

**How to Lose Friends and Alienate People:
The Online Persuasion Tactics of the Animal Rights Movement in the United
States**

Name

Academic institution

ABSTRACT

This capstone was a case study analysis that examined various animal rights organizations in the United States that promote veganism. Previous research suggests that examining human behavior patterns cannot only help activists understand their audience, but it can help them determine how to persuade them. This case study examined four organizations' persuasion techniques used on their social media platforms, along with audience targeting strategies. An analysis of the four organizations' websites and social media posts allowed for the groups to be positioned along a spectrum illustrating: (1) which organizations posted extreme messaging and in what ways, (2) which organizations seemed to communicate with their bases vs. those that spoke to a wider audience, (3) which organizations provided resources for people to make the change to veganism vs. and those that did not, (4) and which organization garners the most positive attention, and which garners the least. Results showed that each of the organizations had a unique approach in targeting their audiences through framing and imagery. Two organizations published graphic content, whereas the others either abstained from or limited such content. Only one organization placed the blame on the public, when attempting them to persuade individuals to change their lifestyles.

INTRODUCTION

“How do you know if someone’s a vegan? Don’t worry, they’ll tell you.” This joke stems from the fact that vegans are known to be preachy, self-righteous and obnoxious. Social media potentially perpetuates such ideas. YouTube videos are often a resource for videos of vegan activists protesting both inside and outside of restaurants, grocery stores and town squares. There are also many videos of vegans condemning fitness trainers, celebrities, and social media personalities for their meat-eating lifestyle, often using slaughterhouse footage to make the case for the ethics of the meat industry or medical journals to make the case for the dangers eating meat has on the individual’s health (Renfro, 2016). Some of these activists even post videos of slaughterhouse footages during their “call-out” videos of public figures to remind them why they

shouldn't consume animal products. However, while it's safe to say that most vegans hold the same values and politics regarding the animal agriculture industry, they may each also hold a unique approach in addressing the topic.

The Vegan Society (2016) defines veganism as "a way of living which seeks to exclude, as far as is possible and practicable, all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose." This means that vegans avoid the consumption of animal products (meat, gelatin and fish), their secretions (dairy and eggs) in their diet, as well as their day-to-day lifestyle (leather and wool fabrics). For many, this lifestyle can be restrictive and/or expensive.

We can see People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) display unsettling images of the Jewish Holocaust juxtaposed next to a still image of a slaughterhouse (CNN, 2003). We can see activists from Direct Action Everywhere storm inside of steakhouses, chanting, "It's not food, it's violence!" much to the annoyance of patrons (Burgess, 2015). We can see Greenpeace create YouTube videos of desk jockeys munching on orangutan fingers, as a warning for the damage palm oil causes the environment when we consume foods that have this ingredient (Shreeves, 2010). We tend to remember these images because they shock us and it fails to break the stereotype popular culture tells us about vegans, only reinforcing our beliefs, even if they're simply a loud minority.

Nick Cooney, founder of the Humane League and Vice President of Mercy for Animals, suggests using a psychological approach in "converting" someone to a vegan lifestyle. In his book, *Change of Heart*, he says, "If we want to influence other people, we need to know how they operate" (2011, p. 11). During an animal rights conference in Denmark in 2013, he tells his audience that the goal should be to have a person walking away from the conversation thinking, "That person is just like me, except they don't eat meat" (VeganKanal, 2013).

The evidence of the damage animal product consumption causes that Cooney also provided the audience at the conference is practically identical to the evidence provided by groups like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). However, what's

noticeably different is their tone and framing. As Cooney stated in his conference, three out of four people who switch to a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle will eventually go back to eating meat (VeganKanal, 2013). Cooney makes the claim that this is because while they may be educated about the animal agriculture industry, they are not taught how to stay within this lifestyle. Eighty-four percent of vegetarian and vegans in the United States eventually revert to the standard American diet (consuming meat and dairy), with reasons ranging from declining health while on the lifestyle to finding it too difficult to remain “pure” on the diet (Humane Research Council, 2014).

On the other hand, in a speech at Georgia Tech University about going plant-based, vegan activist Gary Yourofsky provided his audience several examples of meat and dairy free alternatives and promised them that these options are good: “I don’t eat anything nasty!” (Yourofsky, 2015). He also promised that they would get all the nutrients they need without meat and dairy and they wouldn’t elevate their cholesterol levels while doing it.

But is giving an omnivore a list of cruelty-free foods and promising them that plants are plenty nutritious, good enough? Could Cooney be right? Could it be that because those individuals never learned how to eat a well-planned plant-based diet, they dropped their ethics for their cravings?

While many may be familiar with the communication tactics of PETA, given its media coverage, not every animal rights activist uses the same communication tactics, nor does it frame them in the same manner. Some organizations like Mercy for Animals preach a more moderate message, and don’t even use the word vegan in their messages at all. Some activist groups, like PETA, produce imagery comparing tragedies in human history—the Jewish Holocaust and the Transatlantic slave trade— to the inhumane conditions livestock animals live in.

In recent years, dairy and red meat sales began to decline, with some theorizing that this is a result of the report released by the World Health Organization in the fall of 2015, declaring a clear correlation between red and processed meats and colorectal cancer (Dokoupil, 2015). In 2015, online searches for the term vegan increased by 32

percent (Google Trends, 2016). This could be because vegans and the organizations they support have a growing presence on social media, thus allowing more people to absorb more information about the lifestyle and to become exposed to various communication tactics within the community.

This capstone seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How are the various groups attempting to evoke behavioral change? How are they trying to appeal to their audiences through social media? (2) What models of persuasion are these various groups following? (3) Are these groups taking the next step in helping them maintain their lifestyle?

The findings should answer the question: What message are vegan activists spreading, how are they doing it and do they appear to be employing persuasion techniques that are effective in changing behavior, and if so, in what ways.

This case study will examine the communication tactics of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), Mercy for Animals (MFA), PETA, and Vegan Outreach (VO) on their websites and social media platforms. Specifically, this case study will examine each organization's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts. With the growth of technology and social media, vegan animal's rights organizations can reach a larger amount of people at a significantly faster rate than ever before. How these organizations interact with their audience have the potential to be a testament to their level of effectiveness in persuasion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Veganism

Before vegan messaging tactics and strategies can be discussed, it is important to discuss what veganism is, why people become vegan, and how they stay vegan. Cooney (2014) discusses the increasing number of vegetarians and vegans in the general population and what motivates and once motivated them to ascribe to a

plant-based diet, how their thought process works, and why some of them fail to stay a vegetarian for their entire lives.

Research discovered in a 2012 poll, found that 67 percent of people decided to adhere to a vegetarian diet for ethics, 20 percent for health, 9 percent for the environment, and 3 percent for their religious beliefs (Cooney, 2014). Further research showed that ethical vegetarians were the most likely to stick to their lifestyle than any other vegetarian, 92 percent of ethical vegetarians stuck to their diet, whereas only 6 percent of health-focused vegetarians remained meat-free (Cooney, 2014).

Alternatively, another survey has also found that 75 percent of (surveyed) vegetarians in the United States have gone back , or will go back, to eating animal products. Four main reasons have lead to the failure of these individuals ability to stay plant based: 1.) These people were concerned of their health after beginning the lifestyle, specifically citing fatigue and anemia, and concerns of not getting enough protein. 2.) Some of them missed the taste of meat, and got very bored with their diet. 3.) Others found that their diet was inconvenient, and that it was very difficult to prepare meals, and hard to find certain ingredients in grocery stores and certain meals in restaurants. 4.) Lastly, they found it hard to be around their friends and family who continued to eat meat or they began to live with someone who had an omnivorous lifestyle (Cooney, 2014).

This text also makes the claim that people are being told why they should stop eating meat, but they are never told how they can do it, thus making people who fail to live plant-based feel defeated. This text also highly recommends that vegetarian activists focus on educating people on how they can properly live a plant-based lifestyle (Cooney, 2014).

Persuasive Tactics in Social Change

Persuasion is defined as “the art of convincing others to give favorable attention to our point of view” (Osborn , 1997 p. 415). Persuasive speeches revolve around propositions that can be defended through the use of data and reasoning and that answering questions of fact (verifiable), value (calls for judgment) and policy (advocates for course

of action) are necessary. Persuasive tactics for both neutral and hostile audiences were analyzed. Studies have concluded that one should weave the topic and the proposition together and it is beneficial to tailor the speech to the specific audience.

