The Reef and The Public:

An Analysis of Past and Current Great Barrier Reef Media Campaigns

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Abstract

Coral reefs are essential to Earth's ecosystems and economy. However, the general public tends to know very little about the threats coral reefs face, a result of ocean illiteracy. Mediated campaigns help communicate to audiences about coral reefs, the stressors they face, and ways people can help. The Great Barrier Reef is subject to many campaigns including the "Save the Reef" and "Fight for Our Reef." By setting the agenda for media professionals through alternative media platforms, both campaigns can reach the general public and eventually decision-makers, leading to additional efforts to protect the Great Barrier Reef. Using the Rice and Robinson's Ocean Communication Model of Sustainability, this paper compares two media campaigns looking at the different strategies and tactics they employ to tackle communicating ocean issues to public audiences. By using traditional and new media, media campaigns can receive greater success if they work with the media and news industries using agenda-setting theory, to frame topics in such a way that resonates with the public.

Keywords: Agenda-setting theory, Coral Reefs, Great Barrier Reef, Ocean Communication Model

The Reef and The Public

Coral reefs are distinctive and unique to the areas around them, boasting a variety and biodiversity of species that can rival any terrestrial area. Although the reefs only cover 0.2% of the earth's oceanic floor, which is about the size of Texas and New Mexico combined, an estimated one million species are found around coral reefs (Weier, 2001, para. 1)—around 25% of our marine species (Coral Reef Alliance, 2017, para. 1). Beyond science, reefs generate an estimated $375 billion each year (Bunting, 2001, p. 3). Coral reefs found in coastal areas around the world benefit the aquarium, fishing, and ecotourism industries, creating at least 500 million jobs (Orlowski, 2017).

The Great Barrier Reef (often referred to as GBR or “the Reef”) is Earth’s largest series of coral reefs. It alone hosts approximately 3,000 species of marine life in an area the size of New Mexico; generates 4.4 billion USD annually and supports 69,000 full-time workers in fishing, tourism, and other industries; and boasts a rich cultural heritage that is integral to the Australian identity. However, despite all of this, the GBR did not receive national protection until 1975 and international recognition until 1981 (Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland [WPSQ], 2007, para. 4), only after a series of public media campaigns advocating the reef’s importance (Lloyd, R.J., 2016). An increasing number of reefs around the globe are experiencing local, regional, national, and international protections as active citizens and persons recognize their importance to both their area and the world.

Prior to the 1960s, the general global public didn’t have many concerns for the health of their coral reefs, including Australians with regards to the GBR (Vowles, 2016). With limestone mining and plans for mineral and gas exploration on the GBR expanding in the 1970s, both scientists and laypersons had growing concerns for their reefs (Vowles, 2016). Many efforts

began to help secure protections for the coral reef systems around Australia, among these efforts were media campaigns. As a result, we can see, historically, mediated campaigns have been essential to creating coral reef protection since the inception of governmental coral reef protections (Lloyd, R., Newlands, & Petray, 2016). In 1967, the GBR was the subject of a fourteen-year campaign demanding government officials to protect the Reef from direct threats like limestone/coral mining and offshore oil drilling. Dubbed the "Save the Reef" campaign, its efforts successfully lead to the official declaration of the GBR officially as a national undersea park in 1975 (WPSQ, 2007, para. 4). From these initial protections we see other countries and communities work to create institutional barriers to protect local coral reefs. Bonaire, a small island that is part of the Netherland Antilles and located north of Venezuela, established 6,700 acres of "fringing reefs, seagrasses, and mangroves" as a marine protected area in 1979 (Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance, 2014, para. 1). Despite increased awareness among the public, less than six percent of the ocean is under some form of protection (Mission Blue, n.d, para. 1).

Threats to coral reefs continually increase and evolve at rapid rates; these stressors significantly contribute to the mortality of coral reef systems. With regards to ocean issues, the general population serve as latent publics—blissfully unaware of even related topics besides the amount of traffic to their beach (Rice & Robinson, 2013, p. 231). According to the Ocean Project, public knowledge of ocean conservation has changed little since 1999 (Rice & Robinson, 2013, p.231). With the rapidly deteriorating state of the environment as a result of climate change and other human factors, there is a greater need now more than ever to convert the general public from latent to active, becoming literate in ocean threats and problems. With this need, we see publicly mediated campaigns in support of coral reefs return with new messages addressing these new threats and educate the public about additional efforts to

protecting our coral reefs ecosystems.

