



Storytelling as a Tool for Activist Public Relations: A Qualitative Study in Case of Women*

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on storytelling in activist public relations. Stories emerge as an important "activist public relations" tool in non-governmental organizations' social change and awareness-raising efforts. The research aims to investigate both short and long-term effects of storytelling on emotions, awareness levels, and behavioral changes across different age groups. To illustrate the use of storytelling in activist public relations within the cosmetics industry, the researchers selected the short film "Save Ralph," produced by Humane Society International in 2021. The short film tells in an emotional tone, from the mouth of a rabbit, what happened to him during cosmetic experiments. The research, employing a qualitative research design, comprises three stages. Firstly, a survey was conducted among 30 women from various age groups to gather insights into their definitions of cosmetic products, usage frequency, and factors influencing their preferences. In the second stage, participants were shown the selected short film, followed by in-depth interviews. Lastly, follow-up interviews were conducted with the same group of women three months later. The findings revealed that storytelling had the most significant impact on emotions, awareness levels, and behavioral changes among women aged 18-23. This underscores the effectiveness of storytelling as a strategy for driving social change and raising awareness within activist public relations initiatives.

Keywords: Activist Public Relations, Storytelling, Qualitative Research, Animal Testing, Cosmetic Sector.

Aktivist Halkla İlişkiler Aracı Olarak Hikâye Anlatımı: Kadınlar Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma

ÖZ

Bu çalışma aktivist halkla ilişkilerde hikâye anlatıcılığına odaklanmaktadır. Hikâyeler sivil toplum kuruluşlarının toplumsal değişim ve farkındalık oluşturma çalışmalarında önemli bir "aktivist halkla ilişkiler" aracı olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Araştırmanın amacı hikâye anlatıcılığının farklı yaş gruplarında duygu, farkındalık düzeyi ve davranış değişikliği üzerindeki kısa ve uzun vadeli etkilerini incelemektir. Bu bağlamda, Humane Society International tarafından 2021 yılında gerçekleştirilen ve hayvan deneylerinin kozmetik endüstrisinde kullanımına ilişkin farkındalık yaratmayı amaçlayan "Ralph'i Kurtarın" adlı kısa film, hikâye anlatımının aktivist halkla ilişkiler için kozmetik sektöründe kullanımına örnek olarak seçilmiştir. Kısa film bir deney tavanının ağzından deney sürecinde başına gelenleri duygusal bir tonda anlatmaktadır. Nitel araştırma tarasarıyla gerçekleştirilen araştırma üç aşamadan oluşmuştur. Öncelikle farklı yaş grubundan 30 kadına kısa film izletilmeden önce kozmetik ürünler, bu ürünleri kullanma sıklıkları ve tercihleri sorulmuştur. İkinci aşamada film izletildikten sonra derinlemesine görüşme yapılmış ve filmle ilgili görüşleri alınmıştır. Son olarak aynı kadınlarla 3 ay sonra yeniden derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sonuç olarak hikâye anlatımının duygulara, farkındalık düzeyine ve davranış değişikliğine etkisi en yüksek olan grubun 18-23 yaş arası kadınlar olduğu görülmüştür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Aktivist Halkla İlişkiler, Hikâye Anlatımı, Nitel Araştırma, Hayvan Deneyleri, Kozmetik Sektörü.

1. Introduction

The essence of public relations is described as storytelling. Public relations practitioners are commonly seen as storytellers, with their activities revolving around narrative construction. This involves crafting

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stories that align with their employer's objectives in a manner that is strategically beneficial. Terms like sensemaking, narrative, and discursive practice are often associated with this process, emphasizing the role of storytelling in public relations (Elmer, 2011, p. 47). In public relations, storytelling can be used to create an image for the organization, develop relationships with stakeholders, establish brand identity, and strengthen employee allegiance. Similarly, within the framework of activist public relations, storytelling can be utilized to drive social change. Leading the organizations that carry out activist public relations efforts are non-governmental organizations. Non-governmental organizations use activist public relations to ensure acceptance of the organization's mission, develop communication channels serving the organization, create and maintain a conducive environment for donations, support the development and sustainability of public policies favorable to the organization's mission, and finally inform and motivate organizational stakeholders such as employees and volunteers (Sancar, 2017). In this context, storytelling emerges as a significant force. Non-governmental organizations can use storytelling to create social awareness and foster behavioral change within the framework of a social issue. An example of this is a public relations campaign conducted by UNICEF in the Dominican Republic in 2018. UNICEF conducted "The Worst Soap Opera" advocacy campaign to address the issue of child marriage. UNICEF aimed to raise local awareness and demand action to change the law through this campaign. The campaign utilized soap operas as the most consumed media content in the Dominican Republic, creating 10 episodes that depicted the verbal and physical abuse faced by victims of child marriage. The campaign strategy was to provoke discomfort in viewers and stir conversation by airing the story on television and spreading it through digital media channels. Initially, people protested the soap opera online, but after UNICEF revealed that it was inspired by real-life events, the direction of conversation shifted. Influencers, bloggers, and the public started discussing the need to change laws about child marriage. The campaign successfully raised awareness about the issue and pressured the government to change the law, with quantitative analysis showing a significant increase in awareness and the introduction of a new law prohibiting marriage for those under 18 without exceptions. This campaign demonstrates the power of storytelling in driving social change (Özoran, 2021, s. 227-228).

