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Invisibilization of Animal Journalism: Ideological Gatekeeping, Soft Censorship, and Marginalization of Antispeciesist Journalists in Spanish Written Media¹

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the dual marginalization present in the Spanish media landscape: the invisibility of nonhuman animals as agents and the systemic obstacles faced by journalists attempting to represent their interests. Through in-depth, dialogic interviews with Spanish journalists engaged in antispeciesist reporting, this study investigates the persistent marginalization of antispeciesist journalism, as well as the challenges of advocating for nonhuman animal rights within written media newsrooms. The findings reveal how journalistic conventions, ideological biases and structural constraints contribute to the continued framing of nonhuman animals as passive commodities or spectacles, while their agency, rights and individuality are overlooked. Simultaneously, journalists covering animal rights issues encounter editorial resistance, with their work frequently dismissed as trivial or frivolous. These barriers manifest through ideological gatekeeping, soft censorship and the demand for “balance” that

¹I would like to warmly thank all of the interviewees, whose dedication and courage in combining activism with professional journalism not only made this research possible but also reflects their daily work to make the world a better place for all beings. They are my role models and an example to follow. I am also deeply grateful to the reviewers, whose generous feedback significantly improved this article, and from whom I also learned a great deal. Finally, I thank my friends Laura, Olatz and Rönn for reading an early draft of the manuscript and providing invaluable feedback.

privileges speciesist perspectives. By analyzing this dual invisibility, both of the nonhumans and of the journalists advocating for them, this article studies the power dynamics shaping media agendas and the structural undervaluation of antispeciesist reporting. Situated within the framework of critical animal media studies and drawing on gatekeeping theory, it contextualizes the marginalization of antispeciesist perspectives within broader patterns of media exclusion. The findings highlight the tensions between journalistic integrity and the constraints of human-centric media priorities, underscoring the need for structural changes to ensure that nonhuman animal rights receive serious and sustained attention in the Spanish press.

Keywords: Journalism studies, antispeciesism, nonhuman animals, critical animal studies, gatekeepers, critical media studies

1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Media play a central role in shaping public discourse on justice and equality (Fuchs 2011). However, one group remains largely invisible in this discourse: nonhuman animals. Despite their widespread exploitation, animals-other-than-human are seldom represented in mainstream journalism (Freeman & Jarvis 2013; Khazaal & Almiron 2014; Taylor 2015; Kinefuchi 2024). Even when animals do appear in the media, they are often stripped of their subjectivity and individuality, and their suffering and rights are overshadowed by human-centric narratives (Carreras and Fernández 2024). This omission is not incidental but reflects deeper harmful ideological barriers, expressed through gatekeeping mechanisms (Shoemaker & Vos 2009) and editorial constraints within the journalistic profession.

In this context, “harmful ideologies” are understood as “a way of seeing the world that allows a dominant group to subjugate a vulnerable group and to justify its oppression” (Khazaal 2021: 6). This study specifically examines speciesism and anthropocentrism as central ideologies within these harmful frameworks. Speciesism, as defined by Dunayer (2001), refers to “the failure, in attitude or practice, to accord any nonhuman being equal consideration and respect” (5). Horta (2008) describes anthropocentrism as a moral framework centered on human interests, and in his 2009 work, he refers to “anthropocentric speciesism” as “the speciesist discrimination against those who do not belong to the human species” (36), arguing that anthropocentrism perpetuates human exceptionalism, reinforcing a fictitious binary divide between humans and nonhuman animals and establishing a moral hierarchy that privileges humans over other species.

This study examines the journalistic and editorial barriers faced by antispeciesist journalists in Spanish written media. It examines factors such as news selection biases, editorial gatekeeping, professional norms and agenda-

setting constraints. Additionally, it investigates how journalists advocating for nonhuman animals perceive the marginalization of their work, and how gatekeepers respond to their pitches.

