

Animal welfare as a central theme of digital communication in the food sector: meat and dairy subsectors

El bienestar animal como eje de la comunicación digital del sector alimentación: los subsectores cárnico y lácteo



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Abstract:

Today's consumer, increasingly concerned about healthy and quality eating, demands transparency from food companies and insists that they respect the conditions in which animals are raised, a concept known as animal welfare. Certifications such as AENOR recognise good food, housing, health and the animal's proper behaviour. The main goal of this study is to analyse the communication of animal welfare in digital spaces such as websites and social networks by the main Spanish meat and dairy food brands. A quantitative/qualitative analysis of publications by 21 brands during 2019 and the first half of 2020 has been carried out considering four dimensions –certification, dissemination, audience & interaction and creative strategy–. Results attest to the presence of animal welfare as a central theme of communication in the creative digital communication strategies of brands in the meat and dairy subsectors. These hybrid messages merge their commercial message with the brand's commitment to respond to social and cultural tensions and encourage user interaction and participation, a characteristic intrinsic to digital communication.

Keywords:

Animal welfare; social networks; creative strategy; digital Communication; food.

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Resumen:

El consumidor actual, cada vez más preocupado por practicar una alimentación saludable y de calidad, demanda transparencia a las empresas de alimentación y les exige que respeten las condiciones en las que se crían los animales, concepto conocido como bienestar animal. Certificaciones como la de AENOR acreditan la buena alimentación, el buen alojamiento, la buena salud y el comportamiento apropiado del animal. El principal objetivo del estudio es analizar la comunicación del bienestar animal en espacios digitales como la página web y las redes sociales por parte de las principales marcas españolas de los subsectores de alimentación cárnico y lácteo. A partir de cuatro dimensiones –certificación, difusión, audiencia e interacción y estrategia creativa–, se realiza un análisis cuanti/cualitativo de las publicaciones realizadas por 21 marcas durante 2019 y el primer semestre de 2020. Los resultados avalan la presencia del bienestar animal como eje de comunicación en las estrategias creativas de la comunicación digital de las marcas de los subsectores cárnico y lácteo. Estos mensajes híbridos fusionan su intencionalidad comercial con el compromiso de la marca por dar respuesta a una tensión social y cultural y fomentan la interacción y la participación del usuario, característica intrínseca a la comunicación digital.

Palabras clave:

Bienestar animal; redes sociales; estrategia creativa; comunicación digital; alimentación.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Concern for what we eat, a growing consumer tendency

The intensification of animal production systems has brought with it greater social concern for the effects this has on animal welfare (Alonso, González-Montaña & Lomillos, 2020): the percentage of European citizens who feel that protection of farm animals' welfare is very important grew from 34% to 57% between 2006 and 2015. According to this study "animal friendly" products are perceived as being healthier, of better quality, and an increasing number of consumers are turning away from the purchase of products that do not respect animal welfare.

This awareness is a characteristic of the activist culture which has arisen from citizens' participation in social networks: "users are raising their voices to denounce that which is not coherent, true, natural, transparent or authentic" (Castelló-Martínez & Del Pino-Romero, 2019: 167). Consumers are more committed to the environment, concerned about ecological matters and are seeking a cleaner, healthier lifestyle, one more respectful of themselves, of others and of the world around them. The quest for healthy experiences has led to greater demand for the organic, natural and sustainable in foodstuffs. The idea that "we are what we eat" no longer refers solely to the impact of our diet on our bodies, but on our minds as well.

Reduced meat consumption owes itself, according to 22% of users, to animal welfare-related matters (AECOC, 2020). As opposed to the meat-loving consumer who enjoys the experience of eating meat in itself, the meat-rejecting consumer has turned his/her back on meat due to the social pressure which says that eating meat is bad for both your health and for the environment.

Consumers understand that the conditions in which animals are bred, crops are managed, resources are utilized, and the workers and animals involved in food production processes are treated have a direct impact on the quality of the product and are decisive in achieving a healthy lifestyle. The concept of animal welfare is associated with the animals' good health (20%), the absence of pain during slaughter (17%), free grazing (15%), care by professional veterinarians (13%), the existence of sufficient space for the animals' needs (13%) or good feed (8%) (AECOC, 2020).

According to the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE)¹, welfare is the way in which an animal faces the conditions in which it lives. Welfare is understood to be an inherent property of an animal and includes its mental and physical state, and, in some cases, the degree to which its particular nature is satisfied – genetic characteristics, such as breed and temperament – (Hewson, 2005).

Consumers demand transparency in food production methods and in animal breeding processes, to ensure the animals have not been mistreated and have been reared in acceptable conditions: 94% of Europeans believe it important that farm animals have quality of life and 37% are willing to pay 5% more for products from production systems that respect animal welfare (the European

1 <http://www.oie.int>

Commission, 2019). 84% of Spaniards think it necessary to improve animal protection on farms and 71% declare they would like to have more information about the conditions in which farm animals live (the European Commission, 2015).

