



hulu



THE
HANDMAID'S
TALE

BACKGROUND

When Hulu went to promote its latest original made-for-binge-watching-television show, *The Handmaid's Tale*, based on the 1985 fiction novel by Margaret Atwood, it went all in.

The mass media company worked with UM Los Angeles, who took the renewed tide of female empowerment stemming from the January 2017 Women's March on Washington and amplified it to promote and engage audiences about the release of the new series and to secure the company's reputation as a producer of premium content.

"We wanted to be bold but empathetic and in the right tone," says Kacie Sage, UM's svp, group partner, "so we listened to how people on the front lines were thinking, feeling and speaking out about women's rights." (Adweek, 2017)

The resulting mass media campaign was called "The Laws of Gilead". It featured digital, social, editorial, radio, TV pieces and public events that "drove home the oppressive rules of the near-future drama (women aren't allowed to read, they must wear the color of their caste, they're subservient and powerless) by linking them to current-day events." (Adweek, 2017)

One of the most visual and visceral aspects of the campaign were the orderly troops of women outfitted in the signature handmaid's garb of white hat and red cloak roaming packed events like the South by Southwest festival and the LA Times Book Fair. Their silence and lack of interaction with those around them, except to hand out cards written in Latin which translated into "Don't let the bastards grind you down" deeply engaged audiences. (McNamara, 2017)

TARGET AUDIENCE

In bringing to life the dystopian aspects of Atwood's novel in the real world during a politically charged time period following the Trump inauguration and Women's March on Washington, UM sought to target both men and women with socio-political interests with its *The Laws of Gilead* campaign. (Cream, 2017)

The interest in capturing as many potential viewers as possible, even if they were men, was illustrated by the choice to use a Super Bowl ad to promote the show. (Adweek, 2017) Women's magazines, including *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*, were partnered with for costume exhibits underscoring the harsh divisiveness and social constriction that would resonate with their readers. (Adweek, 2017) The call to action was simple: don't miss the premiere of *The Handmaid's Tale* only on Hulu.



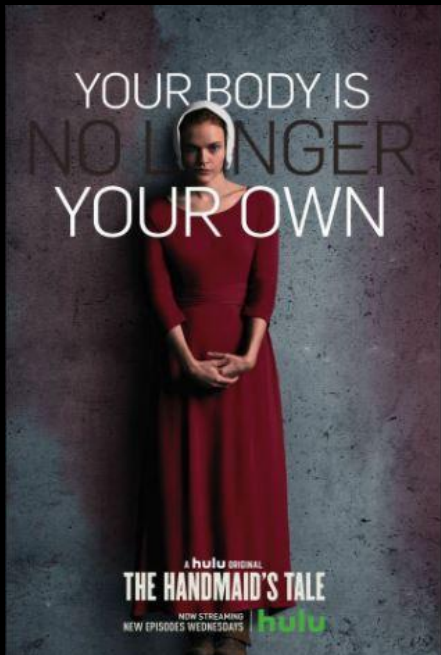
FORMATIVE RESEARCH

Social analysis research both of the recent Women's March on Washington, and following the Super Bowl ad, showed UM that content with a positive, authentic message were received best by their target market but that they would have to tread carefully and act with empathy and care when it came to pairing the Hulu show with women's reproductive rights to stay authentic. (Cream, 2017)

The agency approached female-centric partners, such as Vogue and Vanity Fair, to help them. (Adweek, 2017) They had two primary issues to deal with. First, they had to let women speak for themselves. To do this they needed to reach out to the social influencers in media, such as Nylon Ozy magazine, utilizing print, video and digital, creating events that would spike comments on social media, and creating images that would get people talking. (Cream, 2017)

Second, following social media analysis, they listened to women after the March on Washington on their concerns about women's reproductive rights and realized women were comparing the recent socio-political changes to the laws of Gilead in Atwood's book. (Cream, 2017) They respected that connection and used it as a primary guide when crafting the campaign's messaging and events.

They also latched on to the fact that Atwood's novel was once a "banned" book, and used that connection to seek out opportunities to create events like the release of 6,000 copies from an art installation in New York City. (Cream, 2017)



