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*Frame Analysis of Irish Media Reports on Veganism and Vegetarianism vis-à-vis the Irish Cultural Context in 2019: Veganuary and the Publication of the IPCC Report.*

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## **Introduction:**

This study involves a frame analysis of Irish media reports on veganism/vegetarianism vis-à-vis the Irish cultural context. Variables unique to Ireland (i.e. vested interests in agricultural industries) are taken into consideration. Several core questions relating to this topic are explored:

- What themes, if any, frequently arise in the discussion of veganism/vegetarianism?
- If themes consistently reappear, can they be consolidated into overarching frameworks?
- If overarching frames are identified, what external or internal factors could influence Irish media to apply these frames to reports on veganism/vegetarianism?
- Is there a shift in the way Irish media frame veganism/vegetarianism compared to the way media have framed veganism/vegetarianism previously?

## **Literature Review:**

A literature review is conducted to capture previous Irish media framing trends and to provide an overview of international media framing of veganism/vegetarianism. Several Irish media framing patterns are uncovered, including a tendency to reflect the views of the powerful (Murphy 2010; Power *et al.* 2016; Wagner and Payne 2017; Mercille 2017), prioritise economic interests over scientific consensus (Mercille 2017; Wagner and Payne 2017), and construct *us versus them* narratives (Haynes *et al.* 2006). Additionally, international media coverage of veganism/vegetarianism is analysed, revealing media's tendency toward negatively stereotyping vegans (Cole and Morgan 2011; Rodan and Mummery 2019), perpetuating speciesist narratives and/or dismissing ethical veganism (Cole and Morgan 2011; Almiron and Zoppeddu 2015; Doyle 2016; Rodan and Mummery 2019), associating veganism with poor health (Phillips 2019), and promoting veganism through the lens of celebrity culture (Doyle 2016).

## **Framing Theory:**

According to Robert M. Entman,

to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described

(1993a, p.52).

Entman's framing theory is applied throughout this study with particular attention to elements such as selection, salience, and magnitude (Kahneman and Tversky 1984; Entman 1993b; Entman 2004). Also, the motivations and effects of framed reports are examined to

demonstrate media's influence over elites, journalists, and the public (Entman 2004; Entman 2007; Devereux 2014). However, it is understood that influence of media frames is limited, as demonstrated by Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model.

### **Methodology:**

Frame analysis is a process wherein an individual closely examines how media frame events, issues, and actors (Devereux 2014). In this study, a frame analysis is conducted on Irish media reports of veganism/vegetarianism within two timeframes: (1) the 31-days of Veganuary (2019) and (2) the 31-days following the publication of the IPCC<sup>1</sup> report (August 2019). The month of Veganuary is relevant due to the surge in reports on veganism/vegetarianism during this period. Timeframe two demonstrates how Irish media frame veganism/vegetarianism in the context of a discussion centred around agricultural industries' impact on the environment (IPCC 2019). It is crucial to recognise that meat and dairy industries are integral facets of the Irish economy (National Dairy Council 2019; Meat Industry Ireland 2020). This study interests me because, recently, I have reduced my animal product consumption in response to pressing environmental concerns. My friends and family have criticised my efforts, leading me to question how media may influence this feedback.

### **Veganuary:**

During timeframe one, a frame analysis is conducted on fifty-seven articles. Five frames are identified within this period: (1) veganism/vegetarianism as a health risk, (2) veganism/vegetarianism as healthy lifestyles, (3) vegans/vegetarians as the *other*, (4) veganism/vegetarianism as a threat to Irish agricultural industries, and (5) the promotion of speciesism in favour of ethical veganism/vegetarianism. Articles employing the health risk frame depict vegan/vegetarian diets as unbalanced, unsustainable, and restrictive. Alternatively, the healthy lifestyle frame links veganism/vegetarianism with improved health and athleticism. Next, Irish media *other* vegans/vegetarians by reinforcing negative stereotypes and constructing an *us versus them* narrative which pits vegans/vegetarians against omnivores. This coverage simultaneously ostracises vegans/vegetarians and reassures omnivores that their dietary practices are normal (Cole and Morgan 2011). The fourth frame depicts veganism/vegetarianism as a threat to Irish agricultural industries. A procedural frame is applied, wherein Leo Varadkar's proclamation to reduce meat consumption for health and environmental reasons is criticised. Using this frame, media make the potential short-term losses to the economy more salient than the long-term environmental benefits of widespread

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<sup>1</sup> The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

veganism/vegetarianism. Finally, media perpetuate speciesist narratives by ignoring and/or ridiculing ethical veganism/vegetarianism, normalising animal product consumption, and depicting veganism/vegetarianism as undesirable.

### **Publication of IPCC Report:**

Four frames are identified resulting from a frame analysis of thirty-five articles published during period two: (1) veganism as a healthy lifestyle through the lens of celebrity culture, (2) veganism/vegetarianism as a health risk, (3) vegans/vegetarians as the *other* in relation to omnivores and farmers, and (4) veganism/vegetarianism as a threat to Irish agricultural industries. Reports utilising the health benefits frame glamorise veganism/vegetarianism through the lens of celebrity culture. The health risk frame portrays vegan/vegetarian diets as unbalanced and restrictive. Once again, media depict vegans/vegetarians as the *other*; however, this time, the constructed *us versus them* narrative pits vegans/vegetarians against both omnivores and farmers. Within the final frame, media characterise veganism/vegetarianism as a threat to Irish agricultural industries. This time, media encourage audiences to reduce rather than eliminate animal products from their diets.

### **Findings / Conclusion:**

Through this study, it becomes clear that Irish media engage with many of the same frameworks that international media outlets have employed in the past. In particular, Irish media sustain speciesist narratives by endorsing animal product consumption (Rodan and Mummery 2019), largely ignore the ethical argument grounding veganism/vegetarianism (Cole and Morgan 2011; Almiron and Zoppeddu 2015), *other* and/or negatively stereotype vegans/vegetarians (Cole and Morgan 2011; Rodan and Mummery 2019), and promote the health benefits of veganism through the lens of celebrity culture (Doyle 2016).

However, several trends unique to Irish media framing of veganism/vegetarianism arise from this research. It is argued that Irish media frame veganism/vegetarianism through the lens of ecological modernisation (Wagner and Payne 2017) to protect Ireland's economic interests rather than promoting these diets as tools for combatting climate change. By *othering* vegans/vegetarians and promoting speciesist narratives, Irish media proactively conserve agricultural industries' interests (Haynes *et al.* 2006). A significant limitation of this study is the lack of data indicating how Irish audiences perceive vegans/vegetarians; therefore, the influence of these frames remains unclear. In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that Irish media frames of veganism/vegetarianism are influenced by external and internal factors associated with the Irish cultural context. However, the limitations of this study make way for further research relating to this topic.

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