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## Decoding the Whaling Issue Using Media Theories

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## Decoding the Whaling Issue Using Media Theories

**Motohiro Kawashima**  
*Gunma University, Japan*

### 1. Introduction

News coverage of anti-whaling activism by (mostly) Western environmentalists, coupled with the popularity of whale watching in Western countries, might give the impression that their love of whales (including dolphins) is rooted in their culture and history. In reality, however, it was only a half-century ago that Western people came to regard whales as noble animals. In the past, whales were viewed as distant and mysterious creatures that were rarely seen or thought about from the human perspective. A key factor in filling the physical and psychological gap between humanity and whales was the media—books, magazines, posters, newspapers, films, television, and the internet—which featured the magnificence of whales and the cruelty of whaling. This paper examines how films and documentaries on whales and whaling, as well as anti-whaling campaigns conducted by environmental organizations, popularized the ideas that whales are symbols of nature and friends of humanity and portrayed whaling as an inhumane activity. The main targets of this analysis are the film *Flipper*, the documentaries of Jacques-Yves Cousteau, Greenpeace's anti-whaling campaign, and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society's (SSCS) direct actions. The discussions deploy, as analytical tools, such concepts as pseudo-events, image events, agenda-setting, media framing, encoding and decoding, and cultivation theory, and they consider news values, news production systems, and the problematic relationship between environmental organizations and the mass media. This study also examines the gap in information dissemination ability between anti-whaling nations—especially the world's media hegemons, like the United States and the United Kingdom—and pro-whaling nations, including Japan, which is an economic power but has significantly less media leverage in terms of news dissemination and entertainment film production.

### 2. Flipper and Cousteau

When were whales and dolphins first idealized as noble creatures for Westerners, especially those in English-speaking countries, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand? In Greek mythology, dolphins were depicted as sacred creatures that had a special relationship with Apollo and Poseidon, two of the 12

Olympians. In the Christian *Bible*, whales were the first creatures released into the waters by God in the days of creation, as a warning to humankind. The same book speaks the prophet Jonah being swallowed by a “great fish” that is generally accepted to mean a “whale”. That story inspired many painters and writers, including Carlo Lorenzini (pen name Carlo Collodi), the Italian novelist who wrote the popular children’s book *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, about a wooden marionette that wants to be a real human. With respect to the story of whales and humans, we should not neglect *Moby-Dick*, one of the all-time great works of American literature, written by Herman Melville. Nonetheless, the fact that *Moby-Dick*, published in 1851, described the story of American sperm whale hunting shows that whales at that time were not regarded as creatures to be protected but as economic resources to be exploited. In actuality, before the 1960s, there was little public concern over the predicament of whales, even though tens of thousands were killed each year. Before the 1960s, the general public mostly thought of whales as “very stocky, awkward-looking creatures with about as much aesthetic appeal as a gigantic, overfed pig” (Scarff 1980: 258). For the whaling industry, whales were nothing more than natural resources that produced meat and oil.

This situation changed dramatically by the American feature film *Flipper* (1963, directed by James B. Clark) and the documentary series *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*. *Flipper* related the fictional but heart-warming interactions of 12-year-old Sandy and the injured dolphin he rescued and named Flipper. Set in the Florida Keys, the film showed Flipper performing cute tricks in front of the town’s children, saving Sandy from a shark attack, and leading Sandy and his father, a fisherman, towards fertile fishing grounds. The film was such a success that NBC, one of the three major television stations in America at the time, broadcast *Flipper* as spin-off series from 1964 to 1968. Although there were several differences between the film’ and the television series’ characters, Flipper remained the star. As in the film, the television Flipper demonstrates a range of superb performances: Flipper saves the life of a drowning man and rescues a dog from an alligator attack (“Flipper’s Odyssey”); falls in love with another dolphin (“Dolphin Love Parts 1 and 2”); and even prevents a Russian spy from stealing classified information (“Flipper and the Spy”). Both the film and the television series were exported to many countries worldwide, making Flipper one of the most beloved animal heroes in the world. In the mid-1990s, *Flipper* was remade both as a television series (1995) and a film (1996). Through the original film and the succeeding television series, people became increasingly familiar with dolphins, making the franchise arguably among the most important media entities ever produced in terms of their lasting influence on the public perception of dolphins. Interestingly, the person who trained the dolphins that starred in the television versions of *Flipper* was Richard O’Barry. An American animal trainer turned activist, O’Barry appeared in the documentary film *The Cove*, which critically described the dolphin drive hunt in Taiji, Japan. The film won an Academy Award for best documentary in 2010. In the film, O’Barry claims, “It was the *Flipper* TV series that created this multi-billion-dollar industry. It created this desire to swim with them, kiss them, hold them, hug them, and love them to death.”

