pink Slime and wood pulp

(McDonald's, 2015, 1:58) in burgers could turn customers off of McDonald's, it is likely that McDonald's used the original form of the "Your Questions" campaign as an exploitative form of market research, leading the company to realize this concept appeared reasonably frequently in questions from those who participated in the campaign. The humour with which this question and others from Imahara are treated work to "sanitize" (Wodak, et al., 2008, p. 19) and soften the rumours that have been floating around about McDonald's beef for years. The mixture of credentialed communicators and sanitized images and messages help the ad persuade the audience in the denial of these rumours, and also divert attention away from other serious problems with McDonald's beef.

The reasonably detailed tour of the Cargill factory, yet complete disregard for other elements of production in this ad can only exist and be believable in an economy where the food chain is long. The McDonald's food chain is so long, in fact, that it is unlikely that the average consumer could detail the steps that take place in the factory, let alone before the factory receives the cuts of meat. This ad does an excellent job of bombarding viewers with stimuli that would be new to many viewers prior to watching this ad. It seems extremely informative because it communicates some new information, though in reality, most burger factories probably look like this. However, because McDonald's is the first company to invite the viewer into the factory, it is easy to take a very small portion of this process and make it appear like the principal portion of the overall production process.

Because McDonald's has delivered its message of "only 100% beef" (McDonald's, 2015, 1:01) in such a pseudo-scientific and innovative way, it is easy for the audience to fall into the trap of believing this is how simple McDonald's burger production really is. As discussed in Chapters One and Two of this thesis, consumers often assume standards that are not truly enforced (Johnston & Wilk & Opel, 2010, p. 252), and can have blind spots for other issues that are ignored in an ad. The problem McDonald's tries to solve is the image problem it has encountered over the last few years that its burgers are filled with things other than beef (Taylor, 2016; Harris, 2014).

The factory tour begins when Rickette Collins says "We're really excited to tell you all about McDonald's beef today" (McDonald's, 2015, 0:39). This is a suspicious

statement given how little is shown about the production process in the ad. This ad solves the mystery-burger-recipe problem by confirming that McDonald's burgers are 100% real beef. However, the audience really sees very little about McDonald's beef and only a small part of the beef lifecycle is shown – only that which goes on in the factory. The beef was a cow at one point. It lived, ate, mooed, and was slaughtered. The viewer sees a sanitized and dehumanized version of beef that is only an ingredient. However, as a mere ingredient it is fantastic that it is all beef without lips, eyeballs or pink slime (McDonald's 2015, 1:01; 1:30; 1:58). In the sterilized and pristine white scenery of the ad, there is no light shed on the raising, feeding, and slaughter processes associated with the cows before they become chunks of meat; McDonald's does little to further the education and understanding of its customers through this ad.

However, the purpose of this ad is not an unbiased MythBusting education for consumers courtesy of McDonald's. This McDonald's ad might be understood as a form of damage control to combat the numerous rumours about what is really in the burgers. This hybrid PR-ad forms a narrative to introduce new ideas to viewers, not to give consumers an education on burger production, but to ultimately bring McDonald's back into even more popular demand with viewers. The storytelling tactics employed package the PR-damage control message and the high-quality-beef-promotional message together into a logical and welcoming journey where Imahara travels through the unknown territory of the Cargill factory. The factory tour functions like a narrative in that it takes the viewer through the process sequentially and in relatively non-technical terms. This narrative intermingles with personal life stories, especially for Crane and Imahara. Also, the way Rendon walks Imahara through step by step, vaguely explaining the process, is reassuring and informative for the viewer (McDonald's, 2015, 1:09, 1:39, 2:07, 2:21) as is the way Crane explains the taste testing process (McDonald's, 2015, 2:34).

Using narrative format enables McDonald's to input new values and big ideas like honesty and trustworthiness into its brand and its products. This method also helps form a logical hybrid of public relations and advertising where the company can gain a face through the employees in the ad and their limited life stories told through their words and job titles (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008). In a small way, this style of ad gives McDonald's a relatable personal identity and breaks through the faceless and intangible aura it has

gained from decades of McDonaldization of labour and production. By showing the most enthusiastic of employees, especially in Crane, McDonald's controls perspectives and takeaway messages for the audience (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016).

Controlling the perspectives and takeaway messages for the audience is extremely important for the success and growth of McDonald's, but is rather disadvantageous to the viewer and the environment. In the era of greener fast food choices and massive shifts away from the traditional burger-and-fries combo meal, McDonald's has been forced into a corner and it must defend its product to combat the scepticism and criticism. It is the phenomenon of all day breakfast, healthy salad options and hormone free beef that has forced McDonald's to deal with the rumours about its products. The awareness of health and the growing levels of activism through documentaries (i.e. *Supersize Me*, (Spurlock, 2004)) and food communicators have caused many consumers to question what they eat and search for more knowledge. The inquiring collective audience is, in a way, forcing McDonald's into a corner where it becomes necessary to react with ads like this. In a way McDonald's is also using the rest of its "Your Questions" campaign (McDonald's, 2017) as market research, exploiting the audience for creative content by letting the audience provide the ad ideas and content.

Traditionally, public relations require relationships with media, and advertising requires extensive market research through methods like surveys and focus groups. By building the "Your Questions" online interface and making that the focus of a series of ads, McDonald's has become a vertically integrated marketing giant. McDonald's has done away with the necessary give-and-take relationship that must exist for proper public relations to occur in a scenario like this one where the corporation must defend its product against scrutiny. Positive publicity through journalistic or word-of-mouth means are no longer a concern for McDonald's because the company is universally known and consumers flocked towards the exploitative online question interface of their own accord. Each person in the ad is on the McDonald's payroll directly or indirectly, forming a virtually closed circuit for burger promotion.

As is the nature of advertising, even when framed as an educational public relations message, there are large blind spots that McDonald's can shield from viewer

notice. This is problematic because, as Lahav and Zimand-Sheiner (2016) note, the lines between truth and embellishment become blurred. The blurring of lines is exaggerated with the employment of Imahara, the MythBuster, as host of the ad, because his normal role is one of empirical, theoretically unbiased experimentation and examination. Blurring the lines of facts and leaving blind spots in this supposedly informative ad is perpetuated by the fact that this ad is distributed on YouTube rather than through traditional media outlets. It is extraordinarily unlikely that a viewer will seek out contradictory information to this ad because their object in being on YouTube is to watch the video that is queued up to play after the ad. By separating the ad as much as possible from the outlets normally used by critics, McDonald's ensures its message will be disseminated with very little resistance.

Because this ad is sheltered from immediate criticism, an important but brief discussion of CSR is helpful. Though this ad promotes the good McDonald's is doing by not poisoning its customers or feeding them undefined non-beef ingredients, this ad is not trading a particular charitable or benevolent deed for positive favour. In this ad, McDonald's does not show its kindness through Ronald McDonald House as the company has in other ad campaigns, hoping to incur favour from the audience so it can continue doing business in a harmful manner. Instead, McDonald's performs a more subtle immaterial trade by giving viewers a glimpse of the inner workings of the production process in hopes of receiving more favourable reviews from sceptical consumer groups. This does fulfill the object of CSR campaigns by imbuing the brand with distantly related positive values (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011). It is also a subtle way of distracting from the increasingly mainstream animal rights and health-interested activism without stepping directly into the ring, helping McDonald's avoid becoming the principle target or alienating more passive consumers.

Though this ad is subtle in its method of engagement, it still performs the necessary management function of traditional PR that "deals with the relations between an organization and its audiences" (Petrovici, 2015, p. 52), the organization being, in this case, McDonald's of course. This ad directly tells the audience "these rumours are not true" through Imahara's questions and jokes and taste-testimonial. The truthful feeling of the ad throughout the four minutes slowly chips away at most of the rumours about

freshness, ingredients, and cleanliness, which most likely helps McDonald's accelerate sales and recover from any dips in brand loyalty<sup>9</sup>.

Because the ad is a YouTube paid ad, McDonald's can dictate when and where the ad appears, thus presenting its message to exactly the desired audience, which has of course been the key to successful advertising for decades (Hill, 1958 as quoted in Supa, 2015, p. 409). The way Imahara opens the ad with mention of the "Your Questions" campaign is one of the few more traditional managerial parts of this ad, because, just like any press release or media quote, he states why the piece of communication exists. This decreases room for interpretation, a strategy which is continued with very specific, narrowly defined messages throughout the remainder of the ad. Cutting down on this room for interpretation, for instance when Rendon specifically states that the patties are "100% beef" (McDonald's, 2015, 1:01), creates a more believable PSA-style or PR-style message that will "educate" viewers potentially better than a crafted, artistic ad.

By revealing what appears to be so much of the production process, McDonald's makes viewers feel privileged and educated. Schroder & McEachern (2005) suggest that framing a brand positively through enthusiastic employees and truth-telling can build the positive reputation of a brand both within and outside of the company, as well as within and outside of the existing customer base (p. 214). Making viewers feel educated by seeing the factory appeases current consumers and has the potential to hail new consumers who were turned off by rumours like those of pink slime. McDonald's nurtures trust through transparency. The way McDonald's shows real employees, not actors, firmly places this ad in the new hybrid category of more ethical and progressive hybrid ads; now PR-advertising has evolved to let the audience see some of the people behind the burgers. The latest campaign, released in 2016, has moved even further down this path and allows the audience to see the farmers behind the potatoes (McDonald's Canada (2016); McDonald's (2017b)).

<sup>9</sup> McDonald's (MCD) stock prices skyrocketed after this advertising campaign, more than recovering from the slower growth experienced in 2011-2012. For more information see Yahoo Finance (2017).

A brief analysis of the ad using the TARES framework (Baker & Martinson, 2001 as cited in Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 227) is useful in understanding how and why this McDonald's ad fails to treat consumers with respect in some ways while framing the brand and products as honest and pure. The first section of the framework is Truthfulness of the Message. McDonald's appears to pass this test without much difficulty; it could be quite true that this is how the burgers are made. However, the company only tells a sliver of the story of the life of beef, so this detracts from the ad's ability to truly let consumers understand the process that is framed as informative. The second portion of the analytical tool is Authenticity of the Persuader, which, again McDonald's mostly appears to fulfill. Starring a McDonald's employee, a Cargill employee and a MythBuster gives the ad a distinct level of implied authenticity. The detective and the two gracious key suspects are a great combination for crafting an authentic message. The third part of this tool is Respect for the Person Being Persuaded, in this case the general YouTube audience. The behind-the-scenes nature of the ad and the way the polite employees tour Imahara around the factory show great respect for Imahara and in turn for the audience. Having Imahara be the centre of attention in the ad, acting as the inquiring Sherlock, helps McDonald's appear to hold great respect for its audience's right to know.

The last two portions of the framework are where the ad becomes more problematic. The fourth portion of this framework is Equity of the Persuasive Appeal, which McDonald's partially fulfills and partially violates. Though a knowledge of pink slime and the Your Questions campaign would help certain audience members understand a few of the jokes and references Imahara makes, to understand the main points of the ad audience members require little to no specialized knowledge. Imahara and the employees explain every step of the tour very clearly, so specialized knowledge is not necessary to take away the main persuasive message that McDonald's is a truthful company that provides its customers with the best product in the safest possible way.

The final portion of the analytical system is Social Responsibility for the Common Good. This is where the ad truly fails. Social responsibility for the common good comes through as McDonald's caring about freshness and quality and product safety. Unfortunately, the way the beef is treated in the factory by Imahara, Collins and Rendon suggests very little respect for the entire process or for the ingredients. Framing the beef

merely as a burger or an inanimate ingredient harms the common good by creating blind spots in consumer conscience. Not once is the word “cow” used. By training the audience to see the beef as an ingredient rather than something once living, McDonald’s harms the earth and animals. Unsurprisingly, the company distracts viewers from all of the ethical and environmental problems that come from cattle farming and purposely turns a blind eye on the atrocities that occur on ranches and industrial feedlots and in slaughterhouses. By sterilizing the factory images, McDonald’s sterilizes the audience, banishing any and all horrific realities associated with factory farming and industrial level slaughter. If the audience is already inclined to assume a higher moral standard than truly exists (Johnston & Wilk & Opel, 2010), McDonald’s pushes the audience even further away from the truth by making everything look clean and calm and showing Imahara and the employees disregarding the fact that the meat was actually living once. This, in turn, perpetuates cycles of animal cruelty, massive production levels and unconscious overconsumption that contribute to making fast food fast.

There are numerous issues with an ad promoting a carefully curated half-truth as the whole truth, removed from nature and to some extent from society, as it perpetuates the cyclical nature of uninformed, convenience-fueled cheap consumption. It mostly does this because the majority of viewers do not possess the skills or knowledge to “separate out ‘what is said’ from ‘how it is said’” (Lister & Wells, 2006, p. 89). The clinical sterility of this ad functions in a similar way to a context-free press release or press conference message, as both distract from the less appetizing elements of production. It takes a certain level of informed critical viewing to understand that anything at all is missing from the ad, and even more analytical thinking to decipher what it is that is missing and the reason for the absence. In this ad the latter stages of production are highlighted in such a way as to suggest the factory constitutes the most important portions of the production for consumer health and quality of product. The ad does the job of public relations by managing viewer feelings towards the health and quality of McDonald’s burger patties by presenting production in a seemingly transparent way.

The transparent way in which McDonald’s presents its message of “pure beef” links its food with values of honesty and purity as well as with the positive focus on mechanization, science, and progress that often appear in North American media with



positive connotations. The values McDonald's builds between truth, quality, and a good burger are tenuous, but nevertheless clear. At the very least a viewer finishes watching the ad with a better feeling about the health and safety of McDonald's beef. These values become more believable and more easily absorbed by viewers because of the enthusiasm imbued in the message by Rendon, Collins and Crane. Generally emotions like this are only available for corporations to exploit in the advertising format, not the public relations format. The three employees not only show their enthusiasm through their facial expressions, but also through implied feelings of responsibility for their work. For instance, they each use collaborative ownership words like "we" and "our" as they describe the production process to Imahara, as opposed to referring to the beef and the factory itself in inanimate, objective terms. For instance, they say "our beef" instead of "the beef" (McDonald's, 2015, 1:31). This makes the factory and tasting tour feel not only more personal and special (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 12), but also makes McDonald's less of a mysterious corporate entity that is larger than everyday restaurant level interactions.

Beyond the enthusiasm in the employee's voices and expressions, this ad pulls viewers in and distracts from the omitted messages through visual aids as well. This is much more typical of advertising than traditional public relations because visual accompaniment is difficult to produce on a mass scale without bordering on propagandistic institutional messaging. Explaining the manufacturing and testing process to an audience through words alone would not paint the same picture that this ad does. By adding the visual cues from the factory tour and putting faces on the manufacturing through Collins and Rendon, and particularly the fun, youthful, and relatable Crane, the process becomes more real and alive to the audience. The overwhelming positivity in this ad that almost romanticizes the grinding, shaping and freezing processes to create a world that is only tangentially related to the realities of burger production, making this an extremely deceptive ad (Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 230).

Creating this clean version of the production process is essential for McDonald's to maintain its reputation as the pinnacle of the fast food corporate pyramid as the company is faced with constant cries from activist groups with real complaints, often wishing to gain recognition as serious change agents. As discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Two, consumers often assume a minimum standard exists for animal

welfare and other aspects of food production (McEachern & Schroder, 2002, as quoted in McEachern & Schroder, 2005, p. 221). Activism often points out where these assumed standards are wrong, causing corporations to go on defense. The dissonance caused by the defense and the negative reputation is the gap where consumer beliefs can be changed or swayed. This ad, with the appearance of honesty, functions to “win a sort of “stamp of approval”” (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016, p. 399) from the public, so these activist groups will move their efforts elsewhere, to corporations who are not on defense yet. With this ad, McDonald’s fills this gap and alters audience perception of McDonald’s standards in order to save the company’s reputation.