This essay dives into ocean conservation media campaigns effectiveness and success by focusing on the Great Barrier Reef. This paper provides context of the Australian Marine Conservation Society's 1970s "Save the Reef" campaign tactics and the current "Fight for Our Reef" campaign through comparing the two media campaigns against each other, highlighting what tactics were most effective for each campaign. By using traditional and new media, media campaigns can receive greater success if they work with the media and news industries using agenda-setting theory, to frame topics in such a way that resonates with the public. To compare campaigns, this paper employs Rice and Robinson's Ocean Communication Model of Sustainability (2013, p. 233). This five-step model which analyzes aids in increasing ocean literacy with the public: (a) diagnose dimensions of environmental problems, (b) define and integrate sustainable aspects, (c) choosing the best fit theory-based communication strategy, (d) address issues of low ocean literacy, and (e) integrate impact assessment design (Rice & Robinson, 2013, p.233). Using this model, this paper will compare the examples by looking at: (a) scale, scope, and fit of ocean literacy problems, (b) boundaries to audiences, (c) use of communication theory to approaching audiences, (d) limitations of audiences, and (e) ultimate communication plan. Utilizing the ocean communication model to compare and contrast examples, this paper will provide meaningful answers about the different media campaigns plans.

Two Key Great Barrier Reef Media Campaigns

In August 1967, an application for limestone mining on Ellison Reef, a section in the center of the GBR, was submitted to the Australian Government (Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p.55). Prior to this incident, dead corals were harvested for building material or fertilizer, which is what

applicant Donald Forbes intended to do (Lloyd, R. J. 2016, para. 11; Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p.55). Nothing was particularly unusual about Forbes' application; using dead corals as fertilizer was a common practice in Australia since the 1800s. A group of marine scientists and avid bushwalkers, known as the Queensland Littoral Society (QLS), found a notice for Forbes' coral harvest application. QLS sprang into action to save the coral reefs, and launched one of the longest environmental campaigns in Australian history (Lloyd, R. J., 2016, para. 13). Using media resources such as television and journalism, QLS coordinated a strategic agenda to communicate to the public both the importance of coral reefs and the dangers of industrial practices that will affect these ecosystems (Foxwell & Lester, 2017). Ultimately, their efforts resulted in the formal creation and protection of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in 1975 (Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p. 59).

However, more stressors came. During the 1990s scientists discovered climate change as threat to coral reefs (Vowles, 2016, para. 23)—rising sea temperatures could be correlated with coral bleaching, a phenomenon where corals expel symbiotic algae that the animal depends on for food, which results in corals literally starving to death (National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration [NOAA], 2010, para. 2). The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lists a number of sources aiding in coral reef death from local threats (e.g. physical damages, various pollution, overfishing, coral harvesting, etc.) to global threats (i.e. climate change and coral bleaching, ocean acidification, increased tropical storms, etc.) (2018). Marine protected areas, like the GBR marine park, were the first start in ocean conservation, but there is much more work to do. Future changes buttressed by public support allows greater communication in legal and regulatory spaces which result in further environmental protections.

Echoing the first coral reef media campaign of the 1970s, the seminal "Fight for Our

Reef" debuted in 2012 to combat governmental and individual problems that threatened the GBR. "Fight for the Reef" is a partnership between the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS). QLS who ran the original 1970s "Save the Reef" campaign was renamed the AMCS during the mid-1990s (Australian Marine Conservation Society [AMCS], n.d., para. 4). In particular, the "Fight for Our Reef" campaign works to squash progress made towards government approval for the expansion of coal mining by the Adani Group in Queensland. Adani's Carmichael Coal Mine would negatively affect carbon emissions and local water usage which are indirect threats to Australian coral reef ecosystems, but in particular the mine is a direct threat to the GBR because of a shipping terminal near the reef (Slezak, 2017). The dangerous increased risk of collisions, spills, and excessive coal dust can be detrimental to the GBR (Slezak, 2017, para. 19 - 22). Using both traditional and new media campaigns, "Fight for Our Reef" creates interpersonal events then promotes them across their social media. From there, journalists and bloggers take the events and disseminate the information to further permeate the public about the "Fight for Our Reef" campaign. The campaign has garnered more support over the past five years leading to great strides in government and public awareness of the ocean issues in Australia and other nations surrounding the GBR (World Wildlife Fund [WWF] – Fight for the Reef, n.d.).