Jacques-Yves Cousteau was one of the world’s most respected oceanographers and

marine biologists. He dedicated his entire life to the exploration of the oceans and made an immeasurable contribution toward familiarizing the public with marine creatures. One of Cousteau's most-famous works was *The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau*, a series of television documentaries that aired worldwide between 1966 and 1976. The series brought into the homes of millions of viewers unforgettable images of sea creatures, including exotic fish, fearsome sharks, fast-swimming penguins, mysterious octopuses, and colorful coral reefs, not to mention such wonderful marine mammals as whales and seals. What Cousteau presented as a whale was not the stocky, pig-like creature people saw in paintings, but a streamlined, majestic animal of breathtaking beauty. The animals were also presented as "gentle giant" that showed deliberate consideration to divers who swam close by, despite humans having overhunted many species to the verge of extinction. In Cousteau's documentaries, the whales appeared to be careful not to hurt the human divers with their fins, and the dolphins accepted the caresses of humans and gave them seemingly warm, affectionate gazes. The creatures also seemed to show friendliness and intelligence by following humans' instructions to retrieve coins thrown into the water.

I have interviewed many environmental activists and researchers from Western countries, and many of them attributed the popularity of whales and dolphins to both *Flipper* and Cousteau's documentaries. Through these media products, whales have come to hold a strong presence in our imaginations. Whales and dolphins were transformed from a natural resource to be exploited to enrich our lives into objects of awe, affection, and protection. It was only a matter of time before this affection toward whales and dolphins evolved into anti-whaling sentiment. Before long, this sentiment consolidated into a majority public opinion, especially in the West. The next section examines the activity of environmental organizations, notably Greenpeace, which elevated anti-whaling sentiment into an anti-whaling movement, then providing that movement with a sense of direction and mobilized the general public to work towards a moratorium on commercial whaling.

### 3. Greenpeace's Anti-Whaling Campaign

The 1960s—the decade in which both *Flipper* and Cousteau's documentaries aired—was a period of social, cultural, and political turmoil globally, especially in North America and Western Europe. It was during this decade that people began to challenge certain dominant social beliefs, including the idea of economic development as a vehicle of human welfare and the division of roles between men and women; new social movements blossomed, as well, such as the antiwar movement, the antiracism movement, and the women's movement. Another example was the environmental movement, which during this era saw its second wave of success, the first having been from the late 19th century to the early 20th century.

The 1960s environmental movement differed from the earlier one in its goals and strategies. The new environmental movement no longer accepted the status quo blindly in matters concerning life, social, political, and economic structures or institutions of power.

It advocated for changes in environmentally damaging lifestyles into more benign ones compatible with nature. Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, which were both established in the 1960s and the 1970s, epitomized the tenets of the new environmental movement. They did not hesitate to picket polluting factories or boycott products made by companies or countries that failed to meet their standards of ecological integrity. Among the hundreds of environmental organizations worldwide, Greenpeace played a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of whaling. Although the direct actions of the SSCS have attracted attention recently, it was undoubtedly Greenpeace that drove the anti-whaling movement from the 1970s to the beginning of the 21st century.

Greenpeace was founded in 1971 as a non-profit organization by a handful of North American environmentalists to “ensure the ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity”, although the group assembled in 1969 as the “Don’t Make a Wave” committee, an offshoot of the Sierra Club, to protest US atmospheric nuclear testing that they feared would trigger earthquakes and tsunamis. Greenpeace’s initial campaign target was nuclear power (and weapons), under the influence of a “real whale freak” (Hunter 1979), but its efforts soon expanded into an anti-whaling campaign. Although the anti-whaling movement had already been taken up by other organizations, Greenpeace’s dramatic actions, epitomized by televised footage scenes of its small rubber boats in a standoff between a gigantic whaling vessel and defenseless whales, captured the world’s imagination. Before long, Greenpeace had become the leading organization in the anti-whaling campaign. Throughout its history, Greenpeace has had many successful campaigns, including protests surrounding seal overfishing, genetic engineering, deforestation, nuclear power and weapons, and climate change; however, most experts agree that its 1975 anti-whaling expedition was one of Greenpeace’s most successful campaigns in terms of its impact on both the public and policymakers.

