

## SOCIAL MEDIA ADVOCACY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE AND CAPITALIST INTERVENTION: ANALYZING THE #VEGANOL HASHTAG

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### Abstract

*This study aims to discuss the relationship between commercial companies and veganism through the content analysis of the #veganol hashtag, which promotes ethical veganism, focusing on animal rights. For this purpose, a content analysis was conducted on 273 Instagram posts shared with the hashtag #veganol between April 2023-2024. The study reveals the potential of commercial companies to transform veganism into a consumption-oriented area to expand their market share. The study findings indicate that commercial companies produce social media content about veganism as much as other users, particularly emphasising food and health, followed by an emphasis on ecological issues. On the other hand, veganism is being distanced from the animal rights and freedom roots as vegan products in the market are underscored by both commercial entities and a significant portion of vegans through social media hashtags and content. Furthermore, the study highlights the risk that corporate veganism may overshadow the goals of ethical veganism in favour of corporate interests. This research critically discusses the rapidly growing plant-based industries with an interdisciplinary approach in the context of digital communication and activism.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, Vegan, Corporate Veganism, Activism, Animal Rights.

## TOPLUMSAL DEĞİŞİM İÇİN SOSYAL MEDYA SAVUNUCULUĞU VE KAPİTALİST MÜDAHALE: #VEGANOL ETİKETİ ANALİZİ

### Öz

*Bu çalışma, hayvan haklarını odağına alan etik veganlığı teşvik eden #veganol hashtag'inin içerik analizi yoluyla ticari şirketler ve veganlık arasındaki ilişkiyi tartışmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda 2023-2024 Nisan tarihleri arasında #veganol etiketiyle paylaşılan 273 Instagram gönderisine içerik analizi yapılmıştır. Araştırma, ticari şirketlerin pazar paylarını genişletmek adına veganlığı tüketim odaklı bir alana dönüştürme potansiyelini ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırma sonuçları ticari şirketlerin de diğer kullanıcılar kadar veganlıkla ilgili sosyal medya içeriği ürettiğini ve özellikle gıda, sağlık ve bu konu başlıklarını takiben ekolojik meselelere dair vurguyu içeriklerine taşıdığını göstermektedir. Diğer yandan, vegan ürün*

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*pazarındaki ürünlerin hem ticari şirketler hem de kullanıcıların önemli bir bölümü tarafından sosyal medya hashtagleri ve içerikleri aracılığıyla öne çıkarılmasıyla veganlık, hayvan hakları ve özgürlüğü bağlamından koparılmaktadır. Dahası, araştırmada şirket veganizminin kurumsal çıkarları adına etik veganlığın hedeflerini gölgeleme riski dikkat çekmektedir. Bu çalışma, hızla büyüyen bitki bazlı endüstrileri, dijital iletişim ve aktivizm bağlamında disiplinler arası bir yaklaşımla eleştirel olarak tartışmaktadır.*

**Keywords:** Sosyal medya, Vegan, Şirket Veganizmi, Aktivizm, Hayvan Hakları.

## Introduction

Veganism is a philosophy of life that expresses abstinence from forms of consumption based on animal exploitation. Although the conceptual definition of veganism was made towards the middle of the 20th century, veganism as a philosophy of life is as old as human history. Traces of veganism can be found in various ancient cultures from Asia to Africa, Latin America to Europe. The emergence of an organised vegan movement as a demand for social change in the modern world begins with the definition of veganism and the establishment of The Vegan Society in 1944. Before this definition, the vegan movement manifested itself as various life practices within the vegetarian movement.

Given the long history of criticism against animal exploitation, it is not surprising that there are different philosophical and political perspectives on the definition of the problem and the methods to be followed for its solution. The demand for social justice for animals, fuelled by liberal, post-structuralist, anti-authoritarian, anarchist and socialist perspectives on the social position of animals, has enabled the idea of being vegan to reach a wider audience. In addition to the content produced by ethical vegans on social media, the fact that the spatial and temporal barriers to the organisation of vegan activists have been overcome to a great extent through online networks is also an important factor in the increased visibility of vegans' actions, activities and demands.

The historical increase in the number of people who identify themselves as vegan can be seen as a result of this intellectual diversity and activism. In addition, due to the influence of scientific studies in the field of human health and ecology, the number of people who express veganism as a dietary style rather than an attitude against animal exploitation has also increased. As a result of the emerging scientific evidence on the positive effects of plant-based diets on human and public health and the ecological damages of livestock activities (Steinfeld et al., 2006), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report of 2019 revealed that “consumption of healthy and sustainable diets presents major opportunities for reducing GHG emissions from food systems and improving health outcomes”, the societal

transformation to plant-based diets has an important role in mitigating climate change and adapting to planetary boundaries (IPCC, 2019).

