

The use of Photography as a Prevention Tool Against Animal Abuse Through Instagram

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Abstract. During the last few years, the high percentage of animal abuse in Latin America has become evident. Therefore, this study analyzes the use of photography as a tool for the dissemination of content against animal abuse in the PETA Latino (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) account on Instagram. A qualitative approach with an ethnographic design has been applied. For this purpose, members of non-profit organizations against animal abuse in Peru, as well as documentary, artistic and environmental photographers have been interviewed. The findings of this study highlight the crucial role that photography plays in raising awareness about animal abuse on Instagram. In addition, it highlights the importance of Instagram as a platform for animal rights organizations by providing a space for interaction and reflection on the issue. It was also revealed that the use of different visual elements, such as compositions, texts, and narratives, can generate different emotions and behaviors, depending on the sensitivity of users, which influences their public perceptions and opinions on animal welfare issues

Keywords: Photography, Instagram, Animal abuse, PETA.

1 Introducción

Today, new forms of communication have served to promote significant advances in the dissemination and protection of animal rights [1]. This has led to an increase in the number of organizations and non-profit entities dedicated to safeguarding, caring for the welfare of animals, and advocating for their rights [2]. This digital dissemination of rights seems to have contributed to a global increase in the regulation and punishment of animal abuse [3]. These beings lack formal rights but possess an intrinsic value which would imply that people have obligations towards the correct management of their rights [4]. The struggle for animal rights is perceived in social networks through photography, which allows the creation of a space for dialogue among users [5].

As mentioned above, photography has a vital role to play in the fight against animal abuse [6]. For this situation, photographic practice is seen as a non-interventionist model of space, offering a natural and reflexive view of nature, which questions whether humans can interact with animal life [7]. These images can be found in digital platforms such as social networks, where the exchange of photographs allows interaction and feedback between the different opinions of users [8]. Likewise, many organizations against animal abuse have taken advantage of the opportunity to convey messages of awareness and reflection on this problem on Instagram [9].

At the international level, a recent study identified four main categories representing animals as symbols, citizens, biodiversity, and resources that support political and public perceptions of the ecological crisis [10]. Another study analyzes the influence of about 1723 users who commented on Facebook about animal law enforcement in Australia, which allowed categorizing six problematic issues such as failure of the judicial system, failure of the legislation system, failure of the government, emotional reactions, risk of violence, and distrust of the media [4].

On the other hand, at the national level, there are some studies related to the use of visual media and animal abuse. A recent publication [4, 11] shares the influence of visual strategies in social networks, carried out by the organization WUF, evidencing its impact on university students in Trujillo. Another research analyzes the Facebook messages of the Peruvian organizations Grupo Caridad, ASPPA and ALCO, with the aim of promoting animal rights activism in the country [6]. In addition, it is noted that journalistic media such as El Comercio also address this issue, with headlines that promote awareness and action against animal abuse [12]. Likewise, there are nonprofit organizations such as ARBA (Domestic, farm and wild animals), CREA (Wild animals), Amazon Shelter (Wild animals), SDPA (Wild animals) and Esperanza Verde (Wild animals) that work for the protection of animal species in Peru. Despite the presence of these organizations and the existence of Constitutional Law No. 30407 on animal protection and welfare, their actions are not enough, as reports of animal abuse in the country are increasing every year. [13]. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research question What is the role of photography as a tool for disseminating content against animal abuse in the Instagram account of PETA Latin America? This organization is recognized regionally, thus counting 275 thousand followers in its Instagram account of @PETALatino.

2 Methodology

This study is framed within the interpretive paradigm, which focuses on understanding and attributing meaning to participants' experiences and perceptions from their own personal viewpoint [14]. The qualitative methodology adopted in this study strives to deepen the knowledge of human behavior, addressing concepts such as motivations, behaviors, attitudes and reasons of the participants, whose interpretation is

essential to address the issue in question [14]. As for the ethnographic design, it focuses on understanding emerging cultural practices, behaviors and meanings in virtual communities, social networks, and other digital spaces [15].

The participants in this research are members of non-profit organizations that fight against animal abuse in Peru (Table 1). Likewise, documentary photographers, environmentalists and artists have been interviewed (Table 2) who not only document reality, but also actively participate in it, influencing emotional, identity, social, political, and ideological aspects [5]. It is worth noting that, among the photographers interviewed, some have knowledge outside photography, such as biology, thus providing a scientific critique of the facts. For the development of these interviews, the participants were questioned about three images published on PETA Latino's Instagram account, from the months of January and February 2024. These photographs were selected due to the visual impact they represent and the variety of types of mistreatments, since this organization has left a deep mark in the defense of animal rights by opposing the use of fur, dissection, and their exploitation in entertainment [16].