Save the Reef

In 1967, QLS needed to communicate the importance of protecting the GBR and other coral reef ecosystems to a national audience, with the intent of ultimately influencing decision-makers changing current government policy. The barriers QLS faced for their campaign includes a lack of ocean literacy among the public and potential apathy to the cause to protect reefs. However, QLS decided to approach their audiences by setting the agenda of then alternative

mass media. Agenda-setting theory is the ability the media have to influence the importance of topics discussed and on the public agenda, as well as dictate how the public thinks and discusses a topic; the media does this based on how they frame topics so the topic appeals with an audience (McCombs, 2001). By utilizing a series of "alternative mass media" to advocate protecting the GBR—including magazines, newsletters, books, local radio, local television—QLS is able to infiltrate the national mainstream media: print, radio, and television (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017, p.573; Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p.56-60). The advocates disseminated information by staying in contact with journalists and personalities who shaped the media discourse shared with the public (Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p.56-60). Journalists translate important environmental issues on the agenda to a broad audience, framing the story in a way that resonates with the public. The media continued to engage positively with environmentalists and scientists that allowed a clear, attractive message that "the GBR was too precious to risk" (Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p.57). To craft the story around the environmentalists working to protect the GBR, the mainstream media created a "David v. Goliath" narrative—David being the environmentalists and Goliath being corporate companies and the bureaucracy (Lloyd, R. et al., 2016). This approach increased sympathy for the GBR from the Australian public.

Although Australian politicians recognized the economic benefits of the GBR as a tourism site because of the Reef's beauty, governmental protections for the reef continued to be tied up in red tape (Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p.57). The limitations of both the general public and decision-makers was the lack of foresight of disaster that could occur to the GBR. As a result, an American disaster became an Australian catalyst. In 1969, a well off the coast of Santa Barbara, California, leached three million gallons of crude oil into the ocean, creating an oil slick thirty-five miles long (Mai-Duc, 2015). Known as the Santa Barbara Blowout, this was caused by

inadequate safety precautions taken by the company, despite the petroleum exploration having been granted "only under the strictest control[s]" in California at the time (Mai-Duc, 2015; WPSQ, 2007; Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p.57). Just prior to this event, the Australian government had granted rights to six companies to explore for oil in the GBR area. The Australian news and alternative media's portrayal of the Santa Barbara Blowout, coupled with the recent announcements of approved oil exploration near the GBR, framed the events in such a way that instilled concern and fear in Australians about a similar event happening on the GBR (WPSQ, 2007). The public became increasingly anxious about coral reef protection, especially after an investigative journalist revealed an approved oil drilling permit for the GBR (WPSQ, 2007, para. 4). After securing public support, both regional Queensland and national Australian governments worked to place laws to protect the GBR.

Fight for Our Reef

Upon initial inspection, the "Fight for Our Reef" campaign matches much of the scale and scope of the "Save the Reef" campaign, run by WWF and AMCS. While there are many stressors to the GBR from individuals to industry (as addressed earlier in the paper using the Rice and Robinson's Ocean Communication Model (2013)), the media campaign focuses on the industrial threat of the Adani Group's Carmichael Coal Mine on the indirect and direct threats to the GBR. The national and global public meant to be addressed by the campaign is to again influence decision-makers with regards to Australian government policy. As a result, the fit for the campaign is using alternative media to advocate to protect the GBR. However, in 2013, alternative media that will resonate best with the public are the internet and social media. By using the internet as a vehicle for their message, the "Fight for Our Reef" campaigns are designed to transcend anthropogenic boundaries like nation borders and circumvent traditional

media of TV, radio, and magazines associated with media, government, and industry (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017, p.573). Communication speed has increased substantially in comparison to earlier campaigns. Spikes in topical conversations on Twitter (i.e. Twitter Storms) from "Fight for Our Reef" are a common occurrence, often coinciding when the World Heritage Committee discussions about the GBR (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017, p.573).

According to Foxwell-Norton and Lester, the scale of the communication has exponentially increased, allowing for international participation and support from professional organizations, local groups, and individuals (2017). This was not possible at this level of participation with “Save the Reef.” To further illustrate this, the Australian Parliament received 13,000 signatures in 1968 from the “Save the Reef” campaign. By comparison, as of 2015, the “Fight for the Reef” campaign had 234,518 members for their website. In 2013, they had an online petition of 81,000 signatures was delivered to the World Heritage Committee Meeting in 2013 (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017, p.575). Partner organizations such as WWF has 1.6 million members (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017, p.576). Participants in the campaign can range anywhere from the local communities interested in protecting their livelihoods, to scientists and professionals who seek undiscovered endeavors, and lobbying organizations hoping to engage individuals with their government (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017).