The highlight of the campaign occurred on 27 June 1975, about eighty kilometers off the coast of California: the Greenpeace ship *Phyllis Cormack* dispatched three high-powered inflatable boats in pursuit of a Soviet whaling fleet in the Pacific (Greenpeace 1996; Deluca 2005). One of the inflatables, with Greenpeace activists on board, managed to position itself as a human shield between a pod of sperm whales and a Soviet catcher boat to protect the whales. Despite the expectation that the whalers would not fire their harpoons for fear of mistakenly hitting either the boat or the activists, the Russians fired. A harpoon flew just over the heads of the activists and struck the back of a nearby whale, turning the sea red with the blood spouting from the fatally wounded whale. The dramatic scene was captured on video by other Greenpeace activists and distributed instantly throughout the rest of the world using then-state-of-the-art satellite technology. The spectacular confrontation, in which intrepid Western environmental activists challenged a formidable Soviet whaling fleet comprising a colossal mother ship and several high-speed catcher boats, was riveting for a public living under the disquieting tensions of the Cold War as environmental degradation swept across the globe. Images of the encounter continue to hold such importance for Greenpeace that the organization often uses photos from the confrontation in its calls for donations. Greenpeace has described the importance of the campaign as follows: “Greenpeace had found the

campaign that would bring it its strongest and most widespread support, the campaign that in many people's eyes would define it more than any other" (Greenpeace 1996: 15).

It is no exaggeration to say that the campaign epitomized Greenpeace's media tactics. Robert Hunter, one of the organization's founding figures, wrote in his book *Warriors of the Rainbow*:

All I had to do was make sure never to quote myself. Instead, I invented quotes, placed them in the mouths of various agreeable crew members, then "reported" to the outside world what they had said. As a journalist, I was, of course, a traitor to my profession. As "news manager" for the expedition, I could censor any unflattering realities, control the shaping of our public image, and when things got slack, I could arrange for events to be staged that could then be reported as news. Instead of reporting the news, I was in fact in the position of inventing the news—then reporting it. Sooner or later, we would have to come up with the goods—a confrontation with a whaling fleet. (Hunter 1979: 178)

From the beginning, Greenpeace conducted its anti-whaling campaign with the influence of the media firmly in mind. In publicizing the confrontation, Greenpeace successfully projected three simple but powerful images into the minds of the public: (1) the courageous environmentalists as heroes who selflessly risked their lives for an environmental cause; (2) the helpless whales as tiny, defenseless creatures dwarfed by the towering Soviet vessel; and (3) the sinister whalers as killing machines with no qualms about harming sacred creatures from nature or the humans who dared protect them (Hunter 1979). Unlike well-established environmental or animal welfare organizations, such as the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society (the United States) or the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (the United Kingdom), Greenpeace considered guiding the media response to be a crucial part of its mandate, not just because of its relative newness but also because at that time it had a small membership and a weak financial base. By involving the media first hand, Greenpeace could successfully appeal to the general public to expand both its membership and donations for new campaigns.

Dramatic actions—detractors have called them "stunts"—are Greenpeace's most public campaign methods. Other examples include forcefully occupying the platform of an oil rig in the high seas to demonstrate the dangers of deep-water drilling and the disposal of the contaminated rigs and equipment in the water; climbing the smokestack of factories that discharge toxic or radioactive waste material; and spraying seal pups with colored dye to destroy the value of the pelts. Greenpeace was arguably the first environmental organization to appreciate the power of images in shaping public perceptions and mobilize public concern for environmental causes.

Greenpeace's media savvy in its campaigns was supported theoretically by the then-novel ideas of Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan. His extensive studies in media theory made McLuhan quick to realize the vast potential of advancing communication technologies, foreseeing how instantaneous communication would change society entirely (McLuhan and Zingrone 1997). McLuhan held that technology is an extension of the human body (e.g. automobiles are an extension of our legs; televisions are an extension

of human eyes and ears) and that new technologies would change our perceptions of the environment in which we live. His most significant ideas are well expressed by his most-famous dictums, “the medium is the message” and “global village”. The former implies that the form through which an idea is conveyed has an intrinsic value that has a significant effect on perceptions and actions. The latter essentially predicts the internet by acknowledging that instantaneous worldwide access to information through electronic media—which at the time was television transmitted via satellite—would effectively negate the barriers of time and space, and uniting people everywhere as if they were all neighbors. Some of the early Greenpeace activists were devotees of McLuhan; it would not be an overreach to say that they consciously translated McLuhan’s ideas into practice, as illustrated by a remark made by Hunter, who exquisitely expressed the organization’s anti-nuclear and anti-whaling campaigns as a “media war” and proudly said, “We had studied Marshall McLuhan” (quoted in Pearce 1991: 19).

