

The communication of vegan influencers on Instagram: the Spanish case

La comunicación de los *influencers* veganos en Instagram: el caso español

A comunicação dos influenciadores veganos no Instagram: o caso espanhol

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ABSTRACT | The vegan movement is growing in the world's population due to concerns about animal welfare, sustainability, and healthy lifestyles. Vegan influencers play an important role in the communication of all aspects of this movement through their publications, mainly on Instagram. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to analyze influencers' communication regarding veganism on Instagram. We selected five influencer profiles and analyzed them using the content analysis technique. This research shows low advertising content in the influencers' publications. Moreover, many of these are not correctly indicated as advertising content. The most frequent topic is food, specifically, recipes, but only two influencers have academic studies related to nutrition, as shown by the available data. In addition, those influencers without studies in the area do not support their publications with any scientific arguments. In the current dynamic and constantly changing communication context, we consider that a greater number of more specific rules should exist to protect the consumer.

KEYWORDS: veganism; influencers; Instagram; feeding; advertising.

HOW TO CITE

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RESUMEN | *El movimiento vegano está en auge debido a la preocupación por el bienestar animal, la sostenibilidad, y los estilos de vida saludable de gran parte de la población mundial. Los influencers veganos, a través de Instagram principalmente, tienen un rol clave en todos los procesos de comunicación concernientes a este movimiento. En este contexto, el objetivo principal de este estudio es analizar la comunicación que realizan en Instagram influencers españoles cuya temática principal es el veganismo. Se seleccionaron cinco perfiles de influencers que fueron analizados mediante análisis de contenido. Por una parte, la investigación señala la infrutilización publicitaria que se realiza de los contenidos publicados por los influencers, así como el hecho de que muchas de las publicaciones no están correctamente mencionadas como contenido publicitario. Se confirma que la temática más frecuente está vinculada con la alimentación (recetas) pero, paradójicamente, solo dos influencers poseen formación en materia de nutrición o similares según la información obtenida. Tampoco se observa que aquellos que no la tienen sustenten la información que publican con alguna base científica. En un contexto comunicativo tan dinámico y cambiante, se considera que los organismos competentes deberían proponer más normas, y más específicas, para proteger al consumidor.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *veganismo; influencers; Instagram; alimentación; publicidad.*

RESUMO | *O movimento vegano está crescendo devido às preocupações com o bem-estar animal, sustentabilidade e estilos de vida saudáveis para grande parte da população mundial. Os influenciadores veganos, principalmente por meio do Instagram, desempenham um papel fundamental em todos os processos de comunicação desse movimento. Neste contexto, o objetivo principal é analisar a comunicação feita no Instagram por influenciadores espanhóis cujo tema principal é o veganismo. Cinco perfis de influenciadores foram selecionados e analisados através da técnica de análise de conteúdo. Por um lado, a pesquisa aponta para a subutilização publicitária do conteúdo veiculado por influenciadores, destacando também que muitas das publicações não são corretamente citadas como conteúdo publicitário. Confirma-se que o tema mais frequente está ligado à alimentação (receitas), mas, paradoxalmente, apenas dois influenciadores têm formação em nutrição ou afins segundo a informação obtida. Se observa que aqueles que não possuem a informação que publicam sustentam com alguma base científica. Perante um contexto de comunicação tão dinâmico e mutável, considera-se que os órgãos competentes deveriam propor mais regras cada vez mais específicas para proteger o consumidor.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *veganismo; influenciadores; Instagram; alimentação; publicidade.*

INTRODUCTION

The growth of the vegan movement has been constant in the last decade (Lantern, 2019), so brands have become interested in this trend, trying to find new ways to communicate with this audience (Phua et al., 2020a, 2020b; Abuhab & Araújo, 2019; Erben & Balaban-Sali, 2016; Waters, 2015). One way to reach this sector of the population has been through social networks, specifically through influencers (Wilson, 2019). In social networks such as Instagram, we can find all kinds of publications related to healthy habits, food, diets, supplements, etc., as well as social movements such as veganism (Gil-Quintana et al., 2021). Vegan influencers position themselves as relevant figures in the new digital landscape, both for the public and for brands. Among the many interests of both influencers and followers of this movement, the care of one's own image and body stand out, both linked to health, food, and nutrition, as Marauri-Castillo and colleagues (2020a) gather in their study focused on one of the most successful nutritionists on Instagram in Spain (Carlos Ríos). This is why the proposal presented below intends to delve into this path.