Media do not merely reflect societal priorities—they actively construct them. The role of media in shaping perceptions of social justice issues is well established. The agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw 1972) posits that while media do not dictate what people think, they do influence what people think about. By selecting which issues receive coverage, media outlets shape public discourse and policy priorities. Journalism mediates our access to reality, and gatekeeping theory (White 1950; Shoemaker & Vos 2009) further shows how editorial decisions determine what information reaches the public. Journalistic norms, editorial policies, economic pressures and ideological biases all influence what content is ultimately published. Within this framework, antispeciesist journalism faces systemic obstacles, and stories that challenge dominant anthropocentric perspectives are frequently dismissed as irrelevant or unimportant.

Despite editors' and journalists' intent to maintain objectivity, and, in some cases, neutrality, personal ideologies, preexisting editorial biases, ownership structures and financial pressures significantly influence content selection. These biases often align with hegemonic ideologies, shaping journalistic norms, editorial policies and newsroom cultures. Just as media have historically contributed to the invisibilization of marginalized human groups (Hill Collins 2000), they also sustain the exclusion of nonhuman animals. A number of studies have examined how media discourses contribute to the stigmatization of certain species (e.g. Freeman 2009; Barca 2022; Fernández et al. 2022). However, less attention has been given to how these exclusions shape journalistic practices themselves, in terms of professional routines and experiences of journalists advocating for nonhuman animals.

Over time, the issues that receive prominence in news media tend to become prominent in public opinion, meaning that the priorities of the news media often shape the priorities of the public and policymakers. This also means that when certain topics are consistently overlooked, they are effectively erased from public consciousness, perpetuating and reinforcing the existing power structures. In the case of nonhuman animals, their systematic exclusion from media narratives as subjects contributes to their continued marginalization and exploitation. This exclusion not only affects how nonhuman animals are represented but also impacts journalists who seek to cover these issues, often leading to professional marginalization. Antispeciesist journalists are frequently sidelined, their stories dismissed as niche or lacking broad public interest.

This article explores these processes of invisibilization by examining the barriers faced by antispeciesist journalists whose work is systematically

devalued. Through dialogic interviews, the author aims to uncover the professional and cultural obstacles that journalists advocating for nonhuman animals encounter within the media landscape.

This research contributes to the field of critical animal studies, which examines human-animal relations from an interdisciplinary, non-speciesist and critical perspective on interconnected systems of oppression (Best et al. 2007), and, more specifically, to the subfield of critical animal and media studies (Almiron et al. 2016). As part of a commitment to ethical considerations surrounding nonhuman animals, this work also considers the ethical implications of language, adopting terms such as *nonhuman animals*, *nonhumans*, or *animals-other-than-human* to highlight the fact that humans are also animals. This terminology challenges the socially constructed dichotomy that divides humans and animals into two supposedly homogeneous groups, emphasizing interconnectedness and shared existence within the broader animal community (Dunayer 2001).

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How do Spanish antispeciesist journalists perceive the (in)visibilization of antispeciesist themes and perspectives in Spanish written journalism?

RQ2. What barriers do Spanish gatekeepers in written journalism impose on animal rights coverage, according to journalists' experiences?

The present article begins by situating the study within existing research on media and speciesism (Section 2). The next section outlines the theoretical framework, drawing on gatekeeping and framing theories, political economy and critical animal studies (Section 3). The article then presents the qualitative methodology (Section 4). After that, the results and analysis first address journalists' perceptions of the (in)visibilization of antispeciesist perspectives (RQ1), and second, the barriers imposed by media gatekeepers (RQ2) (Section 5). The article concludes by discussing the implications of these findings and outlining directions for future research (Section 6).

2. MEDIA, SPECIESISM, AND SILENCE: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Critical animal studies scholars have examined different aspects of media and communication, such as how the media portrays nonhuman animals (Fernández et al. 2022; Freeman 2009), or veganism (Cole & Morgan 2011). Several studies have highlighted how media representations often fail to account for the perspectives and suffering of nonhuman animals (Freeman & Jarvis 2013; Freeman et al. 2011). These portrayals tend to overlook the ethical implications of animal exploitation and instead present nonhuman animals through a carnist lens, a perspective shaped by the ideology that normalizes the consumption and

use of animals (Joy 2013). Almiron and Zoppedu (2015) identified tactics such as suppression, ambiguity and sarcasm in the press, which serve to reinforce carnist ideologies, while Khazaal and Almiron (2016) found that the press often aligns with the interests of meat and livestock industries.