Particular persuasive tactics can help foster social and behavior changes, with a focus on examining how social change has helped persuade individuals into living a more sustainable lifestyle. Cooney (2011) encourages activists and communities to use science-driven techniques (specifically, psychology) in their decision making process in attempting to create social change.

Before activists can catch the attention of their desired audiences, they must determine how they produce their message. This text states that education on how to engage in a behavior change; in this case, veganism, isn't enough (Cooney, 2014). Instead, it's worth considering how much an individual is being asked when he or she is encouraged to make a behavior change. Thus, it's best to ask for less of an audience to avoid them rejecting the message. In the case of veganism, someone who tells high-school and university students that cruelty to animals is an issue that society should pay attention to is more likely to have an impact of changing attitudes than an activist telling the same audience that animals should be afforded the same rights and safety from killing and cruelty as humans (Cooney, 2014).

Research suggests that humans are heavily influenced by the actions and opinions of those around us, thus affecting our behavior. It would be beneficial to invoke social norms into activism in attempting to change behaviors (Cooney, 2014). A common method of social norms is modeling – where if an individual engages in a particular behavior, other people will use them to follow suit – a favored tactic of the Humane League, which often distributes pamphlets about vegetarianism at music festivals. To avoid more and more festival goers from tossing the pamphlets on the ground as they walk away, activists will clean up the festivals so there are none. If the festival goers see that nobody is tossing them around, they will be less likely to do so themselves. Alternatively, if these same people see that more and more people are passing the

activists and refusing a pamphlet, they are less likely to take one, so activists will often wait for a few more minutes before offering one to a passerby (Cooney,2014).

McKenzie-Mohr (2011) specifically discussed the importance of behavior change in living a sustainable lifestyle. It is specifically noted that behavior changes play a critical role in the commercial and agriculture sectors. Similar to Cooney's (2011) findings, It is noted that knowledge alone has little to no effect on sustainable behavior. Attitudes and knowledge have been found to be related to behavior but the relationship is close to nonexistent, as lack of knowledge and unsupportive attitudes are simply two of many barriers in the lack of behavior change (McKenzie-Mohr, 2011). Often, sustainability campaigns fail to succeed because they fail to acknowledge the human aspect of sustainability: economics, convenience, etc. (McKenzie-Mohr, 2011).

The Internet As A Tool

Since the rise of the Internet, academics have criticized movements that social networking sites have birthed, referring to them as slacktivism (Penney, 2015). This study specifically examined the Red Equal Sign Facebook movement, where users changed their profile picture to show support for marriage-equality while the Supreme Court reviewed two cases regarding same-sex marriage in 2013. Results showed that many individuals who changed their profile images to the red equal sign had no intention of engaging in a movement outside of social media to request for public policy reform regarding the issue. This study concluded that online civic engagement has no bearing on a person's commitment to further involvement of an issue.

As previously discussed, technological advancements and the rise of social media has made access to education on veganism easier now more than ever. With the use of social media, vegans now have a new platform to promote their message, allowing more people to become exposed to it, when previously, they would not have been otherwise.

Taylor, Kent, & White (2001), examined communication methods of activist organizations that used websites to build relationships with the public. Kent and Taylor

offered five principles for organizations to follow that enhance open communication and organizational responses to public needs. These principles included offering (1) dialogic loops, (2) ease of interface, (3) conservation of visitors, (4) generation of return visits, and (5) providing information relevant to a variety of publics. The purpose of the study was to analyze activists' websites to determine if the organizations were following the principles and if there were attempts to build relationships. Results showed that many of the organizations did not fully use the dialogic capacity of the Internet and highlighted what was lacking.

Further research of online vegan and vegetarian websites revealed an emphasis on the importance of motivation in persuading people to eliminate animal products from their diet. In the context of this study, the reasons for opting for a plant-based diet were as follows, a.) animal welfare b.) health c.) and environmentalism. Focusing on one issue regarding vegetarianism ultimately neglects another important cause; people who focus on health benefits of veganism may neglect the environmental concerns, and animal rights activists may neglect the health concerns. However, it was noted that motivations can overlap (Jorgensen, 2015).

This study also revealed the misconceptions consumers have about food production and processing, consumer habits and the way they shape their awareness of the global food system, specifically, the misconception that small-scale farms are less of an environmental concern, and "friendlier to animals" than industrial agriculture farms. As a result, consumers lack the understanding of such a concept as a whole. Furthermore, this causes consumers to opt for free-range eggs and grass-fed beef, rather than encouraging the current system (factory farms) to change (Jorgensen, 2015).

Persuasive Tactics in Veganism

Vegan activists use specific persuasive tactics to promote their messages, whether they discuss animal welfare, health, and/or environmental benefits of the lifestyle. Behavioral theory and persuasion are key elements in this process.

Research has shown the relevance of behavioral theory for developing communications designed to promote healthy behaviors and prevent, or alter, unhealthy behaviors (Fishbein, M., & Cappella, J. N., 2006), pointing to the model of behavioral theory put forth by Fishbein six years prior, who proposed an integrative model of behavior that attempted to bring together several theoretical perspectives. His model suggested that there are three primary deterrents to that could affect behavior change: attitude toward performing the behavior, perceived norms concerning performance of the behavior, and self-efficacy with respect to performing the behavior. Therefore according to the model, any given behavior is likely if the individual one has a strong intention to perform the behavior, has the skills and abilities that are necessary to perform the behavior, and there are no obstacles preventing the behavior. (Fishbein, 2000; Fishbein et al., 2001). The findings were that the theories of behavioral prediction and change can allow researchers to identify critical beliefs that will predict a person's intention to change or not change their behavior.

There are many motivations for abstaining from animal products, however, research showed that the overriding reason was animal welfare (Guerin, 2014). Interviews were conducted with both vegans and omnivores. The results found that both groups had a positive view of veganism as a lifestyle choice. Both groups had a negative view of extreme vegan attitudes. One hundred percent of the vegans stated they became vegan after being exposed to information about animal agriculture. The study also looked at conflict. One hundred percent of non-vegans felt some form of being attacked for not being vegan. Media was found to play a role in forming the perception of vegans. It was found that vegans relied on alternative media, while 90 percent of non-vegans had minimal contact with alternative media. This study concluded both groups shared similar values on issues such as health, humane treatment of animals, and mutual respect for diet choices. The differences found were in behavior and exposure to alternative media. The findings suggested that emphasis on adopting new approaches that encourage open discussions and the importance of individual actions.

Gunther, A. M. (2012) questioned the persuasive practices of Animal Rights Vegan Activists (ARVAs) in order to determine why and how ARVAs fail to convince people to

become and stay vegan, and what they might do to succeed. The author references a quote by Paul McCartney, "If slaughterhouses had glass walls everyone would be a vegetarian." The author questioned the effects that these words had and compared it to the writings of Ball and Friedrich who have stated "If the realities of factory farms and slaughterhouses were as visible as the meat they produce, all thoughtful, compassionate people would be vegetarian advocates" (Gunther, 2012, p. 13). Further research showed that ARVAs take McCartney's quote literally and use negative framing to get their point of view across by showing images and films of slaughtered animals. The study suggested that organizations should use corporate framing; by representing themselves as an embodiment of positivity (Gunther, 2012).

Framing

Freeman (2010) evaluated and categorized the problems and solutions five major U.S. animal rights organizations used to frame: cruelty and suffering; commodification; harm to humans and the environment; and needless killing. This study found that many frames used animal welfare ideology. This study focused on People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Farm Sanctuary, Farm Animal Rights Movement, Compassion Over Killing, and Vegan Outreach. Farm Sanctuary told their audience the main reason to stop eating animal products was that "food animals' are not protected from inhumane treatment." Farm Animal Rights Movement attempted to appeal to their audience's emotions by making the statement that animals raised for consumption are just as kind, smart and loving as the animals we domesticate (Freeman 8). Farm Sanctuary and PETA both hosted videos of animals being exploited, tortured, and abused on their websites. Compassion Over Killing made the statement that animal products are the only sources of saturated fat and cholesterol (Freeman 10). Vegan Outreach created a booklet "Even if You Like Meat" where it stated that the least an individual can do is reduce their consumption (Freeman 2010). It was also found that PETA was the only organization that used sex appeal in order to entice their audience into a plant-based diet (Freeman, 2010).