The vegan movement

The vegan movement is booming due to concerns about animal welfare, sustainability, and health (Lantern, 2017). The term vegan was officially coined in 1944 by Donald Watson, founder of the Vegan Society in England. Broadly speaking, veganism would be defined as a lifestyle in which the consumption of all food of animal origin is radically eliminated, as well as other types of products whose raw materials come from animals or have been tested on them (Lantern, 2017, 2019). However, to date there is no legally binding definition of the terms vegan and vegetarian in the European Union (European Vegetarian Union, 2021), which raises various terminological problems arising from the complexity of the phenomenon (Díaz-Carmona, 2012).

According to the study *The Green Revolution* (Lantern 2017, 2019), in Spain the percentage of the adult population that declares itself veggie is increasing: 7.8% in 2017, 9.9% in 2019, and 13% in 2021. Within this percentage, most (7.9%) consider themselves flexitarians, only 1.5% say they are vegetarians, and 0.5%, vegans. As for the profile of this type of consumer in Spain, they are mostly women between 20 and 35 years old and with medium-low income, concerned about health, animals, and the environment. More than half of them live in large urban centers. Their motivations vary according to the type of flexibility with their diet (Lantern, 2019). The majority of citizens/consumers who claim to belong to the vegan movement (and among whom are the selected influencers) do so flexibly and with a utilitarian concern for personal health (rather than animal welfare).

Instagram: the social network of the veggie movement

According to IAB Spain (2021), 85% of Internet users aged 16 to 70 use social networks in Spain. Instagram is the sixth most used social network in the world, with more than one billion active users every month (We Are Social, 2020), and is the network that had the most interaction in 2020 (IAB Spain, 2021). Being a key axis of communication and influencer marketing, influencers are the subject of multiple research studies (Arranz & Ortega, 2021; Monge-Benito et al., 2021; Espinosa-Grau, 2020; López-Ferrer & Núñez-Gómez, 2020; Gómez Nieto, 2018).

Most of its audience is between 25 and 34 years old (35%) and 18 to 24 years old (30%) (We Are Social, 2020). IAB Spain (2021) shows that Instagram is the favorite social network of young people between 16 and 24, and that 65% are women. This would be explained by an escape by these young people to a platform where their parents are not present, which grants them a sense of freedom (Madden et al., 2013; Prades & Carbonell, 2016). Added to this is the motivation of Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO), “a pervasive apprehension that others may be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Przybylski et al., 2013, p. 1), translated into the desire to be continuously connected characteristic of young people’s behavior on social networks.

These users represent the largest number of consumers in most societies (González-Loyola et al., 2018), which explains the interest of advertisers and brands in communicating their messages to them. They also show a greater interest in healthier eating and move towards more sustainable consumption patterns (Bollani et al., 2019). The reasons may be ethical (respect for animal welfare), environmental (the pressure generated by intensive agriculture), health-related (reduced intake of saturated fats), or cultural (the Mediterranean diet) (Bollani et al., 2019).

Several studies address how vegan-themed messages are constructed, (re) presented, and disseminated in the media, spaces where speciesist perspectives and culture are usually perpetuated (Molloy, 2011; Parkinson et al., 2019; Almiron et al., 2018; Cole & Stewart, 2014; Plec, 2016). Some focus on veganism as a rejection of animal exploitation, others as a sustainable and healthy lifestyle, or as a minority practice to be ridiculed and dismissed, referred to as vegaphobia (Cole & Morgan, 2011). It should be noted that social networks have contributed to consolidate the vegan movement (Jallinoja et al., 2019; Hancox, 2018) and to make it known in annual campaigns, as in the case of the Veganuary association (Díaz et al., 2021). Specifically, Instagram is considered as new power in food knowledge, i.e., the most used network for information on healthy eating and lifestyles, including the vegan movement (Wilson, 2019), or the Spanish-origin Realfooding (González-Oñate & Martínez-Sánchez, 2020; Sánchez-Amboage et al., 2020).

Advertising in the influencers' vegan movement content

In Spain, 67% of advertisers prefer Instagram to work with influencers, far above all other platforms (BrandManic, 2018). Of these, 79.1% are satisfied with the results obtained.

