

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

‘Interest Groups, Discourse and Food Orientations. The Case of the European Dairy Industry’

UPF-Centre for Animal Ethics / UPF-CritiCC, 16 December 2021

PUBLICATION

Doctoral Dissertation: “[Interest Groups, Discourse and Food Orientations. The Case of the European Dairy Industry](#)”

Author: María Ruiz Carreras (Universitat Pompeu Fabra – Lund University)
maria.ruiz@kom.lu.se

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main goal:

The general objective of this research is to study the discourse of the pressure groups of the European Dairy Industry (EDI) from a Critical Animal Studies frame.

Specific objectives:

To achieve the general objective, this research has three specific objectives:

1. Analyze the history, structure and market of the dairy industry in the European Union to identify its main corporate players and interest groups.
2. Identify the discourse that the main EDI interest groups construct with respect to the animals they exploit.
3. Identify the discourse that the main EDI interest groups construct related to food guidelines.

Method

For the specific goal number one, a documentary observation typical of the studies of political economy of communication has been applied. Based on this documentary observation, the structural data of the dairy industry and its interest groups have been obtained and examined.

An analysis of the history, structure and market of the dairy industry in the European Union has been carried out, in order to understand the sender of the messages and the "relations of power that constitute the production, distribution and consumption of resources, including communication resources" (Almiron, 2017b, p.2), following the usual critical perspective of the political economy of communication.

The main sources have been the European Transparency Register, and the websites of the main organizations whose discourse is analyzed for the specific objectives two and three.

For goals two and three, it has been applied a critical analysis of the EDI's discourse on cows from a sample of 92 documents disseminated by its main interest groups.

The interest groups analyzed were the European Dairy Association (EDA), the European Milk Board (EMB), the European Association of Dairy Trade (EUCOLAIT), the Farmhouse and Artisan Cheese producers European Network (FACE) and The European Food Information Council (EUFIC).

Their relevance has been measured not only by the economic investment dedicated to lobbying activity as it appears in the European Registry, but also by the specificity of its messages regarding the dairy industry in relation to the topics that are the subject of this investigation.

The documents analyzed were reports, press releases, internal bulletins, news published on their websites and position papers.

The discourses of the EDI interest groups were analyzed for the period between 2008 and 2018, paying particular attention to how they discursively represent the animals (the cows) that they exploit for their milk, which is always present in some way in dietary guidelines. The same organizations and the same documents for the same period of time have been analyzed through Critical Discourse Analysis, but for this objective, the discourse related to the official dietary guidelines, including those messages that may or intend to influence these guidelines and the media and public opinion in general. This includes the messages regarding the benefits for people's health and the quality of food, given that a portion of dairy foods is always present within the dietary guidelines, and the orientations always include this type of product.

The requirements to consider the chosen interest groups were that they develop their work at a European level, not just a specific country, that they have a direct relation to the dairy industry, with the exception of EUFIC. Eufic is not a specialized dairy interest group. However, its discourse has been considered relevant enough at a European level in terms of what do they say about dairy products, about nutrition and about the other animals.

What was observed throughout the texts?

Language:

- Type of vocabulary chosen: verbs that are chosen, the type of nouns or adjectives (for example, if the language used could be interpreted as scientific); each of the words or phrases can have an expressive value and connotations behind which there is an ideology.
- Type of pronouns used when talking about the cows, what type of adjectives, if any adjectives are used, what type of verbs and in which person.
- Syntax of the sentence, or how it is exposed who does what. The way in which grammar is used can also be ideologically charged.
- Elisions, that is, the part of the language that is suppressed. For example, when there is no mention of possible plant-based substitutes for milk (substitutes insofar as they also have nutrients such as calcium), or when cows or their babies are not mentioned directly in contexts in which this absence is strange, because ultimately the discourse talks about issues that affect them directly.
- Appeals to science in general.

- Enhance of the scientific character of texts through language, for example, through the use of expressions such as “recent scientific studies affirm”, or through graphics with a scientific appearance.
- Exhibition of industry concern for the environment, sustainability, etc. by the use of these words. Repeated use of environmental terms such as “carbon footprint, environmental footprint, greenhouse gases, biodiversity”.
- Use of bold or other graphic resources (for example colors) to highlight words in the text.
- Use of verbs: active or passive form. The use of passive verbs denotes a lack of agency of the subjects. If the cows are not established as the subject of the sentence, it is easier to see them as objects than as subjects.

Contents

- Controversial statements expressed in a restrictive way (consider as absolute truth issues that are debatable or even ethically problematic).
- Controversial statements supported by scientific language (dietary terms, mention of nutrients or diseases and ailments) or pseudoscientific (to give weight to these statements and avoid possible doubts or double interpretations), for example, expressions such as “nutrient dense foods” or “dairy matrix”.
- Suppression of information on specific issues, both related to climate impact and related to animal exploitation.
- Enhancing the nutritional virtues of milk; what kinds of nouns, adjectives and expressions are used to support the theory that milk is a “particularly nutritious” or “beneficial” fluid.
- Mention of the dietary guidelines. Are they mentioned as a way to support their narrative? Are they mentioned to enhance them? Are some aspects of these guides hidden, such as who influences their creation?