Although negative discourses of veganism were popular in the media, recent years have seen a significant shift in the image of veganism. Towards the end of 2007, UK newspapers engaged in a trend of discrediting vegans, branding them with various stereotypes, including portraying them as hostile extremists. Cole and Morgan (2011) interpreted this phenomenon in UK national newspapers as "vegaphobia," viewing it as evidence of the cultural reproduction of speciesism. Additionally, the researchers emphasized that these media narratives separated veganism from discussions about the rights of nonhuman animals.

Since the 2010s, veganism has become more visible in mainstream media due to the expansion of the processed vegan product market. By 2013, mainstream media increasingly viewed veganism as a popular trend, labelling 2014 as the "year of vegans." This portrayal was fueled by the rise of celebrities adopting vegan lifestyles, signifying a notable shift in the image of veganism (Lundahl, 2018).

This has been fueled by the rise of celebrities embracing vegan lifestyles, leading to a remarkable shift in the image of veganism (Lundahl, 2018). The market size of the processed vegan meat market, which was 6.4 billion dollars in 2021, is expected to increase to 18.01 billion dollars in 2027 (Aritzon, 2022). This shows how quickly veganism is becoming popular. However, this growing market also raised the question of to what extent it reflects the demand for social change to end animal exploitation. Discussing this question is important to understanding the current demand for social justice for animals. The actuality of the demand for social change is the most important tool for the liberation of animals from a life of cruelty and exploitation. The actuality of the demand for social change is the most important tool for the liberation of animals from a life of cruelty and exploitation.

According to the results of Sia Insight Research Company's study on eating habits in Turkiye, the number of people identifying as vegan increased from 83,000 in 2020 to 415,000 in 2023. On the other hand, 620,000 people stated that they followed a plant-based diet in 2023 (Önder, 2023). This dramatic increase in the number of vegans in Turkiye has led to a heightened interest from commercial companies in vegan products and services. The expansion in the vegan product market also meets the consumption demand of non-vegans. Consequently, companies are less inclined to support the demand for social change aimed at ending animal exploitation in order to tap into this large market. Additionally, the expanding market since 2010 has often been utilized by companies for greenwashing tactics, focusing on deceiving consumers.

People following a vegan diet due to health and ecological concerns sometimes identify themselves as plant-based. The term 'ethical vegan' is often employed to differentiate individuals who adopt a vegan lifestyle primarily for health and ecological reasons from those who embrace veganism as a philosophy advocating against animal exploitation. While anti-exploitation ethics have traditionally been central to the vegan movement since its inception, the profit-driven practices of companies seeking a share of the vegan product market have prompted the emergence of this distinction. Ultimately, in 2020, ethical veganism in the UK was granted the status of a philosophical belief protected by law (Gayle, 2020).

This study discusses the purposes for which the #VeganOl (hashtag), which is frequently used by ethical vegans in social media, especially in content produced for non-vegans, is used on Instagram and the links of the vegan movement with capitalist consumption. The reason for choosing this hashtag is that the #vegan tag alone lacks specificity for Turkish content. Tags such as #veganlık (veganism in Turkish), #veganyasam (vegan life in Turkish), and #vegandunya (vegan world in Turkish) are used in considerably fewer instances.

## **1. DEMAND FOR JUSTICE AND ANIMAL RIGHTS**

Criticism and life practices against the use and exploitation of animals date back to antiquity in religious and mystical philosophy. Some Hindu, Jewish, Christian and Islamic sects have adopted an ethic around the principle of not eating animals. However, criticism of animal exploitation has not only come from religious groups. The 11th-century Syrian atheist poet Abu'l-'Ala' Al-Ma'arri publicised his call for a life free from animal exploitation in his poem "I no longer steal from nature" (Shurtleff & Aoyagi, 2022, pp. 7).

After the Industrial Revolution, due to the significant impact of the capitalist production system on cruelty to animals, veganism began to gain visibility in Western countries in the 19th century as a total rejection of animal exploitation. In 1838, the school and community center founded by J.P. Greaves, who embraced a vegan lifestyle, did not feel the need to distinguish itself from vegetarianism. During the 1830s, the term vegetarian generally referred to individuals who abstained from animal-derived foods and adhered to a vegan and raw diet. Vegetarianism, which gained popularity in England and the USA during the 1830s following the discovery of the positive effects of plant-based nutrition on health, started to encompass a diet that also included animal products after the establishment of The Vegetarian Society in 1847 (The Vegan Society, 2014).