An influencer “is a person who has a certain credibility on a specific topic and whose presence and influence in social networks makes him/her become an ideal prescriber of a specific brand” (Gómez Nieto, 2018, p. 1). To determine whether someone is an influencer, more than their number of followers, it matters how admired, followed and/or listened to they are (Romero et al., 2011).

Advertising in influencers' content generates less rejection than in traditional media. Its legality generates debate, since it would be incurring in a case of disguised advertising (Tato Plaza, 2019). In Spain, influencer marketing is not regulated by specific legislation (Vilajoana et al., 2019). Therefore, in 2020, the Association for the Self-Regulation of Marketing Communication (Autocontrol, by its Spanish acronym) and the Spanish Advertisers Association (AEA, by its Spanish acronym) jointly drafted the Code of conduct on the use of influencers in advertising (in force as of January 1, 2021) (Autocontrol, 2020), applicable to adhering advertisers and influencers in the field of social networks and blogs.

Studies on Instagram and influencers have aroused the interest of researchers, especially in the fashion sector (Casaló et al., 2020). However, works on food and, specifically, on the vegan movement are scarce (Segarra-Saavedra et al., 2015; Sánchez-Amboage et al., 2020). Contributions that show the power of influencers to promote healthy eating in children (De Jans et al., 2021), adolescents (Folkvord & De Brujine, 2020), and adults (Folkvord et al., 2020) stand out. Other studies appeal to the potential negative effect of influencers on instituting appropriate eating (Coates et al., 2019; Jin, 2018; Jin et al., 2018). Realfooders -whose promoter is the Spaniard Carlos Ríos-, influencers focused on nutrition and offering information on how to eat real food (Gil-Quintana et al., 2021; Marauri-Castillo et al., 2020a, 2020b), have also been the focus of study. Research also pays attention to food-focused influencers, with a focus on analyzing the content they post and how they display it (Mota et al., 2019).

Constrained to the vegan movement and influencers, Phua and colleagues (2020a, 2020b) and Wilson (2019) analyze this movement from how it is promoted by the influencer.

Starting from this point, the objective of this research is to analyze the communication conducted on Instagram by influencers whose main topic is veganism. Specifically, the aim is to: 1) describe the profile of the most prominent

vegan influencers; 2) observe the content they publish; 3) categorize the topics in their arguments on veganism; 4) identify whether sources or scientific bases are indicated; 5) describe the most used formats, and 6) identify the training or degree of specialization in veganism.

METHODOLOGY

We selected content analysis as our method, defined as a systematic, objective, and quantitative research technique to investigate the characteristics of messages (Neuendorf, 2002).

The case selection procedure followed the following criteria:

1. Google searches with the following entries: vegan influencers Spain, and vegan activism Instagram. From the first entry, we selected the article *Influencers veganos: una tendencia y una inspiración* (Vegan influencers: a trend and an inspiration), from the BrandManic blog (n.d.). From the second one, we chose the article *13 cuentas de Instagram sobre activismo vegano que deberías seguir* (13 Instagram vegan activism accounts you should follow), from the blog Cambiaelchipp (n.d.), specialized in veganism initiation.
2. We reduced the list of influencers extracted from both articles to those with personal accounts in Spanish and with more than 10,000 followers.
3. Users were introduced to Phlanx, a digital marketing tool that allows auditing different social platforms, to know the engagement of each account. The five with the best results were selected: @soyvegana_jenny (6.32%), @lagloriavegana (6.30%), @ally_viamalama (5.75%), @maiteirulegi (5.48%), and @carlotabruna (5.18%).

The selected profiles are:

- Gloria Carrión (@lagloriavegana), 344K followers.
- Carlota Bruna (@carlotabruna), 174K followers.
- Jenny Rodríguez (@soyvegana_jenny), 106K followers.
- Ally Vispo (@ally_viamalama), 38.2K followers.
- Maite Irulegi (@maiteirulegi), 21.8K followers.

In pilot or exploratory studies, both the sample size and the time frame are determined by the quality of the information collected, and are not limited to numerical magnitude or mere quantitative selection (Wimmer & Dominick, 1996).