Sources mentioned

- What kind of institutions are used to support the discourse present in the industry documents? For example, medical organizations, names of scientists, institutions as FAO?

Actors mentioned

- Are cows explicitly mentioned or excluded from the speech? And what about their babies, how does the industry refer to them? Do they speak about “flock”? About “individuals”, “beings”, “animals”, “cows”, “mothers”? Whenever the noun “cow” is used, is it accompanied by the adjective “dairy”? In this case, the use of the adjective “dairy” expresses a whole series of connotations that interest the industry, in line with the

fictional narrative saying that “cows give us their milk”.

- Audiences mentioned in the texts: who is the target, who is supposedly “needing” to consume cows’ milk and dairy products.

MAIN RESULTS

1. Main results for Objective 1: corporate and influence analysis of the European dairy industry (EDI)

1.1. The dairy market in the European Union today

The European Union is the world leader in the production of cow’s milk, an activity that contributes 30% of the Final Livestock Production and accounts for the 13% of the Final Agricultural Production (Yubero, 2016).

The increase in production derived from the end of the milk quotas, together with a decrease in domestic consumption and weak exports mean that the sector is largely dependent on economic aids from the administrations (Amat, 2017, p. 28).

1.2. General framework of the food and beverage industry

The dairy sector is part of the European food and beverage industry, which is the largest manufacturing sector in Europe, with an annual turnover for 2014 of 1,098 billion euros (FoodDrinkEurope, 2017: 2). With a 15.4%, it is ahead of other large manufacturing sectors (such as the automotive industry) in terms of business volume, added value and employment figures.

Así, en volumen de negocio dentro de la industria manufacturera, ocupa un 15,4% del total, seguida por la industria de la automoción (13%), maquinaria y equipamiento (9%) y productos petrolíferos (7,8%).

1.3. The European Dairy Sector (EDI)

According to EDA’s *Annual Report 2017/18. Connect to the World of Dairy*, the EDI has more than 12.000 production sites throughout the European territory, with alliances with more than 700,000 farms in Europe. They claim to have more than 300,000 people hired to work directly for the industry in milk processing plants (EDA, 2017a, p. 2). Following this same EDA report, the European dairy industry is the world leader, given that “5 of the 10 largest dairy companies in the world are European” (EDA, 2017a, p. 2).

Regarding the volume of production, according to EDA’s 2017/2018 report, the deliveries of cow’s milk in Europe during 2017 were “the highest in history”. According to the association, a record of 155 million tons was reached, 2 and a half million more tons than the previous year. Following the same report, the growth rate for 2017 was higher than the average speed observed over the last decade. Of these tons, 31.400.000 tons were converted into cow’s milk for drinking, 10,380,000 in cheese and 9,750,000 in fermented products and desserts, leaving behind other products such as butter, skimmed milk powder, whole milk powder and condensed powder (EDA, 2017a, p. 9).

Exports of these products also increased in 2017 according to the report of the European Dairy Association, and the export volume outside Europe of two dairy products stands out above the

others: cheese and skimmed milk powder. Of the latter, they report having exported 800,000 tons, but both have experienced growth in 2017 compared to previous years. The destination to which the European dairy industry exported the most products was to Algeria, according to the EDA economic report, where 1,486,519 tons of milk equivalent went to. Behind this country is the United States, with 1,225,606 tons, then Saudi Arabia, with 975,519 tons and China, with 928,011 tons (EDA, 2017b, p. 6).

1.5. Main business groups in the dairy sector

The large European multinationals in the dairy sector occupy the top three positions on the world list of companies with the highest turnover in the industry. Thus, in 2017 Nestlé (Switzerland), Danone (France) and Lactalis (France) were in first, second and third place respectively in terms of business volume, with annual turnover figures for 2016 of 21.7 billion euros for Nestlé, 16.6 billion euros for Danone, which is up from the previous year, and 16.3 billion for Lactalis, which is down from the previous year. Of the top 20 dairy companies in the world in 2017, 10, half, are European (Nestlé, Danone, Lactalis, FrieslandCampina, Arla Foods, Unilever, DMK, Sodial, Savencia, Müller). The three main companies have been analyzed in depth: Nestlé, Danone and Lactalis.

1.6. Main interest group of the European Dairy Sector

For the present study, the pressure groups registered in the European Transparency Registry updated on December 30, 2018 have been taken into account. The results have been obtained by carrying out several searches, in which the database has been refined around the concepts dairy, leche, lait and milk. By conducting the search in this way, 48 organizations were found.