In the cleaned-up version of McDonald’s production presented in this ad, McDonald’s employs its accrued cultural capital by assuming the audience has some knowledge of the product and refrains from showing it until the very end. The time gained from not having to promote the assembled burger product in this four-minute ad is instead dedicated to promoting ideas and values surrounding positive connotations of consistency and quality of ingredients in a more intimate and transparent way. Furthermore, McDonald’s utilizes accrued cultural capital of McDonaldization and a smooth and well-oiled machine of burger production in this ad. McDonald’s, like A&W, draws on traditional ideas to promote something that seems innovative without truly being so. It is not truly very innovative to show consumers they are not being poisoned and are eating quality beef instead of pink slime. It is innovative to frame it as a factory tour that suggests unadulterated truth, similar to a PR announcement. After all, it has been found that 61% of fast food purchasers are motivated by ingredient quality claims (Schroder & McEachern, 2005), a fact on which this ad certainly attempts to capitalize. This is displayed in several ways, both directly and indirectly in the ad through comments like “100% beef trimmings” from Rendon (McDonald’s, 2015, 1:01) and humorous exclamations like “wow these are huge chunks!” from Imahara (McDonald’s, 2015, 1:14). Framing these messages in multiple ways and capitalizing on previous brand knowledge from the audience helps the ad continue to straddle the line between PR and advertising.

In terms of using this in the traditional role of brand communication McDonald’s definitely shows it still delivers reliability and consistency of product through this ad, yet the new value it integrates is quality. Schroder & McEachern (2005) state that traditionally,

“convenience, cheapness, consistency and reliability” (p. 220) have been the common topics of advertising in the fast food industry, and messages related to quality have been defensive and limited to the field of PR. Quality, for a few decades, has not always been part of the McDonald’s repertoire of values, as there have been numerous public rumours about strange things like worms and wood pulp being manufactured into the product (Taylor, 2016; Harris, 2014). These rumours have led to an increasing need for consumer-facing quality-related messaging that diverts attention, and this ad succeeds in applying these new qualities.

These consumer-facing quality messages work on the level of informal logic and emotional appeal, which allows viewers to make value-product connections with very little effort. In this ad there are fewer overt emotional appeals (i.e. no French-fry-grabbing baby (A&W, 2015, 0:25)), yet humour works in the same way as the more dramatic appeals in the other ads. For instance, Imahara’s comments like “these are huge chunks” (McDonald’s, 2015, 1:14) help guide the consumer to make value-product connections between “not trimmings” and “burger” or between “McDonald’s undersells itself when it says “trimmings” because they are real cuts of meat” and the burgers themselves. These easily-attained value-product connections pave the way for other earnest appeals. The way Imahara seems sceptical at the beginning but is persuaded at the end is a form of informal logic. His awe feels truthful and also somewhat contagious.

The combination of cultural capital, informal logical appeal, persuasive humour and transparency make up this hybrid of advertising and public relations and shows McDonald’s is able to manifest and legitimize its power and control through this ad (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 10 & p. 259). Though the main messages in the ad are that McDonald’s is not poisoning its consumers and its factory is state-of-the-art and pristine, it appears to be informative via elaborate distraction techniques. The sterile, scientific feeling combined with humour can lead to a “metaphorical slippage” (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 68) that distracts viewers from the true lack of information presented in this ad. There are so many issues that have appeared in the “Your Questions” campaign previously that no single ad could possibly address all of them. However, this ad does work to make it appear McDonald’s is addressing a larger chunk of the beef-related and processing-related problems than it truly is. This ad legitimizes McDonald’s top tier power status by being

entirely inadequate in truly answering the question it claims to answer, but still managing to be an elaborate enough distraction that it is believable.

As this ad falls under both categories of PR and advertising, it also falls under the broader umbrella of greenwashing promotional techniques. Though this is not so much a specifically green ad as it is an ethical ad, it falls under the umbrella of greenwashing because it makes the product look more pure than it really is. An ad commits greenwashing when it gives “the impression that a product or an activity of a company has a less detrimental effect on the environment or the climate” (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 169) than it truly does. Ekstrand and Nilsson (2011) expand this definition to include ethical claims, or “the use of statements that give the impression that the product or production process has been made under generally recognised and accepted factors such as...protection of nature [and] health...in the context of corporate social responsibility” (p. 169). McDonald’s does appear to use 100% beef, but there are numerous USDA and FDA regulations (USDA, 2005, p. 10) prohibiting the presence of lips and eyeballs in the meat anyway, so this is a bare minimum standard.

Showing how sanitary and pure the process is suggests clinical health and sterile practices, which acts as a distraction from any less appetizing elements of burger production. McDonald’s also leverages its corporate and academic link to the process of McDonaldization as the company promotes this sterile and virtually clinical process of production. The company gives the impression that its burgers are pure and its process is transparent because it uses a MythBuster to show the world the production process. This gives the audience the idea that, if not good, the burger production process at least holds no cause for alarm. Unfortunately, the audience is not shown the conditions existing in the farming and slaughter processes, which are horrific, thus making this ad a dishonest and diverting promotional material that commits greenwashing in spades.

The main reason this ad commits greenwashing is in the fact that the audience has very little clue or awareness that Imahara and the others in the ad are handling cow parts. The meat chunks are not referred to as cows, nor do the chunks of beef look like they once belonged to a cow. Sut Jhally (2000) addresses this principle in detail when he discusses how industrial society has “emptied out” (para. 11) the meaning behind the

materials and products consumers purchase and use and consume. He states it is the job of advertising to “refill” (para. 11) the vacuum left behind. This ad from McDonald’s capitalizes on the fact that, over decades, all meaning and significance have been emptied out of the industrial food production process, especially in the fast food industry. The blindness to where the chunks of meat came from in this ad is a perfect example of this emptying that has been occurring slowly for decades. The food chain has become so long and specialized that the average consumer could not hope to begin to name the various steps in cattle farming and burger production. By the end of this ad the audience sees meaning restored to the McDonald’s burger through the people in the ad who care, and all of the hands that touch it to make it into the familiar Big Mac.

As time for cooking has diminished, so has time to research food production processes. With this, food values have also eroded, as they become tied to money rather than cultural relationships and traditional values. The longer the commercial food chains grow, the harder and more time consuming it is for consumers to find out where food comes from. Jhally (2000) suggests the average consumer simply lacks the time to do enough research to make rational purchasing decisions, therefore consumers turn to any easily-consumable justification for purchase, which often comes in the form of ads like this one from McDonald’s. It has become so uncommon that an individual takes the time to find out the origin of their food, that this McDonald’s ad is somewhat refreshing upon first viewing, because it masquerades as an informative, unbiased look into how a burger is made.

McDonald’s enlightens viewers slightly by showing the factory where the meat is ground and the burgers are formed and frozen, but there is still so much consumers are in the dark about, yet are unwilling to prioritize the necessary but laborious research to enlighten themselves. Tarkiainen and Sundqvist (2009), unlike Jhally (2000), blame the consumer for this instead of societal structures, but the outcome is the same: the food chain has become too long and food-related values no longer take precedent over monetary values and convenience.

This ad clearly caters to these values of low involvement, as it draws connections between activist ideas that sparked the need to know for the “Your Questions” campaign,

and emotional responses such as laughter. The images and commentary regarding the progress-driven and clinically sterile production process helps McDonald's add features to the low-involvement product that is the burger (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009, p. 845), beefing up the process to give the illusion of a fulfilling answer to the questions consumers have asked.

The unbiased-insider-glance tone of the ad helps McDonald's draw connections between its burgers and "truth". McDonald's builds this entire ad to tell the audience it treats its customers well by producing its burgers with the highest quality standards. This is a different side of the coin than usually appears in ads that commit greenwashing, but it is equally important, and possibly more persuasive and fitting for a company like McDonald's. In terms of responsibility, McDonald's finds a middle ground between the arguments of Jhally (2000) and Tarkiainen & Sundqvist (2009) by assuming some responsibility in talking about the quality of its beef and in showing the consumer how pure its production process is, while also staying entirely within the bounds of the system by keeping silent as the grave about animal treatment. Really, the consumer only ever sees something they could buy at the butcher or grocery store throughout the entire ad. This limited view helps McDonald's stay within the normal bounds of consumer conceptions of the manufacturing process. The audience is partly to blame for only asking self-interested questions of the Your Questions campaign, yet are also victims of having the wool pulled even thicker over their eyes because the omitted parts in the ad are omitted in most or all of fast food industry-to-public communications.

In this discussion of greenwashing, it is important to note the activism targeting McDonald's over recent decades that sparked the "Your Questions" campaign. Activism towards McDonald's has often been high profile, yet it becomes diluted when it reaches mass popular awareness. Most consumers are not true activists, as easy routes to achieving environmental goals are often taken, such as buying fast food that is advertised as green instead of helping initiatives that aim to change legislation around animal treatment. Therefore it is difficult to force any positive call to action through to a large enough portion of the consumer body to make any noticeable difference to corporate food production. It has been noted by certain scholars (O'Rourke, 2011) that this constant tug of war of difficult, educated activism and convenient, indulgent corporate food have

created an interesting hybrid that is the “sovereign citizen consumer” (p. 15). Though definitions vary as to what levels of environmental interest and activism goes on with this newly-labelled body of consumers, it is clear that voting with one’s dollar is the main strategy promoted to achieve change. Yet, the food chain is still long, thus hindering consumers from making educated votes, hence the inevitable perpetuation of mysterious and harmful corporate food chains.

In this ad, McDonald’s only real statement about a commitment to any value is its commitment to having real beef in its burgers. The company gives what Ekstrand & Nilsson (2011) point out as “vague and ambiguous statements about commitment to values” (p. 172) as the McDonald’s employees in the ad talk about all-beef but not the grade of this beef. McDonald’s has found the perfect balance between telling its viewers what they want to hear and also showing these viewers some evidence of that message. It becomes possible for McDonald’s to get away with this when consumers are unable or unwilling to undertake their own research of the food chain due to economic situation or education level or simply lack of time. It is also possible that this ad discourages critical thinking and research because it masquerades as a breath of fresh, honest air in a marketplace otherwise saturated with bombastic and even less educational or values-based fast food advertising.

Additionally, there are a variety of opinions held in scholarly analyses about how various portions of an audience may be affected by an ad of this style. The appearance of transparency in this ad combined with the relatively thin veneer of facts hiding the lack of information cause some difficulty in analysing the effects of this ad. As Schroder & McEachern (2005) suggest, “customers don’t believe what you tell them. They believe what you do” (p. 215). Even if a small portion of the audience fit into this sceptical category, this ad could still be perceived as truthful with the tour of the real factory where the burgers are made. It is far from inconceivable for the average sceptical consumer to see this factory tour as a concrete action that addresses the mystery that has traditionally surrounded McDonald’s production. This trade of minimal corporate transparency for maximal consumer loyalty bolsters the structural preferences of the current economic system for the corporation over the environment or consumer wellbeing.

In essence, the cleanliness of the factory and acceptability of the messages would disappear the moment the focus shifts outside of the factory to the slaughterhouse or the farm. McDonald's keeps the viewer in the metaphorical petting zoo of the ecosystem of its business, complete with friendly faces and icebreaker-style jokes that are only offensive to those truly paying attention, like the to-go joke Imahara makes while handling chunks of beef (McDonald's, 2015, 1:19). McDonald's is clearly doing this to retain customers and keep them from flocking to chains like A&W who advertise a "better burger", though that A&W claim is also questionable. It appears McDonald's is trying to differentiate its burger production process in a market where consumers are surrounded by identical products. McDonald's perpetuates the simulation of variety through the false and empty values it imbues through this "transparent" advertising.

The appearance of transparency in this ad works as a distraction for the lack of concrete claims and commitments to real change. McDonald's addresses the blanket idea that its burgers are all beef, not pink slime or other cow parts, but ignores many of the other important questions that have been asked about production practices and farming practices. McDonald's appearance of transparency in this ad suggests overall commitment to good values while in fact failing to address what should be the biggest issue in corporate food production: that "our earth cannot sustain these continued levels of growth and...the massive amount of waste produced as a result of our excessive consumption" (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 211). Of course it is essential for McDonald's bottom line to attempt to grow its business and attract newer customers in key target markets, but it becomes deceiving and unethical for the company to frame its current ethically questionable, ecologically unsustainable business model and mode of production as transparent and straightforward and harmless. This omission is one of the principal reasons this ad falls into the category of greenwashing.

Beyond the greenwashing issues that can be pointed out regarding production, McDonald's also commits greenwashing by ignoring the greater issue of food overconsumption. As mentioned previously, McDonald's employees are still trained to upsell product sizes, which is problematic in the midst of obesity epidemics and global food waste issues. In this ad, it is not the Big Mac Grant Imahara consumes at the end of the ad that is supersized, but the overall burger production process. The factory is a



cavernous labyrinth that churns out hundreds of burgers in front of the camera. It is logical that McDonald's should emphasize this super-sized portion of its business, which links closely to ideas of Big Agra and feed lots and mass slaughter of cows. However, this focus on big and efficient does keep the image of McDonald's consistent in this ad, leading to less confusion or incongruence in the viewer's mind.

Keeping images consistent with McDonald's' traditional brand image while also appearing to be honest and transparent helps viewers make the jump from "interested viewer" to "customer" slightly faster and more easily. As Jhally (2000) notes, viewers are almost constantly on the brink of purchase in capitalist society, and all they look for is a small nudge of justification. McDonald's provides that nudge by appearing to be transparent and showing the consumer how pure and high quality its factory and burgers are. The unique properties of this transparency and promotion of individualist consumption values give McDonald's a unique stance in the green and ethical battle that is taking place in the fast food arena. The homey American accents of Rendon and Collins, and the way Collins and Crane look certainly give McDonald's the All-American aura that has served the fast food industry well over the last half century. This welcoming familiarity in combination with the tropes of progress and control form the perfect storm of purchase justification for the average North American viewer.

This justification can be reduced to a promise of fulfillment and light-hearted enjoyment to be gained upon purchase of a burger. Though Imahara, Collins, and Rendon fail to acknowledge the cows that died to give their bodies to fast food, the fact that consumers see the pre-ground beef trumps most of the shocking or disturbing elements of production, replacing it with promises of a wholesome, all-beef patty. Keeping consumers in the dark like this is unproductive for the greater progress of the transparent, green, ethical goals that are necessarily held in popular consciousness for the health of the earth and future generations. Of course, as a corporation focused on relatively short term growth, these are not major concerns.

Along with the ethical elements of the greenwashing that takes place in this ad, this ad ignores economic and social aspects of burger production. Education surrounding economic and social relationships is imperative to provide viewers with a true

understanding of the food chain and the McDonald's production process. McDonald's does not aid in building this understanding, however, instead reproducing traditional power relations of corporate American fast food while appearing to bring transparency and knowledge to its audience for this ad. Showing clean, white, futuristic mechanization and sterility in the factory suggests the futuristic power of science and technology have been applied to food. In a way, it makes the food less food-like. The fast food industry has always been a class-bridging industry by being one of the cornerstones of American culture and tempting rich people with no time and poor people with no money to eat there. This ad segregates McDonald's' corporate power from the mass of the population by being an awe-inspiring manufacturer of something as essential to North America as the burger. The "problem" in this ad within the "Your Questions" campaign is that participants were often on the same wavelength and asked individually-focused questions, such as how the burgers affect their digestive systems due to the presence of pink slime. The "solution" provided by McDonald's after collecting data from the very exploitative "Your Questions" marketing campaign is that the factory is clean, bright, with happy workers and that all the rumours are untrue.

For McDonald's to create an ad that is appealing for curious and green-minded consumers is unsurprising, as the chief concern for the company should be competing with fast food corporations for a larger percentage of the fast food market. The way this ad frames Imahara's interaction with the company appears new and innovative and truthful, as though McDonald's wants to build a closer relationship with its consumers by letting them past the red tape that usually exists between consumer and pre-restaurant production. However this new appearance is not a tangible change, only an affirmation that McDonald's abides by food production and health laws. Ekstrand & Nilsson (2011) note that to be advertised as green or innovative, the advertised elements must not be "a common characteristic of the other equivalent products on the market" (p. 169). McDonald's fails massively under this requirement, as "all beef patties" is a somewhat regulated statement (USDA, 2005, p. 10). Granted, McDonald's is answering questions about this, but the company is still only promoting what should be minimum standards.