1.2. The food sector in Spain and the meat and dairy products subsectors

The food and drink industry is one of the most important sectors in the Spanish economy in terms of production, employment and exports (FIAB, 2020). Turnover for the sector in 2019 was over 120,946 million Euros, representing 14.9% of Spanish manufacturing (FIAB, 2020). It is a sector where investment in RDI is focused on artisanal, biological, health-related and enriched products or others produced with a lower content of additives, sugars, fats or conservatives, in response to the concerns of consumers aware of and committed to care for the environment, animal welfare and healthy eating practices, as mentioned above.

Total food and drink spending in Spain reached 105,465.2 million Euros in 2019 (Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing & Food, 2020). Each Spaniard spent an average of €2,567.17 on foodstuffs. Meat made up 20.6% of domestic consumption, followed by fruit and vegetables (17.2%), fish (13%) and milk and dairy products (11.3%). In 2020 the food sector spent €293.6 million on advertising in Spain (InfoAdex, 2021), making it the fifth sector in terms of total spend. Nestlé, Danone, Mondelez and Ferrero Ibérica are the companies with the highest spending on advertising.

Food is the sector with the greatest advertising presence on television (Barlovento Comunicación, 2021), with a 19% share, and represents 3.3% of interactions on social networks (IAB Spain, 2020), with over 43.5 million followers. After Coca-Cola, Spaniards' favourite consumer brands are El Pozo, Campofrío and Central Lechera Asturiana (Kantar Worldpanel, 2020), all from the food and drink sector. El Pozo is the brand in most homes, with a penetration of 76.8%.

The social networks have become a fundamental channel of digital marketing for brands in the food sector (Youssef, 2019). An example of this is Campofrío Food Group, which has been highly successful with its advertising campaigns, in particular via platforms such as Twitter (Raya, 2017). The central theme of this brand's advertising strategy is no longer based on traditional factors or those related to physical health or wellbeing, but now focuses on positivity and the need to be happy, using humour, emotions and empathy.

Advertising by brands in the food sector contributes to the construction of the concept of healthy eating, as opposed to the inconsistency of institutional nutritional recommendations (López-Briones, 2017). It is not infrequent for food product advertising to turn to medical-scientific arguments to promote foodstuffs not only as healthy, but as necessary to reach the established ideal of beauty (Rey, 2010) or as possessing preventative or curative virtues (Díaz-Méndez & González-Álvarez, 2013).

The meat and dairy subsectors make up 12.1% and 5.7% of food companies (FIAB, 2020), respectively. Porcine products are the most produced meat in Spain (63.8%), followed by fowl (23.9%). This subsector is formed by some 3000 companies, most of them small to medium size. Campofrío Food Group, Bonàrea, El Pozo, Jorge S.L. and Coren are the largest companies in this subsector, each of them having sales of over a billion Euros (FIAB, 2020).

Some data concerning demand stands out, in homes where the shopping is done by someone over 65 years of age, meat consumption is higher, whereas meat consumption is lower in homes where the shopper is under 35. Consumers living in large urban areas –from 100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants– consume less meat, as do younger, childless couples, single-parent families and independent young people. Though meat products are the largest subsector in food, there has been a tendency towards lower consumption and spending since 2014 (FIAB, 2020).

As regards the milk and dairy products subsector, consumption per person is 69.8 litres of milk and 35.5 kilos of dairy products per annum (FIAB, 2020). Milk is one of the principal livestock products in Spain with an economic value only exceeded by that of porcine and beef products. Approximately 88% of national milk production corresponds to cow's milk, 6.2% is sheep's milk and 5.8% goat's milk (FIAB, 2020). Grupo Lactalis Ibérica, Danone, Capsa and Calidad Pascual are the main companies in the dairy sector.

Childless homes register the lowest milk consumption and, again, those homes where the shopping is done by an over-65 show the highest milk consumption, whereas lower demand is associated with homes where the shopper is under 35 years of age. There has also been a tendency towards decreased spending on and consumption of milk since 2014. Moreover, the price of milk has decreased, which has brought complaints from farmers about earning the same or less despite having made investments to adapt their installations (Valero, 2018). Across the range of milks, the only one that has seen a rise in demand is enriched milk.

