

Anna Baugham

Mrs. Jenny Downey

Rhetoric

12 December 2016

Analysis of ASPCA Commercial “Sarah McLachlan Animal Cruelty Video”

In 2006, ASPCA aired their “End Animal Cruelty” campaign commercial, with the help of famous singer-songwriter Sarah McLachlan. ASPCA’s purpose was to spread animal cruelty awareness and urge people to donate money to saving the lives of hurting animals. This commercial was aired in the month of April. Even though they work hard to end animal cruelty year-round, April is particularly special to this campaign because it is officially “Prevention of Cruelty to Animals” month. Throughout April, they advertise many ways that we can support their cause. By using touching music, heartfelt visuals, and baffling statistics, this commercial was strategically made to tug at the strongest affections of Americans through pathos, ethos, and logos.

The commercial begins with Sarah McLachlan’s emotional song “Angel” playing softly in the background as slow-motion clips of abused animals fade in and out. Between the clips, the screen turns black and white words in simple font tell of the hard-to-swallow facts of animal cruelty. Sarah’s song is perfect for the images that are shown. She sings “you’re in the arms of an angel, may you find some comfort here.” As these lyrics are sung, we see the longing and painful eyes of a puppy in the arms of an ASPCA supporter. We see scruffy kittens squeaking at

the camera, and beaten dogs with injured limbs attempting to walk again. The music in the background fades and the screen switches. Sarah is now sitting on a comfy couch with a beautiful Golden Retriever on her lap. They lounge in a warmly-lit room with all the items and furniture that suggest comfort, love, and true affection; A roaring fireplace, a mantle with flickering candles, and a grand piano with a vase of pink flowers. The dog pants with his tongue out contentedly as Sarah gives facts and asks the viewers “Will you be an angel for a helpless animal?” The scene switches back to clips of animals and Sarah continues to speak to viewers at home.

To begin, the commercial appeals to the audience’s emotions through their innate duty to help the helpless. An image of a woman cradling a puppy appeals to the audience’s need to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. As the dog’s head rests against the woman’s forearm, he looks up at the screen with his saucer-like eyes. His face presents just how vulnerable and defenseless these abused animals really are. Even though these images appeal to all viewers, they are especially targeted at women. Women’s motherly instinct does not only extend to children but to all creatures that need care. ASPCA knows that the majority of their donors are women so the many cheerless images is a strategic and effective move. In general, women are more likely to be affected by emotional feelings than facts. Several images appear with one-eyed kittens with casts on their legs. If there is one thing that can make *any* woman cry, it is a one-eyed kitten with a broken leg. Furthermore, Sarah McLachlan’s song “Angel” intensifies the sadness of each image and heightens the compassionate feelings of the audience. Sarah sings *in the arms of an angel, fly away from here...* All of these pathos elements help encourage viewers to donate money to the ASPCA organization.

The commercial also establishes credibility by using Sarah McLachlan as their spokeswoman. Sarah, being a well-established singer-songwriter in the early 2000s, helped give authenticity to the commercial. McLachlan is known for her emotional ballads and her melodious mezzo-soprano voice. She is also known for many charitable contributions including ASPCA. Because of her many heartfelt songs, her appearance implies compassion and trustworthiness. In many cases, fans of Sarah will know her to be a genuine person through her music, and in turn will trust her judgement for causes she believes in. Her admirers will ask themselves the question, "If Sarah truly believes in ASPCA, why shouldn't we?" When we see her in the commercial, she is gently petting a golden retriever. This display of affection shows that she is not detached from the cause. In addition, the ASPCA helpers in the commercial are wearing uniforms that remind us of police officers. Even though the audience is aware that they are not actually policemen, these images make us subconsciously think of defenders of justice. The caretakers bathe and feed the animals in their padded cages, which gives the viewers an idea of how their generosity and money will affect ASPCA: animals will be fed and loved if you give to their cause.

Also, this commercial presents valid reasons why people should become donors for ASPCA. The organization strategically displays facts in white font on a black background.

Every Single Hour in America, an animal is violently abused.

3,000 Animals were rescued last year,

But for others, help came too late....

The simple font, white lettering, and black background each help to discreetly emphasize their message. The white font allows the words to pop against the black. The decision to have a simple

font tells us that they don't sugarcoat the facts. Abuse is a real thing- it should never be glazed over or ignored. The logos is clearly stated and the reasons why you should support ASPCA is (literally) spelled out. The producers of the commercial chose for these facts not to be said by a spokesperson for a good reason. As we see the words across the screen, the truth speaks for itself.

Therefore, by combining the influences of emotion, credibility, and reason, ASPCA powerfully communicates its message to the audience. Through its moving music, emotional pictures, and baffling statistics, the commercial effectively pulls for viewers' support. The organization relates to our empathy and willingness to nurture. This helps ASPCA to receive donations and continue in their worthy cause.