Nearly a century after its foundation, a group within The Vegetarian Society sought to form a "non-dairy" vegetarian group, leading to the establishment of The Vegan Society and the definition of veganism (Cross, 1949). While veganism is defined as a philosophy and lifestyle, it has evolved to encompass a rejection of cruelty towards animals in all aspects, not limited

to food and clothing. This entails abstaining from all animal-derived products for nutrition and utilizing animal-free alternatives to all animal-derived products for the benefit of humans, animals, and the ecosystem as a whole (Casamitjana, 2020).

The word vegan was coined by Watson, Morgan and Shrigley in 1944 to denote the beginning and end of vegetarianism. The ethical attitude against animal exploitation was seen as an integral part of veganism from the beginning. In 1947, Watson wrote: "The vegan renounces it as superstitious that human life depends upon the exploitation of these creatures whose feelings are much the same as our own" (Cole, 2014). Veganism was defined by Cross (1949) as a demand for social justice, proposing "to oppose the exploitation of sentient life, whether it is profitable to do so or not" as its core principle. This principle was later clarified as "to end the exploitation of animals" by humans, with veganism meaning the doctrine that humans "should live without exploiting animals." Consequently, The Vegan Society seeks to "end the use of animals (...) for food, commodities, work, hunting, vivisection, and all other uses involving exploitation of animal life" by humans (Cross, 1951, pp. 5).

Capitalism, which entered the era of mass consumption after the Second World War, experienced further expansion in industrial animal farming with the advent of the fast food revolution and green revolution policies in agriculture. Parallel to these practices, since the 1960s, opposition to animal exploitation has found its counterpart in various subcultures, especially anarchists, as a demand for social change. Ryder explained the lack of concern with animal exploitation in revolutionary thought in the 1960s with the term speciesism. In the 1970s, protests against animal experiments embraced the term speciesism and made the relationship between animal exploitation and other forms of discrimination as racism and sexism (Ryder, 2017, pp. 29). While philosophers such as Tom Regan, Peter Singer, Richard Ryder and Steve Best conceptualized animal exploitation, in the second half of the 20th century, these philosophical and academic approaches enabled animal liberation activism to reach large audiences. The demand for social change against animal exploitation intertwined with various socio-political movements. Casamitjana (2020), who fought for the legal recognition of ethical veganism, states that today there are at least thirty types of vegan-related identities. Activist struggle has been used not only for animal liberation but also to assert the ethical content of the vegan concept.

## **2. THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF VEGANISM**

According to the Good Food Institute's report (2023), global plant-based meat and seafood sales increased to \$6.1 billion in 2022. When combined with sales of plant-based milk, cheese and yoghurt, that figure rose to \$21.6 billion dollars. Total global retail sales, not counting some plant-based food products, reached \$28 billion, according to Euromonitor

International (2021). Although this market expansion corresponds to a small part compared to the trillion-dollar animal products market, it provides clear data on the rate of expansion of the market.

According to a study conducted by Ipsos in 2018 across 28 different countries, 5% of people identify themselves as vegetarian, 3% as vegan, and 3% as pescetarian (Ipsos, 2018). According to the Gallup 2018 survey, vegetarians in the USA correspond to 5% of the total population and vegans to 3% (Reinhart, 2018). While the proportion of vegetarians has not changed over the years, vegans have increased from 2% to 3% since 2012. Meticulous (2022) draws attention to the rate of increase in the number of vegans in Europe over four years. Accordingly, as of 2022, there are 2.6 million vegans, constituting 3.2% of the population. This means that the number of vegans has doubled in a four-year period. Although the outlook in Europe and the US has been at the centre of mainstream media coverage, the Asia Pacific region has the highest proportion of vegans globally, at 9% of the population. The markets where the vegan product market grew fastest between 2015 and 2020 are China, the United Arab Emirates, and Australia.

Globally, 23% of consumers say they try to limit their consumption of animal meat, 16% adopt a plant-based diet, 15% try to limit animal dairy products and 4% are vegan. The reason for tendency to this direction in dietary patterns is mainly (37%) due to the effort to be healthy. This is followed by environmental concerns (21%) and animal welfare (19%). This data shows that the development of the processed vegan product market is driven by health concerns rather than developing alternatives to animal exploitation (Euromonitor, 2021).

It is unrealistic to expect companies which are producing vegan products to follow an anti-animal exploitation marketing strategy within the framework of these views that dominate dietary choices. Moreover, it is unrealistic to expect a food system to end animal exploitation by itself, which condemns nearly one billion people to hunger and restricts 3.1 billion people (42% of the world's) access to a healthy diet (FAO et al., 2023).