This distraction is a form of pacification that helps the audience feel as though McDonald's listens to them, particularly when Imahara mentions that "McDonald's knows

you have a lot of questions about their food” (McDonald’s, 2015, 0:13). McDonald’s delivers its answer with smiles and a carefully curated optimistic tone from Collins and Crane. Seeing happy and proud employees passes this feeling on to viewers. Even Imahara’s apprehension disappears as soon as he dons his smock and hard hat and enters Rendon and Collins’ domain. By picturing only positive emotions from every person on camera during the Cargill factory tour, McDonald’s gives the viewer fewer gaps to stop and think about negative connotations associated with its burgers (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 172). This could be classified as “promotion orientation” (Sengupta & Zhou, 2007, p. 298) with a focus on positive production processes and an insensitivity to negative ones such as animal raising conditions. This strategy expressly exists to divert viewer attention from critical thinking and questions that might harm the bottom line of the company (Sengupta & Zhou, 2007).

Though there are numerous elements that viewers are distracted from thinking about throughout this four-minute ad, the most apparent are food safety, as shown through cleanliness and sterility, and truth in ingredient lists. The entire process of burger production, all the way to the test kitchen and final shot in the McDonald’s restaurant are unfailingly sterile. The camera shows high levels of automation with very few whole humans in the production process. This is McDonaldization at its finest: everything is automated and the individual jobs look simple and repetitive, and also sterile (McDonald’s, 2015, 1:39; 1:43; 1:54). Even the scientific testing kitchen is sterile and looks like an institutional kitchen, without windows or colour (McDonald’s, 2015, 2:30). When Imahara and Crane go to the McDonald’s this theme continues. Though there are a few people in the background milling around the order counter, there is not a moment where the production process appears to not be tightly regulated. There is even a machine shown squirting Big Mac sauce on a bun (McDonald’s, 2015, 3:19), which adds to the impersonal, yet sterile elements of the ad. The automation and sterility fit with a more clinical view of health, yet still carry the idea of purity, which is a green idea. In a way McDonald’s seems to be promoting ethical treatment of customers by showing that it is not poisoning its customers. If anything though, with all the rumours of lips and eyeballs and unsanitary elements that are often picked on in popular media, this ad does a satisfactory job of delivering a sterile picture of the entire burger process.

The hidden trade-off in this ad is that the production process prior to the Cargill factory is treated vaguely and as an irrelevant part of what makes a McDonald's burger (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 209). This vagueness gets past consumers' critical instincts because fast food is an industry that thrives on individualism and modular production and consumption chains. Even this magnanimous transparency shown by McDonald's only addresses or acknowledges the self-interested questions of what goes into a beef burger. Fast food restaurants thrive on families that all want something different, thus ruling out cooking a family meal at home. McDonald's thrives on individuals and families who have no time or no cooking skill but require a square meal. Many of these customers are primarily interested in how the food affects their wallet and their digestive system rather than what happens beyond. This makes it relatively easy for McDonald's to slide a translucent curtain in front of the elephant in the room and pretend the real issues of production do not exist.

Though this McDonald's ad caters to a large portion of the company's probable consumer base, it commits greenwashing when it disguises this self-defence ad as an objectively positive and scientifically regulated answer to consumer questions. McDonald's steers consumers further from positive change by catering to the questions that come from conceptions of food firmly rooted in traditional consumption-based ideas of society. To slow environmental degradation, the entire production process must be acknowledged long before the beef chunks reach the Cargill factory, and the size of the chunks and copious quantities of burgers must no longer be chief concerns (O'Rourke, 2011). To promote systemic changes, excessive consumption must be curbed, and this ad fails to promote ideas of this nature because they do not ultimately align with McDonald's' principal objective of contributing to its bottom line.

This ad might fulfill McDonald's' key objectives by increasing consumption levels because it may show those on the fence about McDonald's burgers that they are in fact real beef, not wood pulp or pink slime. However, on both the production and business sides of the burger, exploitative practices abound. Not only are the earth and the animals being exploited in the production process, but the audience is being exploited to the detriment of the environment and broader consumer education. McDonald's is using consumers' own individualistic concerns and fears to persuade an even broader audience

that they should buy a Big Mac. If even one more audience member falls victim to “presupposition” (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 212) and buys a Big Mac because they now feel it is a less evil product than they did prior to viewing the ad, then McDonald’s has gone further down the path of exploitation of consumers and the environment.

Because consumers often only view products in their present state (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 223), not in any form previous to the end product, this ad does not have far to push consumers to only see the burgers within the bounds of production that McDonald’s opens for public viewing in this ad. The most notable or probable change created by this ad is that rumours about McDonald’s production and burger contents may wane for the near future. McDonald’s appears to shoulder the responsibility of making burgers with all beef, a pride which is exemplified and amplified by several carefully selected employees for this advertisement. By appearing to quell rumours without disturbing the status quo of consumer relationships to fast food, McDonald’s sustains the brand image in the marketplace and builds demand for its products. It achieves the main goal of advertising in a capitalist society of improving brand image and bottom line, while disguising how the company still treats the environment as an externality (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 209).

## The Little Farmer Flips Out

The ad under scrutiny for the third and final case study in this thesis is from the “Cultivate a Better Future” campaign from Chipotle Mexican Grill (Chipotle). This ad, “Back to the Start” is dramatically different from A&W’s “Better Beef” campaign ad and from the McDonald’s “Your Questions” campaign ad in a variety of ways. Chipotle makes fewer direct claims, yet is strongly suggestive of changes that are too good to be true. This ad goes even further back in the production process by situating the viewer in the middle of a farm that provides Chipotle with ingredients. The ad also makes no direct, quotable claims about farming improvements. This seems good for viewers in that they are not being told lies, and this seems good for Chipotle for not making claims to which they cannot live up. The catch is that this ad is animated and narrated by a song rather than words, leaving the link between ad and reality in tenuous limbo.

This ad fixes on the issue of industrialization in the farming system in North America. Through animated emotions and the accompaniment of Willie Nelson’s song “The Scientist” (2002), Chipotle suggests to the viewer that industrialization in farming happened gradually, yet now farmers know this is not a sustainable or ethical way to farm. The Little Farmer in this story has this epiphany and takes action to reverse industrialization on his farm and go “Back to the Start”. This idyllic pastoral framing of the entire story is dramatically different from the scenes in either the A&W or McDonald’s ads studied here, because this ad admits the existence of nature, if only filtered through computer generated images. The amount of emotion and satisfying end result of the ad suggest a greater level of fulfillment than the other two ads, yet also mask how unrealistic it is for a farmer to literally flip a switch (Chipotle, 2013, 1:36) to return to more ethical and sustainable farming methods. This ad, though possibly only an unrealistic ideal, does provide positive awareness of how important the farming process is to the food on our plates, perhaps moving viewer consciousness towards awareness of the farming system.

Chipotle is slightly different in terms of the style of restaurant and fast food. Generally people are more likely to sit down or to take away via walk-in than they are to drive through. There is enough of a customizable element to the food that for the most part one goes in to order and chooses toppings and sauces, like at Subway. There are

more knife-and-fork-friendly options at Chipotle than at A&W or McDonald's too. As Chipotle is slightly different than traditional fast food, it is less confusing for viewers to adjust to this unique advertisement than it would be if McDonald's or A&W employed this strategy. The emotions in this ad also fit with the recent growth in activism in mainstream media, which is less incongruent with Chipotle than these same emotions would be if coming from an ad for either of the other two companies studied in this thesis. Unfortunately, because of this ad's similarities to activist media, it could be seen as deceptive, as it still comes from a multinational corporation ultimately concerned with its bottom line.

In creating a virtually mute ad, except for some perfectly placed lines in Willie Nelson's song, Chipotle opens the ad for more flexibility in viewer interpretation than if they were to definitively tell viewers what the company means. Forcing some creativity from the viewer to follow along and understand the storytelling through actions, displayed emotions, and music give the ad a more collaborative and inclusive tone. Despite the room for interpretation, there are several distinct ideas promoted in the ad, one of which is a tone of nostalgia. Brands like A&W and McDonald's have become filled with nostalgia over the decades of their operation. Chipotle is a newer company (Chipotle, 2017) and therefore must force this feeling into their ads. Through showing family ties and somewhat common romantic notions of how farming should be, Chipotle pulls on these somewhat universally understood North American ideas. The way the story is told through the life of one farmer and his family also makes the ad more relatable. Unfortunately, because the ad is animated, farming practices are still sanitized and much of the food chain is still a mystery to viewers after watching this ad.

The fact that the food communication duties are shared between the little farmer and Willie Nelson's lyrics make all communication in this ad symbolic rather than explicitly stated. For some viewers, the discussion of health, the environment, and ethical treatment of animals would be very real after watching this ad, but for other less aware viewers these topics and issues may be less apparent. When ethical and environmental ideas are forced into food decision-making, food becomes less individual and more political (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 164). For those viewers who understand the way the little farmer and Willie Nelson's lyrics communicate about the farming process Chipotle uses, the included

emotional appeals are difficult to ignore. This makes it relatively difficult for viewers to acknowledge the shortcomings of this food communication and make any decision other than to eat at Chipotle.

Limiting choice in the manner of this ad is excellent for Chipotle to bring more customers through their restaurant doors, but is harmful to overall viewer understanding of their lack of power to make choices about what they consume. According to Farre, et al., (2013) the fact that seemingly positive fast food options like Chipotle exist “should not be seen as making the individual freer than earlier epochs. [Consumers] are still dependent on structures and institutions that organize our everyday lives.” (p. 164) There are more choices of where to eat, but there are not more options of how to eat in terms of ethical and environmental impacts of food purchasing and consumption. One still must fight zoning laws to raise chickens, and one still must submit to the real estate market and live in a balcony-less apartment and rely on the waiting list to get a plot in the community garden. Chipotle, though, through the emotional communication of the farmer and the beautiful computer-generated illustrations of his thoughts and feelings, does appear to be creating more choice for consumers.

In appearing to give consumers a choice in how to eat and select their food, Chipotle is taking a different tack than most fast food companies, giving them a distinct competitive edge. Through the emotions of the farmer and the song, Chipotle endows their brand with comforting values, while serving up new conceptual elements to tempt customers into their restaurants. This is good for Chipotle’s bottom line, but debatable for the sustainability of fast food. Because the food chain is currently so long (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 173), it is not surprising that only an animated glimpse of the farming process is possible in this ad. Furthermore, because this animation is so approachable, the distance from real life is less apparent on first viewing. Of course every viewer will notice the ad is an animation, but many will not make the intellectual jump to the fact that this animation may have no bearing on real farming practices whatsoever (Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 230). Regardless of the reality behind this ad, however, Chipotle’s animation does act almost like a children’s book meant to help the unaware viewer acknowledge that problems of animal treatment and sustainability exist in the fast food system, and of course that Chipotle is the champion of change.



The fact that this ad can seem so acceptable is a clue that the “underlying values” of the fast food consumer audience have changed (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 221). Whether Chipotle appeared to answer a demand or whether this hunger for change was already brewing in the fast food consumer market in the 1990’s when Chipotle was founded is difficult to determine within the bounds of this thesis, but it is clear that the success of this ad directly relates to a thirst for “health, quality and socially responsible initiatives” (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 221). These are values traditionally associated with socioeconomic status groups who have time and money to make choices about what they eat. Chipotle is making itself an accessible foothold for aspirational purchasers who want to gain the status symbol of choosing to make greener food choices. This ad, therefore, acts as a message to consumers that by purchasing Chipotle, one joins the social class of those who can afford the luxury of choice in their food purchasing.

The way this ad communicates its message, as well as the style of message, is different than in the McDonald’s or A&W ads studied in this thesis. The previous two case studies looked at ads that fell between the categories of advertising and public relations, creating a hybrid of what Bernays defined as public relations, and traditional definitions of advertising (Supa 2015, p. 409). This ad, with fewer overt managerial qualities (Petrovici, 2015), fits more closely with the broader definitions from other scholars ((Newsom et al., 2003; Grunig & Hunt, 1984, all as quoted in Petrovici, 2015; Smith & Zook, 2011 and Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994; all as quoted in Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016) defining public relations as an umbrella term for any form of paid publicity, including traditional advertising, as described in detail in Chapter Two of this thesis. This ad exists as a guide towards actions that will apparently harm the earth less, in this case consuming Chipotle (Franzosi, 2008, p. xxxiv). Chipotle builds connections between pollution, animal mistreatment, and industrial farming and disassociates Chipotle from these practices (Franzosi, 2008). If one were to distill the main messages of the ad into a traditional public relations statement, it would not be difficult to communicate, but given the lack of concrete claims in the ad, it is difficult to categorize this ad as something that entirely replaces traditional PR that might take place at, for instance, a press conference. Chipotle has managed to represent a PR message for their brand in a way that is more accessible to popular consciousness.

Because this ad appears on YouTube, it is subject to similar distribution and viewing critiques as the McDonald's ad studied in Chapter Four of this thesis. YouTube can provide algorithmic data to determine when and where is best to play the ad, and before which videos. This diminishes the need for relationship-based publicity (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016, p. 398) and only requires Chipotle to be able to pay for the creative input and YouTube ad space. This ad is accessible to a large audience because it is simple, and the story of the Little Farmer can capture the minds of those of all ages and most demographics. The narrative order of the ad enriches the overall message to become more memorable and to increase necessary viewer engagement and subsequently consumer engagement.

The format of this ad allows more consumers to create value-product connections because the song gives necessary emotional guidance, and the farmer's body language illustrates these emotions in a universally accessible manner. A slumped, sad man taking his hat off to scratch his head while trudging through the snow (Chipotle 2013, 1:13) is almost always symbolic of someone who feels defeated and discouraged with his state of affairs. The advertising format allows for greater access to messages by conveying ideas like this than a scripted public relations directive. The universally understandable elements of this ad suggest that Chipotle realizes the growing interest in all food markets to improve relationships and awareness of food and food production and increase sustainability. This ad, despite being animated, helps viewers feel educated in the negative aspects of industrial farming and helps them feel fulfilled in choosing Chipotle. By making an ad as visually and emotionally engaging and inspiring as this one, Chipotle has surpassed the amount of impact that more traditional public relations or "managerial" forms of public messaging would have (Lahav & Zimand-Sheiner, 2016).

The overarching issue with this ad is that it is a partly coded message that may not in fact communicate as much real information as appears on first viewing. This ad is rich in emotion and narrative, but is poor in concrete claims. This runs the risk of deceiving less critical viewers into believing not only that Chipotle has flipped the switch (Chipotle, 2013, 1:36) on their farming methods to something more ethical, but also that it truly is as easy as flipping switches like the one the farmer flips. The life cycle of the farmer and his family, as well as the ease with which he rewinds his farming practices are of course meant

to be simplifications and metaphors of what Chipotle appears to be claiming to do. However, metaphors can mislead the unsuspecting viewer, which is a problem when ethical beliefs are exploited for commercial gain. Chipotle directly links purchasing decisions of its product to improved farming, which may or may not be the case, as it is outside the scope of this thesis, but is certainly not as easy as this ad makes it look (Petrovici, 2015).

Whether or not the metaphorical “going back to the start” (Chipotle, 2013, 1:26) is actually happening in the farms that service Chipotle, this ad makes no concrete claims to back up the animation. Chipotle also does not advertise any change to what the consumer experiences as the end product, only that they have improved their process. Creating this ethical connotation to Chipotle’s brand is most likely a result of what O’Rourke (2011) found to be demographic-bridging, nonexclusive increasing interest from consumers in the production process that occurs before food reaches the plate. Adding metaphors of idyllic, wholesome farming to Chipotle’s brand does build a “better brand” as perceived by consumers and viewers (Petrovici, 2015, p. 55).

Adding in ethical elements and an awareness of farming to Chipotle’s brand is excellent for the corporate landscape in some ways, but it does complicate the relationship between consumers and the brand. No longer is Chipotle merely a tasty means to an end. Formerly, unrelated ideas such as fun or family values were added into brand identities, yet the brands were still simple. Now by adding in metaphors of ethical pig raising and less industrial farming, consumers are encouraged to be more mindful of their food choices. This is good in the long run, but brings responsibility into the consumer’s decision without proper education to support this decision.