Greenpeace’s anti-whaling campaign is replete with examples of what American historian Daniel Boorstin dubbed *pseudo-events* to describe experiences or activities produced for the explicit purpose of generating media attention and publicity. Unlike natural disasters and traffic accidents, which happen without intention, pseudo-events are not spontaneous but planned so that they will be reported and reproduced. The relationship between pseudo-events and the underlying reality is ambiguous, and pseudo-events are intended to serve as self-fulfilling prophecies (Boorstin 1992: 11–12). This echoes the comments of Greenpeace’s Hunter, who said, “Sooner or later, we would have to come up with the goods—a confrontation with a whaling fleet” (Hunter 1979: 178). Greenpeace’s confrontation with the Soviet whaling fleet was staged to be filmed and transmitted to the world via satellite. As Boorstin wrote, pseudo-events can overwhelm spontaneous events for many reasons, including these: (1) pseudo-events are often more dramatic than spontaneous events; (2) pseudo-events can be repeated and can generate other pseudo-events, reinforcing the impressions; and (3) pseudo-events are purposefully planned for intelligibility and information dissemination (Boorstin 1992: 39–40). Boorstin (1992: 8) has also said, “The successful reporter is one who can find a story, even if there is no earthquake or assassination or civil war. If he cannot find a story, then he must make one”. There is no denying that Greenpeace is a competent newsmaker; it has created many events designed to attract media attention and used the presence of the world’s media to communicate its messages to the public.

Kevin Michael Deluca’s idea of an “image event” is closely related to Boorstin’s pseudo-event concept. Image events are “staged acts of protest designed for media dissemination” (Delicath and Deluca 2003: 315). They are planned for the specific purpose of creating social controversy and shaping public opinion to hold corporations and nations accountable (Delicath and Deluca 2003). In the electronic age, when pictures often overpower words, image events can mobilize audiences around social causes. Image events constitute argumentative practices in a postmodern age in which grand narratives are routinely eclipsed by shocking images, experiences are fragmented, and style has an edge over substance. They stand in contrast to so-called modern projects that are formed in the public sphere—a discursive space in which public opinions are shaped through the



deliberations of informed citizens. Deluca explains that he chose the phrase “image events” to avoid the negative connotation of the prefix, arguing that Boorstin’s ontological distinction between *pseudo*-events (“fake news”) and real events (something happened) is unsound in the context of planned public actions (Deluca 2005: 165). The idea of the image event was first adopted by environmental organizations, then spread to other social movements. Through image events, environmental organizations such as Greenpeace influence the public by conveying their grievances and expectations to governments and corporations. Image events are also a means of expressing organizational identity; they are used as a tool to recruit new members and maintain publicity surrounding environmental causes.

#### 4. Sea Shepherd Conservation Society’s Direct Actions

Image events staged by environmental organizations to publicize the inhumanity of whaling have continued into the 21st century. The organization currently in the spotlight in this ongoing performance is the SSCS, which was established in 1977 by Canadian–American conservationist and activist Paul Watson after he was ousted by Greenpeace. Greenpeace advocates nonviolent confrontation, whereas the SSCS has proclaimed itself willing to take a direct action-oriented approach when necessary. Watson carefully avoids harming people, but he shows no hesitation in destroying property that he believes is being used for illegal activities. Watson and the SSCS have devoted their most ardent efforts to anti-whaling campaigns. Although they have targeted many countries, notably Spain, Portugal, and the Faroe Islands, as well as the indigenous American group the Makah, their fiercest attacks have targeted the Japanese whaling fleet. The most spectacular SSCS attack against the Japanese whalers to date played out in the Antarctic Ocean when SSCS boats tried to disrupt the whaling operations by entangling the propellers of the fleet’s mothership; they also threw smoke pots and stink bombs (glass bottles of butyric acid) onto the Japanese ships’ decks and rammed a Japanese supply vessel. Embracing the spirit of the image event, Greenpeace imposes itself into problematic environmental situations to bear witness, raising its banners in protest and taking pictures and video that can be disseminated to the world. In contrast, the SSCS takes direct action. Watson does not protest; he acts (Lester 2011: 128).