Many people in the US, UK and other rich countries are confident that they can change the capital investments strategies of corporations as they shift their diets in response to concerns about ecological and climate crisis. However, for many large corporations that are controlling the food system, it seems more realistic to use the market for processed vegan (plant-based) products as a way to reach sensitive consumers and save brand reputation through green advertising. In the US, for example, four companies control 75% of the market. Selwyn and Davis (2024) describe this strategy as corporate veganism. This phenomenon can be clearly seen in the relationship between the famous plant-based milk brand Alpro and its owner Danone. Danone is both the largest producer of animal milk and plant-based milk in the world. Corporate veganism, far from ending animal exploitation, may

serve to increase ecological destruction and cover up animal and human exploitation in and beyond the food system.

### **3. VEGANISM AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

Social media provides a vigorous platform for pro-veganism through animal abuse, environmental, and health concerns and, commercial objectives. As these debates grow on social media, various analyses focus on the presentation of veganism and its effect. The analyses by Zeeuw et al. (2017) focus on the self-presentation of three popular Instagram accounts where veganism is a significant part of their identity, regardless of whether they draw attention to animal cruelty. The study's findings indicate that despite veganism's stance against animal cruelty, a minimal number of posts within the sample showcased animal-related imagery. Rather, the predominant content shared by the users included in the research of 'self' and 'food' images on Instagram. This suggests a prioritization of those users's self-promotion and their own commodities' promotions over advocacy for animal rights within the platform's context.

Phua et al. (2020a, pp. 827), in their study titled “The Role of Celebrity Endorsers and Consumers' Vegan Identities in Marketing Communications About Veganism,” found that celebrities who advocate veganism can influence consumers' perspectives on veganism and encourage them to embrace it. The results of the study, involving a sample of 303 people, examined the effects of the eating habits of meat-eating and non-meat-eating consumers, as well as celebrities' vegan identities, regarding altruistic and egoistic motivations on various outcomes related to health communication about veganism. The primary dependent variables of the study were health awareness, intention to spread electronic word of mouth, and intention to become vegan. The findings indicated that non-meat eaters who interacted with an Instagram post by a celebrity describing their motivation to become vegan exhibited higher health awareness, a greater intention to spread electronic word of mouth, and a stronger intention to become vegan compared to meat eaters.

Phua et al. (2020b) investigated the impact of organization type (non-profit or commercial) and message type (altruistic or egoistic) on consumer reactions to veganism-related content on Instagram. Additionally, they examined the effects of source type (celebrity or non-celebrity) and message valence (positive or negative) on consumer reactions to veganism-related content. The research findings indicate that consumers exposed to altruistic messages are more likely to perceive the informational value of veganism posts compared to those exposed to egoistic messages. Another significant finding is that individuals who encounter altruistic messages are more easily persuaded by advertising messages than those who encounter egoistic messages.

Furthermore, veganism is prominently highlighted as a healthy diet on social media platforms. Islam (2019) conducted a study analyzing posts on Twitter categorizing them into themes such as diet and exercise through text mining techniques. This research revealed a correlation between discussions of yoga and veganism based on users' shared interests and thoughts on social media.

Pilař et al. (2021) conducted an Instagram network analysis that included a sample of 2,045,653 posts by 427,936 individual users. The primary purpose of this study was to identify the main topics associated with healthy food. According to the research results, the top three hashtags related to healthy food characteristics were #vegan, #homemade, and #eatclean. The researchers also revealed that users frequently use veganism as a lifestyle characteristic to express themselves, noting the high frequency of #vegan and #veganfood hashtags in discussions about healthy food.

Considering the increasing research on the health and ecological benefits of a vegan diet, Shamoı et al. (2022) analyzed how public sentiments and feelings towards veganism have changed from 2010 to 2022 using Twitter data. By examining the sentiments expressed in tweets, the study concluded that discussions about veganism on social media have increased. The results indicate that the popularity of plant-based diets is rising and that sentiments and emotions regarding veganism are becoming more positive. Veganism-related research focuses on food and nutrition, as the vegan food market is rapidly growing in response to ecological and health concerns.