Within the framework of activist public relations, non-governmental organizations utilize storytelling to raise awareness about social and environmental issues. One of these issues is animal testing. It is defined as "any scientific experiment or test in which a live animal is forced to undergo something that is likely to cause them pain, suffering distress or lasting harm" (What are Animal Experiments, 2021). Animal experimentation has become a prevalent reality in contemporary society. In the 15 "old" EU Member States alone, an estimated 10 million vertebrate animals were employed for scientific and experimental endeavors in the year 2003. Nonetheless, it is probable that the true figure exceeds this estimate substantially, given the reported inadequacies in these data (Kolar, 2006, s. 112). More than 100 million animals are used for testing and killed in USA laboratories for different reasons (Facts and Statistics about Animal Testing, 2021). One of the reasons for animal testing is creating safe cosmetic products for humans. More than 500.000 animals suffer and die each year because of cosmetic testing (Cosmetic Testing FAQ, 2021). Some countries ban testing cosmetics on animals. Although some countries have taken important steps to limit and ban animal testing, it is known that many brands and cosmetic companies still use animal testing.

European Union bans on testing cosmetics on animals and selling animal-tested cosmetics in 2013. India, Israel, Norway, Iceland, and Switzerland has also similar laws. Additionally, New Zealand, South Korea, Taiwan, and Turkey have laws to ban or limit cosmetic animal testing (Cosmetic Testing FAQ, 2021). In 2020, 39 countries adopted laws banishing animal testing in the cosmetic area (Grappe, Lombart, Louis, & Durif, 2021, p. 1533).

In 2021 global cosmetic market size was 287.94 billion dollars and it is estimated to reach 412.29 billion dollars by 2028 (Cosmetics Market Size to Hit USD 415.29 Billion by [2021-2028]; Rising Awareness Regarding Health, Hygiene, and Grooming to Augment Industry Growth, Says Fortune Business Insights, 2021). In this large market, there are still large cosmetic brands that are conducting tests on animals such as M.A.C, Estee Lauder (Scheler, 2018), NARS, L'Occatone, Benefit (Chitrakorn, 2016), L'oreal, Lancome, Revlon, Rimmel, Max Factor (Laughlin, 2021). For that reason, many non-

governmental organizations such as Humane Society International (HSI), Humane Decision, Ethical Elephant, Cruelty-Free International conduct campaigns to raise awareness of animal testing in the cosmetic sector.

Humane Society International operates globally to enhance animal well-being across over 50 nations. Their efforts encompass various initiatives such as fostering the bond between humans and animals, safeguarding and rescuing dogs and cats, enhancing the welfare of farm animals, preserving wildlife, advocating for animal-free testing and research, providing disaster relief, and combating all forms of cruelty against animals (About Us, 2023). In this context, it conducts numerous campaigns both to raise funds and to increase awareness about animals. In this context, it conducts numerous campaigns both to raise funds and to increase awareness about animals.

One of the most notable campaigns is "Save Ralph". HSI released a 4-minute short film to combat cosmetic testing called "Save Ralph" on 6 April 2021. The film is a documentary about a rabbit named Ralph who is working as a "tester" for cosmetic products. Not only he but also his mother, father, sisters, brothers, and kids were testers. He tells his story to the camera throughout the film. He is blind in one eye, partially deaf, has chemical burns up and down his back. In addition, in a sad tone, he says, "it is okay" because he helps humans. In the laboratory scene, while Ralph's rabbit friends cry to the camera to free them, they infect an unknown chemical in Ralph's eye. Now completely blind and in pain, he says he could be a normal rabbit without animal testing. A call from HSI is seen at the end of the short film: "No animal should suffer and die in the name of beauty. Help Humane Society International ban cosmetic testing on animals globally" (Save Ralph - A short film with Taika Waititi, 2021).

This short film is an example of activist public relations using storytelling to raise awareness about an issue and calling people to action for not using animal-tested products and to change the policies of states about animal-testing in the cosmetic industry. The campaign focused on 16 countries, including the USA, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico, South Africa, and Turkey. They chose these countries to move lawmakers to ban animal testing in the cosmetic sector (Save Ralph, 2021). HSI President said it is "a public advocacy and awareness campaign aims to show the terrible suffering that endure in testing" (Bigtas, 2021). It became a successful campaign that is watched 100 million on YouTube, 400 million on TikTok and it amassed more than three million petition signatures (Campbell, 2021). This campaign can be evaluated as showing the power of storytelling by a non-governmental organization for activist public relations.