The 48 organizations which are presented at the dissertation are as follows:

1-Landmark Public Affairs, 2-Science Consult, 3-Cadenza Consulting, 4-Ibec, 4-European Agri-Cooperatives (COGECA), 5-European Farmers (COPA), 6-Nederlandse Zuivel Organisatie, 7-Danish Dairy Board Brussels, 8-European Dairy Association (EDA), 9-European Association of Dairy Trade (EUCOLAIT), 10-Farmhouse and Artisan Cheese and dairy producers' European Network (FACE), 11-Deutscher Raiffeisenverband (Alemania), 12-Eesti Põllumajandus-Kaubanduskoda, 13-US Dairy Export Council, 14-Associazione Italiana Lattiero Casearia, 15-Polska Izba Mleka, 16-Dairy UK, 17-Iris Co-operative Organisation Society, 18-Irish Co-operative Organisation Society, 19-Global Dairy Platform Inc., 20-International Dairy Federation, 21-National Milk Producers Federation, 22-Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association, 23-European Milk Board, 24-Maa- ja metsätaloustuottajain Keskusliitto - Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MKT), 25-Coordination Rurale Union Nationale (CRUN), 26-Centre National Interprofessionnel de l'Economie Laitière (CNIEL), 27-Fédération Nationale des Producteurs de lait (FNPL), 28-Association des yaourts & laits fermentés vivants (YFLA International), 29-Fédération Nationale des Eleveurs de Chèvres, 30-Nestlé, 31-Danone, 32-Arla Foods, 33-Kellogg Company Trading, 34-Valio Oy, 35-Barry Callebaut, 36-Ornu Co-operative, 37-Fonterra Co-operative Group Limited, 38-Lactalis, 39-Royal FrieslandCampina, 40-DeLaval International AB; 41-Glanbia, 42-VanDrie Group, 43-Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, 44-Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 45-Compassion in World Farming, 46-Matvett, 47-Baby Milk Action, 48-Associazione Italiana Allevatori (AIA).

1.7. Cows exploited for their milk in Europe and their calves

Total European dairy production reached 162.8 million tonnes of milk in 2015. To produce all this amount of cows milk, 23,595,000 cows had to be confined and inseminated. Cows

exploited for their milk in Europe suffer from a number of serious health and welfare problems. Because they are used for the production of milk for humans, the life expectancy of cows is reduced to three to five years, four times less than what they would live if they were not used by the industry. In addition, each year these cows, inseminated for their milk production, have a calf that is killed or will be also used in the dairy industry, depending on their sex and industry needs.

1.8. The dairy industry and the environment

The exploitation of cows not only has direct consequences for their lives and the lives of their offspring, but also affects the environment of the planet. The role of the dairy industry is particularly important in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. When milk from cow udders with their more popular plant substitutes is compared, milk of animal origin has a much greater impact on emissions, land use, and water use.

2. Main results Objective 2: discursive framework of the main EDI interest groups regarding how they refer to the animals they exploit

1. Suppression of the subjects: Omission of their existence and/or sentience.
2. Suppression of the subjects' individuality: Metonymy.
3. Suppression of the subjects' individuality: A simile of plants.
4. Suppression of the subjects' individuality: Alienation.
5. Suppression of the subjects' autonomy: Property.
6. Repetition of the industry's benefits: Animal welfare
7. Repetition of the industry's benefits: Environment.

4. Main results for Objective 3: discursive framework of the main EDI interest groups related to dietary guidelines

1. Appeal to Health.
2. Appeal to science.
3. Interpellation of specific groups as consumers.
4. Disqualification of vegetable substitutes.
5. Dietary guides: the industry influences their design and then use them for support.
6. Positive communication. Use of euphemisms to avoid negative terms.
7. Milk touted as "white gold".

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that the dairy industry constitutes a strong and intricate economic and corporate framework that dedicates a great effort to exert influence on food recommendations.

The analysis also shows that the EDI interest groups have adapted their narrative to the current values of concern for science, health and even animal welfare, while at the same time contradicting them, in order to justify their activity.

Outstanding among the contradictions is the denial of the interests of both the cows exploited by their maternal segregations and their offspring through a representation that objectifies the former, obviating their capacity for sentience, autonomy and individuality, while completely excluding the latter from the discourse.

A normalization and naturalization of the exploitation of these sentient beings is carried out through several discursive strategies, the reiteration of messages that show aspects of scientific language to give rhetorical weight to their arguments.

The normalization and naturalization of the exploitation of these sentient beings is carried out through several discursive strategies, standing out the suppression of the individuality and autonomy of the subjects by various means and the reiteration of messages showing aspects of scientific language to give rhetorical weight to their arguments, as well as a continuing appeal to health, while disqualifying plant substitutes for dairy products.

For more references and data, please check the Ph.D. dissertation 'Interest Groups, Discourse and Food Orientations. The Case of the European Dairy Industry' at <https://www.tdx.cat/handle/10803/672682?locale-attribute=en>.

For further clarification or interviews: maria.ruiz@kom.lu.se