Figure 1 shows the worldwide frequencies of the search terms ethical veganism, vegan food, vegan diet, and ethical vegan on Google since 2004. The data indicates that Internet users are more interested in vegan food and diet rather than ethical veganism

**Figure 1. Comparison of Search Terms from 2004 to Present**

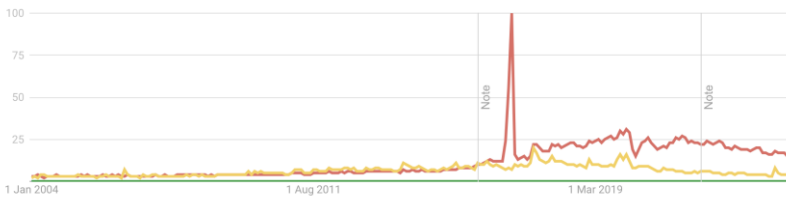
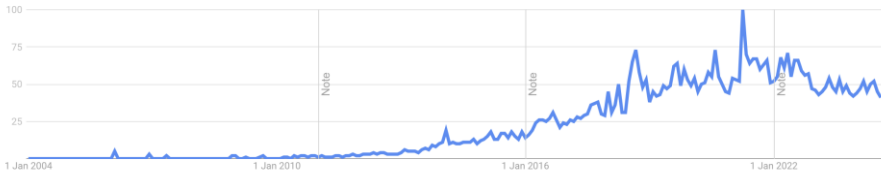


Figure 2 shows the graph of the search term "vegan" in Turkiye over the past twenty years. Accordingly, the growing interest in the term vegan over the last decade can clearly seen.



**Figure 2. Search Trend of the Term Vegan in Turkiye Since 2004**



#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

This study assesses Instagram content associated with the hashtag #veganol and examines the involvement of stakeholders within the capitalist economic system in Turkiye's growing vegan movement. The research aims to address the following questions:

- What types of accounts utilize the hashtag #veganol to advocate for social change (personal, activist, activist community/group, company, entrepreneur, producer, etc.)?
- What types of content are disseminated with the hashtag #veganol (educational, informative, marketing/advertising, news, etc.)?
- In what ways do the contents share with the hashtag #veganol reflect connections to the capitalist economic system?

To address these inquiries, the study employed the qualitative content analysis method, a robust approach for delving into symbolic material and elucidating social or personal interpretations (Schreier, 2012, pp. 29-30). In contrast to the probabilistically generated samples characteristic of quantitative content analysis, qualitative content analysis adopts purposive sampling and engages in an in-depth exploration of social meanings revealed through thematic analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, pp. 1-2). Consequently, the hashtag #VeganOl, strategically employed to mobilize users towards veganism or engage non-vegans interested in the lifestyle, was selected as the focal point for investigation.

In this study, Instagram content, which ranks fourth among the social networks with the highest number of active users in the world and has approximately 58 million monthly active users in Turkiye (Dierks, 2024; We are Social, 2024), is evaluated. The #VeganOl tag is frequently used by vegan activists as the Turkish version of the #GoVegan tag, which is used in approximately 13 million contents on Instagram, and approximately 59 thousand contents has been shared with this tag. The researchers collected 300 content produced with the hashtag #veganol over one year, from April 2023 to April 2024. The Instagram Post Scraper tool on the Apify web scraping cloud platform was used to obtain the content. The content produced in one year provided up-to-date and rich data diversity. The researchers randomly checked the activity of about fifty post links to ensure data accuracy. Some of

the original 300 content were excluded from the sample because they were entirely unrelated to veganism, animal rights, vegan lifestyle or plant-based market. The study included 273 Turkish posts from 80 different Instagram accounts. Basic content information - including username, URL, timestamp, hashtags, tagged users, mentions, and content - was provided by Instagram Post Scraper in an Excel file. The researchers created profile type, content subtype, and content type categories for the study, and each category was coded separately by the researchers following the purpose of the study. For instance, content shared by the user @veganottan was coded as follows:

Profile category: Commercial company/manufacturer

Content type: Informational

Content sub-type: Agenda/news

**Figure 3. Sample Instagram Content**



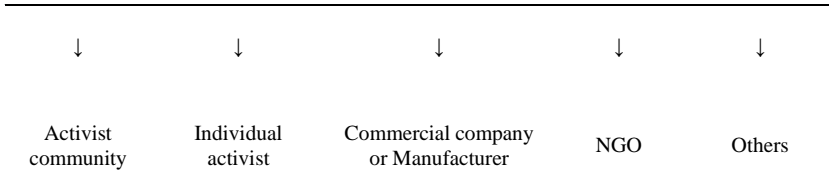
The study's reliability was enhanced by comparing the codes assigned by the researchers. Consequently, all data were analysed in detail using filters. During content analysis, visual content and captions were assessed together, and each piece of content was evaluated only in a single theme.

## 5. FINDINGS

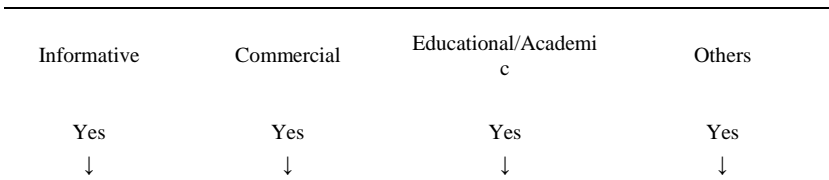
As depicted in Figure 4, categorizing the information helps in understanding the platforms and channels through which veganism-related content in the research sample is created and disseminated.