This film has been examined by researchers from many different perspectives. Serafilm, Xavier and Marques (2022) employs a dialogic analysis approach inspired by the Bakhtin Circle's principles to examine the short film "Save Ralph." The findings indicate that the film successfully conveys social criticism by shedding light on the suffering of animals used for chemical testing in the cosmetics industry. It enhances empathy and fosters a deeper understanding of their plight among viewers. Aydar and Aydınlioğlu (2022) examined the film through the semiotic approaches of Saussure and Barthes. They found that the campaign effectively demonstrates that animals are denied the opportunity to live as they deserve, and that humans selfishly slaughter them for their own interests, while public and private institutions remain indifferent to this unethical behavior. Akpınar (2023) analyzed the film within the framework of digital activism and lynching culture using a semiotic approach, and examined the hashtags "#saveralph" and/or "#animalrights" on Twitter. The study concludes that digital activism and lynching culture have a significant impact, demonstrating the collective power to challenge hegemonic structures. In contrast to previous studies, this research aims to analyze the power of storytelling as an activist public relations tool on emotions, awareness, and action taken for a social purpose by using "Save Ralph" as a case study.

2. Activist Public Relations And Storytelling

Stories occupy a huge place in human life. We learn, share our emotions and thoughts, and understand others and the meaning of life by telling, listening, or watching stories. Since humans were hunter-gatherer tribes, they made sense of the world, connected and related with each other through stories (Zak, 2018, p. 5). Humans have told stories since the dawn of humanity. The only thing that has changed over the centuries is the tools they use to tell stories. 30,000 years ago, humans used cave paintings like the Chauvet

cave, which shows themes of survival. In Ancient Egypt, they used hieroglyphs that includes not only religious documents but also messages to future inhabitants. Humans also used songs, chants, and epic poetry to transfer their stories in the ancient world. Then, they start using written language to transmit stories (Mendoza, 2015). Nowadays with the development in technology, the tools of storytelling have increased tremendously. The introduction of the internet and social media tools into our lives after radio and television has increased the importance of digital storytelling.

Compared to other communication methods, storytelling has some superior aspects, especially in "persuasion" (Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008). First of all, stories are easier to remember because it triggers episodic memory and generates multiple associations and stimuli (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus, & Van Riel, 2008, s. 286; Wachtman & Johnson, 2009, pp. 3-4; Ploran & Wheeler, 2009; Oatley, 2002). Secondly, it generates powerful emotions and empathy that make people live and experience (Peterson, 2017; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Thirdly, it makes it more difficult to resist or counter-argue because people engage in the storyline and identify themselves with the characters in the storyline (Slater, 2002; Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007, p. 781). Additionally, storytelling is an essential tool to create trust, motivation to act, motivate social change and behavioral change, build communities to challenge injustices (Zak, 2018). Stories are a direct route to our emotions, so they can influence the decision-making process (Ganz, 2001). Therefore, stories have a strong power on changing values, mindsets, and rules (Saltmarche, 2018).

Because of that reason, it is a vital part of public relations and according to Elmer (Elmer, 2011, p. 57), it will continue to be an effective part of the public relations routine. Organizations have a long history of recounting their narratives. Although the relationship between organizational storytelling and public relations was first acknowledged three decades ago, it has only been in the past decade or so that storytelling has begun to be recognized as a distinct and concentrated area of interest within the field of public relations (Lane, 2023, p. 1).

Storytelling techniques are essential tools utilized in public relations to communicate messages, evoke emotions, and effectively engage audiences. By presenting communication in the form of a narrative, PR professionals can craft a compelling arc that captures attention and facilitates comprehension. For instance, a brand may utilize storytelling to recount its evolution from modest origins to prosperity, resonating with consumers by emphasizing shared values and experiences (Keith, 2023, p. 53). Storytelling which is defined as "a staple of public relations" by Kent (2015, p. 480) is used from crisis to branding, to identity, to reputation. Public relations employs storytelling to cultivate a favorable perception of the organization and reinforce corporate identity. Additionally, stories serve as significant symbolic endeavors through which organizations foster collective understanding in collaboration with their stakeholders (Saymer, 2018).

After the importance of storytelling in public relations became apparent, there has been an increase in studies in this field. While some researches (Forman, 2020; Gill, 2015) has discussed storytelling within the framework of employee engagement, others (Devi, 2012; Spear & Roper, 2016) have evaluated it within the context of internal communication. However, it is observed that studies on storytelling in public relations mainly focus on shaping audience perceptions, corporate reputation, brand storytelling, and loyalty (Dowling, 2006; Pereira, 2016; Hong, Yang, Wooldridge, & Bhappu, 2022).

