Czarina Agravante

BA2196 – Section 26: Laurie Fitzpatrick

Writing Assignment #4: Merck Analysis

Czarina Agravante

BA2196 – Section 26: Laurie Fitzpatrick

Writing Assignment #4: Merck Analysis

After the Vioxx case with Merck in 2004, their reputation with the public and their credibility with following protocol was up for question. After negative publicity appeared criticizing Merck of removing Vioxx from the market, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Lancet* questioned the ethical values of Merck and the importance of their patients CEO Raymond Gilmartin sent out two open letters defending Merck’s actions and their credibility. Gilmartin’s “Open Letters” use three strategies to try and counter the negative press over Merck’s handling of Vioxx: repetition to describe the reliability their patients had in Merck in the past; the importance of business ethics to ethically appeal to the public; and assuring the public their first concern is their patients.

In both “Open Letters,” Gilmartin repeatedly addresses their company strategies to prove they followed protocol in examining the medicine. Repetition is important because the idea is being presented multiple times reiterating what is being said to reinforce the message. In *The Lancet*, they state that due to the Merck Vioxx case, the public-health institutions will suffer because of the questionable ethical values Merck has exampled. They continue to say that public skepticism of whose interests drug makers and regulators truly represent. In response, “An Open Letter from Merck” addresses how their consistent and rigorous adherence to scientific investigation, transparency and integrity is borne out. The letter then continues to list the reasons how Merck has been consistent and rigorous. For example, how Merck has “extensively studied” Vioxx or how they have “promptly disclosed” clinical data. In Gilmartin’s other “Open Letter”, “For 100 years, patients first” he again talks about how they extensively study their medicine and where they obtain data persuading the reader that their history has spoken for itself. In both letters they constantly bring up their ethical values and supporting how their history shows they have provided great services for their customers. The power of repetition psychologically convinces the reader that these reasons are correct. By Gilmartin continuously repeating their fundamental priorities are what makes them a reliable company, the reader will continue to believe so.

Gilmartin used the importance of business ethical values in both “Open Letters” to persuade the reader that Merck did not do anything ethically questionable. He addresses ethical appeal by referring to past credibility, reliability, or characteristics that allow the reader to believe that their company should not be ethically questioned. As written in the “Open Letter from Merck”, he refers to their history of fundamental priorities that have enabled their company to bringing new medicines to patients in need. This allows Merck to refer back to their long line of history and dependability from their customers to convince readers that they have always put their patients first. Gilmartin takes the time in this letter to say they were ensuring patient safety. This brings me to the other “Open Letter” “For 100 years, patients first” which focuses more on how ethical standards is the foundation of the company. The letter continues to talk about how every employee must meet their high ethical standards and must go through formal training programs to reinforce the standards. These claims were in response to what was written in *The Wall Street Journal* where they question the true meaning of why Merck waited so long to remove Vioxx from the market. The article states that since 2000, Merck knew they pain-killers had side effects resulting to heart-attacks and stroke risk through e-mails that were internally exchanged. Their ethical values were questioned here because of the fact they knew about the effects prior to putting the product on the market. The importance of ethics is shown by letting the reader know that the company is serious about the ethical integrity of their employees. This persuasive strategy, along with repetition, gives the reader a reason to be pulled into the open letter.

In the “Open Letters” by Gilmartin, they make an emotional appeal assure their readers that their patients are their first concerns. Gilmartin uses emotional appeal to assure the reader that their concerns and practices are to benefit their patients’ needs, values and emotional sensibilities. *The Lancet* writes that their patients believed they were harmed by Vioxx. Here *The Lancet* supports the claims of the patients where they state that Merck did not properly research the effects of this drug. In response, “An Open Letter from Merck” assures the readers that “these actions are consistent with putting the interests of patients first, as well as with faithful adherence to the best principles of scientific discipline and transparency”. By letting the reader know this, Merck is trying to build a relationship of trust with the readers and the patients. They refer to their actions of being precise and prompt assuring their patients that their products and medicines are being evaluated closely. In “For 100 year, patients first” the title already give away that their patients are always first on their priority list. They then further support the title of their letter by talking about the importance of product communications and the value the place on business and scientific ethics. Both letters relate back to the importance of their patients by providing valuable reasons that will persuade the reader of the importance of patient reliability and relationship. Because without their patients and their confidence that Merck’s products are helping them, the general public will believe any negative press that might be thrown their way.

Merck’s three strategies to try and counter negative press over its handling of Vioxx were effective in convincing their readers that Merck is still an ethical company. The three strategies that were used: repetition to describe the reliability their patients had in Merck in the past; the importance of business ethics to ethically appeal to the public; and assuring the public their first concern is their patients were effectively displayed in both the “Open Letters” to gain back a positive reputation with the public and their patients. By referring back to past history and explaining the importance of ethics, it shows readers that they hold these qualities to a high standard. The final outcome of Merck’s litigation trials resulted in $970 million for legal costs. After the Merck case, Gilmartin resigned from his position of CEO and is now an adjunct professor at the Harvard Business School.