The sampling was done by convenience, which facilitated access to people who are knowledgeable about the use of photography for the prevention of animal abuse [14]. Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews providing a unique combination of flexibility and structure [17]. The instrument is elaborated in three parts: a) Photography as a means of raising awareness about animal abuse on PETA's Instagram account, b) Visual elements to raise awareness about animal abuse, and c) The role of photography as a tool to disseminate content against animal abuse. Therefore, before starting the interviews, the instrument was validated through three pilot interviews to ensure participants' understanding of the questions. They were also provided with an information sheet covering aspects related to the research, confidentiality, and the handling of personal data.

Finally, during the month of March 2024, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted. These were conducted by video call through the Zoom, Meet or WhatsApp platform, as some experts had difficulties in accessing some platforms. The duration of the interviews ranged between 45 minutes and 60 minutes approximately. The data obtained were initially recorded to undergo a thematic analysis, which was divided into four stages: (a) Transcription of the interviews in Word format, (b) Thorough reading for a more complete understanding of the information, (c) Thematic coding and categorization, (d) Elaboration of the results, and (e) Analysis of the results of the interviews [18].

Partici- pant	Organization	Post	Province
P01	ARBA	Communication	Lima
P02	SDPA	Communication	Lima
P03	Animal Shelter	Communication	Loreto
P04	CREA	Communication	Ucayali
P05	Green Hope	Communication	Loreto

Table 1. Characteristics of organizations against animal abuse in Peru

Table 2. Characteristics of the photographers

Participant	Specialty	Age	Province
P06	Documentary	53	Cusco
P07	Environmental	55	Lima
P08	Artistic	57	Loreto
P09	Artistic	36	Ucayali
P10	Artistic & scientific	45	Loreto

3 Results and discussion

3.1 How does photography raise awareness of animal abuse on Peta's Instagram account?

According to the interviewees, they comment that photography raises awareness of animal abuse issues on Instagram through a) Emotional elements and b) Protests against animal abuse and c) Use of social networks.

a) Emotional elements

First, interviewees emphasize the importance of capturing the suffering and endurance of animals in exploitative situations, whether during alpaca shearing, bullfighting, or scientific experimentation with cats. The presence of visual elements such as ropes, cages and precarious tools reinforce the sense of cruelty and suffering associated with animal abuse in the images. The contemplation of these images awakens a variety of intense emotions. On the one hand, there are feelings of sadness, compassion, and

shock at the obvious suffering of the animals, as well as deep indignation and anger towards those who perpetuate these practices. On the other hand, a certain insensitivity is observed on the part of some interviewees, perhaps due to their familiarity with animal mistreatment in rural contexts or a deep-rooted cultural acceptance of these activities. The present finding of emotional elements is related to a study by Hanisch et al. [19] which indicates that taking images of birds in their natural environment can generate greater emotional attachment and concern for biodiversity and nature, although it does not necessarily increase awareness or interest. Similarly, another study [20], highlights that black and white photography, especially monochrome photography, can evoke a variety of feelings such as joy, happiness, sadness, and nostalgia in people, which generates people's reflection on this issue. In conclusion, the present finding tells us that animal abuse images on PETA's Instagram account generate a variety of intense emotions and ethical reflections, from sadness and compassion to anger and indignation in viewers, which challenges cultural perceptions and promotes critical reflection in society.

"Impotence, anger, rage, frustration, that people do not take them so much importance and continue commercializing and using alpaca wool, vicuña, all kinds of wool" (P01).

b) Protests against animal abuse

Responses provided by interviewees reveal that photographs of animal abuse can lead to protests or active actions against practices such as the bullfighting industry. In addition, they criticize the lack of laws defending practices with animals for commercial purposes such as the use of cosmetics or garments such as wool. They also point out that photographs of animal mistreatment can provoke negative reactions, such as rejection and avoidance that are disseminated in social networks. Some express that the images could generate an aversion towards the situation, leading even to ignoring the problem presented in the images. The finding on animal protests is related to a study that highlights the importance of media use in the promotion of proenvironmental behaviors and suggests that the use of social networks can have a significant impact on environmental attitudes and behaviors, even in a transnational context [9]. Another study is related to the finding of image dissemination in social networks, where direct communication is the most used technique in publications against animal abuse, and that social networking platforms have a significant impact on the transmission of their messages to generate positive behaviors in users [4]. In summary, through these findings, the complexity of using photography to create behaviors against animal abuse on social networks can be highlighted. While these images may have the potential to generate reflection and awareness, they also pose challenges in terms of awareness and variability of individual reactions.