In contrast to dominant studies in the field, this article focuses on the role of storytelling in public relations specifically concerning social change and raising awareness for social issues. Stories can be used for "activist public relations" which "is a focused view of communication activity by politicized third sector groups such as social collectives, community action groups, and non-governmental organizations to foster their public legitimacy as voices for social change" (Demetrious, 2009). Cutlip, Center and Broom also define non-profit organizations as agents of activist public relations. According to them, the purpose of non-profit organizations to use activist public relations is to ensure that the mission of the organization is accepted, to develop communication channels that serve the organization, create and maintain a favorable environment for donation, supporting development and maintenance of public policies which are favorable for organization's mission and finally inform and motivate organization's stakeholders (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994, pp. 497,498).

Within this framework, “Save Ralph” storytelling video is an example of “activist public relations” made by a non-governmental organization to raise awareness about animal testing in the cosmetic sector and countries’ policies about animal testing, and motivate people not to buy from brands using animal testing.

The research focuses on the use of storytelling as a tool for activist public relations. The main aim of the research is to analyze immediate and long-term (3 months) reactions of women of different ages towards storytelling campaign. The first interviews took place in May 2022, and the second interviews took place in October 2022.

In this scope, it is aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How did women of different age groups feel when they watched the short film?
2. What is the awareness level of women of different age groups about animal testing in the cosmetics industry?
3. After women of different age groups have watched the short film, will they act to disseminate information about animal testing in the cosmetics industry?
4. 3 months after watching the short film, do women of different age groups remember the film and have the same feelings about it?
5. Was there a change in the level of awareness of women in different age groups 3 months after watching the short film? Have they researched this topic? Did they research which cosmetic companies do animal testing?
6. Is there a difference in cosmetic product preferences of women in different age groups 3 months after watching the short film?
7. Did women in different age groups work to disseminate this information within 3 months after watching the short film?

3. Materials and Method

This research aims to investigate the effect of storytelling in activist public relations on emotions, awareness level, and behavior change. It also aims to reveal the effect of storytelling in activist public relations on different age groups. Ethics committee approval was received for this study from Amasya University Social Sciences with the letter numbered 63480 on 04.04.2022.

In this study, a quasi-experimental design was used, A quasi-experimental research design is “the use of methods and procedures to make observations in a study that is structured similar to an experiment, but the conditions and experiences of participants lack some control because the study lacks random assignment, includes a preexisting factor, or does not include a comparison/control group” (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2023). Quasi-experimental designs (QEDs) are frequently employed in communication research. These designs offer researchers a moderate level of control in determining causality and are typically applied in real-world settings rather than controlled laboratory environments (Head & Harsin, 2017). In this research, we used pretest and posttest. One commonly utilized quasi-experimental research design involves testing a single group of participants or subjects before and after they receive a treatment or undergo manipulation of an independent variable. If there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, it may be attributed to the independent variable. However, because this design lacks a control group and is not purely experimental, there is uncertainty in making this inference (Colman, 2014).

Within this framework, for pretest and posttest in-depth interviews were used as a data collection method. Since the research was about a storytelling video against animal testing on cosmetic products, interviews were conducted with women. In depth interviews were conducted with 30 women living in Ankara, Turkey. Participants were selected through the probability sampling method. In this method “a sample drawn at random from a population such that all possible respondents or objects have an equal chance of being selected for observation or measurement” (Stacks, 2006).

As it is aimed to make a comparison between women from different age groups, interviews were conducted with three groups of women. Age groups were determined according to the separation of X, Y and Z generations. Interviews were held on the online platform due to the Covid19 pandemic.

In-depth interviews were conducted by researchers, and before each interview, participants were informed about the scope, purpose, and duration of the research. Written consent was obtained from participants for recording the interviews. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed by the researchers and categorized within the framework of the research questions. For ethical reasons, the names of the participants were kept confidential, and each participant was assigned a number (P1, P2,..).

Table 1. Description of Participants

	Number of Participants	Year of Birth	Education
Group	10	1965 to 1980	Bachelor Degree
Group	10	1981 to 1999	Bachelor Degree
Group	10	After 2000 (but over 18 years old)	University Student

Qualitative research consists of three stages. In the first stage, before watching the short film, the participants were asked questions about their definition of cosmetic products, how often they use cosmetic products and the factors that determine their cosmetic product preferences. In the second stage, after participants watched the "Save Ralph" short film open-ended questions were asked to them. With the open-ended questions asked in the second stage, it was aimed to learn about their feelings after the movie they watched, their ideas about animal testing in the cosmetic industry, whether there would be a change in their cosmetic product preferences after the movie, and whether they would take an action to raise awareness about animal experiments.