The Organizations

Animal Liberation Front (ALF) is an international leaderless resistance organization that engages in illegal direct action in pursuit of animal rights. These forms of activism include, but are not limited to, removing animals from laboratories and farms, destroying facilities, arranging safe houses and veterinary care, and operating sanctuaries where the animals subsequently live. Outside of their website and their multiple Instagram accounts, ALF keeps a low-profile on the social media front. The Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) has listed ALF as an eco-terrorist organization, citing incidents of arson and illegal “pre- activity surveillance and well-planned operations” (FBI, 2002). Animal Charity Evaluators does not acknowledge the organization. Animal Charity Evaluators is a non-profit organization that seeks to find and promote the most effective methods of activism by “analyzing research on methods of helping animals in order to provide research about interventions and top-charity recommendations” (Animal Charity Evaluators, 2016).

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), is an American animal rights organization specifically concerned with four core issues, where it claims animals suffer the most for the longest periods of time, factory farming, fur farming, animal testing, and animals in entertainment industry. With PETA's use of public demonstrations and hyper-sexualized advertisements, the general public often believes that the organization is far too radical to be taken seriously. However, law professor Gary Francione (1996) had once argued that PETA is not radical enough. PETA has a very prominent social media presence, posting on multiple platforms several times a day. This capstone examines its use of Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, as well as their website. Animal Charity Evaluators applauds PETA for its accomplishments, but believe that its public profile pushes people away from the movement's cause (2015).

Mercy For Animals (MFA) is an international non-profit organization dedicated to preventing cruelty to farmed animals and promoting compassionate food choices and policies. MFA has conducted several undercover investigations demanding corporations to reform policies regarding the welfare of the animals its supplier's farm (Iaccabo, 2006).

Noticeably different from the other three organizations, MFA is endorsed by Animal Charity Evaluators (2016).

Vegan Outreach, originally Animal Liberation Action (ALA), is a grassroots organization dedicated to promote veganism through the distribution of printed information booklets. In 1994, Jack Norris and Matt Ball began a campaign on street corners and on college campuses by holding signs stating “Stop Eating Animals” this campaign birthed what is now known as Vegan Outreach (VO). Despite having a presence on social media, the organization almost exclusively on leafleting, thus, Animal Charity Evaluators questions the organization’s effectiveness in persuasion (Animal Charity Evaluators, 2016).

RESEARCH METHODS

This capstone is a detailed case study analysis, employing persuasion theory to anchor this investigation of the strategic communication practices of a full spectrum of vegan animal rights activist groups: Animal Liberation Front (ALF), Mercy for Animals (MFA), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and Vegan Outreach (VO). Specifically, using attribution theory, we often explain the actions of other people through dispositional attribution, where we point to a person’s character, where we point to the person’s background and surroundings (Simply Psychology, 2010).

This case study analysis examines vegan animal rights activist persuasion tactics, used in the most popular animal activist organizations that are listed above. These organizations were chosen because it either takes a more traditional approach in vegan animal rights activism and education (i.e. graphic imagery, comparisons to human examples of rape and slaughter) or it takes a more psychological approach to in animal rights activism (i.e. omitting the word vegan from their discussions, or suggesting on takes “baby steps” to veganism).

Through case study analysis, this study systematically curates and categorizes particular framing and persuasion tactics by examining the organization’s social media accounts and how it communicates with its public. Framing will determined by the context in which words are used to describe the factory farming industry (exploitation,

torture, murder, rape, slaughter, violence, etc.), the consumption of animal products, (pus, rotting, contributing to, supporting, etc.) our health (disease, obesity, cancer), and the environment (greenhouse gases, deforestation, displacement, etc.). This analyzation seeks to determine what the primary focus vegan animal rights activists groups have. The analyzation will be conducted using three social media channels, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter for each organization, as well as its website. Finally, media coverage of the organizations is examined. These particular platforms were chosen because they are the most widely used and the most accessible to the general public.

This analysis reviews social media postings and general reactions from commenters from January 1st to March 10, 2016. This was the most recent period of time and it should be sufficient enough to get a sample of how these organizations communicate with its public and persuade outsiders. All pages on the website for each organization website were analyzed; this includes blog entries, links to stories and guides. This capstone analyzes three third-party articles each from the past year in order to examine how the public views the organizations in present time. In order to divert from bias that would be found in blogs or press releases submitted from the organizations themselves, both local and international news organizations are examined. The mass media covers stories about the organization that could potentially paint a particular image of the organization in the manner of framing, as well as the topic itself. Although a news organization reports a story objectively, the specific story they chose to report has the potential to leave the readers with a certain impression of the vegan animal rights organization in the story.

RESULTS

Animal Liberation Front

Website

ALF's main way of communication is through its website. It is not hard to see that its main focus is of veganism is through animal welfare. Animal welfare is raised as an

issue at much higher rate than environment or health. The word slaughter was mentioned 2,520 times and the word cruelty was mentioned 3,890 times, whereas the word “deforestation” was mentioned 127 times and heart disease was mentioned 562 times.

On the “About ALF” page, the first thing a visitor will see is a video, with the thumbnail of animals being tested on. The video turns out to be a montage of activists rescuing animals, as well as images of animals being tested on as they appear to be in distress. This specific page also acknowledges that it is known as a terrorist organization. ALF does not agree with that description and have many pages and articles explaining why the organization believes it's in the right. In the “Timeless Myths About the ALF” section it addresses its use of destruction. The organization states that it holds all life in a high regard, but it supports destroying and property that is used in hurting animals. Unlike the other four organizations, ALF has no place for discussion on its website. There are no opportunities for visitors to interact with each other or the moderators of the website. The forum section on the site leads to an outside vegan blog. ALF's website provides links that explain and provide instructions on how a person or group can become an activist.

There are links to thousands of pictures and articles regarding animal cruelty and the premise that veganism is the only moral diet. However, there are only three hits that lead to articles on how to become a vegan, two of them linking to the same page.

Instagram

ALF's Instagram account has over 11,000 followers, and 3,660 posts. The account `alf_sweden` was used because it was consistent with the information found on the ALF website and appeared to be a good representation of the organization. Over the course of the 10 weeks that were reviewed, ALF published 468 images. The primary focus of the account was veganism. While it included all types of animals, the primary focus was on farm animals: chickens, cattle and pigs. Many of its images were found to be graphic in nature were likely to incite feelings of anger, sadness or guilt. For the purposes of this capstone, they were classified as negative, as shown in Fig. 1. Approximately 43

percent of its images were found to use positive images or messages to promote veganism these were images that showed animals that were happy or messages of empowerment to their vegan followers, and 6 percent used neutral images to promote veganism usually providing information with little to no emotion attached to it. Fifty percent of its images were found to use pictures of animals in distress to trigger emotions of anger, sadness, or guilt.

Through its graphic imagery and accompanying text, ALF dominantly uses the frames to elicit guilt and shame in non-vegans. One such picture contained a very graphic image of pig with the caption “a fully conscious pig being scalded alive so you can eat.” Other messages that supported veganism had the contrast of good versus bad, “Why am I vegan? Torture doesn’t taste good to me.” There is very little gray area found on the Instagram account. When reviewing the posts on the account there was a lot of support.

Many of the posts received several hundred “likes” with nearly unanimous support of the cause of veganism, and the emotions that were found in the comments were often those of sadness and anger. However, some comments were voices of dissent, antagonizing the organization and its supporters. These comments were met with criticism.

Media Coverage

Media coverage of ALF is limited to the arrest of activists within the organization as well as their indictments. In February 2016, the Los Angeles Times reported that two members of ALF, Joseph Buddenberg and Nicole Kissane, claimed responsibility for vandalizing a fur businesses in a “cross-country rampage.” The activists freed minks from the farms in which they were in captivity. In total, Buddenberg and Kissane caused up to \$100,000 worth of damage. The pair pleaded guilty to violation of the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act. (Davis, 2016), a U.S. federal law prohibiting anyone from “engaging in certain conduct for the purpose of damaging or interfering with the operations of an animal enterprise” (Cornell University Law School, 2011).