The “Fight for Our Reef” campaign causes "interventions and interruptions” to capture attention and spread their message by working alongside mainstream politics, media, industries, and celebrities (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017, p.576). Examples include Simon Baker, Leonardo DiCaprio, and Ben and Jerry’s (Fight for Our Reef, n.d.; Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017, p.576). As discussed, the "Fight for Our Reef" Campaign has greater control of how it is framed than past campaigns. Rather than relying on journalist and media professionals, the

modern "Fight for Our Reef" campaign can craft the exact narrative it wants.

Conclusion

Over the course of 50 years, the problem with protecting the GBR is the same as it was in 1970: educating the public about the importance of the reef and influencing decision-makers. Even though the scale and scope of the campaigns were the same, the fit was different because of technological advancements. Alternative media in 1970 is not the same as it is in present-day. The “Save the Reef” campaigners were subject to the media sharing their message with new audiences—a passive representation. With changes from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 came changes in communication interactivity and connectivity around the world. As a result, actions can be instantaneous. With “Fight for Our Reef,” the campaigners represent themselves by forcing power structures to engage with them. By using traditional and alternative (or new) media, the campaigns were able to frame topics in such a way that resonates with the public.

Increasing ocean literacy amongst the public through mediated campaigns helps each of these organizations reach their objectives. Using the Ocean Communication Model (Rice & Robinson, 2013), a baseline of information is created to more easily compare campaigns against each other. In particular, these two GBR campaigns use the agenda-setting theory to demonstrate ways to better reach their public. The 1970s “Save the Reef” used alternative media such as print, radio, and television to communicate to the public and policymakers, which led to the creation of the GBR Marine Park. Present day, “Fight for Our Reef” actively fights for the greater protection of indirect threats to the Reef using modern alternative media, like social media and the internet. By using traditional and new media, media campaigns can receive greater success if they work with the media and news industries using agenda-setting theory, to frame topics in such a way that resonates with the public.

By educating the public, whether through targeting them directly or indirectly, the ocean literacy as a whole increase. Through the steps of the Ocean Communication Model, organizations can create a strategy in how to best reach audiences and achieve their campaign goals (Rice & Robinson, 2013). Both the “Save the Reef” and “Fight for Our Reef” campaigns discussed have used different tactics in media presentation and audience reach, but make progress towards their respective ultimate mission and goal. Through effective and strategic use of traditional and new media campaigns, organizations can continue to increase ocean literacy amongst the public and policymakers.

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By using traditional and new media, mediated campaigns can receive greater success if they work with the media and news industries using agenda-setting theory, to frame topics in such a way that resonates with the public.

Introduction

- Coral reefs are distinctive and unique, boasting a variety and biodiversity of species.
- Beyond science, reefs are important to the economy, benefiting the aquarium, fishing, and ecotourism industries.
- The Great Barrier Reef (GBR) is Earth's largest series of coral reefs, remaining vital to Australian economics and cultural heritage.
- GBR received national protection in 1975 and international recognition in 1981 after 14 years of public media campaigns advocating the reef's importance (Lloyd, R.J., 2016).
- Threats to coral reefs continually increase and evolve at rapid rates, significantly contributing to the mortality of coral reef systems.
- With regards to ocean issues, the general population serve as latent publics (Rice & Robinson, 2013, p. 231).
- Publicly mediated campaigns have returned with new messages addressing new threats and educating the public about additional efforts for protecting our coral reefs ecosystems.
- Through agenda-setting theory, the media influence the agenda and public discussion of topics based on how they frame topics so the topic appeals with an audience.

