

How anti-GMO imagery derails rational discussion of biotechnology

This paper explores the international controversy over genetically modified organisms (GMOs). We argue that the uncommonly high levels of opposition to genetically modified food in both the United States and in Europe can be attributed to the overwhelming success of the online visual campaign against GMOs.

By exploiting the unique characteristics of the internet to create memetic images that can travel freely across linguistic and cultural borders, opponents of the technology have been able to refute rationalist claims about the safety of GMOs. In response to the single coherent narrative of scientific certainty, a diffuse set of challenges emerges. The risk of genetic engineering holds within it the potential for catastrophe, leaving the industries that produce and manufacture the technology in a perpetual state of crisis.

Instead of a unified narrative of scientific certainty, each challenge presents a multiplicity of diffuse narratives that unsettle the public's understanding of the risk presented by GMOs. We aim to augment traditional understandings of the way that publics may interact with the "public screen" by explicating one way in which dominance of the visual in mediated political discourse may privilege non-rational political decision making.

Anti-GMO protests were among the most successful protest movements in modern history, strategically fusing notions of the global and the local, synthesizing universally recognizable symbols with local appeals. This is one of the markers of the anti-GMO movement, at once responsible for the success of the movement and for the failure of "sound science" to persuade the public of the safety of GMOs.

The fact that images operate according to logics that circumvent rational argumentation in their appeals to public opinion means that the proliferation of image-based argumentation through global digital technologies may have profound implications for global, political decision making.

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis. Read full open access article: [Growing monstrous organisms: the construction of anti-GMO visual rhetoric through digital media](#)