"I think I have two points of view here. The first is that it can generate an impact on the conscience and invite reflection. And on the other hand, I feel that when a person is exposed to many images, sometimes they can normalize it and may not feel much empathy for animals" (P01).

c) Use of social networks

Interviewees mentioned the YouTube platform as a valuable option to provide more detailed explanations and delve deeper into specific issues related to animal abuse. They also indicated that TikTok generates questions and reflections among viewers, which makes it a powerful tool to raise awareness about animal cruelty. They also recommended that Instagram and Facebook can reach a wider audience, especially those concerned about animal welfare. For the interviewees, these social networks share visual content in an accessible way and amplify the reach of the message about animal abuse. In addition, the possibility of using intriguing campaigns, which arouse curiosity and reflection in viewers, is mentioned. The present social networking finding is related to a study by Tham et al. [21], as they comment that their interviewees are more inclined to Instagram, because it has high levels of trust in the information provided by companies on the platform. However, another study indicates that there is no preferred social network for the media, as the media do not systematically select and adapt news for any platform [22]. Moreover, in the words of Cheng & Li [23] on the social network TikTok, it is observed that videos with a negative tone are the most viewed. This suggests that videos showing situations of mistreatment or hardship are more popular than those featuring animals in a healthy state. In conclusion, it is suggested to use various social networks to reach different audience segments and maximize the impact of the animal abuse message. Each platform offers unique advantages in terms of reach, format, and capacity to generate reflection, allowing content to be tailored to the preferences and sensitivities of the target audience.

"Social networks are the boom to reach the whole world today and generate awareness about animal issues" (P04).

3.2 What elements does a photographic image have to employ to raise awareness about animal abuse?

According to the interviewees, they commented that the visual elements that a photographic image should have for the awareness process are the following: a) Visual elements, b) Color and c) Visual Narrative.

a) Visual elements

The interviewees mention elements such as the presence of blood, surrounding wounds, liquids, dirt, animals, and humans perpetuating the actions, suggesting a situation of violence and suffering. They also emphasize that the importance of these visual elements lies in their capacity to generate a strong emotional response in those who observe the photographs. The presence of blood, the helpless posture of the ani-

mal and the details that suggest physical restraint contribute to sensitize the viewer to the cruelty of these practices. This is related to a study that analyzes the importance of visual communication in the creation of images. These emphasize the use of visual elements to generate more humanizing photographs that grant dignity to the subjects or animals depicted in the images [24]. Another study highlights the importance of congruent visual aspects that allow understanding the visual communication of images shared in social networks in a simple and understandable way [25]. Furthermore, in the words of Ray [26] the visual elements in photography should not be considered simply as an objective representation of reality, but as an imaginative and aesthetic construction that is produced through various means such as form, light, and composition.

"The animal is already dead, the blood. The chain gives it that strong impact, but the animal is already dead, the animal is not interested." (P04).

b) Color

Respondents have varied opinions on the use of color in photography in relation to the subject matter (Figure 1). Some perceive natural colors as indicators of an unhealthy environment, suggesting poor treatment of animals. Others believe that the lack of intentionality in the color palette does little to communicate animal abuse. However, others point out that neutral colors convey calm and tranquility, generating contrast with the content of the image and highlighting the severity of human actions on the animals. A study indicating that the colors of the animals depicted on Instagram have a significant impact on the "like" behavior of the online community [27]. Also, along the lines of Jeong & Jeong [28], they identified that the difference in color saturation and brightness generates discrepancies in users' perception. In conclusion, interviewees have different opinions on how colors convey emotions and messages related to the issue of animal abuse, from direct associations such as red with violence and suffering, to more subtle interpretations on the contrast between warm and cool colors to represent different emotional contexts.

"Obviously colors are key in the images. They convey emotions and even make us cry or know if the animal is in danger of death" (P03).



