
Why (not) vegan? An NLP-based Investigation of Moral Sentiment and Storytelling in the Vegan Discourse

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With veganism being more present in society and thus frequently debated, vegans are often criticized as do-gooders. This work employs NLP methods to investigate the moral loading of the Vegan Discourse and its interaction with the use of storytelling: **how moral is the Vegan Discourse? Which moral sentiments are expressed most? Does storytelling enhance the expression of morality in text?**

Dataset & Methods. We created a corpus with roughly 10'000 comments on articles about veganism published by the New York Times. To assign each comment moral labels, we implemented a BERT multilabel model trained on the Moral Foundations Twitter Corpus⁶, with reliable performances compared to related work. The comments were classified as containing storytelling with a classifier from our previous work. We further validated both classifiers on a manually annotated gold-standard (100 comments).

Results. The Vegan Discourse itself was proven to be significantly moral in the sense of the five moral foundations since more than a tenth of the corpus was classified reliably with morality. The challenge of implicitness of morality is reflected in the comments' different moral loadings throughout the corpus. The two most frequently assigned foundations are "Care-Harm" and "Purity-Degradation". We find that comments with storytelling were associated with moral loadings, but only weakly. Since these result from implicitness, storytelling is rather enhancive of morality in the corpus as a marker of detectable implicitness.

Conclusion. Our results show that that both concepts, moral sentiment and storytelling, are significantly observable and intertwined in the Vegan Discourse as represented in this work. Reasonably, there are many (non-)vegans that tell their personal opinions in stories to make their way of life more palpable for others.

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