

In Defense of Bottled Water

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The environment has always been a big concern for the majority of people all over the world; many dedicate their lives for the sake of the environment and are willing to do almost anything in order to maintain its balance. Bottled water as it seems is one of the main causes of pollution. According to the statistics found by the Food and Water Watch Organization, “In 2007, 1 million tons of PET were produced to make plastic water bottles consumed in the United States, and about 77 percent of PET plastic water bottles are not recycled and end up in landfills, as litter or incinerated.” (“Bottled Water”). Based on statistical results on their affect, the public and organizations took action by using petitions to save the environment from further damage (Lauria, 2010). In reference to those statistics, people took action and established the first-ever approved ban for bottled water in the United States, which happened in Concord, Massachusetts (Llanos, 2012). It is the first of its kind in the United States and supporters hope to see more in the future.

Despite the convenience and assured source of clean water in which, most people believe that bottled water provides, people still insisted with the bans. Asserting by most people that this would help in reducing plastic in the environment. However, this is only one side of the debate. Thomas J. Lauria, is among the minority of people who spoke for these voiceless bottled water where most had already condemned. Lauria’s concise letter emphasizes his purpose on lifting off the ban on bottled water, although he conveys intriguing points of view, it does not necessarily persuade the opposing side or those in the neutral position to consider about this proposal. The few main factors that contribute in failing to persuade even the slightest student skeptic are the lack of sources, the narrow comprehensiveness of author’s arguments and the author’s authority.

In the letter titled “In Defense of Bottled Water” written by Thomas J. Lauria published by the Harvard Crimson, Thomas provides adequate arguments that are rudimentary for lifting the ban off bottled water in the student community of Harvard. He does so by mentioning three argument points that are; health affects on Americans that are caused by the absence of bottled water, misconceptions about the influences bottled water has on the environment, and the role of bottled water in the event of a water shortage (“Bottled Water Wastes Money”, 2013). He then stresses his main argument by stating that unhealthy beverage options used as the alternative to bottled water has caused more use of, plastic material and water which has no connection in helping with water conservation, nor the decrease in amount of “plastic beverage” containers in “landfills”.

Concerning the publication of this letter, the Harvard Crimson is the United States oldest and well-known daily college newspaper that is published by Harvard University. It has been around since 1873 and had Franklin D. Roosevelt as past editor (“About”, 2014). This tremendously heightens the credibility of the letter that Lauria wrote. This credible source may persuade the general public, as the Harvard student community isn’t the only reader this periodical. In respect to that, they aren’t as skeptical as the students are who are more liberal in thinking. Considering the few points he mentioned about lifting the ban. Thus he has a wide scope of audiences for his letter, which will help him in conveying his thesis statement.

Proceeding further into the argument, he proves his authority in the matter by mentioning that he is a part of the workforce in the Nestlé Waters Company. He also adds that the company is a member of the International Bottled Water Association. From this we can deduce that he has a first person experience to the predicaments of the company’s earnings since the ban was initiated. Other information about Lauria could not be found through the internet so we can only

assume for now that he is well qualified enough to be chosen by his employer to write on behalf of the company and we are neglecting his political views.

With his particular attribute as a staff of Nestlé Waters, he convinces the readers that the general conception on the impact of bottled water on the environment is wrong. He goes on saying that Nestlé had done a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) on the company's water bottles, to evidently show that other beverage packaging have a greater impact on the environment than the water bottles they use to commercialize (Detling, 2012). This fact is accurately true, as other packagings require more energy to manufacture. This is considered the strongest point in the whole letter, (Detling, 2010) where there is an entire project report done by the Quantis Consultants that supports these facts.

However, one can doubt Lauria's objectivity. Considering that Lauria is working for Nestlé Waters, he may have been paid commission to write this letter. The company has had drawbacks since the ban started, it could be a form of marketing to boost sales. Though Lauria did not sound at-all in the way he wrote the letter because he was very straightforward and tried to sound logical. Based on a reliable source, "From 2007 to 2012, Nestlé's total bottled water sales fell by 31 percent." ("Bottled Water wastes Money", 2010). This could have pressured the company to find other forms of advertisement in order to improve the company's image, hence writing a letter to the editor of a popular newspaper brand. This fact also shows that Nestlé is indeed trying to boost sales, "Nestlé has invested heavily in its Pure Life Brand and is greatly targeting its advertising to emerging markets and minority groups. In 2009, Nestlé Pure Life was the most advertised bottled water brand in the country, with nearly \$10 million spent, and 2009, the company increased advertising expenditures on its Pure Life brand by 3,000 percent."

(“Bottled Water wastes Money”, 2010). The facts are staggering, and Lauria objectivity is in serious questioning.