The third stage of the research was carried out 3 months later. The same women were asked new open-ended in-depth interview questions to analyze whether they have the same feelings towards cosmetic testing on animals, whether they research which brands are using animal testing, whether there is a change in their awareness level about animal testing. Additionally, we asked questions to understand if they changed their cosmetic brand preferences and if they acted to raise awareness about animal testing.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. First Stage of the Research: Cosmetic Product Preferences

Before watching the short film, we asked the participants how often they used cosmetic products and the factors that determine their cosmetic brand preferences. Women in all three groups stated that they use cosmetic products every day. Participants in the first group primarily describe make-up materials as cosmetic products.

"I use cosmetic products almost every day. For example, blush, powder, and lipstick are among the products I use every day." (PY3)

Unlike the first group, those in the second group perceive all personal care products as cosmetic products.

"Of course, I use cosmetic products every day. Deodorant, shampoo, face cream are products I use every week." (P12)

The third group, on the other hand, define skin moisturizing and cleansing products as cosmetic products and do not use make-up products every day.

Being a well-known brand comes first among the criteria that affect the cosmetic product preferences of the first group because they think well-known brands offer better quality. For this reason, there are women who have not changed their brand preferences for years. Another criterion for the first group is the ingredients of the products. Most of them stated they prefer "natural" products. However, they define these additives by limiting them to the substances mentioned in product advertisements like paraben and alcohol.

Similarly, the most vital criterion for cosmetic brand preferences for the women in the second group is to be a well-known brand. Secondly, some participants said products should be anti-allergic while others consider price-performance balance.

On the contrary, the primary criterion for the participants in the third group is expert opinions such as doctors, dermatologists, or pharmacists. Most of them stated that a cosmetic product should solve skin

problems or at least should not deepen them. Additionally, participants in this group said that social media is also shaping their product preferences.

4.2. Second Stage of the Research

4.2.1. Emotions after “Save Ralph” Short Film

After participants watched the short film were asked about what they thought and felt about the film. The first group participants were emotional while watching the movie, some of them even closed their eyes. The participants were very upset for Ralph and, some of them stated that they had a hard time not crying.

“I thought animals were slaughtered for people. This is very sad.” (P1)

“I felt incredibly guilty. I regret. I will think of Ralph when I am using cosmetic products.” (P2)

“It pisses me off that beings who don't have a choice are abused by beings stronger than themselves”(P3).

The women in the second group were not as emotional as the first group. While the participants said that the film was effective in raising awareness on this issue, they made rational comments about the issue. They described their feelings as “uneasiness” (P11), “desperation” (P12), “punishment of conscience” (P13).

“We have seen that there are no limits to human beings for materiality and external beauty in production and consumption” (P12)

“The movie made me feel two things. First, there is an animal that lives like a human, and it is happy to live like that. In other words, I thought that our lifestyle, working standards, and even our leisure activities were embellished in the movie. Having a job, even if it hurts him, saves Ralph from ‘idleness’ and serves capitalism. Secondly, I thought of how we harm the entire flow on earth except ourselves.” (P14)

“Ralph reminded me of myself not only animals but also people can often be victims for the flow of daily life. But they somehow convince themselves that they are doing it voluntarily” (P15).

Additionally, some participants in the second group criticized the film because they find the film insufficient to end animal testing.

Unlike the other groups, all of the participants in the third group had watched the movie before because they used social media actively. While this group expressed their thoughts and feelings about the film, they also mentioned the action they took. They defined their feelings as sadness (P21, P22), helplessness (P23, P24) and "guilt" (P27).

“I have watched it before and this video made me not buy products with animal ingredients. They die for us. We can live without cosmetics. But they cannot live without eyes, without mouth.”(P26)

“After the video, I found a barcode scanning application on the Internet. I am using this application to find out which brands are using animal testing. I scanned all of the products at my home, I am careful not to buy them again when they were finished” (P27)

Some participants criticized themselves for not changing their behavior after watching the movie.

“It was viral on social media. However, people who shared it on their social media, still use the same products. And I am one of them.”(P28)

“When I first watched this video, I hadn't slept for two days. I threw away most of my materials, but there were some that I couldn't throw away, for example, my Mac products. Because people think, I bought it once, anyway. But I won't buy it again”(P26).

4.2.2. Awareness of Animal Testing in Cosmetic Sector

The participants were asked whether they knew that animal experiments were used in the production of cosmetic products before watching the short film and what they thought about animal testing. It turned out most of the first group knew there are “test animals”, but they did not know that they were used in the cosmetic industry.

“I actually knew that mice were used as test subjects for drugs, but I did not know about the cosmetics industry” (P4)

The participants, who knew beforehand that there was animal testing for cosmetic products, expressed their thoughts with the following words:

“When I was younger, there were campaigns like this saying no to animal experiments. I learned in those days.”(P3)

“Knowing and applying are two different things. I am happy when I see the phrase "not tested on animals" on a product. But it is not my priority.”(P5)

None of the participants in the first group could say the names of the cosmetic brands experimenting on animals. However, after watching the film, all of them stated that they will research which brands are doing animal testing and they will be sensitive in their brand choices. However, some said if cruelty free products are expensive, they can not change their preferences.