Further studies by Moreno and Almiron (2021) suggest that liberal-conservative media outlets are more likely to adopt carnist perspectives, framing animal exploitation in ways that promote technological solutions rather than addressing ethical concerns. The same authors highlight that carnist ideology is prevalent specifically in the Spanish press coverage, while ethical perspectives on nonhuman animals appear less frequently and are largely confined to opinion sections and blogs (360).

While scholars have examined different aspects of media and communication related to nonhuman animals (Carreras & Fernández 2024), less attention has been given to the journalistic processes that contribute to the marginalization of both nonhuman animals and the journalists who challenge anthropocentric narratives. Despite the advances in understanding media portrayals and ideological framing, there remains a significant gap in analyzing how media routines and practices themselves perpetuate invisibility and exclusion. This research addresses that gap by exploring how antispeciesist journalists in Spain perceive the barriers to incorporating nonhuman animals into mainstream media discourse.

3. GATEKEEPERS, FRAMES, AND SPECIESISM: A THEORETICAL TOOLBOX FOR THE SILENCING OF NONHUMANS

This study draws on the key theories described below to explain how media invisibilizes nonhuman animals and marginalizes their narratives through journalistic routines, and the factors that influence these processes.

Gatekeeping theory (White 1950; Shoemaker & Vos 2009) provides a foundational understanding of how news is selected and shaped by media professionals. Gatekeepers—editors, reporters and media executives—determine which stories are told, how they are framed and which are excluded (Shoemaker & Vos 2009). This selective process is central to agenda-setting, wherein the media does not dictate what people think, but rather influences what they think about (McCombs & Shaw 1972; McCombs & Valenzuela 2020). In the context of animal advocacy, gatekeeping can suppress or amplify narratives related to nonhuman animals, contributing to their marginalization in the media.

Framing theory (Entman 1993) explains how media outlets highlight certain aspects of a story to promote specific interpretations. In coverage of nonhuman animals, framing influences how issues such as animal rights are presented. Media outlets can either present animal exploitation as a normal, natural practice

(episodic framing) or challenge these norms by offering broader contextual discussions about systemic animal suffering (thematic framing). Framing theory can reveal how issues are interpreted and presented, influencing public perception and shaping narratives around nonhuman animals.

Mass media in democratic societies tends to serve the interests of powerful elites, such as corporations and governments, rather than the public. Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued that news content is shaped by a small number of powerful institutions that control the flow of information through mechanisms such as ownership, advertising and political and economic interests. This dynamic, they proposed, constitutes a “propaganda model” that functions to “manufacture consent” among the public, aligning media output with dominant power structures instead of promoting democratic debate, a view later expanded within critical media studies, for example by Fuchs (2011).

Journalistic norms and institutional constraints shape media coverage, often marginalizing certain perspectives. Bennett (1996) identifies three normative orders—political, economic and journalistic—that influence reporting.

These dynamics affect contentious issues. Boykoff and Boykoff (2007) argue that norms like balance and authority-order distort climate change coverage, with U.S. media misrepresenting scientific consensus through dramatization and false balance (Iyengar 1991).

First-order norms—personalization, dramatization and novelty—favor dominant narratives, sidelining complex perspectives deemed lacking a “news peg” (Stocking & Leonard 1990). Second-order norms, like balance, promote false equivalence, reinforcing episodic framing that limits public understanding (Entman 1989; Iyengar 1991).

Tuchman’s (1978) theory of journalistic routines shows how reliance on “official” sources reinforces dominant narratives. Hanitzsch (2007) expands on this, identifying factors like interventionism, market orientation and objectivity, with market-driven constraints often sidelining radical perspectives.