1.3. Welfare legislation and certification

The first regulations for animal protection in Spain date from 1883, when a Royal Command mandated that teachers must inculcate benevolent feelings towards animals in their pupils. Since the proclamation of decree 2715/78 in 1978, animal protection has been the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture. Law 32/2007 regulates animal care, exploitation, transport, experimentation, and slaughter. Royal Decree 441/2001 includes the basic general regulation concerning the welfare of animals on farms and is the transposition to Spanish law of European Directive 98/58/CE. There are also specific regulations, such as Royal Decree 692/2010 for the protection of calves on cattle farms, Royal Decree 1221/2009, which includes basic norms for pig farming, or Royal Decree 3/2002 for the protection of egg-laying hens.

The European Union's strategy 2012-2015 on animal welfare² had among its objectives the provision of clear and precise information for consumers, simplified legislation, better training for farmers and vets and help in complying with the legislation³. At international level, the OIE includes in its Health Code for Land Animals⁴ the regulations concerning animal slaughter.

Given the need to ensure the correct management of breeding systems for animals destined for food production and to inform consumers about this, the Asociación Española de Normalización y Certificación (AENOR) has established certifications to

2 This can be consulted at <http://bit.ly/ce-animalwelfare>

3 Information about questions of animal welfare in the EU is available at <http://bit.ly/ce-animalwelfare-2>

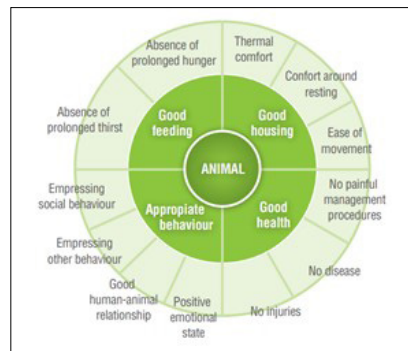
4 <http://bit.ly/oie-bienestaranimal>

this end. Following the Welfare Quality Protocol and AWIN (Animal Welfare Indicators), in 2014 the Instituto de Investigación y Tecnología Agroalimentaria (IRTA) and AENOR created the AENOR certificate of Animal Welfare “Welfare”⁵, which follows the four pillars of European standards: good feeding, good housing, good health and behaviour appropriate to the animal.

These principles are broken down into 12 criteria: absence of prolonged hunger, absence of prolonged thirst, comfort during rest, thermal comfort, ease of movement, absence of lesions, absence of disease, no painful management procedures, expressing social behaviour, expressing other behaviour, good human-animal relationships and a positive emotional state.

These principles can be seen in Figure 1, inspired by the five freedoms which Brambell formulated in the 1960s: freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from fear and distress, freedom from physical or thermal discomfort, freedom from pain, injury or disease and freedom to express normal behaviour. AENOR also has the private certification Leche de Pastoreo (‘Shepherded Milk’).

Figure 1. Principles of the Welfare Quality Protocol



Source: www.welfarequality.net

There are other seals of approval for specific species, such as Interporc Animal Welfare Spain (IAWS) created by the Organización Interprofesional Agroalimentaria del Porcino de Capa Blanca (Interporc) or the Asociación Nacional para la Defensa de los Animales (ANDA) for ecological, free-range hen’s eggs -their rules include environmental measures and support for rural development-. The Spanish meat sector has also established the Welfare Commitment Certificate for all livestock production. Other specific certificates for slaughterhouses granted by private entities can also be found.

The Business Benchmark for Farm Animal Welfare (BBFAW, 2020) shows the food companies which most respect animal welfare and highlights how more and more of them have made investments and efforts to adapt their production systems to animal welfare certification. According to the Animal Protection Index (API) of World Animal Protection⁶, Spain is among the 50 countries

5 <http://bit.ly/aenor-bienestaranimal>

6 <https://api.worldanimalprotection.org/#>

which need to implement urgent improvements in matters of animal welfare, especially in aspects such as bullfighting and some practices of intensive farming such as the confinement of farm animals and the birthing cages in pig breeding and for egg-laying hens.

1.4. *Animal welfare in communication strategies*

As a response to consumers' growing concern for animal welfare, in recent years food and distribution brands have included this matter in their communication strategies as a central theme or differentiating advantage. Figure 2 shows the visual symbol of the AENOR certificate, which the brands include on the packaging of their products:

Figure 2. AENOR animal welfare certificate



Source: <http://www.aenor.com>

Braunsberger (2015) demonstrated that advertising campaigns in defence of animal welfare and of animals against threats like hunting are highly influential among citizens. In their communication actions, the organizations which defend animal welfare utilize resources such as striking images of animals suffering, proof of animal intelligence or socialization as well as the presence of celebrities to promote changes in attitude or behaviour among their audience (Sullivan & Longnecker, 2010). Communication of animal welfare also exhibits a positive focus of animals enjoying pleasant experiences or being “free from negative experiences” (Vigors, 2019).