On February 29, 2016, ABC7 Chicago reported that activists Kevin Johnson and Tyler Lang were caught on a separate cross-country spree freeing thousands of minks from fur farms. They were also found guilty of vandalism. Johnson was sentenced to three years in prison (Goudie, 2016), while Lang was sentenced to six months house arrest (Sun- Times Media Wire, 2016).

One exception to the pattern of coverage framing the organization of terrorists was an interview with Paul Gravett, an ALF activist, who — along with other ALF activists – was spied on by an undercover police officer during the McLibel trial of the 90s (Buist, 2016).

Mercy for Animals

Website

Separate from the other three websites, MFA sticks to a sparse, minimalistic aesthetic, devoid of an easily locatable search engine feature. The opening page has a link to someone who worked undercover at a farm. The video depicts the current conditions on various farms, with words similar to abuse, cruelty, horrible conditions and suffering popping up on the screen, consistent with the visuals. At the end of the video, it asks visitors to stop eating meat and it states to take it one step at a time. It provides guides that visitors can order to help them transition to the vegan lifestyle.

At the very bottom on the page, MFA features four large buttons: a donate request, a pledge to “eating compassionately,” a video vault, and a link to become a subscriber to the organization. In order to access these features, visitors must click on the buttons. In the video vault, there are several undercover films of the poultry, pork, and dairy industries.

The videos are graphic in nature, showing the harvesting and slaughter process the animals go through before being packaged. On video in particular, an undercover video of Perdue Farms, gives a call to action, requesting the audience to sign a petition to tell the CEO to “adopt a meaningful welfare policy.”

Despite being a vegan organization, MFA has been known to flirt with the word itself, often telling its audience to go vegetarian or to “cut out” or “cut back on meat.” It defends these requests by accounting for social marketing tactics:

“Our goal is to create as much dietary change as possible in order to spare as many animals as possible from the misery of animal agriculture. To achieve that, we have to be willing to sometimes ask for less than we really want[. . .] We need to realize that when we’re encouraging dietary change, we’re interacting with human beings. And that means we have to account for human psychology. We need to craft our messaging in a way that accepts how people’s brains actually work, not the way we think they should work.”

Instagram

MFA’s Instagram account has approximately 140,000 followers and it posts on a daily basis. One hundred eighteen posts were reviewed. MFA’s Instagram account is used to promote veganism and animal welfare. Over the 10 weeks reviewed, MFA published 118 images.

Sixty-five percent of the images published were that of positive messages. These images were celebrations of progress—for example, Safeway’s decision to stop caging their chickens—quotes from celebrities, and images of animals that appear to be happy. Thirty-two percent of the images were neutral, showing how to get vegan options at popular chain restaurants and vegan foods and recipes. Only 3 percent of their posts were negative, inciting guilt or disgust for those who have not made the decision to eliminate meat from their diet, making statements like “what if they were puppies” in a short clip of pigs in a factory farm. Most of the comments on MFA’s images show support, however, some people question the validity of their statements about the animal agricultural industry.

Facebook

MFA’S Facebook account has 1.8 million likes. Over the course of the 10 weeks that were reviewed, MFA published 49 original posts, with many of the images repeated

throughout the month, and sometimes week. Many of its Facebook posts overlapped with its Instagram profile. Sixty-five percent of its posts were positive, providing videos and information on how veganism has changed many individuals' lives and how it's good for the environment and animals. Other posts were celebratory ones, congratulating companies on using cage free eggs. Ten percent of its posts were neutral, typically asking its audience to sign a petition to encourage factory farms to improve animals lives at the slaughterhouse. The remaining 25 percent of the posts invoked guilt for not eating less meat, or even cutting it out completely, depicting images of sad animals and on one occasion, a graphic video at a slaughterhouse. Like PETA, MFA regularly interacts with its commenters.

Twitter

MFA's Twitter account has 154,000 followers, and 6, 399 tweets. Much like its Facebook account, tweets overlapped with their Instagram account, with many of the tweets appearing more than once. During this timeframe, MFA published 380 original tweets.

About 56 percent of its tweets were positive. These tweets often depicted images of small animals playing with each other, accomplishments made by the organization or veganism as a whole. About 15 percent of its tweets were neutral, with links to vegan meals, as well as links to humanely-raised meat, making them the only organization of the four to promote such a product. Twenty-five percent of the tweets were negative, inflicting guilt or sadness, often providing links about the effects meat has on our health, our environment, and animal welfare. The most prominent link was typically about animal welfare.

Media Coverage

Media coverage of MFA are typically reports of it commending companies within the animal agricultural industry for making changes to their welfare policies, as well as released undercover videos. On March 2, 2016, CBC reported that MFA was pleased with charges against Chilliwack Cattle Sales, who- along with seven of their employees- faced 20 counts of animal cruelty. In the article, MFA claims responsibility for the

undercover investigation and refers to the changes as “landmark in Canada” (The Early Edition, 2016).

On December 10, 2015, WNCN reported that MFA released a graphic video of a poultry plant in North Carolina, that happened to be a contract farm for Perdue, a company that MFA has made welfare requests with before. As a result of the video, an employee of the plant was arrested (Griffeth, 2015).

On August 29, 2015, the Huffington Post conducted an interview with MFA’s Education Project Coordinator, Alan Darer. In the article, Darer discusses the evolution of MFA, the companies it chooses to target and the message regarding humanely raised meat and Meatless Mondays. Darer echos the same idea written on the organization’s website, asking less of their audience so they more likely to engage in the desired behavior (Guan, 2015).

PETA

Website

PETA’s large website provides a wealth of information regarding animal rights, veganism, and lifestyle guides, often including links within others. With respect to veganism, a person can use the website’s search engine and be directed to several pages of information on the lifestyle. There are free “starter kits” as well as for kits available for purchase.

The website drew numerous hits regarding animal cruelty, with the word slaughter mentioned 3,710 and the word cruelty was mentioned 17,400, yet it appears to keep it separate from the searched term veganism. Under the reasons to go vegan, worker mistreatment as well as a video on factory farming were presented. The factory farming video depicted pictures of animals living in cramped, dirty conditions, being hit and slaughtered. The video depicted similar conditions found in videos on the other organizations’ websites.

Instagram

PETA's Instagram account has approximately 242,000 followers and it posts on a daily basis. PETA uses Instagram to show its dedication of animal rights in general, including vegan recipes, images of factory farm animals, and animals in captivity. Over the 10 weeks reviewed, PETA published 182 images. Approximately 34 percent of the images were positive, depicting images of vegan and environmental-activist celebrities, cute animals, and stories of rehabilitated animals. Thirty-seven percent of the images were neutral.

These images were typically recipe videos, vegan foods and products. The remaining 30% of the images were negative, with the potential to elicit anger, sadness, or disgust. These posts typically showed direct action protests, stories of tortured and hurt animals and calls to action; demanding boycotts of certain places, during this specific time-frame, the Ringling Bros. circus and SeaWorld.

The comments posted on PETA's Instagram account in response to these types of postings were a mixture of support and mocking. It was not hard to find comments that mocked PETA and stated its claims were either outright lies or extreme exaggerations. These comments were often criticized by apparent supporters of animal rights.

Facebook

PETA'S Facebook account has 3.9 million likes. PETA uses its Facebook page to promote its view of animal welfare and interact with its followers. During this timeframe, PETA published 100 statuses to its page. The posts to its Facebook page are consistent with the images that are found on its other platforms. However, this platform features considerably more graphic content than Instagram and Twitter. Sixty-nine percent of its posts were negative, featuring videos comparing a random assault on the street to the fur industry and often showing animals being mutilated for human consumption. The responses generally thanked the organization for being responsible and choosing "compassion over cruelty." Sixteen percent of its posts were positive, promoting dog adoption over the purchase of purebreds, stories of rehabilitated and adopted animals, and celebrity endorsements. The balance of the posts were neutral, typically depicting recipes, tutorials and awareness of current events related to animal rights. PETA

interacts with its audience very regularly, sometimes responding to more than half of the people who have posted.