“Of course, I will make a more conscious choice. I will look at which brands use animals and I will definitely not buy them.” (P4)

“I need to research. I can give up on the brands I use. I can find alternatives, if it won't force me economically.” (P1)

“I have never paid attention to it until now, but now I will.”(P6).

“I'd prefer cruelty free products at the same price. If they are too expensive, I am ashamed to say my true feelings, but I think I would prefer the old ones again”.(P5)

Unlike the first group, most of the women in the second group were aware of the animal experiments carried out by the cosmetic industry. This group did not show as many emotional reactions as the previous group.

"I knew. It doesn't make much sense to me, frankly. These products will be tried in some way. If not on animals, maybe it will be tested on people in low-income countries."(P15)

"I knew. But maybe I was ignoring it because it wasn't brought before us in this way. But I don't think this movie will be effective either. People will react first and then forget.”(P17)

Similar to the first group, the second group participants also can not give the names of the cosmetic brands experimenting on animals. However, almost all of the participants stated that this film will have an impact on their brand preferences and that they will buy cruelty free products.

"I will immediately research and find out which brands there are" (P13)

“I will be more sensitive when purchasing cosmetic products. I do not want to cause harm to any living thing” (P14)

Two participants from the second group stated that the film would not be effective on their cosmetic brand preferences.

“I don't think it will have a direct impact.” (P15)

“I think I will take a look at the packaging and buy the brand I want to buy again”(P16).

All of the participants in the third group stated that they are aware of the animal testing of cosmetic brands. The awareness level of the participants in this group is considerably higher than the other groups.

“I've been careful to buy vegan products since I was little. I threw away my Dove and Nivea branded products at home and turned to vegan products.”(P21)

At the same time, some of the participants in this group had knowledge about which brands were testing on animals. They mentioned the names of some brands such as Head and Shoulders, Maybelline, Max Factor, La Roche, Yves Roche, Johnson and Johnson, Dove, Nivea, L'oreal, MAC. All stated that there would be a change in their brand preferences after this film.

4.2.3. Dissemination of Awareness

Participants were asked whether they would take any action to raise awareness about animal testing. All of the participants in the first group said that they would mention the film to their friends. In addition, they would make an effort for their friends to change their brand preferences. Except one, all said that they would share the short film on their social media accounts.

The participants in the second group are not as willing to share this issue with their friends as the first group. Some find it unnecessary to share with their friends or share it on their social media accounts.

The participants in the third group had already discussed this issue with their friends. They said that most of their friends were aware of it because it was a viral video on social media. One of the participants stated that they downloaded an application with their friends and that they could choose cruelty-free brands thanks to this application. Another participant said that she made a presentation on this subject in a lecture at the university. At the same time, some of the participants stated that they shared this video on their social media accounts the first time they saw the video. However, there are also participants who think that social media shares are not effective in this regard, that people only share such videos to show off, and therefore do not share on their social media accounts.

4.3. Third Stage of the Research

4.3.1. Emotions

A new interview was arranged with the participants after 3 months. In this interview, questions were asked about their feelings about the short film they watched 3 months ago to find out if they have the same feelings.

Except for two participants, the others in the first group remembered the film. Although they could not remember details such as the name of the rabbit, they said that it is about a rabbit working as a test animal for the cosmetics industry. However, two participants completely forgot what the movie was about. Also, it is found that they have the same emotions towards the film and animal testing.

All of the second group and third participants remembered the movie and their feelings. Most of them described the emotions they felt like sadness and guilt and anger.

4.3.2. Change in the Awareness Level and Consumption Preferences

To understand the changes in awareness of cosmetic testing and brand preferences new questions were asked to the participants. Some of the participants in the first group stated that they did not conduct any research on brands that use animal testing. Participants who said this also expressed their embarrassment. Although some of the participants stated that they did research on cosmetic brands that made animal experiments, only one participant could give brand names. Others stated that they could not reach cruelty free brand names as a result of their research.

"I researched right after the film. I did not get good results. Then, I asked the employees of the store where I always go to buy cosmetics for years. They were very surprised and could not answer. When I told the name of the brands I used, we looked at the boxes and could not find any statement on them. They said that those products are very expensive, so they are not selling them." (P5)

"Of course, I researched, I was ashamed to learn that more than 600 brands worldwide do animal testing, I even put their lists in my bag." (P9)

However, most of the first group didn't change their brand preferences.

"Actually, I need to change the brands. My daughter and I made the same decision. But I recently shopped without my daughter; next time I will buy cruelty free brands." (P10)

"I looked at the past kinds of toothpaste and I couldn't see any indication in any of them. I didn't understand if they were all doing animal testing. So, I bought one." (P1)

Only two participants explained that they made changes in their brand preferences.