From the 2007–2008 whaling season onwards, the SSCC has invited staff from Animal Planet, an American television channel that produces series and documentaries about wild animals and domestic pets, to accompany their anti-whaling expeditions. Animal Planet used their first-person coverage of the SSCS’s activities to develop a documentary series called *Whale Wars* (2010) that aired from 2008 to 2015. Focusing on Paul Watson, *Whale Wars* dealt mainly with the intrepid activities of SSCS’s vessels and crews, with a guest appearance by Hollywood star Daryl Hannah; a futuristic-style speedboat resembling the Batmobile; and well-orchestrated interactions and attractions designed to entertain the NGO’s supporters and the television audience. *Whale Wars* was always filmed from the SSCS’s perspective. For example, episodes have shown scenes from a confrontation with Japanese whaling ships interspersed with interviews with



crewmembers of Sea Shepherd vessels. In response to criticism that their documentaries are biased, Animal Planet explained that their requests to access Japanese ships for filming purposes were declined. According to the executive director of the series, their shooting style is that of an “observational documentary” and “they are independent of the crew and goals of Sea Shepherd” (McHendry 2012: 148).

In *Whale Wars*, there were several scenes that appear to feature excessive staging or even media manipulation. One of the most well-known was Japan’s allegedly shooting Watson during a skirmish with Japanese whalers near Australia in the Antarctic during the 2007–2008 season. The incident can be described roughly as follows (*Whale War: Season 1* 2010): Watson, standing on the deck of the SSCS’s *Steve Irwin*, provocatively shouted “Come on” at the Japanese ship *Nisshin Maru*. Suddenly, Watson pressed his hand to his chest. Watson took off his jacket to reveal a squashed metal fragment embedded in his white bullet-proof vest. One of the crew shouted, “Captain was shot”, while another crew member remarked, “Someone tried to assassinate him.” Watson maintained his composure, remarking, “They are very ruthless people who are involved in killing whales down here. I expected this kind of violence.” The “shooting incident” was immediately reported by the world media, covered by television networks such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. In response to the alleged shooting, Japan’s Institute of Cetacean Research (ICR), the agency responsible for conducting whaling research and owner of the *Nisshin Maru*, countered the SSCS’s version of events with a press release stating that the incident was “directed by the Animal Planet filmmakers themselves in a ‘tail wagging the dog’ format,” and that “[t]his staged event involved Sea Shepherd” (ICR 2008). The truth remains a subject of controversy; considering that it is very difficult to shoot someone on a swaying vessel in the chest from another swaying vessel more than 100 meters away, besides the fact that after the “shooting”, the crew of Sea Shepherd kept their composure and maintained the course of their vessel, it seems reasonable to suppose that the incident was staged in order to disgrace the Japanese whalers and live up to the expectations Animal Planet had in mind when seeking to dramatize the whaling conflict.

Paul Watson is a master of creating media events; he decides where, when, and how his crews confront the whalers. SSCS’s media team films scenes of confrontation, then adds commentary and disseminates the videos to news media and the blogosphere. Watson is a veteran of the media wars, having been one of the Greenpeace activists who took part in the aforementioned confrontation with the Soviet whaling fleet in 1975, and he has led many campaigns over the past 40-plus years. Combining his natural charisma with today’s internet technology, he has had an undeniable influence on the media. In his book discussing the protest strategies of the environmental movement, Watson wrote about the unreliability of the media. The following two citations seem to illustrate how the SSCS put Watson’s media strategies into practice:

Objectivity is a myth, an illusion, a con, and a trick. Objectivity in the media does not exist. The illusion of objectivity may work as a strategy, but only a fool would believe it is a reality within the media culture. (Watson 1993: 36)

If you can't achieve your aims through facts, then baffle your opposition with bullshit. Deceive with dazzling dramatics, fabricate fantasies fired forth with flair, and shower your targets with flamboyance and fiery rhetoric. Give the public a circus and contain your message within. Educate through the media of entertainment. Exploit existing myths and create your own myths and legends. (Watson 1993: 108)

Paul Rotha, a British documentary filmmaker and film critic, identified two kinds of methods in making documentaries: descriptive (journalistic) and impressionist (Rotha 1939). The choice depends on the purpose of the film, as well as the personal preference of the director involved (Rotha 1939: 225). The descriptive approach attempts to report or delineate a series of events without sensationalizing the material; objectivity is paramount. In contrast, the impressionist approach dramatizes the material because it aims to generate an emotional effect, meaning a detailed literary description is not expected. Traditional print media generally take the descriptive approach, while social media and the visual media generally take the impressionist approach. Both *Animal Planet* and Paul Watson favor the latter. For them, Watson, especially, the important thing is not to weigh down their documentaries with facts and figures but to impart the right message. As long he communicates the message that whaling is an absolute evil, he remains unconcerned about whether his assertions contain exaggerations or manipulations.