Speciesism, as defined by Dunayer (2001), is the failure to give nonhuman beings equal consideration and respect (5), a concept that is key to understanding media portrayals of animal oppression. While speciesism explains animal oppression broadly, anthropocentrism can be seen as an underlying ideology that shapes how nonhuman animals are marginalized in the media. These “harmful ideologies” justify animal oppression and create “zones of exclusion” that render nonhuman animals invisible (Khazaal 2021: 6). Visibility becomes key to challenging anthropocentrism, yet not all visibility strategies disrupt these ideologies, highlighting the need for critical scrutiny (Carreras & Fernández 2024).

Media representations play a key role in normalizing violence and reinforcing power structures generally speaking (Herman & Chomsky 1988). Critical animal communication scholars specifically emphasize that media representations of nonhuman animals are deeply problematic, playing a central role in normalizing violence and shaping how audiences perceive suffering (Carter & Weaver 2003; Chouliaraki 2006). Speciesist ideologies are perpetuated through news and advertising, constructing animals as “the other” and obscuring their sentience (Nibert 2002, 2016; Dunayer 2001). Nonhuman animals are frequently silenced, receiving minimal or shallow media coverage (e.g., Fernández et al. 2022; Freeman 2009; Kinefuchi 2024). Journalistic discourse often legitimizes violence against animals by framing narratives from industry perspectives, objectifying animals, masking cruelty with euphemism and presenting their suffering as inevitable or culturally normalized (Barca 2022; Khazaal & Almiron 2014; Taylor 2015). This aligns with Joy’s (2013) concept of carnism, which frames meat-eating as normal, natural and necessary, discouraging critique and reinforcing systemic exploitation.

4. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative methodology, rooted in an inductive approach (Rennstam & Wästerfors 2018) and a social constructivist epistemology (Prasad 2018). A dialogical interview approach is used, where knowledge is co-constructed through an open exchange of perspectives (Frank 2005). This contrasts with traditional structured interviews, recognizing meaning as emerging through interaction, with the researcher as an active participant in the dialogue, reflecting Freire’s (1970/2018) view that knowledge emerges through dialogue.

A purposive sample of nine antispeciesist journalists in Spain was selected through professional networks, with snowball sampling identifying additional participants (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981). Interviewing journalists to gain insights into gatekeeping is essential because they are directly involved in both the pitching and editing processes. Additionally, they have the opportunity to observe and compare how and when the final piece is published and shared. Their perspectives offer relevant insights into how editorial decisions are made and how news is shaped before it reaches the public. Saturation was reached when no new themes emerged (Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006). Interviews were conducted via Zoom, focusing solely on verbal communication.

This research involved human participants but did not require formal approval from an ethics committee, as no sensitive personal data were collected and no institutional ethics review process was mandated for this type of qualitative research in the researcher’s context. Anonymity was promised and rigorously maintained, and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation. No demographic descriptions or detailed profiles are presented in this article in

order to protect participants' professional identities and to encourage candid reflection on potentially sensitive issues, such as editorial conflicts and institutional constraints. This decision is particularly important given the very small number of openly antispeciesist journalists in Spain, which could make identification particularly easy. The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including those outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report. The researcher ensured voluntary participation, confidentiality and the respectful treatment of participants and their views.

The researcher, drawing on professional experience, engages in reflective dialogue rather than adopting a neutral stance, enriching the interview process through lived experience (Haraway 1988). As a journalist and communication scholar familiar with media practices and activist contexts, the researcher's standpoint informs the analysis and interaction with participants. This approach fosters collaborative knowledge production, enabling deeper engagement with the subject matter (Brinkmann 2017). Recognizing expertise as distributed among participants, this methodology is particularly useful in activist or professional communities (Brinkmann & Kvale 2015).

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2019), identifying themes that naturally emerged across participants' responses. This inductive approach grounded interpretations in participants' experiences, providing in-depth insights into antispeciesist journalism (Braun & Clarke 2006).

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1. RQ1. *How Do Spanish Antispeciesist Journalists Perceive the (In)visibilization of Antispeciesist Themes and Perspectives in Spanish Written Journalism?*

Table 1. Results RQ1: How do Spanish antispeciesist journalists perceive the (in)visibilization of antispeciesist themes and perspectives in Spanish written journalism?