**Figure 4. Determination of Themes and Sub-Themes**

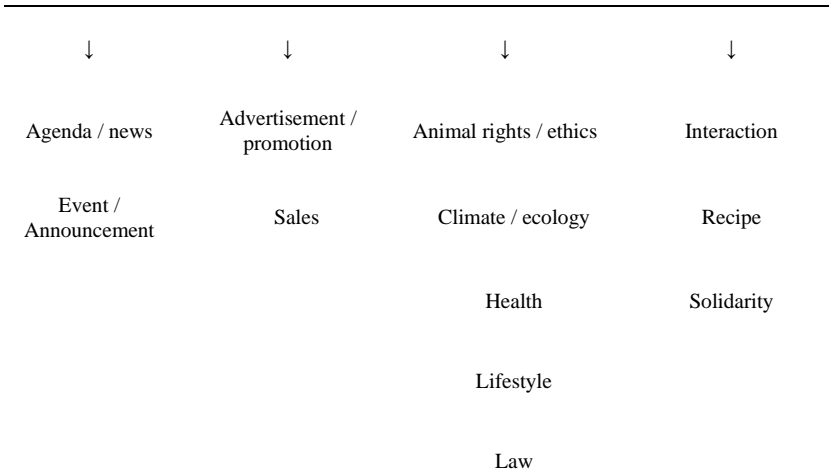
What types of user accounts generated or shared the hashtag #VeganOl?



What is the primary theme of the content related to veganism?



Under which sub-theme was the content shared both visually and textually?





#Veganol were identified as an activist community, activist, commercial company or producer, NGO or personal accounts. None of the content was shared as an advert on Instagram.

**Table 2. Use of the Hashtag #VeganOl by Instagram Profiles**

Theme	N	%
Activist communities/group	58	21
Activist	75	27
Personal account	38	14
NGO	48	18
Commercial company/producer	54	20

Content shared with the hashtag #veganol is used at approximately the same rate by different types of Instagram profiles. Table 2 shows that the profiles that use the #veganol tag the most are in the activist category with 27 per cent. This rate is followed by activist communities (with 21%) and commercial company/producer profiles (with 20%) at nearly equal rates. The least use is seen in individual account-type profiles.

**Table 3. Definition of Instagram Content Themes**

Theme	Description
Informative	This category covers current topics on the agenda, events or news that are followed by the public.
Commercial	Content produced for commercial purposes, highlighting a commercial enterprise, producer, product or service is included in this category.
Educational/Academic	The content that provides specific data, findings or information to vegans or nonvegans based on academic, statistical or research results on a specific topic is in this category.
Other	This category comprises personal posts rather than reflecting information, comments or opinions about a specific social event or situation.

Table 3 depicts the four main themes shared with the hashtag #veganol: Informational, commercial, educational/academic and other. The content types indicate the message outlined by the image (or video) caption and the image (or video) as a whole. For example, an image caption may only contain

the tags, whereas the visual content may contain a description of the prosecution of a legal case. Therefore, the relevant content is evaluated as an informative content type.

A specific distinction is made between informative content and educational/academic content. Educational/academic content is information based on scientific findings, research results or expert opinions. In other words, content that would raise awareness of users about veganism and document concerns about issues such as ethics, health and climate are included in the educational/academic category. In the informative content type, there are contents on topics such as the current agenda, news, developments related to the legal processes monitored, and the efforts of political and social actors to bring their statements and actions to the agenda.

Commercial content-type refers to the content that positions other users as vegan consumers instead of vegan activists. Content that promotes a commercial company, manufacturer or brand and their services or products that are relevant to users' purchasing decisions and behaviours is classified in this category.

**Table 4. Content Types with #VeganOl**

Theme	N	%
Informative	67	25
Commercial	53	19
Educational/Academic	73	27
Other	80	29

As depicted in Table 4, it is noteworthy that there is no dramatic difference between the proportions of the themes. The #VeganOl hashtag is mostly (29%) used in the other theme – in other words, it is mostly used to reflect personal opinions, thoughts and feelings. This is followed by educational content based on academic, statistical or expert opinion with 27%, and informative content focusing on agenda and news with 25%. Commercial content constitutes 19% of the total content.