## 5. News Values and the News-Making Process

There is no denying that the mass media are essential institutions for life in the modern world. In the highly segmented and complex societies in which we live, the chances to experience the totality of myriad events and happenings first hand are minimal. For instance, for military conflicts in foreign countries or global environmental problems in remote areas, such as the loss of biodiversity and marine pollution, the mass media are usually our only source of information. The media alert us to the issues, and how they tell the stories (e.g., tone, perspective, etc.) guides our interpretations. What they choose to cover (and when) is known as “the agenda-setting role of the media”, while their presentation of the stories is known as “media framing”. Without agenda-setting, we would be flooded with a babel of information—an indistinguishable clamor impossible to parse for priority or veracity; we could not separate news from noise. Without framing, we might be unable to fathom the ramifications of complex events; we would have trouble knowing what the news meant in context. However, agenda-setting and framing also have downsides. When we allow the media to set the agenda, we have to accept that they filter what we will hear based on what they think is important, and we might miss important issues because they are not covered. Additionally, framing, by definition, molds our perceptions of issues in a particular way to steer us away from other interpretations, while simultaneously blinding us to different perspectives and other sources of information.

Given the vast number of events occurring every minute of every day in every place around the world, the question of which issues the media considers newsworthy is an

important one. There is general agreement among scholars and journalists across cultures as to what makes something newsworthy: timeliness, relevance (proximity), scale, impact, currency, clarity, visibility, consonance (cultural framework), prominence (celebrity, heroes and villains), unexpectedness, organizational focus, sensationalism, evocation (prompting emotional responses), drama, personification (not abstract), conflict, and negativity. The more of these traits a story has, the more likely it is to be considered newsworthy. The level/degree of each item is also important.

The newsworthiness filter can be applied to whaling. Whaling is newsworthy for many reasons: its issues are ongoing (timeliness); it is conducted around the world (scale); it influences the management of natural resources (impact, consonance, currency); it has perpetrators and victims (clarity, drama); it offers bloody scenes and confrontations (visibility, conflict); it features celebrities, such as anti-whaling supporters Brigitte Bardot, Daryl Hannah, and Sean Penn (prominence); it pits intelligent mammals against each other (unexpectedness, sensationalism, drama, conflict); it involves social animals with a strong family bond (evocation, consonance); it features heroes, who may be courageous environmentalists or the people meeting a basic need by hunting in the most humane way possible (drama, conflict, personification, consonance); and it was once generally accepted (currency) but is now often seen as cruel and exploitative (negativity). Clearly, whaling satisfies many of the items on the list describing newsworthiness.

Of course, just because the media leans toward an anti-whaling stance, this does not mean that every audience receives their message. In his classic “encoding and decoding model”, cultural theorist Stuart Hall argued that even if senders (encoders) create a message with a specific intention (usually based on a dominant ideology), the receivers (decoders) may not accept everything in the manner intended (Hall 2001). For example, the receivers may reject the senders’ intentions and adopt their own interpretations (oppositional position), or they may only partly accept the senders’ intentions, thereby modifying the message according to their own values (negotiated position). Receivers decode messages in unique ways because we all filter messages through our own experiences, beliefs, interests, cultural framework, and social position. That is, the audience is not a passive receiver but an active player who negotiates with the message/text in their own way—the idea that “the audience negotiates and resists.” In addition, the message itself contains multiple meanings and allows different interpretations—the idea that “the text is polysemic.”

Nevertheless, in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where whaling as a business has become a thing of the past, virtually no one in industry circles supports whaling. Politicians are also inclined to be against whaling, partly because this buoys up their green credentials. The general public in Western countries, the millions who grew up watching *Flipper* and Cousteau’s documentaries, have internalized a positive image of whales. As a result, an overwhelming majority of them oppose whaling. British cultural theorist Richard Hoggart argued that the most important filter through which the news is constructed is “the cultural air we breathe, the whole ideological atmosphere of our society, which tells us that some things can be said and that others had best not be said” (Bennett 1982: 303). It is also possible to rephrase the words

“cultural air” with “dominant values”, which describes “a mixture of personal and institutional choice, external pressure, and anticipation of what a large and heterogeneous audience expects and wants” (McQuail 1987: 285). Paul Brown, an environment correspondent for the British broadsheet newspaper *The Guardian*, once said this in an interview:

If you are in a country like this one, which is more or less a hundred percent against whaling, if all the political parties are against whaling, it's very hard to stand up and say, “Japanese whaling is okay.” It's not what the reader wants to read. It's certainly not a popular thing to say, and it is also true it is very difficult to get a story in the paper. (interview, 24 May 2001)

Thus, the Western media tend to refrain from news coverage of whaling stories unless they advocate against whaling. Audiences that have been repeatedly exposed to beautiful images of whales and negative images of whaling on their screens commonly hold the worldview that “whales are good, and whaling is evil,” and act on the basis of that dogma (this is called “cultivation theory”).