It could be argued that if Chipotle is providing a more ethical product, it should not matter why consumers purchase it or if they understand why it is a better product. However, to create sustainable change, Chipotle must give viewers concrete reasons and real education about the changes the company has made to its farming practices and why those changes are important. The animation functions as a distraction from the messy elements of both ethical and unethical farming practices and is yet another layer in the information chain and production chain of Chipotle’s food. This animation, by omitting

reality, acts in a similar way as the aggressive sterilization in the McDonald's-Cargill factory discussed in Chapter Four. The animated element in this Chipotle advertisement puts even more spin on the message than would a damage-control public relations message at a press conference.

Chipotle's farming process is still shrouded in mystery, as this animation only shows an ideal farming process, and shows it in a way that is impossible in real life. The omission of concrete claims, even if Chipotle is ensuring the most natural farming standards, leaves the brand open to scepticism from more critical viewers. This ad seems to be attempting to cover too large a variety of issues, from antibiotics in animals, factory farming, enclosure of large scale farmland, mechanization of farming, and long distance transportation of food. Without the concrete claims or certifications to back up all of these implied changes to the Chipotle farming network, viewers are left believing that all of these changes have been made. It is extremely unlikely that Chipotle has been able to abide by all of these greener farming methods, and there is virtually nothing in the media about positive initiatives from Chipotle in recent years to corroborate this. This ad shows what could be too good to be true. However, whether this ad, in all its metaphorical glory, is a reaction to undercurrents of curiosity and calls for greener corporate food chains (Johnston & Wilk & Opel, 2010), or whether Chipotle is attempting to build nostalgia into the brand without truly changing much of the production process, this ad shows the stability of the structural relationships of power at play in the fast food industry.

Denotatively, this ad seems positive. Chipotle is advertising how it has flipped a switch (Chipotle, 2013, 1:36) to return to greener pastures (literally) of farming methods. On the surface, this is not a difficult concept, and, as McEachern & Schroder (2005) have found, viewers assume a "minimum acceptable (statutory) standard" (p. 221), especially in animal welfare. However, the number and types of methods that appear to have changed in this Chipotle ad are questionable in that they appear so simple<sup>10</sup>. It is becoming clearer that once a farm industrializes, it is virtually impossible to go "back to the start" (Chipotle, 2013, 1:26) and deindustrialize because land size and yields and

<sup>10</sup> For detailed analysis of the difficulty of changing the farming system, see Patel, 2007; Pollan (2006); Rodale Institute (2015)

labourer availability and cost are no longer proportional. To return to these more natural farming methods takes decades and careful economic planning.

By animating and speeding up this process, Chipotle dilutes the reality of changes, thus harming the ability for the ad to educate viewers about food production and help them make real food choices. Chipotle presents a fantasy of simplicity. Simplicity of ideas, simplicity of ethics, simplicity of farming, and simplicity of fulfillment for the farmer and the consumer (Farre, et al., 2013). It takes years for pesticides to filter out of soils, and at least a full generation of pigs to breed out effects of antibiotics and hormones, if it can even be done. The legal processes associated with switching years of farming engineered seeds to more naturally reproducing seeds is astronomically costly. The fastest way for Chipotle to do this would be to switch the farms from which they source their food, which is not shown in this ad, as the same Little Farmer guides the viewer through the changes throughout the ad. These are issues with the denotative meaning of the ad, and even when taken metaphorically, as discussed above, this ad is misleading.

Despite the issues with what this ad shows and how it presents change, it is an effective ad. It combines many public relations messages, such as antibiotic free pigs, free range pigs, decreased pollution, and free range naturally nourished chickens into an impactful two minutes. It is engaging and makes viewers feel good about consuming Chipotle products. However, the reason for this effectiveness, as discussed above, is not because the real meaning of the ad is true or positive. The reason this ad is effective is because it is original in its presentation. Creativity has become the competitive currency that allows corporations to stimulate the audience enough to hold their attention and make them engage with the brand (Petrovici, 2015).

In the case of this Chipotle ad, not only are the message and animation engaging, but so is the underlying message of status and fulfillment. Amongst fast food corporations, this new category of greener and more ethical initiatives presented in advertising gives viewers a sense that by choosing Chipotle, they are joining the echelon of society with discerning taste (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008). This is fulfilling in itself for many viewers, who traditionally have been excluded from this group for educational, economic, or locational reasons. Chipotle is not promoting itself as a gourmet brand in this ad, but it is

showing itself to be a wholesome and kind company. The company is also showing how American it is. Chipotle was founded by Steve Eells, a Californian American, born and raised, with no Mexican heritage whatsoever. In this ad Chipotle plays on its American heritage rather than aligning with the ethnicity of its food. This combination of wholesomeness and Americanism frame Chipotle as a brand linked to nostalgic North American culture which also raises the status of the brand.

The suggestion of fulfillment from the aspirational elements applied to the brand through this ad distract from the difference of intentions and reality. Chipotle has the intention of becoming more ethical, and consumers have the intention of fulfilling their ethical and status needs by shopping at Chipotle, but neither of these concepts are the same as making real changes to the mass industrial food complex or to the environment in any tangible way. Linking Chipotle's brand image to nature in this way causes disconnection between real change and intentions without concrete action to back them up (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008). Chipotle has romanticized farming and has sanitized both industrial farming and the difficulty with which change can come about.

By showing the little farmer make the switch to more classical and familiar farming methods, Chipotle demystifies the production process of its food, even if only in animation. The trope of the traditional farm goes back several generations in North America and is familiar through stories and various media even for younger generations that have never set foot on a working farm. Reframing Chipotle's Little Farmer turning the clock back to the start on his farm draws on the wealth of farming cultural references, making Chipotle seem like a more relatable and natural fit with the average North American life (Petrovici, 2015).

Chipotle is also only a hair's breadth away from making a political statement about all fast food industrial farming practices through this animation and the cultural references on which the ad draws. Farre et al., (2013) and Johnston, Wilk & Opel (2010) state that food has become a battleground for political and social negotiation and has become the "thin end" (Johnston, Wilk & Opel, 2010, p. 251) of environmental activism. Chipotle sidles right up to many of the economic, political, and social debates surrounding industrial farming and animal rights with this ad. Through the way the farmer looks increasingly

unhappy and the season changes to winter as everything turns grey (Chipotle, 2013, 0:41), Chipotle shows how far fast food production has gone from nature. During the farmer's stroke of inspiration before the crescendo in Willie Nelson's song (2002), Chipotle appears to be making a statement about how horrible and unnatural food production is in the North American economy. By softening this message but still including it, Chipotle appeals to the passive awareness held in popular culture and activist-lite media. Unfortunately, meat is still a significant part of the menu, so the company uses the treatment of pigs, which is a recognizable reference to this issue for much of the population (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 213), to exploit this issue for their own commercial gain in making the brand look environmentally conscious and positive.

To make itself relatable and less nebulous, Chipotle personifies the brand through the Little Farmer and makes difficult concepts, like factory farming, accessible to most levels of the audience. This is instead of using collaborative language (Wodak & Meyer, 2008) as A&W and McDonald's did in the advertisements studied in Chapters Three and Four. The Little Farmer's presence adds authenticity and relatability. The narrative of his life through four seasons directly links Chipotle to "personal life stories" (Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p. 63) that make the ad relatable to a greater portion of viewers. Of course the majority of viewers are most likely not farmers, nor do they live in farming communities, but they will be able to identify with the story of the farmer and with his emotions, thus lending authenticity and honesty to Chipotle.

The classic character of the farmer is usually some form of "honest john" stereotype, so giving the viewers a face, even an animated one, to latch onto is essential to lend a trustworthy air that will help the audience engage with the ad content. This is a form of informal logic that can cause viewers to evaluate the ad subjectively and emotionally, which can be both good and bad. It can be good because viewers will relate to and engage exponentially more with what they see on screen, yet it is also a problem because it encourages individualistic thinking, which is exactly what put industrial farming and fast food into the mess it is in now.

It is important for Chipotle to show emotions through the farmer because this decreases the connotations that viewers could potentially glean from the ad otherwise.

According to Nicolosi & Korthals (2008) when scientific images are displayed in food advertising, viewers find food advertising more appealing. Pairing the farmer's frustration and sadness with images of factories and chemicals decisively pits Chipotle's stance against that of McDonald's' positive framing of industrialized progress. Both make process-related claims in their ads, but for extremely different reasons. Rejecting mechanization and industrialization when it alienates people from their food and the environment appears to be Chipotle's strategy for cultivating authenticity.

Another way to evaluate this authenticity and quality of Chipotle's ad is to briefly apply TARES (Baker & Martinson, 2001, as cited in Lee & Nguyen, 2013, p. 227). Unlike McDonald's and A&W, Chipotle makes no concrete claims in this ad, so in a literal sense the company is not being dishonest or failing on the "truthfulness of the message" scale. Of course, Chipotle is implying numerous changes in this ad, so as there are no concrete changes stated by this ad, the company might be deceiving certain portions of the audience, therefore dramatically failing the "Truthfulness of the message" measure. The ad appears quite authentic and uses the Little Farmer as an aid in appearing more authentic, so in this sense Chipotle succeeds in the "Authenticity of the Persuader" measure. Still, because this is an animated advertisement, the company is moving away from authentic reality and fails in this measure too. Chipotle does appear to have a higher level of "respect for the viewer" as it acknowledges what many viewers have called for in the last number of years, which is more ethical production practices and animal treatment practices. If what Chipotle displays in this ad is true, then it succeeds in this category of TARES. In terms of "Equity of the Persuasive Appeal" Chipotle definitely measures up. By having a narrative that is animated and easily accessible to audiences of all ages and languages, this is an incredibly equitable ad. Finally, for "Social Responsibility for the Common Good" Chipotle may or may not succeed. The company appears to care deeply about the environmental and ethical elements of farming, making it very socially responsible, yet, like with the first two evaluative categories in this list, it is not making concrete claims or showing real results, thus making it impossible to determine, to the average viewer surfing YouTube, whether the company is truly contributing to the common good rather than just to its own bottom line. Chipotle appears to be purposely shouldering responsibility for the environmental and ethical elements of farming shown in the ad, yet only partially committing to communicating these changes to the public. This could be



where creativity gets in the way of real change, which could stem from the fact that industrial capitalist structures of the farming and food production economy are difficult to entirely subvert for the common good without going out of business.

Though this ad is closer to a traditional advertisement than to traditional public relations, it is still a form of the new style of green-aware fast food advertising that is appearing throughout the industry. For the most part, this ad is less controversial than the A&W ad and the McDonald's ads studied earlier in this thesis, though it still harbours several issues, some of which have been discussed above. The principal issue, as mentioned earlier, is that there are no concrete claims to accompany the beautiful animations and music in this ad. Though the images and main messages are reasonably clear and raise awareness of issues like ethical treatment of animals in factory farms, without concrete accountability, this ad can have the opposite effect it should. The "metaphorical slippage" coined by Nicolosi & Korthals (2008) as discussed numerous times earlier in this thesis causes consumers and viewers of green ads like this one to assume a certain amount of real, truthful information is being communicated when it is not. Pictures of progress take the place of real progress. When viewers see everything being solved for them, they run the risk of feeling fulfilled without acting in a way that creates real positive impact. The way this ad frames change in terms of emotions rather than regulations and economics is as distracting and appeasing as even the best public relations messages, even though this is only a partial solution.

According to definitions discussed in previous chapters, Chipotle commits various styles of greenwashing in this ad. The majority of the greenwashing Chipotle performs stems from the fact that the ad is animated with no verbal language to back up the implied changes in the narrative, causing the majority of implied claims to be dramatically simplified and unexplained. In particular, Chipotle commits the greenwashing "sins" of "vagueness" and "no proof" (Terrachoice, 2007, 2009, 2010, as cited in Budinsky & Bryant, 2013, p. 209). Because popular culture is calling for green ads suggests Chipotle is merely giving its audience what they ask for, but through the previously discussed dialectical relationship that exists between culture and structures of society (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 7) the fast food industry's response to calls for greener menus has diluted real green progress.

Without concrete claims and evidence to back up the “Cultivate a better future” ad, Chipotle could be showing itself to be greener than it really is (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011). Though Ekstrand & Nilsson (2011) specify “the use of statements” (p. 169) in their definition of greenwashing, Chipotle’s use of music, and animated or caricatured emotion seems to be a statement with similar impact to a verbal statement in changing beliefs, therefore this ad still qualifies as greenwashing.

Despite Chipotle clearly committing greenwashing when one puts the ad under scrutiny, on the surface this promotional animation does appear to communicate real information. The motivational parts of Willie Nelson’s song (2002), as well as the happy ending to this ad frame the subject matter of the narrative in a positive light, leaving the viewer feeling warm towards Chipotle. This makes the ad communicate green and ethical values rather than concrete ideas, which is better than nothing. Guiding consumers to greener values eventually could spark more real activism and less passive consumerism. However, until more precise information is included with this values-based education of viewers, this ad and others like it will still commit greenwashing as it appeases consumers enough so consumers do not take real action because they either feel fulfilled or they do not understand that more is needed (Johnston, 2007).

In showing the farmer cleaning up his farm to “cultivate a better future” for his son, the ad implicitly suggests that Chipotle is working for the future not for now. Perhaps this ad is meant to show Chipotle’s goals rather than current practices, however, the absence of commentary to corroborate this is problematic. Even if this is a goal that Chipotle is on the road to achieving, the company fails to show how long and difficult the journey truly is. Given evidence that consumers assume higher ethical standards than are in place (Schroder & McEachern, 2005, p. 221), this is a problem as viewers are still being deceived. This ad becomes quite acceptable at first glance despite this glaring hole in Chipotle’s premise, because the food production chain has become so long, as discussed in Chapter Four, that most audience members have very little idea how much must change to create certified green farms to source ingredients from.

As Chipotle uses creative presentation of values as the currency for this ad to sell this green farming idea to consumers, it is clear that Sut Jhally’s (2000) theory that food

now has been emptied of all meaning in North America is correct. Chipotle “refills” (para. 11) this empty space with family values, as seen through the farmer standing beside his wife as she holds their baby at the beginning of the ad, and how the farmer and his wife hold hands at the end of the ad (Chipotle, 2013, 1:55). Chipotle adds meaning back into its brand by superimposing the farmer’s exaggerated emotions, seasonal imagery and crescendos in the accompanying song (Chipotle, 2013, 0:23; 1:28) over top of the real issue of farming practices. The way the sun shines on the grassy fields and the tire swing hangs off a tree in the background at the beginning and end of the ad (Chipotle, 2013, 0:10; 1:55), when the farmer is farming in the most non-industrial way also bring values of home, childhood, love, security, and many of the other wholesome feelings that come together to create a nostalgic tone. These portions of the ad assign positive meaning of a “better world” to the brand even before the final frame of the ad where the sign specifically states this (Chipotle, 2013, 2:11). There is absolutely nothing to link Chipotle to the realities of family happiness or to the positive changes to farming methods because there is nothing concrete to anchor the ad, thus placing it firmly in the category of greenwashing.

However, the average audience member most likely would not read into this ad nearly so much if they were awaiting their video to play on YouTube after the ad finishes, though they might see that many wholesome values can be attained by visiting Chipotle. According to Tarkianen & Sundqvist (2009) because fast food is a “low involvement” (p. 845) product category, consumers tend not to research the company or the product, let alone the agricultural practices of farms that provide a restaurant with ingredients. This ad pulls on family values and nostalgic imagery to disguise itself as a breath of fresh honest air, when really it is a smoke screen for minimal action and short term fulfillment. By building a strong link through informal logic and emotional connections between Chipotle as a brand and traditional North American pastoral values, Chipotle animates and narrates its way to a simulation of a higher level of involvement available to consumers through purchase (Tarkianen & Sundqvist, 2009, p. 845). This certainly falls into the category of greenwashing by the use of vague claims and distraction techniques, as well as promises of fulfillment in exchange for purchase.