"I made a list of cruelty free brands. I check that list while shopping." (P9)

"My brand preferences have changed. I even spent a lot of time the other day to see if there was a rabbit logo on products." (P2)

Most of the participants in the second group did research on cruelty free brands. Many have created lists of brands using animal testing, so they were able to name the brands.

"I prefer brands that do not use animal testing such as Mustela, Sleepy, Molfix, Pastel, The b-Balm. I was using Nivea, Clear, Finish, Garnier before. But now I know they are testing on animals. So, I am not using them anymore." (P12)

"I eliminated all the brands I used such as Avon, Channel, Dior, Lancôme, Oriflame, Max Factor, Flormar, Dove and Colgate." (P17)

"I have a list. Let me share with you. Some cosmetic companies test on animals: Air Wick, Axe, Avon, Calgon, Clear, Comfort, Dove, Estee Lauder, Febreze, Finish, Garnier, Gillette, Head & Shoulders, Ivory, Johnson & Johnson, Kerastase, L'Oreal, L'Occitane, Lacoste, Lancome, Listerine, Lux, MAC, Max Factor, Maybelline, Mr. Clean, Neutrogena, Nivea, Olay, Old Spice, Organix, Pampers, Pantene, Procter & Gamble, Schwarzkopf, Signal, Vaseline, Vichy, Vicks, Victoria's Secret, Yves Rocher. Some cosmetic companies that do not test on animals: Africa Organics, Almawin, Aubrey, Avalon, Body Essence, Burt's Bees, Ciel D'Azur, Dalan, Dalin Organic, Dermalogica, Dermalush, Dr. Hauschka, Ecem Kozmetik, Ecover, Evora, Giovanni, Lush, Salon Natural, The Body Shop, Trukid." (P18).

Among the participants, some declare that they were doing research but cannot give a brand name.

"I researched brands that do and don't do animal testing. I can't name you right now, but I learned that many well-known brands, unfortunately, experiment on animals." (P14)

"I searched but now I can't remember" (P16).

Some participants openly stated that they did not conduct any research on brands.

"Unfortunately, I couldn't research, because I worked so hard, I didn't have any time" (P13)

"I didn't investigate. I said it that day too. If there is no experiment on animals, maybe this experiment will be done on low-income people. (P15).

Most of the participants in the second group changed their brand preferences.

"I stopped buying the brands I just mentioned." (P17)

"I started to prefer natural products. For example, rose oil, rose water, aloe vera." (P19)

In addition to two participants who said that they have not changed their brand because they haven't bought cosmetics yet, one stated that the film did not change any of her habits.

All of the third group both conducted in-depth research on this issue and changed their brand preferences. Most of them shared the names of brands that use and do not use animal testing.

"I was using The Body Shop and Note. They are cruelty free. L'oreal, for example, is insensitive about animal testing, so I decided not to use it". (P28)

"Johnson and Johnson and Mac were experimenting on animals. Yves Roche was also animal testing. I thought it was vegan, so I was using it. It is very surprising." (P30)

"L'oreal, Maybelline and Nivea use animals as test subjects." (P21)

Participants in this group either changed their brand preferences or stated that they were happy when they learned that the brands they used are cruelty free.

"The brands I use are cruelty-free. Mac and Gillette are using animal testing, so I stopped using them"(P29)

"I continue to use what I have, but I changed my shampoo because I learned that it is testing on animals." (P27)

"I changed my shampoo and deodorant, now I use cruelty free brands." (P25)

4.3.3. Actions to Disseminate Awareness

In the first interview, the participants were asked what they would do to raise awareness on this issue. In the second interview, questions were asked to learn about the actions they took in 3 months.

The participants in the first group stated that they would share the film with their friends in the first interview. However, it is revealed that they shared the film with very few people within 3 months. Most of them stated that they could not meet face to face with their friends because of the pandemic. So they did not have the opportunity to talk about this issue. Some said that they forgot to share. Only two of them shared this film with their friends but they didn't know if they changed their brand preferences. The answers show that the participants developed a superficial dialogue with their relatives on the subject, and then the subject was not brought up again. Only one participant stated that she shared the film with all her friends and family and, their habits had changed.

"After surveying with you, I shared it with my family, friends, and relatives. My cousin bought rabbits. We all changed our brand preferences." (P4)

It is found that although most of them said they would share the film on their social media accounts, they did not.

Most of the second group stated that they discussed the short film with their friends. Most of the participants said that their friends watched the film. However, most participants do not know whether there is a change in their friends' brand preferences because they didn't talk about it again. However, they think that their friends will question their preferences.

"Many people have watched Ralph's movie. We talked about the fact that we didn't know that there was such a species as a test animal." (P11),

"My friends have already watched it and I think they will shop carefully like every conscious person." (P12)

"I told my close friends about this short film. They felt pretty much the same as me, but I have no idea if they changed their brand preferences." (P14)

"Some of my friends were very impressed, they even said that they would change it and throw away their products at home. I don't think they did" (P15),

When the participants in the second group were asked whether they shared the short film on their social media accounts, it was striking that the participants who declared that they would share it in the first interview stated that they did not share it.