Several supermarket chains in Spain include the diffusion of animal welfare measures in their advertising discourse, examples being Eroski or Lidl. The latter gained certification for the production of eggs from deep-litter indoor housing, becoming the first supermarket chain in Spain to guarantee that 100% of the eggs it sells come from free-born chickens (El Mundo, 2018). Furthermore, its fresh milk has a double certification in animal welfare and shepherding, certification in animal welfare for its milk brand Milbona, 100% national, and certification for their fresh chicken. This is promoted in their shops and on their webpage⁷. Figure 3 shows examples of some of the communicative actions carried out by Lidl. Eroski publishes videos on YouTube⁸ in which the farmers they work with talk of how they look after their animals and show off their installations.

⁷ <http://bit.ly/lidl-bienestaranimal>

⁸ An example can be found at <http://bit.ly/eroski-yt>

Figure 3. Communicative action by Lidl concerning animal welfare

Source: Google (www.google.es) and YouTube (www.youtube.com)

In the dairy sector the communication strategies of the brands Leche Pascual and Central Lechera Asturiana stand out. Handled by the Oriol Villar agency, in 2019 Leche Pascual launched a campaign which broke away from the traditional advertising strategy of the sector. It was focused on cows at rest. Spots such as “Good night”⁹ or “Song”¹⁰ made clear that all the farms the brand worked with had their Animal Welfare certificate, using the slogan that the better off the cow is, the better its milk will be.

The “Let’s agree”¹¹ campaign (2019) by Ogilvy&Mather for Central Lechera Asturiana, revindicated the values of sustainability and animal welfare and invited reflection on the merits of cooperation. The same agency created “What we learn at home”¹² (2019), showing the commitment of the brand as a farming family.

2. Material & methods

The principal objective of this study is to analyse the communication of animal welfare in digital spaces such as web pages and social networks by the main Spanish brands from the meat and dairy subsectors. The research questions are as follow:

RQ1. Do the main companies in the meat and dairy sectors possess animal welfare certification? Do their web pages mention such certification?

RQ2. Do they post on social networks using the seal of animal welfare? What percentage do these posts represent of the total number of items posted?

RQ3. What audience and interaction do the posts on social networks by the meat and dairy brands using the seal of animal welfare receive?

RQ4. Are there common characteristics in the items using the seal of animal welfare posted by the meat and dairy brands on social networks?

⁹ <https://bit.ly/buenasnoches-leche>

¹⁰ <https://bit.ly/cancion-lechepascual>

¹¹ <http://bit.ly/cla-pongamonos>

¹² <http://bit.ly/cla-loqueaprendimos>

The field work is based on a quantitative / qualitative content analysis of the web pages of 21 brands from the meat and dairy subsectors, belonging to the main Spanish companies by sales volume (FIAB, 2020). Also analysed are posts by these brands on the three most popular social networks in Spain -Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, after WhatsApp, according to IAB Spain (2021)- relative to animal welfare and its certification made in 2019 and the first half of 2020. The data was compiled in July 2020. Table 1 shows the coherence matrix of the study:

Table 1. Coherence matrix

Dimension	Research Question (RQ)	Indicator	Reference
Certification	RQ1. Do the main companies in the meat and dairy sectors possess animal welfare certification? Do their web pages mention such certification?	1. Existence of certification 2. Presence on the web	Google, web page
Diffusion	RQ2. Do they post on social networks using the seal of animal welfare? What percentage do these posts represent of the total number of items posted?	1. Posts on animal welfare vs total # of posts	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube Costa-Sánchez, 2017
Audience & interaction	RQ3. What audience and interaction do the posts on social networks by the meat and dairy brands using the seal of animal welfare receive?	1. Hits 2. 'Like', 'Dislike' comments	
Creative strategy	RQ4. Are there common characteristics in the items using the seal of animal welfare posted by the meat and dairy brands on social networks?	1. Intervals of posts 2. Type of posts 3. Inclusion of text, tags, and URL 4. Type of video 5. Call for action 6. Draws, competitions, promotions	

Source: created by the author

Table 2 includes the sample and the 51 channels analysed for the 21 selected brands. As we can see, 20 of the 21 companies have their own spaces on the main social networks (95.2%). Facebook is the most popular platform (n=20; 95.2%), followed by Instagram (n=16; 76.2%) and YouTube (n=15; 71.4%). Of the 21 brands, 15 (71.4%) are present on the three social networks.