With this starting point, posts published during two weeks (September 28 to October 11, 2020) were randomly analyzed. The selection of this period obeys the casuistry, also envisaged by Marauri-Castillo and collaborators (2020a, 2020b), and by Martínez-Sala et al. (2018): to avoid any type of festive temporality that undermines the daily/weekly naturalness. It was estimated that the amount of information collected in two weeks was sufficient to meet the quality criteria endorsed by exploratory studies.

We manually downloaded all feed posts (screenshots) as well as stories (via the StorySaver.net website).

We developed three analysis templates: for the feed, for the stories, and for the influencers’ personal information (table 1).

Analysis levels	Variables and categories
Formal data	Influencer name and date
Format and topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Topic(s): self-promotion/personal/recommendations/dissemination/veganism/other. - In case of veganism: recipes/vegan nutrition/ethics/anti-speciesism/environment/sustainability/health/animal welfare/truths & myths/legislation/vegan philosophy/cosmetics & beauty/animal exploitation/other¹. - Format used for vegan-themed content: photo/photo or video carousel/video/reel/IGTV. - Indicates source or scientific basis.
Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is advertising content. - Advertising content is indicated in hashtags recommended by the Code of conduct on influencers in advertising. - There are tagged brands.
<i>Feedback</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No. of Likes: from 0 to 15,000, in intervals of 500. - No. of comments: from 0 to 500, in intervals of 50.
Relevant comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brief description. - Type of comment: positive/negative /neutral/doubt.

Table 1. Templates for collecting information on publications in the feed

Source: Own elaboration.

1. Both the topics and subtopics have been defined based on the preliminary observation of the profiles under study and other similar ones.

Using this template as a basis, we prepared another practically identical, with the following variables/categories adjusted to the stories format:

1. In formal data, the number of stories (from the same dialog) is added, and it is sought to determine if the publication is reposted.
2. In the analysis of format and topic, the variable format used is eliminated.
3. The levels of analysis on feedback and relevant comments are eliminated.

Regarding the template for collecting personal information from influencers, the following levels of analysis were considered:

1. Demographic data: age, gender, place of residence, and educational background.
2. Information about the account: followers, engagement, number of posts (in feed and in stories).
3. Other channels used: personal page, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

Logging instructions were also provided to facilitate the coding of the content. Discrepancies were submitted to consensus by the authors of the study.

Extraction of the results was performed by descriptive analysis based on frequency distribution. The association between two or more variables was determined by a Chi-square test (χ^2); the statistical significance value was set at $p < 0.05$. We used the SPSS 26 statistical processing program.

RESULTS

We obtained content from 36 posts in feed publications and 1,003 stories for five vegan influencers between 19 and 40 years old and urbanites. Four reside in large cities (Barcelona and Valencia) and one in a rural area in Catalonia. In addition to Instagram, in all cases the influencers have at least one other medium. Four (Gloria Carrión, Carlota Bruna, Jenny Rodríguez, and Ally Vispo) have a website with personal information; the same number (Carlota Bruna, Jenny Rodríguez, Ally Vispo, and Maite Irulegi) have a YouTube channel; three (Gloria Carrión, Carlota Bruna, and Jenny Rodríguez) use Facebook, and two use Twitter and Tik Tok (Jenny Rodríguez and Ally Vispo).

Regarding the publication of books or ebooks, four of the five influencers have launched one or more products of this type. All of them allude to veganism and several titles are focused on the vegan diet.

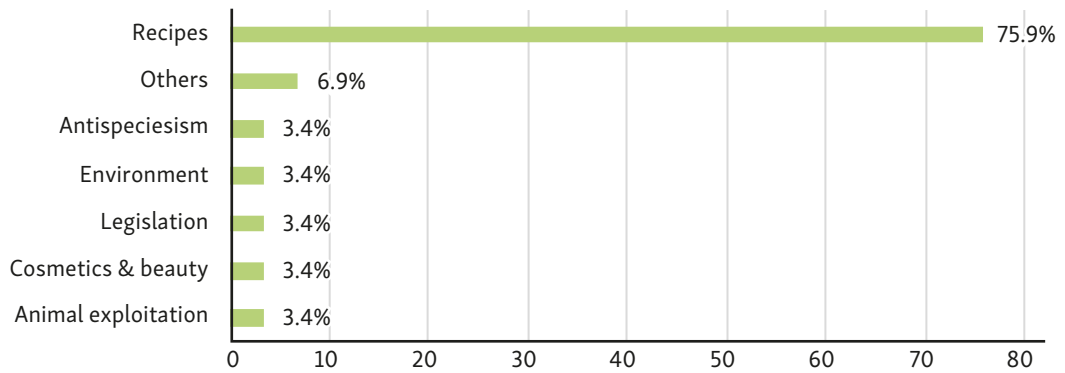


Figure 1. Frequency of subtopics on veganism in the feed's publications

Source: Own elaboration.