The participants in the third group talked to their friends about the film. Participants in this group stated that they discussed the issue with large groups of friends and took decisions together.

"We talked when we met with the girls. We decided to be as careful as we could." (P29)

"Yes, we talked a lot as a group." (P28)

"All my friends downloaded the barcode app. They're probably using it." (P30)

"Watching the film and doing research on it was enough for them to change their preferences." (P23)

"My friends and I are very sensitive about this issue, when I said I changed my deodorant, they changed it too, we try to be as careful as possible." (P23)

"I completed my final homework at my school by drawing attention to Ralph's story, and my classmates watched the video, so my group of friends changed their brand preferences." (P26)

Unlike the other groups, most of the third group participants shared the short film on their social media accounts. Some even stated that they shared more than one.

5. Conclusion

In this study, it is aimed to examine the effect of storytelling in activist public relations on the emotions, awareness level, and behavior change of different age groups. In this context, the short film "Save Ralph" created by HSI which aims to raise awareness about "animal testing" was chosen as an example.

The qualitative research design was used in the research and in-depth interviews were used to collect data. Amasya University Social Sciences Ethics Committee approval was received for this research with the letter numbered 63480 dated 04.04.2022. Informed consent forms were signed by the participants. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 women from different age groups. In the first stage of the study, before the short film was shown, the questions about their cosmetic brand preferences were asked. It has been observed that different reasons determine the cosmetic product preferences of women in different age groups. Women between the ages of 43 and 62 stated that the most important factor determining their cosmetic product preferences is brand awareness. For women between the ages of 23 and 42, the brand must be known as well as being anti-allergic and having a price-performance balance. The most important factor when choosing cosmetic products for women between the ages of 18-23 is the opinions of specialists such as doctors, dermatologists, and pharmacists. However, none of the women in all three groups mentioned the "cruelty free" issue.

In the second stage of the research, questions were asked after the women watched the short film. Women between the ages of 43 and 62 gave more emotional responses to the film, while women between the ages of 23 and 42 gave more rational responses. Most of the women between the ages of 18-24 stated that they had watched the film before. In all three groups, women expressed their feelings with the words "sadness", "guilt" and "desperation".

While very few of the women aged 43-62 stated that they knew about "animal testing" in the cosmetics sector, all of the women aged 23-42 said that they knew it before, but they did not know which brands use animal testing. Unlike these groups, all of the women aged 18-23 said that they know that "animal testing" is used in the cosmetics industry, and some participants even gave the names of some brands. Most of the participants stated that they would change their cosmetic brand preferences after watching the film. In addition, most of the women stated that they would mention the film to their friends and share it on their social media accounts. However, it was observed that women between the ages of 23-42 were less willing to talk about the short film than the women in the other two groups. The most important reason for this is that they think that the movie will not have enough effect on changing people's behavior. Therefore, while older women approached the film more emotionally, middle-aged women made more rational decisions, while younger women both acted emotionally and took action immediately.

In the last stage of the study, new interviews were conducted 3 months after the women watched the movie. Except for two women aged between 43 and 62, all women remembered the film and described their feelings with the same words. This shows that the effect of the story continues. However, a difference was observed between different groups in the level of awareness. Although women between the ages of 43 and 62 gave very emotional reactions while watching the film, most of them did not research which brands were using "animal testing". Those who stated that they did research could not say their brand names. At the same time, most of them did not change their brand preferences. Most women aged 23-42 have researched which brands use "animal testing". Some could say brand names, while others could not. It is seen that 3 out of 10 women in this group have changed their brand preferences. All of the women in the 18-23 age range have done the research and stopped using brands that do "animal testing". Some even said that they downloaded an app on their phones that detects brands that do animal testing.

In the second stage of the research, most of the women stated that they would share this information with their friends and share the short film from their social media accounts. However, other groups, except for women in the 18-23 age group, did not take many actions to disseminate information.

In summary, storytelling has different effects on different age groups in activist public relations studies. While significant changes occurred in both the awareness levels and brand choices of women between the ages of 10-23, the same change was not experienced in other groups. It is planned to repeat this study after 1 year and to re-measure the change in awareness level and brand preferences in the long term.

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Yazarların alıřmadaki katkı oranları Beris Artan ÖZORAN %50/ Aytuę Mermer ÜZÜMLÜ %50 řeklinde dir.
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ıkar atıřması Beyanı / Conflict of Interest

alıřmada herhangi bir kurum veya kiři ile ıkar atıřması bulunmamaktadır.
There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person in the study.

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Bu alıřmada Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Arařtırma ve Yayın Etięi Yönergesi kapsamında belirtilen kurallara uyulmuřtur.
In this study, the rules specified within the scope of the Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive were followed.

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