**Table 5. Instagram Content Frames of #VeganOl**

Theme	Definition
Interaction	Content where personal memories, thoughts, beliefs, and experiences are shared or where messages are given to mobilise emotions rather than rational information

	directly related to a subject. (Example: <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/C4gW5BHorj5/">https://www.instagram.com/p/C4gW5BHorj5/</a> @vegandiyebiri)
Events / Announcements	It includes all events and announcements that may be of interest to animal rights defenders that take place on a specific date and place (Example: <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/C2Kg-E5IHpv/">https://www.instagram.com/p/C2Kg-E5IHpv/</a> @veganpiknikankara)
Recipes	This theme includes recipes applied and shared by the user.
Solidarity	Content featuring actions and support organized in solidarity with another social movement. (Example: <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/C4Q9a0CMR3y/">https://www.instagram.com/p/C4Q9a0CMR3y/</a> @ezberbozankedi)
Agenda / News	It contains content that informs vegan activists and supporters of the movement, such as news, and updates on the legal processes being followed, and aims to draw the attention of other users to the relevant issue. (Example: <a href="https://www.Instagram.com/p/C3r3AtmI1xR/">https://www.Instagram.com/p/C3r3AtmI1xR/</a> @tvd.org.tr)
Animal rights / Ethics	Content within this category prominently features information, opinions, and commentary on animal rights and ethics. (Example: <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/C5DmdLgIOwM/">https://www.instagram.com/p/C5DmdLgIOwM/</a> @bagimsizhayvan)
Climate / Ecology	Content that emphasises the benefits of veganism concerning the climate and ecology movement (Example: <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/C2thXxuqCYt/">https://www.instagram.com/p/C2thXxuqCYt/</a> @izmirclimatesave)
Sale	Content in this category revolves around discounts that can enhance the commercial endeavours of a company, producer, or association. (Example: @veganbakkal)
Advertisement/P romotion	Any product and service promotion that serves the interests of a commercial company, manufacturer or association is in this category. Content in this category can be produced directly by a commercial structure or shared by other users. In addition, sweepstakes and other marketing efforts to increase interaction for commercial purposes are also in this category. (Example: <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/C4uuB-ul5d-/">https://www.instagram.com/p/C4uuB-ul5d-/</a> @lilaokyanus)
Health	Content in this category emphasizes the health benefits associated with veganism. (Example: <a href="https://www.instagram.com/p/C3DWDvIoDis/">https://www.instagram.com/p/C3DWDvIoDis/</a> @badecanlar)

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In determining the content frames, visual content and post captions were taken into consideration. Determining the themes of Instagram content in detail provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship of veganism-related content with consumption and the capitalist economic system. Accordingly, Instagram content was framed as interaction, event/announcement, recipe, agenda/news, animals and ethics, climate-ecology, discount, advertisement-promotion and health.

**Table 6. Instagram Content Frames**

Theme	N	%
Events/Announcements (informative)	51	19
Agenda/Academic (informative)	15	5
Animal rights/ethics (educational/academic)	47	17
Climate/ecology (educational/academic)	12	4
Health (educational/academic)	15	5
Sales (commercial)	3	1
Advertisement/promotion (commercial)	50	18
Recipes (other)	23	8
Solidarity (other)	3	1
Interaction (other)	54	20

## Conclusion

This study explores the connection between veganism and commercial enterprises by analyzing the hashtag #veganol, a call to ethical veganism. The research results show that commercial companies implement communication strategies within social movements to increase their market share.

Social media tags offer users the convenience of performing targeted searches on specific topics while categorizing content. Other hashtags used in the content, other than #veganol, produce material primarily related to nutrition and vegan food brands rather than focusing on animal rights. Therefore, these contents direct users to consume the products of commercial companies.

Social media content related to veganism is shared by commercial entities that produce and sell vegan products or services nearly as frequently as by activists. This trend suggests that veganism is increasingly perceived as a market segment centred around consumption. According to Lamarche-Beauchesne (2024), despite vegans being a minority, the vegan market is gaining acceptance from traditional retailers. Consequently, the rapid growth of the vegan market is inevitable. Although the #veganol hashtag pertains to ethical veganism in commercial social media content, it employs similar consumption-focused tactics as seen in the non-vegan products market.



Similarly, it is noteworthy that personal accounts frequently promote brands of vegan products and services on social media, often tagging commercial companies in their content. A closer examination of social media content reveals that the majority of these products are related to vegan food. This finding aligns with the results of Zeeuw et al. (2017), highlighting the prominence of content related to food and self in social media production. This pattern also suggests the adoption of a mainstream consumption culture within the vegan community.

How do these results impact the vegan movement to end animal exploitation? The results support the view that with the rise of vegan products and services since the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the main focus of social justice for animals has shifted to a market struggle for competing goods and services between animal products and vegan products. This shift stems from the implicit assumption that market forces will lead to an end to animal exploitation. Considering the expected increase for plant-based products in both global and national market forecasts, it can be expected that this market struggle will dominate the vegan agenda in the coming years.