Image 1. Example of a publication of a recipe subtopic in the feed

Source: Rodríguez (2020)

Only two are known to have studies related to the subject. Carlota Bruna has a degree in Human Nutrition and Dietetics, with a specialization in vegan food (according to her LinkedIn and Instagram profile), and Ally Vispo, in Nutritional Therapy, although on her website she does not specify what type of training it is. The rest of the influencers mention their training, although this is not related to nutrition or veganism.

Of the 36 publications in the feeds, the predominant theme was veganism (80.6%, n=29). Only two cited sources or scientific bases to support the content. To a lesser extent, there is content of a personal nature (13.9%, n=5). Two were categorized as dissemination (5.6%). In the veganism issue, the most recurrent subtopic is recipes (75.9%, n=22) (figure 1).

There is a statistically significant relationship between the influencers and the topic of the publications in the feeds ($\chi^2(8) = 28.510^*$, $p < 0.05$). The relationship between the veganism topic and the influencers is evident in influencers such as Gloria Carrión or Jenny Rodríguez, since all their publications deal with veganism, or Ally Vispo (75%) and Maite Irulegi (66%), with a majority of their publications on this issue. However, it is surprising that Carlota Bruna, who defines herself as a vegan activist, has not published about it and focuses on the personal aspect (50%) or dissemination (50%).

There is also a statistically significant relationship between the influencers and the publications' subtopic ($\chi^2(18) = 38.623^*$, $p < 0.05$). Most are linked to vegan food recipes: Gloria Carrión, with all her publications on cooking ideas; Jenny Rodríguez, in 90% of her publications, and Ally Vispo in 33%. However, Maite Irulegi divides the two publications she has on veganism in environment and others. Along with the predominance of the recipes subtopic, it is observed how, in a residual way, the following subtopics are mentioned: cosmetics and beauty (10%), antispeciesism (16.7%), animal exploitation (16.7%), legislation (16.7%), and others (16.7%).

As for the most frequent formats on veganism, photography predominates (62.1%), followed by photo or video carousel (17.2%), IGTVs (13.8%) and, lastly, the most recent format, reels (6.9%).

Concerning the analysis of advertising, although the time axis of the sample (September/October 2020) is prior to the entry into force of the Code of conduct on the use of influencers in advertising in Spain (January 2021), it was considered for coding purposes. Of the 36 posts in the feeds, only 13.9% ($n=5$) included advertising content. Of these, three do not indicate advertising content according to the Code's recommendations, despite evidence that influencers promote products/services by interacting with brands, mentioning or tagging them. On the other hand, of the total of 36 publications, 38.9% ($n=14$ publications) include tagged brands, i.e., mentions of brands categorized as altruistic or merely editorial.

As for the stories' content analysis, we worked by allusions to a topic, since sometimes influencers use several stories to develop the same issue, in which case they were grouped. Of the 1,003 stories that constitute the first sample, 433 were considered after grouping.

The most frequent contents of the stories are personal (33.3%), followed by others (20.1%). Among the latter, there are interactions between influencers and their followers, reposts from accounts that do not fit the proposed categories,

humorous photographs and videos, and images of animals. This is followed by the category of recommendations (19.9%), in which they talk about the benefits of certain products or services.

In self-promotion (12.5%), there is an abundance of reposts of posts from their own feeds to increase the chances that their followers will see them or to remind them to leave a Like. Another publication considered as self-promotion is one that publicizes their own projects. Ally Vispo's podcast serves as an example.