Table 2. Channels analysed on Facebook, YouTube & Instagram

Company	Sector	Brand	Facebook	YouTube	Instagram
Calidad Pascual	Dairy	Pascual	http://bit.ly/pascual-fb	http://bit.ly/pascual-yt	http://bit.ly/pascual-ig
Campofrío Food Group	Meat	Campofrío	http://bit.ly/campofrío-fb	http://bit.ly/campofrío-yt	http://bit.ly/campofrío-ig
Casa Tarradellas	Meat	Casa Tarradellas	http://bit.ly/casatarradellas-fb	http://bit.ly/casatarradellas-yt	http://bit.ly/casatarradellas-ig

Coop. Ganad. del Valle de los Pedroches	Dairy	Lácteos COVAP	http://bit.ly/lacteosCOVAP-fb	http://bit.ly/lacteosCOVAP-yt	http://bit.ly/lacteosCOVAP-ig
Coop. Ganad. del Valle de los Pedroches	Dairy	Ibéricos COVAP	http://bit.ly/ibericosCOVAP-fb	http://bit.ly/ibericosCOVAP-yt	http://bit.ly/ibericosCOVAP-ig
Cooperativas Orensanas	Meat	Coren Grill	http://bit.ly/corengrill-fb	http://bit.ly/corengrill-yt	http://bit.ly/corengrill-ig
Corporación Alimentaria Guissona	Meat	Bonàrea Agrupa	http://bit.ly/bonarea-fb	http://bit.ly/bonarea-yt	http://bit.ly/bonarea-ig
Corp. Alim. Peñasanta (CAPSA Food)	Dairy	Central Lechera Asturiana	http://bit.ly/cla-fb	http://bit.ly/cla-yt	http://bit.ly/cla-ig
Corp. Alim. Peñasanta (CAPSA Food)	Dairy	Larsa	http://bit.ly/larsa-fb	http://bit.ly/larsa-yt	http://bit.ly/larsa-ig
Danone	Dairy	Danone	http://bit.ly/danone-fb	http://bit.ly/danone-yt	http://bit.ly/danone-ig
Elpozo Alimentación	Meat	Elpozo	http://bit.ly/elpozo-fb	http://bit.ly/elpozo-yt	http://bit.ly/elpozo-ig
Frigoríficos Costa Brava	Meat	Costa Brava Foods			
Grupo Comapa 2001	Meat	Comapa	http://bit.ly/comapa-fb		
Grupo Jorge	Meat	Campodulce curados	http://bit.ly/campodulce-fb		
Grupo Lactalis Iberia	Dairy	Lauki	http://bit.ly/lauki-fb		
Grupo Lactalis Iberia	Dairy	Président	http://bit.ly/president-fb		http://bit.ly/president-ig
Grupo Lactalis Iberia	Dairy	Puleva	http://bit.ly/puleva-fb	http://bit.ly/puleva-yt	http://bit.ly/puleva-ig
Industrias Cárnicas Oriente Piqueras	Meat	Incarlopsa	http://bit.ly/incarlopsa-fb		
Industrias Lácteas Asturianas (ILAS)	Dairy	Reny Picot	http://bit.ly/renypicot-fb	http://bit.ly/renypicot-yt	http://bit.ly/renypicot-ig
Lácteas García Baquero	Dairy	García Baquero	http://bit.ly/qgb-fb	http://bit.ly/qgb-yt	http://bit.ly/qgb-ig
Mondelez España	Dairy	Milka	http://bit.ly/milka-fb	http://bit.ly/milka-yt	http://bit.ly/milka-ig

Source: created by the author from social networks

The 20 brands analysed have over 11.1 million followers on social networks, with an average of 558,971 followers per brand. Milka has 84.3% of the followers and 96,7% of them come from Facebook. Over the period analysed -2019 and first half of 2020- 5,904 posts were studied, distributed as shown in table 3: 54.4% on Facebook (n=3,210), 8.2% on YouTube (n=482) and 37.5% on Instagram (n=2,212). With the exception of Coren Grill, -86% of their posts are on Instagram- Danone - 39.5% of their posts on

YouTube- and Milka -no posts on Facebook-, all the brands post more frequently on Facebook. Central Lechera Asturiana (n=771; 13.1%) and Casa Tarradellas (n=607; 10.3%) are the brands with the highest number of posts. The average number of monthly posts in the sample is 328: 16.4 posts on the three social networks for each brand and 5.5 posts per social network and brand.