Despite the vagueness of the claims made in this ad, Chipotle does do one thing well. The only words visible on screen are those on the wooden sign at the end of the ad. They read “Cultivate a better world” (Chipotle, 2013, 2:07). This is subtle and simple, which fits with the theme of the ad. This sentence holds promises for those who shop at Chipotle by gently telling viewers that Chipotle is the answer to the environmental and ethical woes shown earlier in the ad. Because mass produced fast food is unlikely to ever be the best answer to the environmental and ethical issues caused by decades of factory farming, this promise perhaps ignores some of the negative elements of Chipotle’s industry. However, this simple sentence does do one thing well: it uses the word “better”. This word choice is both deceiving and the salvation of the ad.

Chipotle presents a promotion orientation (Sengupta & Zhou, 2007, p. 298) in this ad by suggesting there is a simple solution to fix the litany of problems shown. There is no way to flip a switch (Chipotle, 2013, 1:36) to undo the decades of damage to prime farm land, but by finishing the ad with the word “better” (Chipotle, 2013, 2:07) Chipotle takes a step back from full responsibility. Finishing the ad with a different sentence, like “Cultivate a green world” or “Cultivate sustainably” would be digging Chipotle into a deeper greenwashing hole. By using the word “better” Chipotle suggests “it is not a perfect world, but a somewhat improved world” (Ferraro, 1999 as cited in Nicolosi & Korthals, 2008, p64) that will become more sustainable than it currently is. This pledge to make the world slightly greener and serving food customers can feel good about purchasing (Johnston, 2007) is promising, especially as there are no specific negative outcomes that have come to light from Chipotle’s farming network. Unfortunately, this single word is not enough of a disclaimer to balance the unattainable environmental and ethical claims in this ad, and it is also not showing any concrete changes to Chipotle’s source farms, so this partial green step is not nearly as honest and positive as it first appears (Ekstrand & Nilsson, 2011, p. 169). Therefore, this is still a problematic advertisement.

Even if the word “better” (Chipotle, 2013, 2:07) saves Chipotle’s ad slightly from the level of deception that is committed by the other two advertisements studied here, Chipotle still must increase its accountability to its message to be accountable. Because Chipotle chooses to assign nostalgic meaning to its ad through animation and song instead of through less coded, direct communication, the company reinvents the image of

the product, without changing the product itself. The company has assigned positive familial values and vaguely green values to its brand but its menus have changed minimally. This ad may create a deeper connection between viewers and Chipotle as a brand (Budinsky & Bryant, 2013), but it does not create deeper connections or understandings of how the ingredients are farmed or how farming can become more sustainable or ethical. Consumers still Tweet about their confusion over finding bay leaves in their wraps (@ChipotleTweets, 2017), which is a far cry from consumers complaining about how the pigs are treated prior to slaughter. This is not surprising, as Budinsky & Bryant (2013) have found that consumers see food in front of them and do not think about “the effects of extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal” (p. 223). The ad may bring the consumer into Chipotle, and Chipotle may indeed be sourcing ingredients from more sustainable farms, but this ad is not enough to link consumers to a real understanding of sustainable farming, or at least not enough for them to actively make lifestyle changes in the long term.

The new values Chipotle adds to their brand through this ad certainly could bring more customers through restaurant doors. Chrysochou (2010) has found that brand image is often taken as a “proxy for product-related characteristics” (p. 70), which would suggest Chipotle customers may take the green and ethical values of the ad, however thin these are, and apply them to the menu, thus seeing Chipotle products as sustainable and fulfilling. The fact that this small brand-related justification for purchase is effective shows how desperately consumers seek fulfillment and inclusion. As mentioned in previous chapters, food is no longer an individual act, but a political and social statement. In order to feel included, consumers must attempt to consume more consciously, especially when surrounded by positive values promoted by brands like Chipotle. Numerous scholars have found links between green values, however tenuous, and purchasing decisions (Magnusson et al., 2001; Wandel & Bugge, 1997; Makatouni, 2002; Schifferstein & Oude Ophuis, 1998; Chrysochou & Krystallis, 2005; Torjusen et al., 2001, all as cited in Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009, p. 857), so it is deceptive for Chipotle to present green values without real justification.

Perhaps the suggestion of an easy route to fulfillment with the suggestion of sustainability without preaching or factual overload is exactly what consumers desire. The

cyclical relationship shared by culture and commercialization (Farre, et al., 2013, p. 174) means that once a particular cultural trend or belief has been commercialized, it becomes easier to access for certain population groups. In the case of the “Back to the Start” campaign from Chipotle, viewers are given an opportunity to reinvent themselves through their food choice into greener and more wholesome versions of themselves by purchasing Chipotle for lunch.

Like A&W, Chipotle has simplified the environmental realities associated with its production process, making it appeal to a greater audience. According to scholars like Johnston (2007) and Jhally (2000), consumers search for fulfillment to fill voids left in cultural life by retreats of the state that pass control of cultural life to corporations. This unbalanced power structure perpetuates the cycle of commercialization in cultural life, opening the door for virtually any type of fulfilling cultural value to become appealing. As a result, cultural life has narrowed to what corporations can appear to provide, limiting consumer fulfillment options to thinly veiled corporate advertising disguised as wholesome values, like this Chipotle ad.

In the case of this Chipotle advertisement, the lack of concrete claims of change is the most problematic aspect within the ad, but the fact that Chipotle is still promoting consumption is a bigger problem for the environment. Perhaps Chipotle is sourcing their ingredients from more sustainable farms with higher ethical standards, but the company is still serving products that promote overconsumption. The portion sizes at Chipotle are enormous, more than any one person should eat for most meals. The company also still serves meat. By ignoring these factors in this ad, these issues are diminished almost to the point of invisibility. As Ekstrand & Nilsson (2011) point out, giving “the impressions that they do not break with other ethical or green values” (p. 172) is definitively a greenwashing tactic that could harm real change in consumer habits. By naturalizing consumption and encouraging complacency in consumers, Chipotle creates a “value universe” (Chrysochou, 2010, p. 71) that brings temporary fulfillment to consumers with very little apparent benefit to the environment.

If, however Chipotle has indeed moved all ingredient sourcing to sustainable farms, perhaps the company is making a positive difference to ethical standards in

farming. O'Rourke (2011) notes that "making necessary (and sometimes unnecessary) product choices each day can be a critical entry point to deeper engagement with global labor and environmental issues and to further action" (p. 40). On this line of thought, even the unsupported green value suggestions in this Chipotle advertisement may create an inviting gateway for consumers to pass through to deeper environmental values. Unfortunately, there is no logical next step recommended by Chipotle, but at the very least consumers are being shown these green values should be adopted. If nothing else, this ad provides solace or justification to consumers and possibly even to those with ethical beliefs working for or with Chipotle to combat the guilt of decades of environmental degradation as a result of intensive farming practices (Johnston, 2007, p. 262; Jhally, 2000).

Regrettably, this only makes sense for those who find it difficult to act on green beliefs or for those who are unaware of issues with mass industrial farming. This is a YouTube advertisement that plays before other videos for which viewers are actually searching. Many viewers would skip the ad, if that option is provided by YouTube, and those for whom the Skip button does not appear may not be the group that this ad will make a difference to. Having time to watch YouTube videos, whether for educational purposes or entertainment purposes suggests a certain socioeconomic class. The viewer most likely possesses a computer or at least computer literacy skills, which means they may be educated and they most likely have time to spend doing this outside of work. This is the class of people who are already likely to possess some awareness of green and ethical values, whether they act on them or not. Chipotle is merely reminding these consumers of these values, making Chipotle merely appear like a nice option for a meal rather than a champion for urgent change. This is not enough change for Chipotle to truly "Cultivate a better future" of farming. Broader systemic changes and education are required (O'Rourke, 2011).

Despite Chipotle being guilty of employing greenwashing tactics in this advertisement, perhaps not all of the blame should fall on a single company's shoulders. Much of what is promoted today, even by activists, is citizen consumption and voting with one's dollar, as explained in Chapters One and Two. These appear to be two of the most popular options available to the general public through media and popular activism, most

likely because they are the easiest styles of environmental awareness for any average consumer, busy with their daily life, to participate in without affecting the power structures inherent in capitalist economies.

Cheretis & Mujtaba (2014) put it clearly: “without customers there is no chance of survival” (p. 9). For Chipotle, continuous consumption must be promoted, or the company will fail to exist. Because questioning consumption as a whole must be removed from the bargaining table, the issue green aware corporations may promote solutions for is how consumers should buy. Chipotle, through the lifecycle of the Little Farmer, show their audience that consuming Chipotle is synonymous with farmers who are proud of their way of life and work for their families to “cultivate a better future” without industrial agriculture and farming. Budinsky & Bryant (2013) challenge ads like this by claiming it focuses on the “lesser of two evils” (p. 208) because it does not subvert dominant power structures. However, corporations like Chipotle must act with individual corporate survival interests in mind, or risk perishing.

Chipotle offers a surface level compromise to the tense relationship between citizenship and consumption, by offering a path of least resistance to achieve green values and consumer fulfillment. As the Little Farmer feels fulfilled for producing slower food for Chipotle, the consumer can feel fulfilled by buying what Chipotle prepares from the farmer’s delivery. This is a form of individualized downloading of responsibility that exists in the entire fast food industry in North America, in that consumers must choose between numerous bad or mediocre options then convince themselves they are fulfilling their values. This individualization has made the “vote-with-your-dollar” strategy mainstream because it fits with all major power structures in North American society. The extensive number of choices in the fast food market that face consumers at every meal make educated and consistent voting virtually impossible, and this ad from Chipotle only adds to the noise.

Consumers have become the crucial wedge between activism and corporate profits, so it is virtually impossible for corporations to entirely ignore calls for greener options (Johnston, 2007, p. 244). However, just because the Little Farmer is happy with how he has cultivated a better future by the end of the ad, as shown by the satisfied way



in which he watches the white van drive away (Chipotle, 2013, 1:49), the environment is still being harmed by consumption of fast food every day. This part-way solution of choosing the least harmful fast food option by choosing Chipotle still harms the environment by assuming consumers must consume fast food at all. The lack of concrete measures taken in this ad give consumers something positive on which to spend their votes, while hiding the larger structural issues with Chipotle's business and industry. This is not how educated voting should take place in democracies. As the economy becomes increasingly free, especially with U.S. President Trump pulling the US out of various international climate and trade partnerships, consumption is becoming less regulated and more confusing to the average consumer to make a difference.

Despite the fact that this ad is inadequate in terms of providing a real green consumption choice to consumers or providing longer term fulfillment to those who purchase Chipotle, this ad does do one thing well. Chipotle brings farming into the spotlight for one fleeting moment, placing much of the unethical factory farming processes in front of viewers, even if in an unrealistic animation. For the very narrow range of options available to Chipotle to keep it a profitable corporation, and for the very narrow range of options for consumers, this ad communicates values well. By linking such a vast variety of values into one package with farming as the object, Chipotle encourages thought, even if only in a tiny way. Chipotle acknowledges that the food chain is long and could be shortened, potentially helping consumers understand what ends up on their plate through awareness of processes that go on before it reaches the plate, even if consumers are not fully equipped to understand this at this point. As Katz (2003, as cited in Johnston, 2007) states, food has become "a politicized, gendered, and globalized terrain" (p. 239) where more people than ever contribute to every meal on every plate. Chipotle acknowledges one of these people, who has traditionally been hidden from consumer view. Perhaps the next step for Chipotle will be acting on the shrunken food chain that is implied in this ad, as the Little Farmer places his crate of eggs into the small Chipotle branded van (Chipotle, 2013, 1:48), and making concrete claims about it.

## Conclusion

In undertaking this study, I hoped to explore several significant questions pertaining to the quality and effectiveness of green or ethical fast food advertising. These include whether the three ads in this study actually promote real change that can be sustained; whether corporations are truly taking responsibility for making the fast food industry more ethical, or if responsibility still falls to consumers; and whether consumers can achieve higher or more permanent levels of fulfillment from purchasing the food promoted in this set of advertisements. Each of the ads chosen for this study promotes a different element of fast food corporations, from farming to consumption, so studying each ad chosen from A&W, McDonald's and Chipotle Mexican Grill as a group allows for broader understanding of the dialectical relationship between fast food corporations, consumer perceptions and mediatized sustainability initiatives. Applying communications theories of advertising, public relations, and greenwashing as frames for evaluation has led to a variety of conclusions regarding such questions, but also about the apparent interdependence that exists between fast food corporations, consumers, and the media.

### **Can these companies incite change in the level of interest and commitment to bigger issues like the environment, animal rights, and transparency?**

The fact that the fast food industry has brought differing styles of advertising for ethical and sustainable products to most socioeconomic levels of the consumer market suggests an even more widespread "democratization of the idea of commodity choice" (Johnston, 2007, p. 242) in the food industry. The perception of democratization is central to the growth of the capitalist economy and essential for consumerism to prevail in an era where growing citizen awareness of sustainable consumption necessarily suggests curbing consumption. Unfortunately, encouraging consumption of green products as a way to live sustainably is simplistic and demotivates further green behaviour in consumers. Green promotion also discourages collective education on sustainable values, as the simplification of sustainable consumption through green advertising gives consumers an easy and attainable way to navigate the complexities of environmental action. Though greater debates over the ethicality of voluntary business exchange between consumers

and food corporations<sup>11</sup> fall outside of the scope of this thesis, the results of the analysis in this document suggest these three advertisements are deceptive and unethical.

Much of the green advertising and environmental or ethical initiatives that have appeared in recent years are corporate responses to increased popular culture and activist focus on the environment, health, and ethical treatment of animals (Johnston, 2007, p. 240). This corporate response extends beyond the food industry even to corporations in the pharmaceutical and cosmetics industries. For instance, Monsanto renamed a portion of itself as “Pharmacia” (Johnston, 2007, p. 240) to dissociate from ecologically unsustainable connotations commonly circulated in public media. According to Wodak (2008) the release of advertisements like the three covered in this thesis is suggestive of traditional power systems at play in North American society. Companies like McDonald’s can fill viewers with awe over images of the cavernous and efficient labyrinth that is the Cargill burger factory such that viewers come away with positive feelings towards the quality and purity of McDonald’s burgers as opposed to concern over the unsustainable volumes of beef sliding along the conveyor belts. The visual contradictions in the McDonald’s ad would fall under Wodak’s (2008) notion of systemic and constitutive characteristics of society being harnessed for corporate gain (p. 9). The way McDonald’s removes unethical connotations from its product while promoting excessive production and consumption appears new and innovative and positive, but in reality merely strengthens systems of capitalist exchange and ingrained consumption habits. The increased commodification of food in the McDonald’s ad still treats the environment like an externality and promotes consumption without true understanding of the production process.

Though there are many alternative strategies promoted for solving consumption-related environmental degradation and unethical animal treatment in the food industry, most of these are difficult, slow, or require ideological shifts in the consumer public. Slower food corporations, such as the grocery store chain Whole Foods, appear as a mecca for food worship and promotes education while decreasing societal reliance on factory

<sup>11</sup> For more perspectives on the ethicality of voluntary exchange in the food industry, see Mackey (2011)

farming and industrial agriculture, yet are still found to be problematic. Whole Foods is criticized for promoting maximum “commodity choice while minimizing the citizen’s ecological responsibilities to restrain consumption, reduce needs, and simply buy less” (Johnston, 2007, p. 259). To be the true citizen consumer that is promoted by many ethical corporations, consumers would have to “analyze all aspects of their life and change their behavior in dozens and dozens of ways” (Lehner, 2013, p. 50). Changing so many elements of life is both difficult and unrealistic. By promoting minimal changes to consumption habits, McDonald’s, A&W, and Chipotle all commandeer the goals of green food movements and dilute them to the point of annihilation. This makes it difficult for true environmental change-oriented organizations like community gardens and food coops to attract larger audiences (Johnston, 2007, p. 260), thus harming overall impulses for change in North American communities.