Twitter

PETA'S Twitter account has 638,700 followers and tweeted 628 times over course of the 10 weeks that were reviewed. At the beginning of the year, PETA dubbed 2016 "Year of The Vegan" maintaining the hashtag throughout the month of January. Often, PETA would join in on trending topics of the day, making sure to relate it back to veganism. During Beyonce's Super Bowl performance, it tweeted to her alerting her of the harm lobsters face when they are captured for restaurant sales, with the hashtag "Formation," in reference to the racy lyric in the song she performed. Analyzation found that about 31 percent of its tweets were found to use positive images or messages to promote veganism. These messages were often stories of rehabilitated animals or celebrity interviews and endorsements. Fourteen percent of its tweets were neutral. These tweets typically included links to recipes and vegan products. The remaining 55 percent of the tweets were negative, eliciting sadness, disgust or anger. These tweets were anecdotes and information about animals living and suffering in the agricultural, cosmetic, entertainment, fashion, and science industries.

Media Coverage

Media coverage of PETA usually deals with the topic of animal rights, usually its involvement of petitioning for animals to be set free or to have equal rights as humans. On March 17, 2016, after much protesting from PETA and the documentary Blackfish, SeaWorld's CEO announced that the marine amusement park would end orca breeding (Manby, 2016). President of PETA, Ingrid Newkirk, reported to have said that ending orca breeding simply wasn't enough, demanding that orcas get the opportunity to have "some semblance of a life outside their prison tanks" (San Diego Union-Tribune Editorial Board, 2016).

Ironically, PETA has faced some animal cruelty accusations of its own. On November 24, 2015, the Huffington Post curated a follow-up story regarding an incident where, in

the prior year, two PETA employees had taken and killed a young girl's Chihuahua, claiming to have mistaken it for a feral dog while they were making rounds in Accomack County, Virginia to help residents with feral and abandoned dogs in the community (Wavy News, 2015). The girl's family is now demanding seven million dollars from PETA. The article goes on to list statistics of dogs in PETA shelters that are euthanised and not adopted. "In 2014 [. . .] Of the 1,025 dogs taken in, 788 were euthanized" (Greenwood, 2015).

During the 2016 Super Bowl season, PETA submitted an ad to promote veganism. *The Huffington Post* reported that the ad was rejected, presumably because of its sexual nature. In the commercial, two couples are seen juxtaposed next to each other in separate scenarios having sex. One meat eating couple and one vegan couple. The meat eating couple finishes prematurely, and is shown going on about their day, while the vegan couple continues to have sex. The commercial concluded "Last longer, go vegan." *The Huffington*

Post notes that this isn't the first time a PETA ad did not resonate with an audience. A spokesperson from PETA claimed that the organization had fine-tuned it to make sure that it would resonate this time around. The reporter of the article presumed her statement to be a joke (Dicker, 2016).

Vegan Outreach

Website

VO's website provides its visitors with multiple guides on veganism, how to sign up for a membership, and information on how to participate in outreach activities. The free guide is titled "Guide to Cruelty-Free Eating" but there is very little mention of animal abuse on the home page. Under the link, "reasons to go vegan" the user is taken to a page that list health, environment and animal welfare in that order. However, there is a section on the site that ask the question, "why a person should be vegan." This leads to a "Modern Farming" section. There are pictures of animals in very cramped and dirty spaces. There are also pictures of sick and dying animals as well as slaughtered animals. There

are captions and detailed descriptions that purport to explain what is going on the visual.

Much of the site is information that provides insights about how to become a vegan. Tips and recipes are provided. This case analysis searched for trends of the mention of the words moral, murder as well as words such as slavery, holocaust and rape to see if there were comparisons to human tragedy were searched, but no such trend was found.

Instagram

VO has 119,000 followers on Instagram, but does not post as often as the other organizations in this study. However, when it does post, it is not unusual for the organization to receive several thousand likes, and, in some instances, more than a hundred comments on a single post. During the period of January 1, 2016 to March 10, 2016 there were 63 posts, nearly all of them related to the promotion of veganism. Thirty- three percent of the images were positive, these were messages and pictures cute animals and vegan jokes, in an attempt to bring a sense of unity. Sixty-one percent of the images were neutral, typically showing pictures of food and recipes. The balance of the images was negative, reminding its audience that suffering of animals is not worth the pleasure of consumption. Based upon the comments, the site attracts both supporters and detractors of a vegan lifestyle. There is interaction with people arguing with each other over which lifestyle is the best. VO does not tend to interact with its audience.

Facebook

VO's Facebook account has over nearly 520,000 likes. Over the course of the 10 weeks that were reviewed, VO published 86 posts. Like its Instagram, the overwhelming majority of the statuses on its page were either positive or neutral. With 59 percent of posts on its page being positive and 28 percent being neutral, these posts were typically about small animals, food and the promotion of vegan businesses and celebrities. In a controversial post, founder Jack Norris published a picture of himself with the words "People say 'I'd go vegan but I can't give up cheese.' Then go vegan except for cheese!"

Some posters voiced disgust that a vegan organization would make a suggestion that would contradict with its values. Only 13 percent of the images had the potential to invoke feeling of sadness, guilt, disgust or anger. These were messages about the fact that animals suffer for the cost of one's dinner. As with the Instagram account, VO's Facebook page gets lots of likes and comments on each posting, voicing mostly support. Unlike MFA and PETA, VO rarely interacted with commenters.

Twitter

VO's 's Twitter account has 63,000 followers. Over the course of the 10 weeks that were reviewed, VO published 77 tweets. Forty-two percent of their tweets were positive, containing messages about living with compassion and images & stories of animals. Forty- seven percent of its tweets were neutral, once again, providing its audience with recipes and vegan brands. Only 11 percent of its tweets during this timeframe were found to use messages that attempted to incite negative emotions, one example included information about baby chicks being tossed in a grinder on an egg farm.

Media Coverage

Unlike the other organizations, VO doesn't generate much press. However, founder Jack Norris is reported in *The New York Times* to have endorsed Tesla for adding the option of vegan leather seats to its cars, stating pride that "indicated that enough people had voiced concern to push the carmaker to respond" (Cardwell, 2016).

DISCUSSION

Preaching to the Choir Analyzing all four organizations allows a set of conclusions about how each of these organizations communicate externally, and accordingly, which might illustrate evidence of best practices as suggested by persuasion theory.

Based upon the results, we can see that each organization is different in how it promotes its message on various social media platforms. Results show that ALF is content in appealing to its base, even if it has the effect of outcasting others. This shows

that the organization may be more interested in maintaining its audience, specifically, like-minded individuals. Previous research has shown that organizations that fail to have a website that is easy to navigate, maintain and generate a return of visitors, lose its message (Taylor, Kent, White, 2001). While PETA includes messages to encourage people to become a part of its movement, its use of imagery and oversaturation of social media usage could overwhelm newcomers, only leaving the organization with its base. While MFA and VO cater its messages on its website to people who are curious about being a vegan, both organizations use its social media platforms to primarily communicate with people who are already vegan. Even then, the imagery used by both organizations may be perceived as more palatable to the general public. Thus, in this instance, every organization is guilty of preaching to the choir to a certain extent, but they differ in the methods they use.

But...How Do I Become a Vegan?

In discussing persuasion methods, Cooney differentiates low-involvement changes (buying a new detergent) and high-involvement changes (lifestyle changes). In the case of a high- involvement lifestyle change –in this case, veganism– people gather information about the change and think about it for some time. For this reason, Cooney proposes that the information presented should use sound logic and supporting evidence, and should be presented well. If the presentation of the information is poor, the advocate has lost their audience (Cooney 2011 p. 110, 111).

Animal Liberation Front

On ALF's website, the organization stresses that eating meat is not only unhealthy and disgusting, but it is wrong. Social norms theory shows that individuals are more likely to engage in a behavior that everyone else is doing (Cooney p.95, 2011). However, vegan organizations have a certain reputation, and it is not promised that people will come to the realization that they should re-evaluate their behavior. Rather, people may not take the movement seriously, or they will be insulted that an outsider dared to challenge the status quo; that is, their lifestyle. ALF provides various links and articles from outside

organizations to prove this idea, however there is precious little on how the individual can begin to make the change. Not only does ALF lack information on how to make the change, they imply that the non-vegan reader is a bad person for their lifestyle. Through attribution theory, ALF attaches the action of consuming animal products to the audience's character (Simply Psychology, 2010). Furthermore, the organization uses graphic imagery on both its website and Instagram accounts. Its lack of resources to help people who have never considered the morality of their lifestyle choices combined with its gory imagery and accusatory language has the potential to turn away newcomers and possibly confirm biases they have about vegans or ignite them, if they do not already exist.