## 6. Environmental Organizations and the Mass Media

Analysis of the anti-whaling campaigns conducted by environmental activists reveals the interactive and sometimes problematic relationship between environmental organizations and the media. Social movement activists generally (and environmental activists in particular) need the media to spread their message to the general public as widely as possible. Without the assistance of the media, activists would have a much harder time appealing to and mobilizing the public around their causes. Every time the media covers a message or action of the activists, the activists' campaigns gain credibility; amplified by the media, activists come to be perceived by society as legitimate players whose voices should be heard. The internet has given everyone, including environmental organizations, access to many forms of direct media such as webpages and social networking services with which to directly spread their message widely, not just to the public but to policymakers, as well. Nevertheless, the influence of the mass media remains strong, and even occasionally overwhelming.

Meanwhile, the mass media are currently in a difficult situation. Print newspaper circulations have plummeted, owing to escalating worldwide aliteracy, and television faces increasing competition from the internet. News organizations, especially newspapers and news-focused television programming, are struggling under both incessant time pressures and limited resources, both human and budgetary. In most cases, both print and broadcast journalists must gather materials, evaluate their meanings, and synthesize cohesive stories on paper or screen for the 24/7 news cycle. Time and staff are finite, budgets are limited, competition is severe, and some issues—especially environmental issues—are too complicated to report thoroughly given the limitations of format, time, and the audience's attention spans. Despite such constraints, news has to be continually

produced without delay every day.

In the relationship between interviewers and interviewees, the former usually hold the stronger position because they decide when and how to report on a given subject. However, this is not always the case. For instance, when it comes to complex issues that require broad and deep scientific understanding or events that happen far from the journalists' everyday beats, the media have to depend on briefings by experts or the parties concerned. They often contact politicians, government officials, scientists, and activists for information. Among these sources, activists, including environmentalists, are likely to be the most vocal, accessible, and quick to respond. Thus, the influence of environmentalists on the media is considerable, especially if the journalists are not conversant with the subject matter, giving the environmentalists the upper hand in that they can dictate how they should be reported. Even for journalists who specialize in environmental issues, it is next-to-impossible to check every background detail and implication systematically. As a matter of necessity, they often rely on the expertise and resources of environmental organizations, which places environmentalists in a powerful position.

In the case of *Whale Wars*, the Animal Planet staff brought cameras and other equipment to the ships operated by the SSCS and interviewed the activists. However, it is not always easy for the media to accompany such organizations. For example, incidents (or image events) may take place in locations far away from the Western media centers where journalists live and work and, if the incidents occur in places like the Antarctic, which may take several weeks to reach by ship, even from Australia, on-the-spot media coverage is unlikely. In such situations, the media rely heavily on the press releases and packaged news items (texts and pictures supplied with sound) produced by various groups—including environmental organizations—for dissemination. Activist organizations leverage this structural limitation on the media to full advantage to get their messages across.

Another factor we have to take into account when discussing the relationship between environmentalists and journalists is that journalists are generally sympathetic towards the environmental movement. This assertion was backed by Lowe and Morrison (1984) who conducted interviews with journalists specializing in environmental coverage. They reported that many journalists become environmental campaigners in their own right. A case in point is Robert Hunter, who quit his job as a journalist with a Canadian newspaper company to become a Greenpeace activist. Journalists' pro-environmentalist views also seem to be mutual. According to Dalton (1994: 166–168), environmentalists generally regard journalists as supporters of their cause, as evidenced by this remark by Pete Wilkinson, former chairman of Greenpeace UK:

We had a very good relationship with the press. We took people to the sea with us.... We tried to assimilate them into what we were trying to do. ... We had a good laugh. Eventually the press came around to our way of thinking. ... They tended to be very sympathetic (interview, 29 May 2001).

This symbiotic relationship seems to have continued. For example, the Australian media are said to be generally supportive of both Paul Watson's goals and their government's attempted interventions to prevent Japanese whaling in the Antarctic (Lester 2011: 133).

The relationship between environmental organizations and the media is not always untroubled. The members of the press are not all gullible dupes who believe uncritically whatever environmental groups say. Some journalists have condemned various environmental organizations' dramatic but dangerous direct actions. Others have been critical of environmental organizations' biased statements that focus on the plight of endangered whale species but fail to mention that there are many whale species whose populations are robust. Despite some journalists' mistrust of environmental organizations, it appears that environmental activists still maintain a considerable influence on the media.