As with the publications in the feed, statistically significant relationships were found between the influencers and the stories' topics ($\chi^2(20) = 146.547, p < 0.05$). It can be affirmed that Gloria Carrión is the influencer who posts the most about veganism (17.5%) in stories, followed by Jenny Rodríguez (12.3%). However, the personal theme is the one that best defines the topics of the stories used by Jenny Rodríguez (46.2%), Maite Irulegi (40.2%), or Ally Vispo (38.8%). When studying which proportion of the stories are own content or reposted content, statistically significant relationships were found between the topics and reposts ($\chi^2(5) = 149.956, p < 0.05$). Thus, the greatest number of reposts are on the topic of dissemination: 81.3% of these contents are reposted publications from other accounts. The same occurs with the topic others, with 72.4% of reposted content. In third place, self-promotion, with 66.7% of reposted content, is largely made up of posts made in their own feeds and reposted in stories to achieve greater visibility. Reposted posts on veganism account for 34.8%. Finally, the categories recommendations (11.8%) and personal (10.4%) are the ones with the lowest number of reposts, which means that influencers create more original content on these topics.

Regarding veganism in content published in stories, there is a range of different subtopics. The main one, well above the rest, is recipes (58.7%), in line with what was observed in the publications of the feed. Broadly speaking, and regardless of the position/frequency occupied, the subtopics are much more varied in the stories format, in which practically all of them appear, with the exception of cosmetics and beauty. However, no mention was made of ethics, sustainability, or animal welfare in the analysis of the subtopics of the publications in the feed (figure 2).

We found statistically significant relationships between the influencers and the subtopics of veganism in the stories ($\chi^2(32) = 63.723^*, p < 0.05$). With the exception of Ally Vispo –the influencer who least alludes to the vegan theme–, the rest follow the parameters found in the feeds' publications: the clear prevalence of recipes in the cases of Gloria Carrión (94.1%), Jenny Rodríguez (66.7%), and Maite Irulegi (50%).

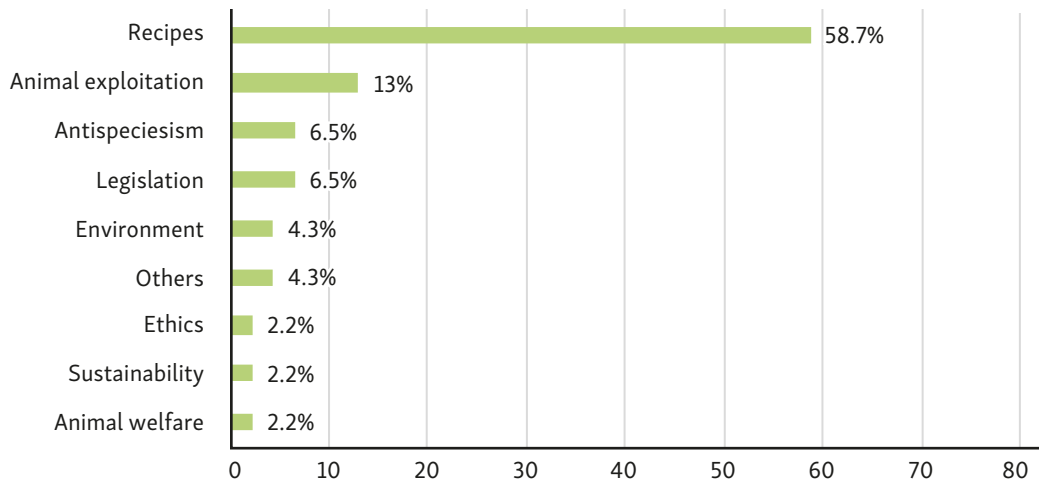


Figure 2. Subtopic frequencies on veganism in stories

Source: Own elaboration.

Also noteworthy, although to a lesser extent, is Carlota Bruna's allusion to ethics, antispeciesism, or sustainability (14.3%), or her allusions to the environment (28.6%).

In line with the findings in the feeds' publications, there is practically no reference to sources or scientific bases in the stories: of the 46 (10.6%) allusions to veganism, only 5 (10.9%) indicate this.

As for the presence of advertising broadcast through stories, 58 cases (13.4%) promote products or services. Of these, in 30 cases (51.7%), it is indicated that it is advertising content as recommended by the Code on the use of influencers in advertising. In these cases, there are two predominant situations:

1. Some influencers initially indicate with the relevant mentions (#gift, #ad...) the contents in which they show products sent by a company. However, it has been detected that when they show these products again, they do not always indicate the advertising mentions.
2. A series of stories published almost daily for a week (from October 1 to 8, 2020) by three of the five influencers studied, promoting the sale of a product through an affiliate link. The product was a personal growth bundle, i.e., a pack that includes a large number of online courses and ebooks for a small price (image 2).