To create quality, sustained change, all three of the companies under scrutiny in this document would need to promote lower consumption levels, which contradicts their own goals. Ads of the style of the A&W, McDonald’s and Chipotle campaigns studied here have altered consumer perspectives on environmental and ethical consumption so much that consumers underestimate how much change is needed in daily life to make a real impact on the environment (Lehner, 2013, p.50; Johnston, 2007, p. 260). O’Rourke goes so far as to say “individual acts of ethical consumption need to be experienced by the consumers as only one facet of engagement with environmental issues, not as a substitute” (O’Rourke, 2011, p. 26; *my italics*). This indeed contradicts the messages of all three advertisements in this thesis, as each one promotes slight improvements to the individual decision to consume fast food.

One increasingly popular buzz word associated with true change is “conscious” (Wang, 2013, p.61). “Conscious capitalism” and “conscious consumption” are now being promoted as the corporate and citizen bookends of the consumption-based environmental movement. Conscious capitalism, or CC, is “fundamentally different from Corporate Social Responsibility” (Wang, 2013, p. 61) in that conscious capitalism promotes ethical business management through employee wellbeing, close supplier relationships and education of consumers. Corporate Social Responsibility typically trades promotion of a good deed or charitable spending to mitigate less positive impacts and practices of a

business (Wang, 2013). Studies of CC businesses suggest the angelic way in which these businesses behave promotes higher profit margins and more sustained growth over time (Wang 2013, p. 65). These findings certainly make sense as a motivating factor for companies like McDonald's, Chipotle, and A&W to build positive environmental connotations into these brands and products. However, as all three of the initiatives shown in each ad are without concrete claims or support, and in some cases are flawed in the way they are enacted or framed, each of these fast food companies only manages a weak imitation of conscious capitalism without real change.

It makes sense that each of these fast food companies would try to harness the trend of change in some way without harming their traditional brand image in any major way. Each of these companies has been successful over decades with a consistent branding message (Chrysochou, 2010, p. 76) so it would not be profitable or believable for any of these corporations to entirely rebrand. For instance, if A&W were to take its small green step of "Hormone and Steroid free beef" to a level that would make a real difference, such as continuing relationships with Canadian farmers, A&W's production levels would fall, harming the corporation's bottom line, thus frustrating customers who were unable to get their "better beef" burger" subsequently switching fast food burger joints. This might help them become a more conscious business, but it might also drive them into nonexistence.

On the other hand, this strategy of promoting an improved process without noticeable effect to the end product for each of these three companies allows each corporation to slowly bring greener connotations to each brand. It has been found that consumers take brand images as a substitute or an extension of the product (Chrysochou, 2010, p. 70), thus helping each brand slowly shed any harmful or unethical connotations it may have gained over decades of operation. After all, brand recognition is what brings customers into fast food restaurants, as labelling and packaging for walk-by grocery store consumers is not available. Thus, building a better brand, when green and ethical connotations are perceived as better, does grow these three companies' bottom lines, while unfortunately only creating minimal real changes.

By claiming to toe the line of real change, each brand in this study has managed to promote to new and interested consumers without alienating current consumers. Each company brings awareness to the production process in some way, making each brand look new and fresh, as though much has changed. The way A&W's Better Beef campaign has become almost universally known and associated with the brand, the way McDonald's invites the viewer into the factory, and the way Chipotle personifies the entire farming process through one animated farmer could all have the potential to make real change. However, Chipotle comes closest to promoting and educating viewers on green values applied to farming or production, but as the images are softened by animation techniques (Chipotle, 2013), the harsh realities do not appear in clearly. Unfortunately as each of these ideas is only promoted as a proxy for the brand identity, not as a springboard for real, sustained change, each brand fails to educate consumers as to how unsustainable current consumption levels remain.

Though it is possible that each of the changes shown in each advertisement studied in this thesis is a first step in what will be a long line of positive changes for each brand, it is unlikely that the intentions are anything beyond corporate self-interest. A&W and McDonald's promote that their burgers are healthier end products as the patties are more natural than formerly. Better burgers are a positive change, but both changes have far less impact than the specific ads and broader campaigns imply, as discussed in Chapters Three and Four. However, A&W has built a similar campaign for each major protein on its menu, so future positive changes are likely. If the quality of these changes is low like that of the Better Beef campaign, these changes may still be superficial. If Chipotle has switched all source farms to organic, natural, non-industrial farms this would be the most positive change promoted in any of the three campaigns, but it is unlikely the company has done so.

Though there is some slim possibility that each of these campaigns is the gateway to deeper, higher quality environmental initiatives by each company, these particular ads were somewhat deceiving when released. The A&W Better Beef campaign is fraught with hidden trade-offs between ingredient quality and source locations, yet the company gives the impressions it has broken from traditional methods of beef production. McDonald's has since followed up the Cargill Factory Tour ad with answers to sourcing about potatoes

in particular (McDonald's Canada (2016); McDonald's (2017b)). This ad is outside of the scope of this thesis, but on first watch, appears to positively raise awareness about the people behind the French fries, though it does little to educate viewers about environmentally friendly consumption. Finally, Chipotle pulls on family values and nostalgia to imbue the brand with emotional connections to farming methods. Chipotle simulates higher involvement in environmental change, though according to scholars like Patel (2007), Pollan (2006) and the Rodale Institute (2015), the speed and quality of the changes suggested in the ad are unlikely to have occurred at this point. This ad comes closest to proposing change to educate consumers, but because of the absence of concrete claims to back up these proposed changes, this ad is rather an empty proposal for change.

One of the other major issues preventing each ad from being successful at promoting high quality, sustained change in the fast food industry are the assumptions made by each brand about consumer knowledge. Each brand assumes a different level of consumer knowledge about the brand itself and about sustainable consumption. A&W and McDonald's rely on viewers having seen and thoroughly remembering past portions of the "Better Beef" and "Your Questions" campaigns. Both ads proceed from where previous ads left off in the sense that the campaign slogans as a whole are mentioned only in passing. Both ads communicate very little real information and primarily rely on the viewer developing relationships with the positive emotions of the people on screen. Given the hidden trade-offs and omissions of crucial information in both of these ads in terms of A&W abandoning Canadian cattle ranchers and McDonald's remaining silent on animal treatment issues, these ads employ high quality distraction techniques to demotivate consumers to learn more and create further change. In effect, these ads discourage viewers from being reflexive about their consumption habits. Not only do they fail in communicating the ethical consumption they promote, but these ads actively prevent further change that might otherwise occur by raising thoughtful questions about the industry's environmental track record.

It is of course the interest of each one of these companies to grow their own bottom lines, and actively demotivating consumers from either gaining more knowledge or taking deeper interest in environmental concerns contributes to this goal. However, to fit with

current levels of consumer consciousness, some commitment to green values is necessary to avoid criticism, yet full commitment requires major changes in business models and branding that would put each brand at risk of losing principal customer bases and decreasing profit margins over the short term (Wang, 2013, p. 66).

As the food chain has lengthened over the past fifty to seventy years, it has become increasingly uncommon for consumers to know where food comes from. It now is a serious time commitment for the average consumer to trace their food back to the burger factory, let alone to the farm or the individual cow. It has become such a difficult undertaking to attain this level of knowledge that scholars like Michael Pollan have dedicated large portions of their books to their journey in researching North American food chains (Pollan, 2006, p. 65). There are of course more and more community food organizations and grocery stores like Whole Foods Market that claim to help consumers understand where their food comes from, and that emphasize characteristics of the food products that are already valued by those who subscribe to sustainable values (O'Rourke, 2011, p. 17). However, those consumers who have the time or means to participate in these communities are still a small portion of the population.

Even the options that are available are often limited in their impact. Whole Foods Market, despite positive emphasis on helping consumers ask questions and learn about the food they buy, implies one can shop responsibly and sustainably with little or no sacrifice of convenience or quantity which is generally untrue, according to some critics (Johnston, 2007, p. 250). The way Whole Foods Market and other grocery store chains frame nature as abundantly bountiful "obscures the contradictions of ethical consumption" (Johnston, 2007, p. 250). Just as Chipotle frames the switch to less industrial more ethical farming as simple and quick, grocers like Whole Foods Market cater to ideologies of consumerism and scientific or industrial ingenuity to solve all major problems with society and the earth (Johnston, 2007).

Another example of this trend of light promotion of green values demotivating further scrutiny or green impulses from consumers is a study by the American Marketing Association undertaken in 2015 (Karmarkar & Bollinger, 2015). This study critically examined the impact of encouraging consumers to bring their own bags to grocery shop.



On first look, it might appear that this awareness and/or habit will encourage consumers to select foods and other grocery store products that align with this positive ecological move. It would seem that “consumers’ awareness that they brought their own grocery bags could make environmentally friendly items more salient, [or] evoke goals of making green choices in general” (Karmarkar & Bollinger, 2015, 1). However, the study found that “because doing so [in bringing one’s own bag] might feel like making a virtuous choice, consumers could feel licensed to make other less virtuous or more indulgent decisions afterward” (Karmarkar & Bollinger, 2015, 2). Other scholars have found similar effects from both greenwashing and limited environmental values promotion suggesting ads like the three studied in this thesis appease consumers’ green intentions, “leading them to feel they have done their part and demotivating further collective action” (Szasz as cited in O’Rourke, 2011, p. 28). Thus, the style of promotion in ads from A&W, McDonald’s and Chipotle demotivates more comprehensive change and consumers’ search for deeper understandings of sustainability.

### **Are these companies taking real responsibility, or merely reframing consumer responsibility for environmental change?**

In tandem with the fast food industry’s failure to create the change implied in the ads studied here, fast food corporations are continuing to load responsibility onto consumers. Consumers have been socialized to believe voting with their dollars is the best strategy to halt negative environmental impacts in society. Several scholars have suggested that voting with one’s dollar has become “a highly significant, if not a preferred venue for political participation (Dickinson & Hollander, 1991; Shaw et al., 2006; Stolle et al., 2005; Arnould, 2007; Barnett et al., 2005; Schidson, 2007; Stolle & Hogghe, 2004; Hilton, 2003 all as cited in Johnston, 2007, p. 231). This is a problem in that consumers are only given options on how to spend money, not whether to spend money.

A growing understanding of how little this unaltered total spending truly does to halt environmental degradation has led to certain companies, mostly small businesses or grocery corporations like Whole Foods Market, to promote the concept of the “citizen consumer”. The idea of the citizen consumer is meant to collapse roles of both politically, socially, and environmentally aware citizen and consumer identity into one. Chipotle

(2013) comes closest to reaching out to this portion of the viewing public, despite inadequate focus on concrete change initiatives. By emotionally connecting the audience to the Little Farmer and his family (Chipotle, 2013, 0:10), Chipotle sheds social and political light on consumer connections and impacts on the food system. Chipotle implies that by consuming its products one can participate positively in making farming systems less harmful to the environment and animals, ergo be a good citizen.

The issue with the concept of the citizen consumer, especially when combined with the trendy strategy of voting with one's dollar, is that participation is voluntary and responsibility is seldom framed as part of either concept. A&W, McDonald's and Chipotle all avoid any direct claims about responsibility to the environment, either implying they have taken on responsibility for the particular positive ethical or environmental phenomenon in the McDonald's and Chipotle ads, or avoiding the concept entirely, as in the A&W ad. Despite this, each ad does suggest that ethical and sustainable status is easy to attain if a consumer shops at each of these three restaurants, in particular because the menu offerings are so blindingly positive. For instance, Chipotle shows, through the exaggerated emotions of the Little Farmer (Chipotle, 2013, 0:20, 1:13, 1:55) that purchasing food at a Chipotle restaurant helps farmers who take pride in their work, yet the ad fails to give any clear statements of commitment to change or results of a change-oriented initiative. Because choosing which fast food restaurant to eat at is entirely voluntary, it is wholly up to the consumer to shop correctly and create this change. As the nature of fast food is impulsive and low involvement (Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2009), fast food consumers are even less reliable than consumers in other areas of the economy in creating consistent, permanent positive change. In essence, promoting this style of positive consumer choice with few repercussions for eating elsewhere, McDonald's, A&W, and Chipotle are conveniently pawning off responsibility for real change to the consumer.

Part of the issue with keeping responsibility on the consumer is that consumers, like corporations, are more likely to act on self-interest motivations than to sacrifice where, what or the amount to consume to achieve positive change in the ecological commons (Johnston, 2007, p. 245). In the case of these three ads, only partial change is promoted, as each ad still promotes products available on each corporation's menu that are unhealthy, oversized, and meat-centered which diminishes possibilities for real change,

as discussed above. This decreases the potential for consumer decision-making to make any more than minimal environmental or ethical impact. When combined with self-interested motivations of taste, consistency, and speed, giving responsibility to consumers makes it unlikely that real change can occur.

Furthermore, the nature of fast food is to be fast. If consumers are required to go out of their way to research their food, decreasing the amount of free time they have, their need for fast food becomes even greater. Chipotle (2013) comes closest to successfully and logically downloading responsibility to the consumer by suggesting the farms it sources from produce food in a slower, less industrialized manner. This unique way of framing production, whether truly as pristine and idyllic as pictured, helps Chipotle come closer to becoming an adequate choice to help consumers shoulder the responsibility of solving environmental issues through consumption.

Though Chipotle comes closer to providing consumers with good menu options, the issue with placing responsibility mostly on consumers is that the fast food industry still provides such a vast array of choices, a large portion of which claim to be beneficial to health, the environment, or animals in some way. Scholars like O'Rourke (2011) have found that consumers form a "cognitive bias" called "illusory superiority" meaning that most consumers overestimate the level of sustainable and ethical consumption they perform (p. 23). This is a problem if consumers are the main force for environmental change yet they are surrounded by too many choices and not enough information. The three companies whose ads were studied in this thesis are only three of dozens of companies promoting a variety of appealing reasons to consume fast food, all of which are presented in a vacuum during a single ad, often without context or alternative products available to the consumer. Presenting products with sustainable connotations and values deceives consumers into believing corporations have taken responsibility for their environmental impacts, when in reality responsibility is still downloaded to consumers.

## **Are these companies providing consumers with opportunities for fulfillment or just temporary distraction?**

Part of the reason it is easy for A&W and McDonald's to continue promoting individualization and consumption as a solution for problems created by individualization and consumption is because consumers seek fulfillment. As society has become entirely consumption-oriented and maximizing economic growth has become a principle goal, cultural bonds and responsible and informed connections to nature and community have become diluted or in some cases dissolved entirely. Corporations have stepped in to provide citizens with products that will make this stark individualism more bearable, though in reality these products promote further dissatisfaction and accelerate desire. Unfortunately, as the sales cycle must continue for maximum growth to be achieved, no consumer is ever finished their job, hence fulfillment can never be allowed to be achieved or a consumer will no longer be a useful member of society.

As connections to community and to production processes for food and goods are helpful in achieving satisfaction, consumer education is essential. Chipotle (2013) and McDonald's (2014) succeed in educating consumers in a small way, if inadequately, by raising awareness about the farming process and the manufacturing process, respectively. Both of these ads look innovative in their approaches and content, though neither is unique, as every fast food company has a farming source network similar to that of the Chipotle ad, and most burger factories most likely look similar to Cargill in the McDonald's ad. This falsely unique appearance is testament to the lack of consumer-facing education that is easy to access. However, as consumers may be unaware of these two manufacturing processes, ads like the two from McDonald's and Chipotle studied in this thesis may increase feelings of consumer satisfaction when consumers choose these two restaurants.

Another factor of this individualization is the value of choice. Johnston states that "the unifying logic that weaves together the various strands of ethical consumer discourse suggests that commodity choice can satisfy an individual's desire for personal health and happiness" (Johnston, 2007, p. 232). Johnston (2007) suggests this wealth of choice, especially when some brands like the three studied here frame products as solutions to

“social and ecological injustices” (p. 232), becomes the key to making the concept of the citizen consumer attainable.

This ultimate limit on choice in the fast food industry is easily disguised, especially when environmental or ethical advertising assigns a wealth of new values to individual fast food products. As meaning has been sucked out of food over decades of lengthening food chains and increased corporatization, advertising refills each product almost as fast. By creating emotional connections to farming through the Little Farmer in the Chipotle advertisement, and seeing the care and enjoyment the McDonald’s and A&W workers and patrons take from their burgers gives new, relevant substance to each brand.