CAMPAIGN MESSAGE

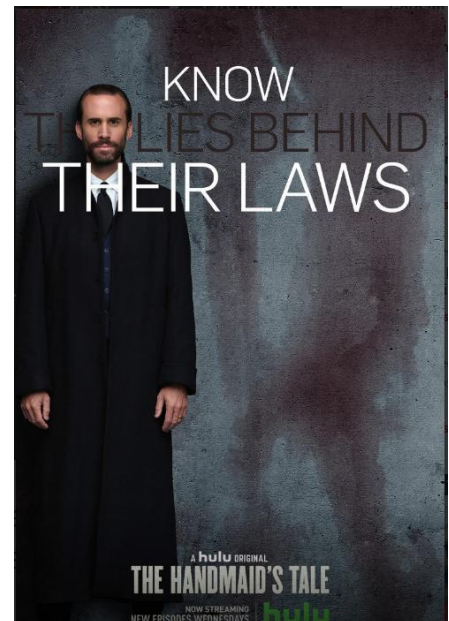
Using the main character, Offred, and her story of survival in an totalitarian regime, the agency sought to tie the authoritarian context of Gilead's laws to recent changes in reproductive rights and access to care, an uptick in authoritarian-style government, and the increase in #MeToo style movement happening to women today. (Diep, et al., 2017) Over a three-month campaign, each Wednesday, before new episodes dropped, the agency released a high impact combination of digital, video and outdoor placements. (Cream, 2017)

"UM focused on three laws of Gilead to activate its partnerships:

- Law #1 - Women do not have a voice in society
 - Law #2 - Women are not allowed to read
 - Law #3 - Women must wear the color of their caste."
- (Cream, 2017)

Live events at busy venues like South by SouthWest were curated by UM, but others became spontaneous, like women dressed as handmaids who showed up at the Texas' Legislature adding to the vibe that this was an authentic cultural expression among today's women, not just a pr move. (McNamara, 2017)

While the messages varied along the same thematic of "resist", they all had the same call to action, pushing for people to subscribe and watch the latest episode of The Handmaid's Tale. (Adweek, 2017)



PROJECT EVALUATION

As a campaign, The Laws of Gilead was transformative for Hulu. It set the Internet buzzing, becoming the most talked about show during its launch week, earning a total of 1.8 BILLION social impressions and is still to date the most-viewed, and highest daily subscription driver for any series on Hulu. (Adweek, 2017)

Even halfway through the first season of the series, the campaign was still driving audience demand and creating discussion. According to Parrot Analytics, a third party researcher, The Handmaid's Tale stayed at the top of the chart for weekly demand impressions among new season one streaming originals. (Cream, 2017)

"The Handmaid's Tale reached the highest awareness levels ever seen for a new Hulu original series. Awareness among non-subscribers reached 158% of its goal, and surpassed the stretch goal by 14%. Awareness among existing subscribers also surpassed goals by 20%." (Cream, 2017)

The show cemented Hulu's presence as an original content producer with multiple Emmy wins, including the award for Best Drama and a Golden Globe for Best Actress Drama Series. It also serves as a launch platform for Hulu's goal to offer more original programming as a value-add to its subscribers according to Hulu CEO Mike Hopkins. (Adalian, 2017)

"What's more, Hopkins hints *Handmaid's* is driving subscription growth, key for a service such as Hulu. 'Every week there are new people joining and staring from episode one,' he says. 'We've seen this up-and-to-the-right trend of new subscribers getting in, and existing subscribers keeping up. So it's something that's actually growing week to week, [rather than] that normal decay that you see in Nielsen ratings from the vast majority of shows.'" (Adalian, 2017)

The campaign ticked all the boxes when it came to the Hierarchy of Effects. It got people to **Think** about the show and discuss the applications the fictional world of Gilead might have in the current political climate and what it could mean for the future. It made them **Feel** a need to tune into the show and find out what everyone was talking about, which in turned caused them to **Do** something, by having to subscribe to Hulu in order to watch the show, then continue watching it to be able to discuss what had happened. The campaign did this so well, that to date the premiere of The Handmaid's Tale is still the biggest subscription show on Hulu.



THEORETICAL APPLICATION

While the agency did not specify using in particular theory, there are several which apply to this stunning campaign. The first is **Cognitive Dissonance theory**, which states that if people are confronted with information that logically does not meet with their beliefs, but is irrefutable, they will change either behavior or beliefs in order to reestablish balance between the situation and their conflict. In this case, aligning the current dissatisfaction among women with issues on reproductive rights with that of the fictional totalitarian regime of Gilead, underscored the how close to the tipping point we are, thus creating intense discussion and interest on social media. (University of Twente, 2017)

The second theory that could be applied to this campaign is that of **Priming**. In Priming media enhances the effects of the message by giving audiences a prior context – in the case of The Handmaid's Tale previews, as well as public events that underscored the restrictive nature of the show's setting and its impact on society so viewers were not just knowledgeable about the program's premiere, but waiting for it. (University of Twente, 2017)

The third theory that could be applied is the **Bandwagon Effect**, where people do things because they believe everyone else is and don't want to be left out of a social trend. Given the intense and extreme exposure the campaign created, it encouraged people to subscribe to Hulu find out what everyone was talking about. (Psychology Today, (2017).

#RESISTSISTER

RESOURCES

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