Regardless of whether or not the content was indicated as advertising, 17.3% of the total (75 out of 433) was coded under the tagged brand parameter. These are mainly altruistic recommendations that influencers make in a disinterested manner or responses to followers who ask where certain products are from.



Image 2. Examples of stories promoting bundle sales

Source: Carrión (2020).

Finally, there is a disparity between the number of posts in the feed of each of the influencers: the number is very uneven, ranging from 11 posts per influencer in two weeks to only four. On the other hand, there is no statistically significant relationship that allows associating certain topics with a higher number of Likes or comments. Nor is it possible to establish a relationship between the latter and the type of format. Likewise, it is observed that feedback in the vegan community is characterized by a conciliatory tone and without verbal belligerence. With positive or neutral tones, predominantly, users find in the influencers' profiles a place where they can respectfully share their opinions and reflections on different topics concerning veganism, and are grateful for the information.

DISCUSSION

The average profile of the vegan influencer corresponds to urban women between 19 and 40 years of age. These results coincide with the previous study on realfooders (Gil-Quintana et al., 2021). They have higher education, although not necessarily in nutrition, medicine, biology, or similar. They are characterized

by making posts about veganism in their feeds –mainly recipes–, while in their stories they publish more personal content. These results coincide, on the one hand, with the study by Lawo and colleagues (2020), who determine that the main way of sharing veganism is by showing highly appetizing-looking recipes, as well as with those of Marauri-Castillo et al., (2020a, 2020b), focused on several Spanish nutritionist influencers, among them the well-known Carlos Ríos.

Although the topic of recipes is shared in the studies cited above, they differ from our findings regarding the training of the influencers. In the case of the profiles studied by the aforementioned authors, they are nutrition professionals who use their social networks to bring healthy eating closer to users. In the case of the five influencers studied here, only two specify having studies in nutrition, although it is not possible to state with complete certainty that the other influencers lack such studies. On the other hand, there is no use of scientific studies to support the information. This is diametrically opposed to what happens with the promoter of the Realfooding movement, an influencer with specialized training in nutrition, and who argues many of his publications with academic articles/studies (Gil-Quintana et al., 2021; Marauri-Castillo et al., 2020a, 2020b).

The promotion of veganism in social networks is a topic that has an impact, especially when food issues are addressed, on health. While certain studies point to how influencers are potential channels that have positive effects when it comes to promoting healthy eating habits among different audiences (De Jans et al., 2021; Folkvord et al., 2020), others point to the opposite (Coates et al., 2019; Jin, 2018; Jin et al., 2018). Thus, depending on the content published, it could be asked whether it is necessary for the competent bodies in this area to require some type of training for people who, from public profiles with a large number of followers, offer information that may affect nutritional aspects. It is curious that four of the influencers have published one or more books on recipes and veganism, and that only two report having studies concerning this area.

This research differs with that of Erben and Balaban (2016) –based on the use of social networks by Turkish vegan activists– in that the images in the analyzed content are not violent. In that study, there is talk of bringing veganism closer to the population by showing the harshest and bloodiest part of the industry. In contrast, this work shows a different approach in the influencers' work, based on raising awareness of the positive things that a vegan lifestyle can bring to people and the environment, and showing how it is possible to carry it out.

When delving deeper into the subtopics of veganism, discrepancies are found with the study by Dietz and colleagues (1995), who pointed out that the four main reasons why people decide to lead a vegan lifestyle are empathy and compassion for

animals, environmental concern, world hunger, and health. However, no allusion to the latter two was found in this study. On the other hand, empathy and compassion for animals are expressed from different perspectives (animal exploitation, animal welfare...), as well as environmental concern (sustainability, environment...). Regarding veganism and ethics, our results coincide with those of Arango (2016), since allusions to these aspects (antispeciesism, ethics...) are also found.

In terms of vegan activism, Waters (2015) noted that campaigns by animal organizations were an important key to convincing audiences to convert to veganism, but that the low budgets of these entities did not allow them to compete against the massive campaigns of the meat industry. However, six years later, it can be seen that influencers can become important spokespeople for the cause, since they have large audiences.