This strategy of refilling fast food with wholesome values encourages customers to vote with their wallets (O’Rourke, 2011) to find fulfillment and dictate to corporations what consumers desire. Perhaps if A&W experiences a bump in sales, the global cattle industry will move towards eradicating hormones and steroids in beef during the raising process. However, it is unlikely that this will occur until after the majority of the fast food burger market has turned its back on ranches and industrial feed lots that use hormones and steroids. In turn, it is unlikely that fast food burger chains will make the expensive and complicated switch to new suppliers that raise beef cattle without hormones and steroids until it becomes unprofitable to continue producing burgers from hormone-rich beef. At this point the majority of green advertising messages in the fast food industry are not unified enough for consumers to collectively turn their back on unethical beef raising practices, so this entire ethical chain reaction is unlikely to occur. On the other hand, raising awareness, however humble, of issues such as factory farming in ads like that from Chipotle (2013) is more positive than if the industry were to entirely ignore production in its promotion of fast food.

Awareness of production and promotion of deeper more knowledgeable connections to food is extremely important for consumers to learn to think about their food. Income and nutritional education disparities can lead to unhealthy food choices skewed too heavily towards fast food. It is unlikely that any of the three brands whose ads were studied in this thesis will increase the level of health in menu offerings in any significant way, but promoting healthful connections to production may spur the audience to pay more

attention to nutrition content as well. As is, for those with less time, money and education, a lack of connection to food and subsequent overconsumption of fast food can lead to “irreversible harm to their health and result in obesity and other chronic, life-threatening diseases” (Lee & Nguyen, 2013, 238). In the eyes of some scholars, the connotations of fun and value-for-price traditionally advertised by brands like McDonald’s suggest “an intent to blindsides the audience.” (Lee & Nguyen, 2013, 238). This is ethically problematic for corporations, especially when juxtaposed with the supposedly ethical values promoted in this new style of advertising campaign. However, making fast food more appealing through ethical and environmental ads may also exacerbate health problems if consumers at lower income levels feel higher status badges associated with green consumption can be attained (Johnston, 2007, p. 247) through purchasing Chipotle, McDonald’s or A&W.

Though consumers of lower income may feel more fulfilled when consuming Chipotle, for instance, because of the newfound connection to farming, the chance to achieve the citizen consumer hybrid, discussed above, makes Chipotle an even more appealing choice. Climbing the morally stratified ladder that is created by consumption-oriented citizenship causes gaps in class and status that Chipotle and A&W in particular attempt to flatten through democratizing achievement of green values. Unfortunately, the perceived satisfaction achieved by those purchasing fast food framed as ethical are still purchasing fast food, not attaining the next level, which would be shopping at an ethical grocery store, and cooking their own food at home. As the satisfaction is short term and superficial, but possibly the only attainable reward, the cycle of commercialization of ethical ideas and purchasing of fast food is perpetuated, making each of these three ads damaging for societal health yet successful from a corporate standpoint.

By providing small opportunities for gratification, however, brands that advertise in a way similar to Chipotle, McDonald’s and A&W encourage consumption of fast food, thus contributing to numerous diet-related chronic diseases<sup>12</sup>. Continuously rising consumption levels also contribute to environmental degradation, especially when proper sustainability education is not readily available for many consumers. Each ad studied in this thesis, then, raises some awareness of production processes, but ultimately provides

<sup>12</sup> For more information on chronic diseases and Fast food consumption, see Baylis, (2011).

only superficial fulfillment with long term repercussions for the environment and societal health.

The fast food industry appears to continue to dictate North American culture in a major way. The industry deceives its audience into believing there is real change occurring in production processes but it can be argued that simply the acknowledgement of the production process is a step in the right direction. Re-educating consumers about the food chain is essential. Consumers aim to find fulfillment, and fast food corporations aim to survive in a competitive market. Of course, all should be concerned with the future and working towards sustainable and ethical consumption in order to prevent environmental degradation.

The case studies in this thesis have shown that fast food corporations actively put in minimal effort into creating these changes. The lack of motivation for corporations to truly educate consumers about production and health, works in conjunction with the inability of consumers to think beyond self-interest to cause stagnation in levels of consumer understanding and environmental action. This stagnation partly occurs because the education required to help consumers understand the real impacts of every consumption choice is unavailable, contributing to the current abysmal state of fast food production. Corporations and consumers have been at odds for decades, but perhaps more expansive consumer education initiatives like community gardens, elementary school curricula and more expansive government education initiatives can help consumers become aware of the power they hold in the marketplace. Whether these conditions involve changing subsidy structures and distribution networks, or whether cultural and environmental education changes to help consumers understand their role and identities outside of consumption, a change must occur.

Future change must come from society as a whole; not only from the fast food industry, but also government regulators, educational institutions, consumers, and activist groups. These issues have been debated for years and yet there have been very few new pieces of legislation or corporate penalties to reflect the outrage in some sections of the critical and health communities. This is possibly because the fast food industry prefers to self-regulate, and has the funds to do so, though the strongest case can be made for

greater regulatory scrutiny and intervention. The power held by the fast food industry allows the industry to push back against efforts from legislative bodies to impose rules (Jones, 2007, 149). Solving the issue of responsibility is outside of the scope of this document, but it is important to keep these issues in mind when discussing other aspects of these companies' relationships with customers, the environment, and shareholders. Hopefully, in future the balance of power will continue to shift towards the consumer and responsibility will shift towards fast food corporations. One day, perhaps, the fast food industry will undergo real sustained change and consumers will be informed and activated, and see themselves as custodians of the vital connections between food and the physical and social environment.



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## Appendix A.

### A&W Advertisement Transcript

**0:00** Video is of a television screen being paused then played so info bar appears on bottom of screen – Sportsnet Central on channel 22, a SportChek ad is just finishing, the camera person uses Shaw cable and it is 10:03pm.

**0:01/0:04 Allen Lulu:** [points at screen and nods in authoritative manner] More and more people are coming to A&W. Let's find out why.

[wearing black corporate coat with A&W chest crest, black shirt and striped tie, slightly chubby in a "cute way" with a big smile, and a bald patch]

**0:03/0:06** [Goes inside restaurant]

[Restaurant window has the Hormone & Steroid free slogan on the left side and the better beef guarantee logo on the right side window. Door frame is A&W signature orange. There is no weather or nature, just bright]

**0:04/0:07 Allen Lulu:** Do you come to A&W a lot?

[Camera focuses on A&W Man's face and back of Customer 1's head]

**Customer 1:** [Young Asian woman with black hair & pale pink hoodie age roughly 25-40] Yes [laughs and adjusts hoodie suggesting some sort of embarrassment or shyness]

[Camera cuts to her face at an angle – she is sitting beside her dining partner who is a Caucasian man with a round face, glasses, same age range, and a green and yellow hoodie under a sheep skin lined jacket]

[Restaurant is empty beyond the table; they have some invisible food in brown paper wrapping and both she and the man she is with, as well as A&W Man have big glass mugs of root beer. When camera cuts to the customers' faces there is an orange wallpaper that suggests the word BABY (perhaps Baby Burger?) that looks like advertising material]

**Allen Lulu:** Why?

**0:06/0:09** [Cuts to Customer 2, African American man in black hoodie and black and red ball cap, roughly 30-35]

**Customer 2:** The beef [everyone laughs, he chews a couple times, and he turns to someone off screen at his table] [No food is visible]

**Allen Lulu:** it's all about the beef [assumption...A&W Man appears to be dipping in a fit of laughter at the same time. Camera is still focused on Customer 2's face with A&W Man's back of head in corner of frame]

[Restaurant is empty beyond their table]

**0:09/0:12** [Cuts to Customer 3, someone of vaguely Asian descent roughly in the 25-35 age range wearing grey collared sweater and black fleece headband]

**0:11/0:14 Customer 3:** Nice thick patty, juicy

[The back of another customer is vaguely visible and blurry behind this customer's table; no food visible, nor evidence of eating]

**0:12/0:15** [Cuts to A&W Man]

**Allen Lulu:** What have you heard?

[Cuts to Customer 4; caucasian man roughly between the ages of 28 and 40 with red full beard and shoulder length hair in blue t-shirt, sitting by himself]

**Customer 4:** [talking with his hands] Oh, I've heard that it's got the no hormones no steroids [cuts to cardboard folded sign which appears to be on a table beside a salt and pepper shaker (not necessarily his table)] and whatnot

[Restaurant is empty behind this customer and no visible food or evidence of eating]

**0:14/0:17** [Still focused on cardboard sign ad for no hormones and no steroids]

**Customer 5:** (voice only) I think that that's

**0:16/0:19** [cuts to face of customer 5 – young Caucasian woman between 18 and 25 wearing a multi-coloured striped toque, medium length blonde hair and black hoodie; sitting at a table with two other young women (one possibly still a child) and a middle aged woman and man all looking at the girl smiling] very good [customer nods, as do others at the table – man holds up thumbs up] [no food or packaging in the picture, except for a clear plastic cup that is empty held by the child]

[Hand of A&W Man in bottom left corner of screen waving cardboard ad sign for the campaign]

**Allen Lulu:** Really? Thumbs up over there too

**0:18/0:21** [Cuts to Customer 6, a woman between 35 and 45 with knit grey sweater and styled, brown bob and earrings, but no makeup]

**Customer 6:** [looking very serious] Which is one of the reasons why we've actually switched fast food restaurants

**0:21/0:24** [cuts to her baby, less than one year old wearing pink sweater, looking down at food]

**Allen Lulu** (to baby): What do you think of that?

**Customer 6 Baby:** Ya? [There are fries and a burger (presumably held by the mother) in the foreground sticking up into the frame in front of the baby]

**0:24/0:27** [cuts back to A&W Man, giggling hysterically; other child in left side of the frame, girl with colourful shirt and white jacket looking about 6 t 8 years old, giggling too] [In front of this child there is a paper soda cup with lid and straw bearing A&W logo, as well as a burger, presumably in the mother's hand] [two empty tables visible in background, one with a blurry blue folded cardboard sign, like the one shown earlier with the No-Hormones-No-Steroids ad copy on it]

**0:26/0:29** [Cuts to customer 7, man with sparse beard roughly 25 to 30 years old wearing black v-neck tshirt, very round face]

**Allen Lulu:** Do you know about it?

**Customer 7:** Yea, that's why I eat here [laughs with a "duh, obviously" look on his face]  
[No customers sitting at tables behind him, but one table looks like it may have a plate and some packaging on it] [no evidence of food at his table]

**0:27/0:30** [Camera frame zooms out, turning screen into grid of 9 customers, two of which were not in the ad, all looking happy]

**Allen Lulu** [disembodied voice]: come see for yourself [**0:28/0:31** A&W logo pops up in middle box on screen with [awguarantee.ca](http://awguarantee.ca) website below] at A&W

## Appendix B.

### McDonald's Advertisement Transcript

**(0:01)** Golden arches logo and "I'm lovin' it" slogan

**(0:01)** Cut to Cargill factory sign

**(0:01)** Cut to conveyor belt with rows of burgers sliding along

**(0:02) Grant Imahara:** Are there lips and eyeballs in there Jimmy? [shot inside factory, Imahara stands with two employees, one male one female, all wearing white smocks, hard hats, ear muffs and safety goggles]

**(0:04)** Cut to conveyor belt with various cuts of meat travelling along and rubber-gloved hands picking up and putting down various pieces

**(0:05) Imahara:** At what point in the process do we inject the pink slime?

**(0:06)** Cut to Imahara standing between the two employees the two employees standing at a different conveyor belt with various cuts of meat travelling by. Another gloved employee hand is visible reaching into the screen sorting

**(0:08)** Cut to shoulder-to-waist shot of an employee with gloved hands handling meat that is coming out of a chute onto the conveyor belt

**(0:10) Imahara:** Hey, can I have this to go? [Imahara and the male employee each pick up giant chunks of meat off the conveyor belt]

**(0:11)** Cuts to Grant Imahara, with his name flashed across the bottom of the screen, driving a car down a highway lined with road signs, nondescript industrial buildings and the occasional palm tree [He looks mid thirties, Asian with a nondescript American accent, and looks very healthy]

**(0:11) Imahara** [narrating off screen]: I'm Grant Imahara. McDonald's knows you have a lot of questions about their food. So they've asked me to help you find the answers. I'm in Fresno, California, where I'm gonna show you ["Is McDonald's beef real?" Flashes up on screen while camera is still focused on Imahara driving] if McDonald's beef is real.

**(0:25) Imahara:** Which way to the meat? [calls out window towards large white wall of a building to someone off screen]

**(0:26)** [Cuts to Imahara, wearing dark grey Henley shirt, standing outside Cargill building with its white wall and large sign. "Cargill, McDonald's USA Beef Supplier" flashes across bottom of screen]

**Imahara:** Alright, so we're here. [Points behind himself, over his shoulder] Cargill's right behind me. I really don't know what to expect in there. Let's go find out.

**(0:35)** Cuts to interior of lobby of Cargill factory with Imahara opening the door. Camera is position behind the shoulder of a woman, toward whom Imahara is walking.

**(0:37) Imahara:** Hey Rickette

**(0:38) Rickette Collins:** Hi Grant, great to see you again [they shake hands] [She looks like she could be anywhere between the ages of 35 and 55, is white with highlighted blonde and brown hair, medium build]

**(0:39) Collins:** [Cuts to side view of Collins and Imahara shaking hands and smiling. "Rickette Collins Director of Strategic Supply McDonald's" flashes across screen.] Welcome to Cargill. We're really excited to tell you all about McDonald's beef today

**(0:42) Imahara:** Alright. I'm eager to see some meat [with suspicious look on his face, turns to look at camera] Never thought I'd say that.

**(0:47)** Collins opens door and they walk through

**(0:48)** camera cuts to the backs of Collins and Imahara, dressed in white smock coats, ear muffs, hard hats, safety goggles, and blue rubber gloves walking through a sliding door like a garage door.

**(0:49) Collins:** This is the beef plant [lots of noise, like the whirring of machines in background]

**(0:50)** Camera cuts to inside plant. Lots of white walls and concrete floor. A few yellow safety signs and orange pylons appear periodically on walls and on the floor]

**(0:51) Jimmy Rendon:** Rickette [Also dressed in smock coat, ear muffs, yellow hard hat, safety goggles and rubber gloves; waves at Rickette and holds out his hand for Imahara to shake] [He looks between 45 and 60, with very round face and slightly saggy jowls, also white]

**(0:51) Collins:** Jimmy, Grant. [“Jimmy Rendon Operations Supervisor Cargill” flashes across the screen]

**(0:52) Imahara:** Hey! How’s it going Jimmy?

**(0:53) Rendon:** Hey Grant! Good, good, good. \*mumbles something\* Pleasure to have you here.

**(0:56) Imahara:** Got a lot of questions for ya. [all three are smiling]

**(0:57) Rendon:** Outstanding.

**(0:58) Imahara:** Are there lips and eyeballs in there Jimmy? [This is the same shot as in the opening ten second sequence]

**(1:00) Rendon:** [cuts to Rendon’s face] No, it’s one hundred percent beef trimmings from the cow.

**(1:03) Rendon:** [Cuts to Imahara’s face] When we go to the tour you’re gonna be pretty impressed by the quality of beef that we own.

**(1:07) Imahara:** [Cuts to shot of all three of them] Alright, let's do it.

**(1:07)** Camera cuts to shot from under stairs of their feet going up a set of metal stairs.

**(1:09) Rendon:** Right this way [Cuts to another conveyor belt with gloved hand handling and moving chunks of beef around] to our beef inspection area

**(1:12) Imahara:** [Cuts to shot of all three standing over conveyor belt \*\*note, none of them are wearing masks\*\*] You know, when they say 'trimmings'...I mean these are, these are huge chunks [laughs while reaching in to grab a giant piece off the conveyor belt]

**(1:16) Collins:** Yes

**(1:16) Rendon:** Some nice cuts, yes [Also reaches onto the conveyor belt to grab a piece of meat]

**(1:18) Imahara:** this is some nice stuff right here [picks a large piece off the conveyor belt] Hey can I have this to go?

**(1:21) Rendon:** Ha, wish we could do that but unfortunately not [both toss their beef chunks back onto the belt]

**(1:23) Imahara:** [Quick cut to hands moving beef around, then cuts back to Imahara, Collins and Rendon standing beside the belt] So you don't use any of that stuff, the – what's it called [turning to Collins] – lean...