Light History of the Campaigns

- In the 1970s, using media resources such as television and journalism, the Queensland Littoral Society (QLS) coordinated a strategic agenda to communicate to the public both the importance of coral reefs and the dangers of industrial practices that will affect these ecosystems (Foxwell & Lester, 2017).
- Ultimately, their efforts resulted in the formal creation and protection of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in 1975 by the Australian government (Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p. 59).
- The 1967 "Save the Reef" campaign protected the GBR from drilling and mining, standing as an example for other countries and communities to protect their reefs.
- During the 1990s scientists discovered climate change and other factors as a threat to coral reefs, both locally and globally.
- Public support of policy changes allow greater communication in legal and regulatory spaces for further environmental protections.
- Echoing the first coral reef media campaign, "Fight for Our Reef" debuted in 2012 to combat governmental and individual problems that threatened the GBR.
- "Fight for Our Reef" campaign works to squash the advances made towards government approval for the expansion of coal mining by the Adani Group in Queensland.
- Using both traditional and new media campaigns, "Fight for Our Reef" creates interpersonal events then promotes them across their social media.
- Journalists and bloggers take the events and disseminate the information to the public about the "Fight for Our Reef" campaign.

Rice and Robinson's Ocean Communication Model (2013, p. 231)	Save the Reef Campaign (1967 – 1975)	Fight for Our Reef Campaign (2012 – present)
Ocean Literacy Problem	QLS needed to communicate the importance of protecting the GBR and other coral reef ecosystems to a national audience, with the intent of ultimately influencing decision-makers changing current government policy.	Climate change and other factors are threatening coral reefs globally. "Fight for Our Reef" campaign focuses on the industrial threat of the Adani Group's Carmichael Coal Mine on the indirect and direct dangers to the GBR.
Step One: Dimensions of Problem	• Scale of Problem: Global (National) • Scope of Solution: Global (National) • Communication Fit: Alternative Media, leading to News Media	• Scale of Problem: Global (International) • Scope of Solution: Global (National) • Communication Fit: Alternative Media, leading to News Media
Step Two: Define and Integrate Science Aspects	Potential apathy to reef protection through lack of public ocean literacy Decision-makers must be able to see the threats to and importance of the GBR Difficult to reach past agendas and gates to the public and politicians	
Step Three: Best Fit Theory-Based Communication Strategy	Monologic Approach (Education/Awareness/Advocacy) Agenda Setting Theory, Gatekeeping Theory, Two-step flow theory, and Framing Theory Audience: General Public then Decision-makers Channel: Alternative/New Media	
Step Four: Address Issus of Low Ocean Literacy in Communication Strategy	• The approach chosen to reach their audiences by setting the agenda of then alternative mass media channels in order to then infiltrate the national mainstream media. (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017, p.573; Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p.56-60). • Media channels include magazines, newsletters, books, local radio, and local television. • Journalists translate important environmental issues on the agenda to a broad audience, framing the story so it resonates with the public. • Media engaged positively with environmentalists and scientists that allowed a clear, attractive message (Lloyd, R. et al., 2016, p.57). • The Australian media portrayal of a 1969 California oil well blowout framed the events in such a way that instilled fear in Australians about a similar event happening on the GBR.	• The national and global public meant to be addressed by the campaign is to again influence Australian government policy through decision-makers using alternative media channels that will resonate best with the public. • Media channels include social media, blogging, and the internet. • Through the internet, the campaign reaches a broader base and circumvents traditional media channels associated with media, government, and industry (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017, p.573). • Participation ranges from local individuals and communities to international organizations (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017). • "Fight for Our Reef" campaign can craft the exact narrative it wants working alongside mainstream politics, media, industries, and celebrities rather than relying on journalists alone (Foxwell-Norton & Lester, 2017, p.576).
Step Five: Integrate Impact Assessment Design	After securing public support, both regional and national governments worked to place laws to protect the GBR in 1975. Later, in 1981, the GBR received international recognition, proving the campaign was successful.	Despite access to an increased number of media channels and communication tools, the campaign has not seen much success. Increased success would probably rely on a tangible environmental tragedy somewhere else in the world, similar to the 1969 California oil well blowout that catalyzed GBR protections in 1975.

Conclusions

- To protect the GBR, organizations need to continue increasing public ocean literacy and influencing decision-makers.
- Using traditional and alternative media, media campaigns can receive greater success if they:
  - work with the media and news industries using agenda-setting theory and
  - frame topics in such a way that resonates with the public.
- Targeted mediated campaigns help each of these organizations reach their objectives.
- Through the Ocean Communication Model, organizations can create a strategy in how to best reach audiences and achieve their campaign goals (Rice & Robinson, 2013).
- Both the "Save the Reef" and "Fight for Our Reef" campaigns have used different tactics in media presentation and audiences reach, but make progress towards their respective ultimate mission and goal.
- Through effective and strategic use of traditional and new media campaigns, organizations can continue to increase ocean literacy amongst the public and policymakers.

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