Table 3. Posts studied over the period of study

Brand	Facebook			YouTube			Instagram			Total posts	
	Followers	Posts		Followers	Posts		Followers	Posts		Abs.	%
Pascual	9.054	397	68,4%	596	39	6,7%	2.981	144	24,8%	580	9,8%
Campofrío	126.867	212	57,5%	14.400	40	10,8%	5.305	117	31,7%	369	6,3%
Casa Tarradellas	57.268	303	49,9%	28.500	47	7,7%	17.100	257	42,3%	607	10,3%
Lácteos COVAP	3.473	191	48,8%	600	70	17,9%	2.795	130	33,2%	391	6,6%
Ibéricos COVAP	9.788	256	67,9%	91	9	2,4%	7.025	112	29,7%	377	6,4%
Coren Grill	300	1	1,8%	462	7	12,3%	1.510	49	86,0%	57	1,0%
Bonàrea Agrupa	3.047	100	49,0%	210	22	10,8%	3.513	82	40,2%	204	3,5%
Central Lechera Asturiana	181.318	401	52,0%	4.580	42	5,4%	36.000	328	42,5%	771	13,1%
Larsa	11.014	164	46,5%	222	26	7,4%	1.777	163	46,2%	353	6,0%
Danone	852.772	72	35,1%	29.700	81	39,5%	19.500	52	25,4%	205	3,5%
Elpozo	74.130	270	48,9%	2.060	61	11,1%	8.515	221	40,0%	552	9,3%
Comapa	1.153	75	100%							75	1,3%
Campodulce curados	230	2	100%							2	0,0%
Lauki	1.339	10	100%							10	0,2%
Président	2.756	46	50,0%				978	46	50,0%	92	1,6%
Puleva	153.249	225	75,0%	12.600	9	3,0%	3.869	66	22,0%	300	5,1%
Incarlopsa	2.747	0								0	0,0%
Reny Picot	9.184	236	51,2%	8	8	1,7%	920	217	47,1%	461	7,8%
García Baquero	44.978	249	53,8%	147	9	1,9%	4.480	205	44,3%	463	7,8%
Milka	9.267.000	0	0,0%	4.310	12	34,3%	153.000	23	65,7%	35	0,6%
TOTAL	10.811.667	3.210	54,4%	98.486	482	8,2%	269.268	2.212	37,5%	5.904	100,0%

Source: created by the author from social networks

The data base compiled during the course of the study can be consulted in Castelló-Martínez (2020a). In Castelló-Martínez (2020b) screen shots of all the posts on animal welfare identified can be seen.

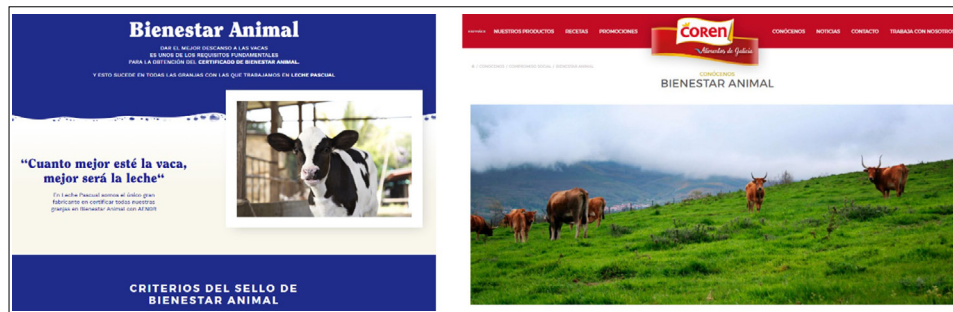
3. Results

3.1. Certification & publication on webpage

RQ1. Do the main companies in the meat and dairy sectors possess animal welfare certification? Do their web pages mention such certification?

Most of the main brands in the meat and dairy subsector have the animal welfare seal (n=19; 90.5%) and communicate this fact on their web pages (n=16; 76.2%), even dedicating more than one section to the subject (n=8; 38.1%), as seen in Figure 4. The information is usually placed in the section dedicated to the company - “about us” or “our farms”- or to corporate social responsibility, as in the cases of Larsa and ElPozo. Brands also highlight the certification in the news section or on their blog.

Figure 4. Information about animal welfare on the web page



Source: <https://lechepascual.es> and <https://coren.es>

3.2. Diffusion on social networks

RQ2. Do they post on social networks using the seal of animal welfare? What percentage do these posts represent of the total number of items posted?

Of the 20 brands with some presence on social networks, 6 do not post anything regarding this subject (25%): Campofrío, Campodulce Curados, Lauki, Président, Incarlopsa and Reny Picot. The case of Président, from Grupo Lactalis Iberia is noteworthy, as, while Lauki and Puleva, belonging to the same group, do post content related to animal welfare, this brand does not. Despite having the certification, stating this on their web page and having frequent posts on the three social networks (n=369), Campofrío does not dedicate any content to this subject on Facebook, YouTube or Instagram.

Reference to animal welfare has been identified on 5.1% of posts over the period under examination (n=299): 41.8% on Facebook (n=125), 19.7% on YouTube (n=59) and 38.5% on Instagram (n=115). YouTube is the network on which most posts regarding this subject are made relative to the total number of posts, exceeding 12%. By advertisers, Coren Grill, Central Lechera Asturiana and Larsa are the brands who dedicate most posts to animal welfare relative to the total number of posts: 15.8%, 14.3% and 10.5%, respectively. 36.8% of the posts identified correspond to Central Lechera Asturiana (n=110). Larsa is second (n=37; 12.4%), then Lácteos COVAP (n=35; 11.7%) and Pascual (n=32; 10.7%).