**(1:26) Collins:** Lean finely textured beef or so-called pink slime. We don't use that in our burgers.

**(1:32) Imahara:** [making hand motions imitating what he is saying] There's no giant machine that \*\*pffff\*\* [Imahara makes squirting noise] and then puts it right in the, in the mix

**(1:39) Collins:** not at all



[Camera cuts to conveyor belt again where hands are moving beef around as it comes down a chute onto the conveyor belt]

**(1:39) Rendon:** So the next step is to start the grinding [Camera cuts to conveyor belt filled with ground meat] The product is loaded into our grinder here [cuts to hands pushing ground beef into patty forms] And then we hand it over to a formulator, and they wanna check this product to ensure that everything is quality all the way through, right.

**(1:50) Imahara:** [cuts to a chute where ground meat is falling into a large vat or tub] I like that

**(1:51) Rendon:** So that ground beef is automatically fed into our patty formers and *at least* [a mumble, so unsure of exact words] form our patties

**(1:56) Imahara:** So you don't pour [camera moves to conveyor belt with lines of patties moving along] in any wood pulp or other kinds of meat [quick cut back to Imahara before going back to the chute with the ground meat coming out]

**(1:59) Collins:** No wood pulp

**(2:01) Collins:** Beef in, and beef out. Nothing else is added.

**(2:04) Rendon:** Real simple process.

**(2:05) Imahara:** [Cuts to Imahara, Collins and Rendon all holding raw beef patties and moving them from hand to hand] And so where does it go after this?

**(2:07) Rendon:** [cuts to Rendon opening a heavy-looking metal door with yellow slippery, cold and other warning signs on it] Wanna come around here. [Imahara and Collins follow Rendon into the doorway] Now we get to look at our flat freezer [Through the doorway over Imahara's and Rendon's shoulders layers of conveyor smaller conveyor belts can be seen]

**(2:10) Imahara:** Oh wow [Cuts to Imahara's face, where he stands in front of Rendon and Collins presumably still staring at the freezer] And so they start off just off the line and when they get to the top they're completely frozen.

**(2:16) Rendon:** [cuts to Rendon's face] exactly.

**(2:17)** Cuts to Imahara bending down staring open-mouthed at the freezer

**(2:17) Rendon:** All of that is to ensure that we [cuts back to freezer conveyor belts moving across and up] lock in the flavours.

**(2:21) Rendon:** [Cuts to conveyor belt of rows of pink patties] This is the patties comin' out of the spiral freezer. From there [Cut to close-up image of brown cardboard boxes whizzing by on another conveyor belt, each stamped with "100% Pure Beef Hamburgers" on the side] we simply put them in a box. {camera moves so long line of boxes on the conveyor belt can be seen]

**(2:27) Collins:** [Cut to Imahara and Collins] So how 'bout we go taste some beef

**(2:28) Imahara:** Ya?

**(2:29) Collins:** Alright, let's do it [begins to walk towards edge of screen]

**(2:30) Imahara:** Alright

**(2:30)** [Cuts to different part of the factory where there is no mechanical noise. Imahara still wearing a white hard hat, hair net and white smock coat, but no longer is he wearing safety goggles and ear muffs. Camera focused behind Imahara's back looking at Manoah Crane. "Manoah Crane Food Safety, Quality and Regulatory Technician Cargill" flashes across the screen]

**(2:32) Crane:** How's it going? [Smiling, white, about 25-30 years old with a light brown beard, wearing white smock coat, orange hard hat, hair net and blue plastic gloves. This is the first employee whose face you can really see at any point in the ad.] [As camera

moves around the two men it is clear they are standing in a small kitchen with tan cabinets, white walls, stainless steel sink, and an industrial-style flat grill]

**(2:32) Imahara:** Good. Alright, so what do you do here?

**(2:34) Crane:** Well what we're doing here is we're replicating pretty much exactly what they do in the McDonald's, uh, restaurants, so we know what the consumer's [cuts to Crane placing a stack of burgers on the hot grill] gonna be getting in the end product

**(2:41) Imahara:** So your job is to eat hamburgers [cuts back to Imahara and Crane standing in the middle of the kitchen] every day of the week [smiling with an excited tone of voice and pointing at the grill enthusiastically]

**(2:44) Crane:** Yea [cuts back to the grill where a heavy-looking metal grill top is covering the burgers so they are not visible]

**(2:46) Imahara:** Pretty exciting! [Cuts back to Imahara and Crane standing in the kitchen both smiling] You're livin' the dream

**(2:48) Crane:** [in funny voice] The American Dream, awesome! [both laugh, cuts to less close up shot of them] Do a little dance [starts dancing slightly]

**(2:49) Imahara:** So this is gonna go \*pfff\* [makes noise like something sliding and uses hand motion to imply something on hinges flipping up]

**(2:51) Crane:** Ya they pop right up [motioning to the grill] as you can see here

**(2:52) Imahara:** Hey! [Camera moves towards the grill where viewer can see the large metal top moving up off the burgers]

**(2:53) Crane:** Alright. [Cuts to Crane's hands using spatulas to remove burgers from the grill]. Take 'em off the way we put 'em on [Crane places the burgers on a plate a few at a time] looks like a burger [lays the cooked burgers out on a white tray] [Imahara laughs in the background]

**(2:59) Crane:** [Cuts to Crane passing Imahara a plate with a burger patty on it] There you go

**(3:00) Crane:** [Both pick up their burgers from the plates] Cheers!

**(3:01) Imahara:** Cheers! [Crane and Imahara take bites of their burger patties]

**(3:05) Imahara:** Hmm [surprised tone, chewing] that's good

**(3:06) Crane:** [chewing] the only thing that we don't have here though was we don't have lettuce and tomatoes because we have to test the product exactly the way that we do here, but, if you want to try the real product we can go to McDonald's [points over his shoulder]

**(3:15)** Camera cuts to Golden Arches McDonald's sign outside of a McDonald's restaurant in a sunny place with blue sky and a highway in the background

**(3:18)** Cuts to hands pulling burgers off a hot grill with two spatulas, just like when Crane did it

**(3:19)** Cuts to a metal tube squirting yellow sauce (could be mayonnaise or mustard) on both halves of a burger bun, which is open in a cardboard takeout box

**(3:20)** Cuts to a closed burger box being pulled off a rack with the marketing slogan "There is only one Big Mac" and a small picture of a burger on it

**(3:21)** Hands wearing plastic gloves slowly fold closed a cardboard burger box on top of a burger with multiple patties and some green lettuce and yellow squirts of sauce on it

**(3:24) Imahara:** [Cuts to Imahara, wearing his grey henley shirt again, sitting at a table inside what looks to be a McDonald's. He has the red and white burger box in front of him and opens it slowly] Moment of truth [There are no other customers in the background, but there is a long counter with three order station computer screens where two employees stand – a woman in a tan shirt and a man in a black shirt and black hat]

**(3:25) Crane:** [voice from off screen while hands are just visible inside the corner of the screen making it clear he is sitting across the table from Imahara] yes sir.

**(3:26) Imahara:** [Imahara opens box fully and a sesame-seed covered burger bun is visible. The Camera angle moves down to focus on the burger and his hands] So you know what, I've been through the whole process [Camera cuts to focus on Imahara's back with Crane sitting across the table looking excited] I know exactly what goes into this all beef patty

**(3:31) Crane:** yup

**(3:32) Imahara:** [Cuts back to Imahara's face, showing him sitting with his burger in front of him] There's no fillers, no preservatives, no additives, it's all beef and there's no pink slime [In the background, a very overweight man has walked in the door up to the counter to place an order]

**(3:37) Crane:** [Cuts back to Crane's face, as he decisively shakes his head no] Nope, none at all.

**(3:40) Imahara:** [Cuts back to Imahara's face as he picks up his burger] Here we go. You know what? It's been fifteen years since I've had a Big Mac [Overweight person still at counter ordering food]

**(3:45) Crane:** [Cuts back to Crane's face, nodding, he is also wearing a Henley shirt with a yellow undershirt and it appears he once had a spacer earring] Wow

**(3:46)** Cuts back to Imahara's face as he raises the burger to his mouth and takes a big bite [Overweight person is gone and a different person who was not there in the last shot is visible in the side of the screen at the counter, and overweight employee in a black uniform walks out from behind the counter towards the door]

**(3:48)** Cuts to a shot over Imahara's shoulder of a close-up of the burger with a bite out of it, then cuts back to Imahara's face

**(3:50) Imahara:** That's good

**(3:50) Crane:** Yea?

**(3:50) Imahara:** That's really good

**(3:52) Crane:** [Cuts to Crane's face, smiling, sitting with hands folded on the table. There is a sign behind his head with the word "Refresh" on it, presumably a drink and cutlery station] Nice!

**(3:53) Imahara:** [Cuts back to Imahara's face, he is talking with his hands; the overweight customer is back at the same part of the counter, now pulling something out of his pocket, presumably a wallet to pay with] McDonald's has a lot of other food out there, and I know you've got questions [The golden arches logo appears on the screen, with "Our food. Your questions" flashes across the bottom of the screen] So ask your questions, and I'll find out the answers [Golden arches logo flashes onto screen again with "GET THE ANSWERS" written beside it, then turns into the social media logo list (McDonald's, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram)]

## Appendix B.

### Chipotle Mexican Grill Advertisement Transcript

**0:00-0:04** Sunrise; birds chirping.

**0:05** “The Scientist” instrumentals begin (mellow guitar chords); Blue sky, mountains and fields stretch into background, with green grass and trees in foreground. One small wooden fence is pictured

**0:10** Farmer with wife and infant child appear. Tire swing hanging from one tree in background

**0:12** Small, pink, oblong pig enters frame, walking calmly up to farmer. The pig is grunting.

**0:16** Pig turns and trots into A-frame enclosure; farmer places final wall on enclosure with pig inside. He turns away brushing his hands on his shirt as though he has finished his work for the day. This is the first barn.

**0:20** Farmer turns around and six more pigs are roaming freely. A large red exclamation point appears about farmer’s head as he gives a start with either anger, annoyance, or surprise. The exclamation point appears at the exact moment of a small slide in the guitar accompaniment, giving emphasis to the farmer’s jump.

**0:23** A fence builds itself around these formerly free-range oblong-shaped pigs. A new note is added to the instrumental, making the musical accompaniment feel faster. Farmer disappears from left side of screen

**0:25** The first storage building appears. It is a barn to store hay.

**0:27** The first sight of mechanical technology appears. Farmer reappears on right side of screen. The farmer is riding a tractor as other farm buildings quickly build themselves near the pig enclosure. The camera angle is rising above ground level. The shadows are longer. One tree is turning brown and losing its leaves.

**0:29:** The first grain silos appear as the farmer appears to be performing evasive driving maneuvers to avoid these buildings that are rapidly going up, seemingly growing from the earth. More trees are turning brown and losing their leaves. These grain silos make noise, like construction materials being put together, as they are growing out of the ground.

**0:32:** The farmer drives along further, away from the silos and the pig enclosures towards some cows, grazing in a field.

**0:34:** More industrial grey buildings grow around the cows, looking like the cows are wedged in tightly. The farmer drives on. ***I was just guessing***

**0:37:** The camera angle drops back down to ground level. The cow enclosure grows one storey higher. Snow begins to appear on the right edge of the frame, towards which the farmer is driving. The mountains are still visible in the background and the trees have no leaves. Everything except the tractor is grey. ***At numbers and figures***

**0:38:** the farmer jams on his breaks, a highway overpass is rapidly growing across his path, going out the top of the camera frame. A semi-truck drives along the new highway.

**0:41:** The farmer disappears from the frame as the camera increases speed in its rightward movement. Near a dead or wintering tree, an even larger, 3-storey, more industrial pig building is going up. The pigs are in rows behind railings. ***Pullin' the puzzles apart***

**0:43:** the pigs are being flipped out of the cages onto a conveyor belt. They no longer walk but are moved.

**0:46:** The conveyor belt takes the pigs into yet another large grey building. There are two tanks of pill capsules and green liquid being pumped into the building as the pigs disappear. The pigs disappear from view as they enter the building. The background is entirely white and grey. The only colour comes from the pink pigs and the bright chemicals. The farmer has still not caught up. ***Questions of science***

**0:48:** The pigs come out the top of this building on another conveyor belt, only now they are spherical, not oblong. They still do not walk or grunt as they are moved along.



**0:50:** The camera angle has moved to a bird's-eye view again. Beneath the pig factory there is a blue lake. We see pools of green oozing out of pipes into the lake. ***Science and progress***

**0:53:** The pigs are moved along their conveyor belt to another building, where a large machine violently moulds them into cubes with no eyes, snouts, or tails. The cubes fall deeper into the building out of sight. ***Don't speak as loud as my heart***

**0:57:** The camera angle is a bird's eye view still. The pink pig-cubes come out of conveyor belts in the bottom of the shaping building and move into the back of giant grey transport trucks. There are eight trucks that take the pig-cubes away. The pavement below the trucks is full of traffic-directing lane lines and there are other grey buildings nearby

**1:00:** The trucks split into different direction, driving past more factories spewing green puddles into the lakes. The ground is white with snow and the trees are dead. There are smoke stacks billowing opaque grey smoke. ***Nobody said it was easy. It's such a shame for us to part.***

**1:07:** Most of the lakes that the trucks are driving by are more green than blue now.

**1:10:** The sun sets on the snowy ground. The camera leaves the factories behind and we see a broken tractor below on the snowy ground.

**1:13:** The farmer comes into view, walking through the snowy. He has a cloud above his head. ***Nobody said it was easy***

**1:17:** The camera returns to ground level and focuses on the farmer, looking older and slouching like a broken man. It is dark and there are stars in the sky. As he walks, clouds appear above his head filled with thoughts of chemicals or antibiotics, pigs behind bars, and chemical sludge being dumped into lakes. ***No one ever said it would be so hard***

**1:26:** The farmer looks like he has sudden inspiration. He puts his hat back on and the clouds dissipate, leaving the sunny grassy background from the beginning of the ad. The trees still are leafless. ***I'm goin' back to the start***

**1:28:** The farmer runs to the cow building and pulls it down with one tug. The cows are free to walk around the grassy field now, as the building fades into the grass on the ground. Guitar chords become more optimistic and energetic, and stay that way for the rest of the ad.

**1:34:** the farmer runs to the pig building and frees the pigs in the same manner.

**1:36:** The farmer runs over to a dry-looking brown field with a partial fence around it. There is a tall lever beside it. The farmer flips this switch and the small rectangular plot flips over to reveal more green grass. This grass comes with green leafy trees and pigs walking around.

**1:39:** This switch starts a cascade chain reaction where all the dry brown dead looking rectangular plots of land start flipping over like dominoes into the distance. In the farthest point of the background, one can see the two red buildings and the turquoise building, arranged exactly as they were when the farmer “built” them earlier in the ad. These do not go away when he flips the switch. Farmer disappears from the left side of the screen.

**1:42:** In the foreground, the camera zooms in on the farmer, who has reappeared on the right side of the screen, looking very old, with glasses and a white mustache, carrying a small wooden crate. He is walking by a group of chickens pecking at the ground.

**1:48:** The farmer reaches a small white van with the Chipotle logo on the side. He pushes the crate into the back of the van. The van slowly drives away

**1:55:** The farmer walks over to his now-white-haired wife and his grown up son. In the background are the mountains, leafy green trees and the tire swing. The farmer and his wife hold hands.

**2:00:** The farmer’s son walks over to a pig that is walking towards him, just like the moment where a pig walked up to the farmer at the beginning of the ad. The pig grunts.

**2:07:** The camera continues to pan right, away from the family and the pig. It stops on a rustic wooden sign with a wagon wheel in front of it. The sign reads: "CULTIVATE A BETTER WORLD Chipotle.com"

**2:11:** The camera moves past the sign and the sun sets over the mountains, green fields and leafy green trees. The sound of crickets is audible as the song ends.

**2:14:** The screen fades to black as the iTunes logo and song credit appear advising viewers to download the song from the ad.