Mercy for Animals

As Nick Cooney is the Vice President of MFA, the organization does a pretty decent job of presenting information to their audience with sound logic and supporting evidence in an aesthetically pleasing manner. On its website, visitors will find a toggle button at the very bottom, "Eat With Compassion" one click and they are provided the option of receiving a vegetarian starter kit. As previously mentioned, MFA tries to avoid telling their audience to become vegan because it asks for far too much. Previous research has shown that people are more willing to adopt a vegetarian diet than a vegan one. Because people are unlikely to make a larger change on their own, organizations ask more later on (Cooney, 2011). By doing this, MFA is using the foot-in-the-door approach (Cooney, 2011). This is where MFA's social media accounts come in. Unlike its website, its Instagram, Facebook and Twitter accounts are littered with memes and popular culture references to veganism. This shows that MFA is using its website to inform those who are curious about a plant-based lifestyle, and its social media account to unite those who have made the lifestyle change.

PETA

PETA provides a wealth of information on how to be a vegan on its website. Of the four analyzed organizations, PETA is the most recognizable brand name. Yet, of the four organizations, PETA has the busiest looking site. One could spend hours looking at the

website, reading the front page, viewing the videos, and clicking various links. However, on average visitors only spend less than three minutes on the website (Alexa). Because it's so difficult to navigate, people who are not yet vegan could potentially use it as an excuse to not make the extra step to become educated or adopt the new lifestyle. Furthermore, PETA publishes multiple social media posts a day, sometimes up to seven, potentially overwhelming its audience. If someone wants to become a vegan, their preconceived notions of the organization, combined with the design of the website and over saturated social media activity, could drive them away. Previous research has shown that campaigns fail to succeed when they neglect the human aspects of sustainability (McKenzie-Mohr 5). PETA fails to understand that some people may not have the resources to purchase cruelty-free replacements, let alone the time to comb through the website to find out what exactly constitutes as cruelty free.

PETA has stated that its goal is to garner attention. However, it is not enough to gain a visitor, follower, or a like. Because it's a low-effort action, anyone can do it, but not everyone will adopt the behavior or become apart of the cause (Penney, 2015). For that reason, PETA likely fails to effectively educate their audience.

Vegan Outreach

Loyal to its name, VO's mission is centered on telling people why they should become vegan and how they should make the change. Results have shown that both MFA and VO have the friendliest approaches to veganism. What separates the two, however, is VO asks for a huge favor from their audience right of the bat. Because we are more likely to do something when the initial request is small (Cooney 2011), people might be hesitant to make the switch when asked. In a Facebook post, the CEO of the organization told newcomers that if they think they can't give up cheese, they should "go vegan except for the cheese." While this is may be an effective tactic to comfort people who are afraid to let go of their comfort foods, it contradicts the organization's mission statement and name. This could potentially confuse people in the meaning of veganism.

We're Going to Change Your Life

From previous research and personal experience, Cooney (2010) notes that people are less likely to be influenced when they are told they are going to be influenced, referencing his guest lectures at colleges and high schools when a teacher made the mistake of telling students that he is there to tell them why they should be vegetarian, rather than telling them he is there to tell them about the impact that animal agriculture has on our environment, our health and animal welfare, where the students would be more likely to be interested and listen.

Animal Liberation Front

While ALF tells its audience about the impact animal agriculture has on their health, the environment, and the welfare of animals, it once again provides the information in a manner that is only palatable to those who already agree with it. The organization infers, through guilt, that people should not want hurt animals or even eat something so grotesque. The issue with this method is that while the audience are not being told they are about to be influenced, they are being told that their lifestyle is not only immoral but it's disgusting. This could put its target audience on the defense and make them feel like they have to justify their choices, rather than re-evaluate them.

Mercy for Animals

As previously stated, MFA does its best to avoid using the word vegan in its vocabulary when speaking to a meat-eating audience. While the word is readily noticeable on the website, it is only used in the context of a particular person, place or thing. True to Cooney's message, while it does not directly tell its audience on social media why they should be vegan, it provides anecdotes of people who never thought they would be vegan and now are. This could provide people who are on the fence about making a such a change with insight from someone just like them. Because we are more likely to listen to someone who is just like us, MFA has the potential to convince someone who might not have otherwise thought of about changing.

PETA

Due to the layout of its website and several social media posts a day, one would be hard-pressed to find themselves being told that they are about to be influenced immediately. However, further analysis showed that PETA is in fact, guilty of explicitly stating, “Why you should be vegan.” One tweet in particular read “Why would someone decide to go #vegan? The answer is simple.” The tweet was followed by a link. The link tells the reader what a vegan is then tells them it is the best way to help the animals, proclaiming “that it couldn’t be easier” to make the change, then going on to list brands that do not test on animals and cruelty-free clothing brands.

People are more likely to adopt a behavior when we ask less of them (Cooney, 2011). Not only does PETA explicitly tell their audience that they should be a vegan, they are insinuating they need to give everything up all in one go. When one goes vegan, they usually sacrifice more than dairy, eggs, and meat. Because it’s an ethical lifestyle, they have to rethink household items, cosmetics, furniture and more. When people realize how much they will have to get rid of or replace, they will not see the new lifestyle as easy, but inconvenient and expensive. Research has shown that many quit the lifestyle because they believe it’s too difficult to be pure (Humane Research Council, 2014). Because of this, PETA may have successfully converting individuals for the long term.

Vegan Outreach

Because VO’s mission is “to move society away from eating animals and their products,” and the word vegan is in its name, VO immediately tells their audience that it is going to persuade them. While VO is a perfect resource for those who intend to transition to veganism and they present themselves and the voice of reason through their social media, the organization could potentially struggle in persuading its audience, especially because they keep a very low profile online. If a person who has been eating meat all their life, and their only exposure to veganism is through PETA, sees an individual in a “Vegan Outreach” t-shirt with their arm outstretched, pamphlet in hand, they might keep walking or trash the pamphlet after they’ve reached another block. VO already has a very ambitious goal in wanting to people to switch to a vegan lifestyle, and it may be hard to achieve if they have a scarce social media presence.

Awwwww

Studies have shown that people are more willing to contribute to a cause when they experience pleasurable stimuli. Thus, if a message is created in a positive manner (i.e. humor, cute animals, popular culture memes) the audience will be receptive (Cooney, 2011).

Animal Liberation Front

Out of all the four organizations, ALF provides the least pleasurable stimuli. Because most of its messages are that of negative stimuli—mutilated animals, animals in distress, people judging meat-eaters, blood, and the like, people will feel repelled from the imagery, and turn away, the very thing the organization laments about when it comes to changing a non-vegan's mind. Furthermore, its website looks dated, in that the website is dark, text-heavy. This could give outsiders the idea that vegans, and this organization in particular, are out of touch with reality and modern times.

Mercy for Animals

On all of its social media platforms, MFA provides its audience with light-hearted imagery. A scroll through a week's time shows a visitor images of cute animals and popular culture nostalgia makes the organization appear welcoming, friendly and relatable. While it is likely that its target audience remains people who are already vegan—based upon the humor that would only appeal to vegans—it is clear that non-vegans are fans and followers of the profiles, and they not only see the material, but they share it as well.

PETA

As previously discussed, PETA's website is very busy, and its social media is possibly overactive. Not only this, but on its Facebook account, visitors will see graphic — and potentially triggering - material. Visitors will see animals being beaten into submission in the entertainment industry, activists confronting people on the street, and animals in distress. While PETA posts positive images on its Facebook account, it is

overshadowed by films of activists making people uncomfortable and upsetting videos of animals being harmed. Because people do not spend much time viewing PETA's information, people will make assumptions based off their initial impression. In regards to its website and Facebook account, the first impression will be a negative one.

PETA's Instagram is slightly more positive. Providing the audience with images of vegan food and cosmetics, it makes the vegan lifestyle look cool and fun. Due to PETA's reputation, however, it is unlikely that the people it is trying to persuade would ever follow the account or have any interest in doing so. For that reason, non-vegans are unlikely to see the positive side of the organization.

Vegan Outreach

Across all platforms, VO provides their audience with very pleasant stimuli. A modular web design, bright colors and delicious looking food, entices the audience leaving them wanting more.

That's Horrible!