The amount of advertising content detected is rather residual, which leads us to think that perhaps brands are not yet aware of the potential of this sector of activity. Although there is not much content of an advertising nature, when it is, it is not adequately indicated, in accordance with the recommendations of the Code of conduct on the use of influencers in advertising. This absence occurs mainly in the stories in which the influencers show products sent to them by the brands and which they previously indicated as advertising. However, we consider that it is insufficient to present the product as an advertisement only once, since it is possible that not all users will view the stories in which it is told that a certain product is a gift or a paid collaboration.

Another important component of the promotional content without any indication of its advertising nature is framed within the bundle sale, which is part of an affiliate marketing strategy. We consider, given the limited scope of the strategy in regulatory and commercial terms, that although there is a commercial intention in such content, the influencers do not always specify that for each sale they receive a commission (in fact, one of them does not mention it at all). To this end, the question arises as to whether consumers are really able to detect this type of strategy without being confused, and whether affiliates (in this case, influencers) should expressly state the terms of their commercial relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

From a communicative point of view, influencers, in general, bring value to brands, function as their prescribers, and could influence purchasing behavior. On this premise, our research shows that although the creation of the recent Code –of a voluntary nature– is a positive step forward, it may be too ambiguous

and generalist given the communicative strategies used. In this regard, it would be interesting to check in future studies whether, after its implementation, the number of mentions in advertising content increases. It would also be worthwhile to observe whether it is updated in response to new advertising trends. Likewise, considering that the predominant theme is vegan food, which entails giving up certain foods that are necessary in our diet but can perfectly be substituted in line with veganism (Lantern, 2017, 2019), it would be necessary to raise regulatory proposals about the capacity, experience, and training of influencers, and their potential influence on this type of issues, which can have a direct impact on health.

The results show how the predominant topic in all formats that influencers communicate most about, when talking about veganism, are recipes. On this point, the research by Erben and Balaban (2016), based on vegan activists, focused on showing the harshest and bloodiest side of the industry. In this work, aspects such as antispeciesism or animal exploitation are shown in a very residual way. Taking these data as a reference, future studies should focus their attention on answering the following questions: what do vegan influencers communicate and what do vegan activists communicate through social networks? Can their interests and objectives be equated? It should be noted that asking what goals vegan influencers are pursuing versus vegan activists is key to knowing who to target depending on what people want to communicate.

This research shows how the healthy lifestyle, marked by vegan food, is the main line of influencers. However, when it comes to activism, their content on networks is practically non-existent. Thus, should vegan influencers be associated with vegan lifestyles but not with activism? Walters (2015) pointed out that animal organizations could not compete with the meat industry in terms of budget when it came to showing their objectives; influencers could be a good tool for communicating the animal cause, but first we should analyze what vegan influencers communicate with respect to the animal cause. This point is key, not only for the associations involved in this philosophy of life, but also for brands.

It should be noted that in this study we limited ourselves to a single social network, Instagram. However, as has been suggested, the influencers analyzed use more channels to disseminate their content on veganism. Future work should also explore several lines of study: 1) the analysis of other social networks, and try to establish whether there are similarities or differences in terms of use, formats, and thematic content; 2) conduct work focused on in-depth interviews with influencers to learn first-hand about their real position and to what extent they are aware of the vegan cause, and 3) observe what antispeciesist associations communicate and whether they use influencers among their communication tools. On the other hand,

it is also necessary to consider the time frame: it would be convenient to establish longer periods, as well as at different times, to observe the publications' dynamics.

The importance of this work lies mainly in the contribution it makes regarding the current regulations on advertising and influencers. It proposes to debate about the need for more specific regulations that try to respond to this current and changing phenomenon. On the other hand, from the point of view of marketing and communication, this work may be of interest when deciding certain brand strategies, such as the choice of certain prescribers. In this regard, vegan influencers can bring value to brands with vegan product products, especially in the food sector, as content about recipes is well received by followers. However, it is questionable whether they are important spokespeople for the vegan cause if most of their content does not respond to antispeciesist postulates. They can also be a suitable figure for all those brands whose activity and philosophy is aligned with other issues, such as sustainability, respect and care for the environment, as well as biodiversity or waste reduction.

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