Among social networks and advertisers, the cases of Central Lechera Asturiana, Lácteos COVAP, Pascual and Larsa stand out. The first has 62 posts on Instagram, a figure that makes up 18.9% of the brand's posts on that network, 56.4% of the brand's posts on animal welfare on social networks and 53.9% of the posts concerning animal welfare identified on Instagram. This brand has 42 posts related to this subject on Facebook -33.6% of the posts concerning animal welfare examined on that platform-.

Lácteos COVAP is the brand with most videos about this subject on YouTube (n=24), comprising 34.3% of the brand's posts on the network, 68.6% of the brand's posts on animal welfare on social networks and 40.7% of the posts on YouTube about animal welfare from our total sample. Pascual and Larsa do the same on Facebook, with 23 and 20 posts, respectively -71.9% and 54.1% of the posts by each brand on the social networks concerning animal welfare-.

3.3. Audience & interaction

RQ3. What audience and interaction do the posts on social networks by the meat and dairy brands using the seal of animal welfare receive?

Regarding the audience and interactions of the posts on social networks by the meat and dairy subsectors relative to animal welfare, the 299 messages accumulate more than 7 million hits and 185,623 interactions, distributed as follows: 98.4% Likes, 0.1% Dislikes and 1.5% Comments. The posts on animal welfare receive more Likes on Instagram -68.9% of the Likes come from this network- and more comments on Facebook, with 63.8% of total comments.

The messages from Central Lechera Asturiana constitute 93.2% of the Likes and 80.2% of Comments. This brand also has the posts about animal welfare which receive most interaction, with six posts exceeding 5,000 Likes and 70 comments each. The five posts by Central Lechera Asturiana with most interaction on Instagram -and from all our sample- concern a competition the brand launched among its followers with the tag #MiPradoEsTuCasa ('#MyMeadowIsYourHome'). Figure 5 shows two of the most popular posts by the brand.

Figure 5. Central Lechera Asturiana posts



Source: Instagram (<http://bit.ly/ba-cla-196>) & Facebook (<http://bit.ly/ba-cla-147>)

If we compare the interaction -in terms of Likes and Comments as these variables are present on the three social networks - of the 5,904 posts examined with that of the 299 posts relative to animal welfare, we can observe that the average of Likes and Comments is higher for the latter: 611 Likes and 9.6 Comments per post related to animal welfare as opposed to 563.2 Likes and 7.8 Comments per post.

3.4. Creative strategy

RQ4. Are there common characteristics in the items using the seal of animal welfare posted by the meat and dairy brands on social networks?

As regards the formal characteristics of the content on social networks about animal welfare, 64.5% of the posts are made on a Saturday (n=193). There are no posts that are text only; in fact, 98.3% of the messages combine text with some other content (n=294). Most posts include hash tags (n=232; 77.6%), such as: #BienestarAnimalPascual (Pascual), #BienestarAnimal (Casa Tarradellas), #BienestarAnimalbonArea (BonÀrea), #GarantíaGanadera, #MiPradoEsTuCasa, #LoNaturalSabeMejor (Central Lechera Asturiana), #LeiteDePastoreo, #PastoreoLarsa, #VacasFelices (Larsa) or #LoBuenoUne (García Baquero).

The commonest type of content posted by the brands from the meat and dairy subsectors on social networks concerning animal welfare are images (n=122; 4.8%), videos (n=88; 29.4%) and micro videos of less than 20 seconds (n=42; 14%). Following the Costa-Sánchez classification (2017), the commonest videos are short spots -less than 1 minute long- (n=27; 30.6%), corporate videos (n=17; 19.3%) and those about corporate social responsibility. (n=17; 19.3%).

Links to related content (n=114; 38.1%) and calls for action (n=113; 37.8%) are not frequent. The brands normally encourage the following of their company on social networks (n=49) or post questions for their followers (n=44) when they post messages about animal welfare. Neither is it common to find a relationship between this type of message and some sort of promotional

incentive -competitions, promotions, draws-: we found 28 posts with competitions -89.3% are by Central Lechera Asturiana, with a competition in which users become the protagonists-. Figure 6 shows an example of a post from Pascual with a competition:

Figure 6. Post by Pascual on animal welfare with a competition



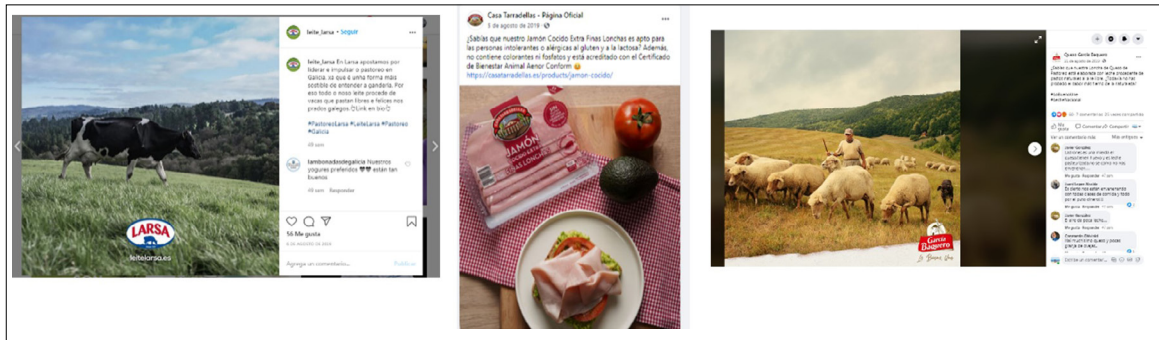
Source: Facebook (<http://bit.ly/ba-pascual-11>)

The association of content about animal welfare with corporate-type messages, such as those related to corporate social responsibility, or with persuasive communication by the brand -in the case of the spots-, and the lack of promotional incentives in this type of posts indicate the strategic value that the subject of animal welfare has in the differential positioning of a brand's communication.

Finally, the emotional tone of the messages used in most of the posts analysed is worthy of mention – they appeal to a love of nature, to fondness and passion, as Larsa does when speaking of happy cows -commitment to animal care as a traditional value and family legacy- Pascual speaks of “a philosophy which has always been with us”, Lácteos COVAP declares that “time has united generations of honest men and women committed to a way of life between tradition and innovation” and Central Lechera Asturiana says that “cattle farming means much more to us than just our way of life: it's our inheritance from our parents, who knew how to transmit to us the right way to do things and how to love what we do”-.

Commitment to sustainability, improved installations, and ties to the land -especially in the case of Central Lechera Asturiana- are the arguments that accompany the communication of animal welfare. The most common images show cows grazing in freedom with farmers caring for them, in the case of the dairy subsector, and the final product in the meat subsector, as seen in Figure 7:

Figure 7. Posts on animal welfare by Larsa, Casa Tarradellas and García Baquero



Source: Instagram (<http://bit.ly/ba-larsa-260> and Facebook (<http://bit.ly/ba-casatarradellas-33> y <http://bit.ly/ba-qgb-291>)

4. Discussion & conclusions

The results attest to the presence of animal welfare as a central theme in the creative strategies for digital communication of brands in the meat and dairy sectors. Unlike the arguments traditionally present in foodstuff advertising, such as health, variety or packaging (Díaz, 2003; Rey, 2012), the presence of animal welfare as the central theme of persuasive communication in digital environments of the brands studied shows that ecology, as a facilitator of food health and quality, is gaining force as a differentiating advantage.

The content which food brands broadcast on social networks is presented as a series of hybrid messages (Balasubramanian, 1994) in which commercial intention merges with the content, in this case especially informative content, which strives to transmit the brand's commitment to animal care and healthy eating, thus connecting to the consumer's concerns. These messages encourage the user's interaction and participation, an intrinsic characteristic of digital communication thanks to the cooperative culture and the participative society established by technological democratization (Castelló-Martínez & Del Pino-Romero, 2019).

Thus, food safety and quality, and nutritional benefits for one's health, are now joined by consumers' concerns for the proper management of breeding systems for animals intended for food production as challenges to be met by the food sector. Animal welfare legislation is increasingly demanding and good practices in this area have a direct impact on the quality of the product and on the reduction of costs, with more efficient and sustainable production models. To this end, a frank and lasting commitment, and coherent, transparent and honest communication are essential.

The history of reputational crises lived by the food sector (Saura, 2005) confirms the importance for the sector of professional management of its communication in the face of society's sensitivity on the subject of food safety. Furthermore, numerous studies have demonstrated the causal relationship between food advertising and unhealthy diets and obesity, particularly among more

vulnerable publics such as children (Chou, Rashad & Grossman, 2008; Veerman *et al*, 2009; Chapman *et al*, 2012; Moreno y Luque, 2014).

With entrepreneurial initiatives and communication solutions which engage with current social and cultural tensions such as animal welfare plus the promotion of healthy eating, the companies strive to be counted among those brands seen as useful, brands that want to make a contribution to building a better world. Despite everything, several studies show that companies still have a long way to go in the use of social media in terms of transparency, debate and the coherence between words and deeds (Gómez, 2013; Aced & Lalueza, 2016; Zeler & Capriotti, 2019).

This study was limited by the size of the sample and the lack of pre-existing scientific literature on the subject in hand. Future lines of research should extend study to other food sub-sectors, such as fishing, as well as studying the history of the use of animal welfare in creative strategies of digital communication.

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