One reason for this is the aforementioned structural limitations on the media in terms of expertise, time, budget, and other resources. In his study of the press coverage of environmental issues in two British newspapers (*The Guardian* and *Today*) between 1987–1991, Hansen (1993: 164–65) found that Greenpeace was quoted directly in almost half of the articles assessed and quoted indirectly in another 20%. Even if the organization was not quoted, according to Hansen, in over a third of the coverage, its name was still mentioned. He noted that six out of the 611 *Guardian* articles were written not by staff writers but by Greenpeace representatives. Television broadcasting stations, too, have been known to air packaged news items created by Greenpeace or the SSCS. However, it is not fair to blame individual journalists on the environmental beat; it is usually the editors (or their bosses), not the journalists, who are responsible for selecting which stories to run and whether to give them prominence or bury them. As Anderson (1991: 471) pointed out, packaged news items are generally sent not to journalists but straight to editors who may be desperate to fill column inches or air time with ready-to-go pieces. Given the role of editors, this is not surprising; they bear the onus of determining newsworthiness. “With one eye always fixed on circulation or audience figures” (Hannigan 1995: 67), and with the other eye on the limitations of time and budget, editors often feel compelled to accept ready-made articles and pictures. Packaged news can be irresistible to editors and journalists under constant pressure. The packaged items are especially desirable if the stories are confrontational, sensational, and emotionally appealing to the public.

## **7. The Gap of Information Dissemination Ability Regarding the Whaling Issue**

The previous sections examined how *Flipper* and Cousteau's documentaries were instrumental in disseminating a positive image of whales among Western audiences. They also considered Greenpeace's legendary anti-whaling campaign of 1975 and the SSCS's direct actions in the Antarctic in the 21st century, providing analysis grounded in several media theories. Environmental organizations have been successful in co-opting the media to persuade the international community of the inhumanity of whaling. Other media vehicles have affected people's images of whales and whaling as well. Take the film *Star*

*Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986, directed by Leonard Nimoy, USA), for example. In the science fiction genre, the Star Trek franchise of films and television programs is rivalled in popularity only by the Star Wars franchise. In the film *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, the humpback whale is portrayed as a keystone of the Earth's communications; its extinction prevents humanity from responding to an alien signal, and travelling back in time to prevent that extinction is necessary to save the Earth from destruction. The film was released in 1986—the height of the anti-whaling movement reached and the year that the whaling moratorium was implemented. The film clearly reflects the mood of the times. Whaling is described in the film as the epitome of human folly, and whales are portrayed as the foundation of the entire ecosystem. Another example is *The Cove* (2009, directed by Louie Psihoyos, USA), a documentary film about dolphin hunting in Taiji, Japan. The scene in which a school of dolphins was driven to an inlet and slaughtered by local fishermen attracted a barrage of criticism from across the world.

What these media products and environmental organizations' activities have in common is that all were created by Westerners, chiefly North American activists and directors. While it is true that many Japanese do not support whaling, anti-whaling as a social movement has been predominantly a Western phenomenon. Japan, which carries out whaling as a national policy, does not stand by idly. For instance, as mentioned above, the Japanese whaling research agency ICR has presented counterarguments, distributing press releases that explain the Japanese position. Nonetheless, there is no denying that the Japanese pro-whaling publicity campaigns have been far from strong. The Japanese nonfiction writer Shinobu Yoshioka once claimed that Taiji should make its case with words and images, with the help of film directors (NHK 2010). In fact, after *The Cove* was released, Japanese directors created several documentary films on whaling to offer alternate perspectives on whaling. However, in terms of audience attendance and influence, these films were no match for *The Cove*. In the entertainment film business, Hollywood's major movie studios hold an overwhelming market share. In the international news market, meanwhile, Reuters (based in London), the Associated Press (based in New York), and Agence France-Presse (based in Paris) are three of the leading international news organizations. The home countries of these three organizations were all victors following the Second World War, are permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations, and are all states of media supremacy in the sense that they dominate the world news market. In contrast, the major whaling nations—Japan, Norway, and Iceland—are not media hegemons.

The power relationships are clear in international politics with regard to the varying levels of influence in the media industry vis-à-vis the environmental movement in general and the anti-whaling movement in particular. Furthermore, because English is a lingua franca of international politics and business, non-English-speaking countries and people are at a disadvantage. Discussions should be based on facts and logic; however, fluency of language, rhetoric, and media skills are also indispensable. As the analyses herein have shown, major whaling nations are neither media powers nor English-speaking countries. For example, Japan is an economic power but it does not possess strong media power



relative to its economic size. That relative lack of media dominance is one reason why whaling nations, including Japan, have been upstaged in the whaling controversy.

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