The problem with leaving a social justice demand on the market forces can be explained in three ways. First, there should be a balance of power in the food market between competing goods and services so that consumer choices can affect the production trend. However, the companies supplying animal products have significantly larger capital, better connections at the supply chains, and their more extended historical background gives them a better experience in various fields than the vegan companies in the food system. In addition, animal agriculture is supported by government subsidies compared to plant-based companies. These facts above provide companies supplying animal products with a larger market share, options for investment strategies, and manoeuvrability in the financial markets. Moreover, this market power also brings them better cost management skills, e.g., in the labour market.

Plant-based companies do not have these advantageous positions in the food system. This power structure imbalance does not provide a “free market” competition for plant-based products. The expectations from plant-based companies to increase their market share solely depending on consumer preferences is not a smooth path. Market barriers are already challenging for them. For example, new plant-based companies gaining market share are seen as acquisition targets by companies operating based on animal exploitation (Sundström, 2021). So, it is not reasonable to expect more from plant-based companies in ending animal exploitation and transforming the food system.

Secondly, when discussing plant-based products, this doesn't cover unprocessed vegetables and fruits. An economy rich in agricultural production but not having plant-based companies within the domestic economy would face a disadvantageous position in this competitive market. Plant-based products will be imported into the domestic market, and consumers will face

a price structure that depends on foreign exchange. This will cause plant-based products to be perceived as luxurious and be avoided by low-income consumers. It will cause a crowding effect for small farmers and producers from the food market.

The third problem is the relationship between market forces and social justice issues. It is known that market forces have significant effects on society. Still, it is not expected to see that society affects the market itself, especially regarding social justice issues. If we consider the broader implications of the commercialisation of social justice movements, it is common to see that implementing sustainability certification for the products is the most common pathway taken, e.g. fair trade certificates. From the very beginning of the history of capitalism, somehow forced labour, slavery, and ecological destruction still exist in the global supply chains, although they are illegal in Western economies.

Furthermore, downgrading a social justice struggle into a consumer choice makes the social justice problem an option in the market. Societal problems need a political process to be restricted or supported within the economic structure, especially for producing goods and services. Therefore, with the commercialisation of veganism, animal exploitation would still be present as an option for consumption. Therefore, animal exploitation would continue, contrary to the only explicit goal of veganism.

Consumer choices can transform the food system if only there is an economic democracy in which consumers can decide on what should be produced together with the small and big-scale producers. If we consider that social justice demand to end animal exploitation is a call being made to society, it is understandable that a large part of the content, including the hashtag, is about socialising within the vegan community and informative posts about the possibility of a lifestyle without animal exploitation. These contents may support the mobilisation of the social justice demand for animal liberation if considering consumer choices should be backed by political processes.

Because ecological capacity is advantageous for agricultural production in Türkiye, and this provides a 10th place in the global agricultural economy (Foreign Agricultural Service, 2024), plant-based production has broad potential to come. However, this potential does not seem to prevail within the current market structure. Initiating and supporting production and consumption collectives, cooperatives, and unions, putting political pressures on community restaurants, and reaching out to small farmers would not only make plant-based products reachable for all but also shift the vegan goal back to its roots of ending animal exploitation. As Selwyn (2021) argued, community restaurants financed by taxation, sourcing local produce, serving healthy plant-based dishes, and providing a combination of free and cheap meals are essential for the democratization of the food system.

Commercial companies are sometimes seen producing content solely related to health or animal rights without actively promoting any products or services. Nevertheless, the potential for corporate veganism to overshadow the societal demand for animal liberation remains a significant obstacle to establishing a sustainable and plant-based food system from animal exploitation. In Phua et al.'s (2020a, pp. 817) study, environmental and ethical considerations emerge as the primary motivations for adopting a vegan lifestyle among consumers with pro-social and altruistic orientations. However, the emphasis on health reasons for veganism by the social media contents of corporate veganism may divert people's attention away from ethical veganism. Additionally, Griffin (2017, pp. 7-8) argues that simply embracing veganism as a health-conscious lifestyle does not necessarily address animal exploitation or other forms of cruelty on a personal level. Therefore, adopting a vegan lifestyle solely for health reasons cannot be considered activism against animal exploitation.

The research was confined to a single hashtag and social network. However, conducting a more comprehensive qualitative or mixed-method study involving both vegan activists and commercial entities would yield a deeper understanding of how the vegan movement positions itself on social media within the capitalist economic system. Moreover, analyzing the discussions on social media regarding the animal rights emphasized by commercial companies and retailers will provide insights into their current stance on greenwashing.

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