Although Lauria has shown proficient understanding about the matter of plastic bottles, he lacks sources that would backup his claims. Surprisingly his target audience is the student community of Harvard. Harvard University having known for its superb intelligent students are more perceptible in considering facts that are presented to them and are more skeptic than the average reader. Lauria had only used general statics by mentioning “... American Adults consume 450 calories a day from beverages and 68 percent of those 20 years old and older are classified as overweight or obese, ... But if bottled water is not available, consumer research shows...” This is just a typical statistic that most would have already heard of and the fact that he did not quote the source of this research raises doubts on his accuracy and even his authority, as it also shows that he is not a professional at this area of study. What Lauria should have done is to quote a reliable source or mention statistics done by an expert so that he could solidly his opening argument. He should have also aimed at a different target audience if he were to present such loosely stated claims.

Still in relation to his flawed arguments, the refutation on the impact of bottled water’s on the environment is one that cannot be overlooked. Lauria insisted that by banning bottled water people are subjected to buying other drinks causing higher levels of pollution. Although true, bottled water is still one of the main causes of pollution regardless of it having a weaker influence. This fact supports this claim, “Bottled water wastes fossil fuels in production and transport. Bottled water production ... used the energy equivalent of 32 and 54 million barrels of oil to produce and transport plastic water bottles in 2007—enough to fuel about 1.5 million cars for a year. ... about 75 percent of the empty plastic bottles end up in our landfills, lakes, streams

and oceans, where they may never fully decompose.” (“Food and Water Watch”, 2012) So this could ultimately still maintain the ban on bottled water. Lauria may or may not have persuaded the readers by using this point in the argument, because it solely depends on the reader’s position in this topic. Because some people may find that the inconveniences of not having bottled water around, weighs heavier than the stated claim above. If they do, they would most likely agree with Lauria rather than the stated claim, and vice versa if they don’t.

Furthermore there are many points that Lauria did not mention, for example, how would he refute the point about reusing water bottles? And recently the U.S government had “signed a legislation increase federal funding to improve public water systems infrastructure.” on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2014 (Ellsbury, 2014). This would tremendously decrease the need for bottled water and he did not state anything to refute this point. Also, how would Lauria refute the fact that their company had used tap water as a source of their manufacture? Based on this news strip from USA Today, Nestlé Waters “landed a consumer lawsuit” for not disclosing the source of their water (McCoy, 2012). Even for Lauria who has experience in working with Nestlé Waters did not explain the importance in the source of water that the company uses. Thus Lauria’s letter on the issue is not comprehensive enough to an extent that, would make people even consider lifting off the ban, especially to highly opinionated Harvard students.

In addition to the argument that Lauria claims “... people want access to clean, high-quality drinking water as part of their daily lives...” This assertion is completely true. We all want to consume safe and salubrious food or drink. Conversely, there are many studies that show that the taste of bottled water is no different than tap water and even found that some bottled water were contaminated with bacteria. Based on the article (Standage, 2005) “Bad to the Last

Drop”, the researches from the *Archives of Family Medicine* found that 25% of bottled water “had significant higher bacteria levels” than in tap water from Cleveland. So can we really trust bottled water? On the other hand, this source from CNN states that the pipes that water flow in plays a major role in deterring the quality of drinkable tap water as lead pipes can cause lead poison (Kelly, 2013). Sometimes, changing all the pipes in your home isn’t the solution and therefore this point ascertains Lauria’s claim that bottled water is a safer alternative. Therefore, this shows that his argument lack comprehensiveness by not covering different angles of reasoning.

Moreover, this letter is written in a very direct manner where Lauria tries to expresses a profound understanding to the matter. Overall, he explains his few arguments in a very logical and open-minded way by stating points and describing the consequences and actuality of facts. Conversely, Lauria does not relates to the reader enough by using words like “we”, “you” and “I” to give a feeling of a 2 way conversation between reader and author or what is known as “Collective Effervescence”. The ban of bottled water is a very personal change to most people as drinking water is a part of daily life needs. This factor decreases his persuasiveness. However, he did only attempted once at this by stating “ You may recall bottled water’s key role...” (“Bottled Water wastes Money, 2013).

In conclusion, Lauria did not make an appealing argument in his position. Despite having a good attempt by covering all 3 aspects of the rhetorical appeal although not in a balanced way, and the factors that made this argument unsuccessful out weighed the good points about his article. Especially where his authority was in question, he worked for Nestlé Waters, which is the

biggest bottled water manufacture in North America. Concerns about the company's earnings raises doubt amidst the effects of the ban. Who knows what this letter is really intended for?

Lastly, the debate over bottled water and its effects on the environment will not disappear any time soon as it is still a heated debate today, and the likeliness of the ban lifting so far is very unlikely unless proven otherwise.



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