Disgust appeals, for example, where activist will show graphic images, raise concern among nonprofits that the audience will disregard the message. They'll turn away without receiving an otherwise compelling argument (Cooney 2011). In a study published by Communication Quarterly, where people were shown videos making the case for and against animal experimentation, results found that arguments that contained graphic images of animal experimentation was not received as well as the arguments without it.

While little research has been done to confirm or deny whether or not this method works, we can assume that graphic content can be received well, as long as it is what someone new to the topic might consider tame (Cooney 2011).

Animal Liberation Front

Out of all of the organizations, ALF not only utilizes the disgust appeal the most, but uses it on both its platforms. The responses on the Instagram account are mostly positive.

However, on one post in particular –an image of a chicken’s neck being slit– someone commented that they did not wish to start their day seeing such imagery. Many commenters responded to the person that if they were truly disgusted, they should not continue to eat it. The person responded in kind that were in fact vegan, but did not find this form of activism to be effective.

In the process of analyzation, there were a few users who appeared to comment on the organization’s images to get a rise out of its followers, often commenting “looks delicious” or questioning the immorality of eating meat, much to the anger of ALF’s supporters and followers. It appears that while this is a favored tactic of the organization, it is only effective for like-minded vegans. Those who are not ready to make the change or believe that the message is overly aggressive and ineffective, will likely distance themselves from the movement and ignore an otherwise compelling message.

Mercy for Animals

While MFA does share graphic imagery on its social media accounts, it is not as prominent as it is on ALF’s and PETA’s social media handles. MFA provides the audience with a warning of the graphic nature before the video begins. Other organizations often condemn non-vegans for turning away or closing their eyes when they are exposed to graphic imagery. While it is very true that most people will agree that they do not want to see an animal suffer, the way a video is presented will not change whether or not they choose to see the material. That being said, MFA provides its audience the option to see it, giving them the liberty to educate themselves, thus, taking away the chance for someone to complain about their daily social media routine being interrupted by such imagery.

PETA

Second to ALF, PETA shares the most graphic material on its social media account. While it is stated that the material is graphic in the caption, due to autoplay, the video has started before the visitor has finished reading the caption, and often, the graphic nature has already started. Thus, the only way the person could stop seeing more is if they pause the video or continue to scroll, avoiding it all together. Furthermore, PETA's brand is centered around graphic material; it's what made it famous, afterall. While people remember traumatic imagery that PETA puts out into the world, the general public's reaction is usually negative, and as a result, fails to persuade outsiders.

Vegan Outreach

Out of all the organizations, VO is the only one to not provide its audience with graphic imagery. Of the four organizations, VO has the smallest following. Unfortunately, this could lead to its work going unrecognized, especially because it heavily relied on leafleting tactics.

Any Press is Good Press, Right?

Previous research has shown that the media plays a role in forming the perception of vegans (Guerin, 2014).

Animal Liberation Front

The FBI has long branded ALF as an eco-terrorist organization (2002) and the media has no trouble ensuring the public that such a reputation is upheld, often reporting of the arrests of members who have freed animals from their farms, just before setting fire to places they were held. The stories paint a sympathetic light in favor of the farmers, claiming their lives were destroyed and the animals endangered (Sun-Times Media Wire, 2016). This sort of reporting likely convinces audience members who are not already on the side of the organization that the movement is nothing but trouble.

Mercy for Animals

Out of the organizations examined, MFA is painted in the most positive light. MFA is typically reported praising corporations for making changes to its animal welfare policies (The Early Edition, 2016), and are often painted as heroes for exposing those who engage in animal cruelty and bringing them to justice. (Griffeth, 2015). Furthermore, MFA is painted as consistent; by constantly emphasizing the importance of social behavioral theory when talking about the organization's legacy (Guan, 2015).

PETA

Findings have confirmed that the media potentially directly impacts the way the public views PETA today. In covering PETA's reaction SeaWorld's announcement of ending its orca breeding program, the organization was painted as insatiable and over-ambitious, hoping all of the animals will someday be freed from the marine park, highlighting the CEO's statement that such an action would not be economically sound (Manby, 2016). The media also paints PETA as hypocrites, reporting statistics on the number of household pets they have euthanized annually. Furthermore, PETA is framed as being out-of-touch, failing to understand why a commercial that was incredibly sexual in nature would not be aired during a highly viewed program (Dicker, 2016). Because PETA is a high-profile organization, it is likely its media coverage plays a role in how it is seen.

Vegan Outreach

Unique to the other three organizations, VO has nearly no media coverage at all, with the exception a brief mention in an article about a new Tesla model (Cardwell 2016). Its lack of media coverage cannot harm it, nor can it help it. However, this could mean that unlike the other organizations, it has a clean slate; its limited media coverage almost makes it invisible. Because individuals do not have a preconceived opinion of the organization, they will craft their own opinion when they find out about them.

CONCLUSION

This case study analysis sought to find out how four vegan animal activist organizations attempted to evoke behavioral change through the vehicle of social media, the methods of persuasion it was using and if it made any efforts to help its target audience, new vegans, maintain their lifestyle. The organizations were Animal Liberation Front (ALF), Mercy for Animals (MFA), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and Vegan Outreach (VO).

Organizations of this nature typically have ambitious goals: large-scale reduction of animal products and by-products and abolition of animals in the entertainment, fashion and science industries. However, these organizations often have a reputation for their exclusionary tactics, ranging from aggressive to further marginalizing communities that are already marginalized. How is that a movement that wants the world to be apart of the cause have a reputation that prevents it from reaching its goals?

Overall, results have shown that the organizations have used its social media accounts and websites to target its audience in a different way. ALF used its website as a primary communication vehicle to inform the public about its message. It used its member-curated Instagram to communicate that livestock animals were suffering at the hands of human consumption through memes and graphic imagery.

MFA uses its website to educate non-vegans about the effects meat has on our planet, our health and the welfare of livestock animals. MFA used its social media accounts—Facebook, Instagram and Twitter—to communicate the very same message, but tailored the information to people who were already vegan; inside jokes about the lifestyle, claiming victories of campaigns it has started and requests for corporations to make changes to the welfare of the animals from its suppliers.

PETA uses its website as a baseline for vegans and non-vegans alike in finding information about campaigns against the agricultural, cosmetic, fashion, and science industries and guides to a vegan lifestyle. PETA uses its social media accounts to discuss animal rights in general, beyond the dietary lifestyle that MFA and VO focus on through its social media. PETA also uses its social media to create a lifestyle brand out of veganism.

VO uses its website to inform those who have recently heard about the organization about how to become a vegan and uses its social media accounts to motivate its audience in engaging in the lifestyle, reminding them that the suffering of animals is not worth the pleasure of consumption.

Each organization used different persuasion tactics to convince its public why they should stop consuming animal products in their day-to-day lives. ALF used guilt, disgust and shaming tactics, telling those who continued to consume and use animal products that not only was their behavior immoral, but it was disgusting.

Similarly, PETA used guilt and disgust tactics to persuade its audience, but PETA avoided placing the blame on the audience. While the imagery was graphic and intense, PETA used toned-down language, simply asking its audience to take action regarding the visuals they have just seen.

MFA and VO both used nearly identical approaches. Both showed a very small amount of graphic imagery, sticking to mostly positive and humorous messages, appealing to its audience's stimuli and psychological patterns. What separates the two, however, is that MFA asked less of their audience with the hope of getting them to engage in a new behavior further down the road, while VO takes on a more ambitious endeavor, asking its audience to engage in the behavior right away.

Almost all of the organizations have provided resources to a certain degree on how the individual could maintain such a lifestyle. PETA, MFA, and VO all provided its audience the option to receive a starter kit on how to get started with the lifestyle, where ALF does not. While it is unclear whether or not the audience will continue to engage in the desired behavior after receiving the kit, these organizations make the option to start it much easier. The only organization with a potential problem with this was PETA. Because its website is difficult to navigate, its starter-kits might be poorly designed or complicated as well. It could also take sometime time before the audience could find the location to input personal information to receive a starter-kit, making it difficult for the individual to receive on in the first place. But by then, PETA probably has already lost its audience.

Limitations

Because certain social media outlets, like Twitter, currently allows us to only see a certain amount of posts before they are difficult to find, other social media outlets had to be accounted for in order to even out the balance. There was also a limit in regards to the timeframe in which the social media posts and general reactions to them. While this can give an accurate picture of what the organization communicates in present time, certain issues were not covered because they fell outside of the timeframe. For example, PETA's reaction and self-praise to SeaWorld's announcement of the ending of the orca breeding program was not including during the analysis. However, the media's coverage of PETA's reaction was.