Fig. 1. Officialpetalatino: https://www.instagram.com/p/C2i8I12L0tS/

c) Visual storytelling

The visual narrative focuses on exposing the suffering of animals in the textile industry and bullfighting. It highlights elements such as the angle of capture, the framing and the details that highlight animal suffering, such as blood, chains, and traces of mistreatment. It transmits messages of indignation and repudiation towards these practices. The present visual narrative finding relates to a study by Crilley & Chatterje-Doody [29], which highlights that photography and audiovisual media are used in social networks to generate affective and emotional stimuli, creating emotional connections in the audience. Other authors have identified in their results that the presence of reflective elements such as PETA's compositions in their images, generates more participation and engagement by the audience [30]. Furthermore, in the words of Yeoh & Kim [20], suggests an ethical narrative of the affected groups, such as abused animals, to avoid rejection by users. Thus, the opinion of the interviewees exposes the reality of animal abuse, generates awareness, and provokes an emotional response in the viewer, either through indignation, empathy, or reflection on cruelty practices towards animals.

"It's a denunciation. Basically, it is a denunciation photo, and it also shows you, it tells you how the animal suffers in such a circumstance." (P02).

3.3 What is the role of photography as a tool for disseminating anti-animal abuse content on PETA Latino's Instagram account, according to the perceptions of leaders of anti-animal abuse organizations in Lima?

For the interviewees, photography plays a crucial role in raising awareness and activism against animal abuse by offering a striking and moving visual representation of the reality of these beings in social networks. They highlight the proliferation of digital platforms as constantly moving media that bring sensitivity and prominence to the fight against this issue. By showing explicit images of the abuses suffered by animals, photography provides visual evidence that can influence public opinion and generate behavioral changes in people. In addition, they comment on the importance of telling stories through images, documenting the processes of rescue, rehabilitation, and release of animals. However, they recognize the need to use photography in an ethical manner, avoiding excessive manipulation of elements to avoid a negative or polarized response from people. The present finding on the role of photography, supported by the study of Borges-Rey [31] is closely related to technological progress, since photography, as a medium, facilitates the capture and dissemination of images. This aspect is directly linked to the present study since photography serves as a tool for disseminating information about animal abuse. The authors Jiménez-Alonso & Brescó de Luna [32] highlight how technological tools and audiovisual devices have the power to raise awareness and sensitize people about the treatment of animals. Therefore, photography has an important role in the problem of animal abuse, since it allows the perpetuated behaviors towards animals to be known, the responsibility that society has as a consumer and the ease of reaching the public through social networks. However, the correct ethical handling of photographs is necessary for this practice to achieve a professional and respected scope.

"Generally, photos have a lot of importance because if they do it right, they tell a story without effect, and people generally make a lot of impact." (P06).

"We have to raise the camera to denounce. We cannot be the ones who silence the issue." (P09).

Another finding is the effectiveness of Instagram and photography in raising awareness about animal abuse because it conveys powerful messages and reaches a broad global audience. In addition to the image, the importance of accompanying posts with explanatory texts that contextualize the situation and promote concrete actions to address the problem is emphasized. This is related to a study [12], which indicates the use of photography on Instagram, has provided a new context for photographic dialogues. These contribute to the fight against animal abuse, making the content reach the users faster [33]. Therefore, interviewees highlight the use of Instagram and photography to raise awareness about animal abuse and propose strategies that combine images, persuasive texts, and audiovisual content to generate awareness and positive actions.

"I think photography can raise awareness, but I doubt very much that a photo is enough. You also must work with creating videos that show solutions" (P01).

4 Conclusions

Through this research, it has been concluded that the Instagram platform and photography are effective tools to raise awareness about animal abuse. The research identified that it is crucial to maintain correct ethics in the images shown to the public and to propose strategies that combine different media to generate awareness and encourage positive actions. Likewise, the photography published by PETA Latino plays a crucial role in raising awareness and activism against animal abuse, offering impactful and moving visual representations that can influence public opinion and generate behavioral changes. In addition, the use of emotional elements such as animal suffering and resilience, from sadness and compassion to indignation and rage, has been evidenced through photography. Also, several key visual elements were identified in the photographs published by PETA Latino such as the use of color, visual narrative, among others.

In relation to the limitations of this study, the lack of scientific research that addresses the use of photography as a means of raising awareness in social networks to combat animal abuse stands out. In addition, since the sample was small due to the lack of access to organizational leaders, the data cannot be generalized.

Finally, future research suggests fostering interest among organizations and photographers in understanding the most effective ways to convey animal awareness messages on social media. This not only ensures the successful transmission of the message, but also motivates users to apply what they learn in their daily decisions.

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