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The construction of veganism in vegan food blogs

The proliferation of food as a matter for identity construction and distinction in industrialised countries seems to have coincided with the advent of the internet and the rise of new technologies for sharing information and for interacting across space. One such happy marriage of foodiness and technologically-mediated communication (TMC) instantiates in vegan food blogs. They allow the blogger and users to construct and celebrate a certain food-based lifestyle, to create symbolic capital and a virtual, but real community across the globe.

Linguistically, food blogs are of interest since they represent contemporary versions of a centuries-old genre, the recipe. In this paper, we will analyse structural and lexical features of vegan food blogs as opposed to classical written recipes with a view to the communional TMC construction of vegan lifestyle. The structure of vegan food blogs is investigated against the backdrop of classical written recipes from cookery books to highlight their increased interactiveness and communicative thrust. One handy example is the comments section which does not have an equivalent in the book world and allows for a calibration of vegan identity and practice. Lexically, the use of adjectives such as "creamy" or "meaty" flag the inherent problem that veganism is, in the end, defined negatively, in the sense of 'no animal products'. Nevertheless, it is depicted as a choice for something (positively, as a plus) by vegans themselves. So vegan food blogs construct veganism as an eye-opener, a gaining of independence from trodden paths, a discovery of new ways (e.g. "Culinary discoveries are one of my favourite things about vegan food creation"). Concurrently the bloggers have to tackle the problem that the English lexicon for tastes and textures of food is non-vegetarian and non-vegan, hence terms like "creamy" or "meaty". While "meaty" is an obvious derivation from a non-vegan (and non-vegetarian product), "creamy" is polysemic and does not only refer to some soft, rich texture, but also to the dairy product, again a "forbidden" choice. So despite all attempts to show that veganism is 'more', not 'less', reference to animal and meat-based diets cannot be sidestepped in these blogs. This dilemma also shows in the extremely high frequency of the adjective "vegan" used as pre-modifier for dishes and ingredients (e.g. "vegan pancakes" or "vegan Worcestershire sauce"). Also, in evaluations of dishes, comparison to traditional meat-based versions is all prevalent.

Considering the aforementioned findings of our analysis of vegan food blogs, we show how bloggers construct an ideology that not only revolves around food but rather transcends it with the result of readers discussing the recipes at hand as well as veganism itself.