Some organizations did not post frequently enough, specifically, Vegan Outreach and Animal Liberation Front. Thus, each organization had a completely different sample size. This could potentially make the comparisons to their more frequently posting counterparts, MFA and PETA, unfair.

In late February 2016, Facebook launched the "reaction" feature, allowing users to let the individual of the status they are reacting to state if it makes them amused, angry, happy, sad or shocked (Stinson, 2016). This capstone failed to keep a record of who was reacting to the information. Although the new feature is just as much of a low effort as the like button, it could be another signal of how the individuals were reacting to the information.

Future research seek to directly understand people who are vegan. Through focus groups and surveys, such an approach would seek to understand the extent to which organizations in the animal rights movement represent them well.

Future research should closely examine the public's reception of the organization through focus groups to determine what people who are not vegan think of the organizations and what they think of about the vegan lifestyle, if they would consider it and if their perception of vegans and vegan organizations have any bearing on their decision to engage, or not engage, in the lifestyle.

The starter kits of the organizations should also be examined for language, readability, and content: do the recipes actually include affordable and widely-available ingredients? Are the recipes easy to make? Does it answer the age-old question about protein, iron and B12? Does it provide information about what restaurants are veg-friendly?

Research should consider looking at the accounts in more depth for a longer period of time as well as the comments and responses they receive. Future research could also examine the responses of the organizations' social media posts in much greater detail, as well as track the "reaction" features on each of the Facebook platforms.

Overall, this case study was able to examine the potential level of effectiveness based upon what we know about persuasion and social change theory. While we cannot say for sure whether or not these organizations are effective in converting someone to the lifestyle in the long term, we can examine more effective methods of encouraging their audience to make their change in the first place.

REFERENCES

Alexa. Competitive Intelligence: Peta.org. (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/peta.org>

BBC. McLibel: Longest case in English history. (2005, February 15). Retrieved from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4266741.stm

Buist, E. (2016, March 11). Paul Gravett distributes leaflets in McDonald's with undercover police officer, Bob Lambert, 1986. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/11/thats-me-picture-paul-gravett-leaflets-bob-lambert>

Burgess, R (2015, September 27). *Got Dog Meat? Watch Meat Eaters React at a Steak House*

[Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJzw7SeVnHI>

Cardwell, D. (2016, January 14). From Tesla, a New Car Smell That Vegans Can Get Behind. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/15/automobiles/from-tesla-a-new-car-smell-that-vegans-can-get-behind.html?_r=0

CNN. (2003, February 28). Group blasts PETA 'Holocaust' project. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/Northeast/02/28/peta.holocaust/>

Cooney, N. (2011). *Change of Heart: What Psychology Can Teach Us About Spreading Social Change*. New York, NY: Lantern Books.

Cooney, N. (2014). *Veganomics: The Surprising Science on What Motivates Vegetarians, from the Breakfast Table to the Bedroom*. New York, NY: Lantern Books.

Cornell University Law School. 18 U.S. Code § 43 - Force, violence, and threats involving animal enterprises. (2011). Retrieved from <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/43>

Davis, K. (2016, February 17). Two animal activists plead guilty to vandalizing fur businesses. Retrieved from <http://www.latimes.com/local/crime/la-me-animal-activists-plea-20160217-story.html>

Definition of veganism. (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/definition-veganism>

Dicker, R. (2016, January 25). PETA Actually Submitted This NSFW Ad To The Super Bowl. Wow. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/peta-actually-submitted-this-nsfw-ad-to-the-super-bowl-and-wow_us_56a6623be4b0d8cc109ad974

Dokoupil, T. (2015, October 26). The decline of red meat in America. Retrieved from <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/the-decline-red-meat-america>

Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Threat of Eco-Terrorism. (2002). Retrieved from <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/the-threat-of-eco-terrorism>

Fishbein, M., & Cappella, J. (2006). The Role of Theory in Developing Effective Health Communications. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00280.x/citedby>

Francione, G. Rain without Thunder: The Ideology of the Animal Rights Movement. Temple University Press, 1996, pp. 67–77.

Freeman, C.P. (2010) Framing Animal Rights in the "Go Veg" Campaigns of U.S. Animal Rights Organizations

Google Trends - Web Search interest - Worldwide, 2004 - present. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.google.com/trends/explore?hl=en-US#q=vegan>

Goudie, C. (2016, February 26). Activist who freed thousands of minks in Morris gets 3 years in prison. Retrieved from <http://abc7chicago.com/news/activist-who-freed-thousands-of-minks-in-morris-gets-3-years-in-prison/1224681/>

Greenwood, A. (2015, November 24). PETA Killed A Little Girl's Dog, And Her Family Wants Them To Pay. A Lot.

Griffeth, C. (2015, December 10). Mercy For Animals releases graphic video of NC poultry plant. Retrieved from

<http://wncn.com/2015/12/10/mercy-for-animals-releases-graphic-video-of-poultry-plant/>

Guan, M. Y. (2015, August 29). Inside Mercy for Animals' Farmed Animal Advocacy. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/melody-y-guan/inside-mercy-for-animals_b_8044880.html

Guerin, K. (2014). Where's the Beef? (With Vegans): A Qualitative Study of Vegan-Omnivore Conflict. Retrieved from http://scholar.colorado.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1108&context=honr_theses

Humane Research Council (2014) Study of Current and Former Vegetarians and Vegans

Gunther, A. (2006) An Inquiry into Animal Rights Vegan Activists' Perception and Practice of Persuasion

Iacobbo, M. Vegetarians and Vegans in America Today, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006, p. 93.

Jorgensen, B. To Meat or Not to Meat? (2011). Retrieved from <http://ir.uiowa.edu/poroi/vol11/iss1/4/>

Norris, J. (2006). A History of Vegan Outreach and Our Influences. Retrieved from <http://www.veganoutreach.org/articles/history.html>

Osborn, M., & Osborn, S. (1997). Public speaking (4th ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company

Mohr, D. M., Ph.D. (2011). *Fostering Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing* (3rd ed.). New Society.

Penney, J. (2015). Social media and symbolic action: Exploring participation in the facebook red equal sign profile picture campaign. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 20(1), 52-66.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) | Animal Charity Evaluators. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.animalcharityevaluators.org/research/organizations/peta/>

PETA won't be satisfied with SeaWorld - ever. (2016, March 17). Retrieved from <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2016/mar/17/sea-world-peta-not-satisfied-ever-orcas/>

Renfro, K. (2016, March 23). 2 YouTube fitness stars went to war over veganism and cancer. Retrieved from <http://www.techinsider.io/vegan-gains-attacks-furious-pete-about-cancer-and-diet-2016-2>

Shreeves, R. (2010, March 19). Greenpeace And Nestle In A Kat Fight. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/2010/03/18/kitkat-greenpeace-palm-oil-technology-ecotech-nestle.html>

Sun-Times Media Wire. Tyler Lang, activist who freed thousands of minks in Morris, gets 6 months home confinement. (2016, March 23). Retrieved from <http://abc7chicago.com/news/activist-who-freed-thousands-of-minks-gets-6-months-home-confinement/1259267/>

Taylor, M., Kent, M. L., & White, W. J. (2001). How activist organizations are using the Internet to build relationships. *Public Relations Review*, 27(3), 263-284.

Top Charities | Animal Charity Evaluators. (2016). Retrieved from http://www.animalcharityevaluators.org/recommendations/top-charities-2/?utm_expId=80992747-8.yIMWKZMCTYqHyTYNs9xsKg.1

The Early Edition, (2016, March 02). Mercy for Animals pleaded charges laid in Chilliwack Cattle Sales investigation - British Columbia - CBC News. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/mercy-for-animals-pleaded-charges-laid-1.3473108>

VeganKanal (2013, September 13). *The science of animal advocacy, Nick Cooney at IARC 2013 Luxembourg* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUEGBDpmX0A>

Vegan Outreach Review | Animal Charity Evaluators. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.animalcharityevaluators.org/research/organizations/vegan-outreach-review/>

Yourofsky, Gary. (2015, February 6). Gary Yourofsky - The Most Important Speech You Will Ever Hear [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5hGQDLprA8>