

The Media of Veganism

In this essay I will be talking about how the media and communication of veganism (currently in social media and TV) relate to the public sphere democracy, food industries, gender equality and popular culture. Media and communication are important in all aspects of life, perhaps most importantly used to spread accurate information and fight inequality. Along with the public sphere, communication is the basis of understanding other opinions, news, and discussion. To summarise, I will analyse why these aspects of media tie together to form a bigger picture not just affecting how we live currently but also our futures.

The presentation of media inherently displays perfection. We have all been swayed by something on the big screens before, whether the food or objects we buy, everything is glorified as being the best of the best – as shown in ‘The Stopping Power Of Advertising’ (Pieters R 2010) “Advertising needs to stop consumers and hold their attention in likable ways”. It is no different with the animal products humans buy on a large scale from these industries. Only the positive aspects of these industries are fed to consumers and everything ultimately abhorrent or distasteful is secretly hidden away – as evidenced when the animal industries show consumers ‘happy animals’ who are not very ‘happy’ when inside the abattoir. To summarise, the public has been deceived to a certain extent while living their lives a particular way because of what is presented by the media. We make misinformed judgements which affect our lives due to not seeing the bigger picture of advertisement, thus supporting industries that have malicious intents of exploiting sentient animals as commodities.

While the mainstream media, advertisers and corporations promote the bright side of products and corporate agendas, the public ‘vote’ with their actions and spending habits: increasing demand for the specific product that is advertised as more and more purchases are counted. This propensity to deceive the public with advertising clearly shows how the projection of media, through campaigns and publicity, heavily influence the democratic vote of the public.

The projection of media can be used to fuel hatred. On occasion, a controversial piece of media will be uploaded to the internet, a photo or video which may initially appear benign. However, many people will view the content and suddenly an online bickering session has begun. No matter what the problem was, victims of online hate speech will be evident as other people may not empathise with victims, “Hate speech online has been linked to a global increase in violence toward minorities, including mass shootings, lynchings, and ethnic cleansing” Laub Z (2019). Popular opinions are not always factually correct and such misinformation can cause harm, especially to others in different ‘groups/minorities’ in the public sphere “Corona crisis fuels racially profiled hate in social media networks” (Stechmesser A 2020).

People being oppressed from controversial speech (for example, using heavy derogatory terms against certain people can lead to the systematic deterioration of the perception of them) also ties in with equality issues like women’s rights, minority rights and animal rights. Popular opinions voiced from different, especially opposing, cultural perspectives may conflict with people’s thoughts cultivated in different backgrounds have the potential to spark violence and cause members of a certain group to attack others with different beliefs. Conflicts can even arise due to the nature of the freedom of media and communication – in a similar relation to the currently popular ‘cancel culture’ “to cancel someone is to reject them, to ignore, to publicly oppose their views or actions and to deprive them of time and attention – and, sometimes, their ability to make a living.” (Goldsbrough S 2020).

Media has the power to shift public perception to make something ‘popular’. Veganism (just like other social justice movements) started small with only a handful of followers initially, with the help of activism and spreading information using the internet and various other media sources, veganism is slowly but surely growing, with 1.16% of the UK population adopting the lifestyle (TheVeganSociety). The public is gradually becoming more aware of abuses

surrounding factory farming and shifting to a plant-based diet. This shows that veganism is experiencing a period of growth and continues to spread through public consciousness.

However, there can be negative impacts when depicting veganism in the media. It often makes people angry since these ideas are of the minority. Because these ideas are unpopular, people react against vegans and the ideology of protecting innocent creatures, calling themselves 'carnists'. They promote an all/majority meat-based diet and shun the ever-growing popularity of a plant-based diet. This resembles the history of movements fighting for equality - for example, during the enforcement of segregation/slavery, anyone stepping out of line or protesting against the inequality would be ostracised and oppressors would use nonsensical reasoning to justify oppression "Slavery is good for slaves" (BBC 2014). Popular perceptions have demonstrated to change with time and injustice will not be perpetuated indefinitely.

Media can be used to present opposing sides of a narrative. Since when we were born, our parents had already begun to feed us a bias narrative (both literally and metaphorically). We consumed the flesh of animals while consuming the idea of happy barn animals. As we grow up, these habits are reinforced by the traditions and conditions set upon us by our social and political context. However, with the development of technology and the expansion of worldwide connections, more and more communication has arisen with the intent of conveying the truth and what realities are hidden from public view, behind the barn doors, the factory farms and the slaughterhouses "workers flinging young sheep around and brutally kicking them at Spanish slaughterhouse" (Mitchell C 2020) "Thanks to the advent of the Internet and to the efforts of vegan advocates, many people today are aware of the intensive and extensive suffering of farmed animals." (Castricano J 2016). This mass expose would have never happened a few decades ago with media technologies that have since become obsolete. Even though the fourth estate can be biased towards certain elements of industries, the focus can be shifted to the other side. This also connects with the democracy of the people wanting to see different viewpoints.

As more and more farms are being exposed for what they truly are, the meat, dairy and egg industries attempt to evade criticism and sell more ideas of providing higher standards of animal welfare. Of course, people can choose what they believe in but there is an objective standpoint of truth. They can remain stuck in their archaic concepts (that something is normal, necessary and natural) while taking in the falsehood that makes them feel better about contributing to the suffering of animals, or popular culture can accept the fact that there is no 'humane' way to slaughter an animal that doesn't want to lose their life.

The rising encouragement to adopt a plant-based diet over the most recent years has surely influenced the rise in veganism. Why is this the case? Not only has a plant-based diet has proven to be just as healthy as one with meat, many leading diseases have been found to be reversed due to it. The 'Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' have also stated that 'a well-planned vegan diet is adequate for all stages of life, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy and for athletes too'. For some while now the UN have been urging people to switch to a plant-based diet (Carus F – 2010), to reduce water use, land use, and overall climate change. Not only has a meat eating diet been found to be destructive to the environment, but it is only a matter of time before humanity will change. As popular culture adapts to this new diet, we can see a shift similar to the 'Frankfurt school' being dissatisfied with the current state of the world and thus creating a new ideology.

In conclusion, we live our daily lives wearing a filter. That filter can make us view things differently and can change based on the information publicly shown to us. Freedom of communication can lead to conflict and even escalate to physical violence. It has been demonstrated historically that public perceptions evolve over time, slowly adapting to the view of a rising minority. Growth of the media can convey the realities of life the public have not been previously exposed to. In relation to a plant-based diet, not only does it eradicate the industries that needlessly slaughter non-human animals, it has also been publicised to be humanities next step in solving world hunger, sustainability and health "Agriculture, particularly meat and dairy products, accounts for 70% of global freshwater consumption, 38% of the total land use and 19% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions" Carus F (2010). It is not a matter of 'if' public

opinion will shift, rather a matter of 'when' the world will shift to a plant based diet so that the whole of humanity can live sustainably.

Word count: 1488

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1. Essay (1000-1500 words) (which accounts for 30% of your mark):

You should write a critical essay of 1000-1500 words, responding to the following question.

"In your view, what are the two main perspectives we should consider in the critical study of media or communication? You should choose from those perspectives covered in the lectures, such as democracy, industry, gender or popular culture."

The essay is due on **Wednesday 29 October, 12pm**.

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