Categories of perceptions	Explanation	Example
Marginalization of Antispeciesist Views through a Predominance of Anthropocentric Perspectives	Antispeciesist perspectives in Spanish journalism are marginalized by an anthropocentric framing that focuses on human interests like pets, conservation, and public health, relegating antispeciesist discourse to niche outlets and opinion sections.	"It is practically impossible to find a news article in the Spanish press about animals that is not written from an anthropocentric perspective. (...) Coverage falls into specific categories: pet stories, conservation, and "livestock farming" from a speciesist perspective."
Invisibility Compared to Other Social Movements	Antispeciesist issues in Spanish media are marginalized, much like feminism in the past. While movements like feminism and housing rights have gained media legitimacy, animal rights remain sidelined, often needing sensational angles to gain coverage, highlighting a double standard in newsroom activism.	"Twenty years ago, I faced the same problems with feminism that I now face with antispeciesism. When I started working, treating gender-based violence as a structural issue rather than as an isolated incident was very difficult—especially when covering protests against sexist violence."

Categories of perceptions	Explanation	Example
Resistance to Radical (Rooted) Perspectives	Media outlets resist radical antispeciesist perspectives, preferring welfare-focused content over stories that challenge the root causes of speciesism. Journalists note that pieces advocating systemic change are often seen as too controversial or "ethical" to be published.	"When you write something that addresses the root of the problem, they won't publish it. No. It needs to be much more focused on welfare."
Especially Sensitive Topics	Certain animal-related issues, like meat consumption and animal experimentation, face media resistance and need sensational framing to be covered. These topics often provoke backlash, especially from those involved in other social causes, as they challenge deeply held beliefs and force a reconsideration of privileges.	"Another very thorny issue is animal experimentation. It generates more divergence. It's much easier to position yourself against an oppression when you're not part of the oppressive side."
Devaluation of Antispeciesist Journalism	Antispeciesist journalism is often trivialized and stigmatized, dismissed as superficial or irrational. This marginalization is compared to less prestigious kinds of journalism like local journalism.	"Serious journalists would never talk about animals—let alone speciesism—because their status as serious journalists would be questioned; they would be seen as entering the realm of the 'crazy.' [in the original, 'las locas,' which is in the feminine form in Spanish]"
Gendered Online Harassment	In addition to general trolling, women journalists experience sexism, with online comments targeting their gender and personal lives.	Women journalists have also encountered comments like, "The crazy cat ladies," "You're going to end up alone, that's why you care about animals," and "Only your dog puts up with you."
Activist Journalism and Precarity	Antispeciesist journalists face financial instability, as their work is undervalued and driven by activism. The commercialization of journalism, prioritizing profit and viral content, further marginalizes these perspectives.	"Precarity has a huge impact. It's massive. (...) Who can afford the luxury of, in their free time, sitting down to write and research? You need a level of activism and a real passion for writing. (...) I can't anymore."

5.1.1. Marginalization of Antispeciesist Views through a Predominance of Anthropocentric Perspectives

One of the recurring themes among interviewed journalists was the predominance of anthropocentric perspectives in Spanish written journalism, with most articles concerning animals framed through a human-centered lens. One of the interviewees explains:

"It is practically impossible to find a news article in the Spanish press about animals that is not written from an anthropocentric perspective. You do see animals in the news, but it's always stories like 'They adopted a dog's sister, and it went viral'. Pure pet-centered journalism. There is coverage of animals in the media, but it falls into very specific categories: pet stories, conservation-related news, and, of course, articles about "livestock farming" from a clearly speciesist perspective. Public health topics—such as avian flu—also feature animals, but always in the context of human concerns and exploitation" (Interviewee 1).

All interviewed journalists agreed that, because of this predominant anthropocentric view, antispeciesist coverage is virtually absent from mainstream media.

“When it comes to antispeciesist perspectives, there are almost no outlets that cover them. *El Diario* and *El Salto* are exceptions, which is quite remarkable, and sometimes *Público* publishes something. *La Marea*, also. I have seen a few pieces in *El País*, but only in the opinion section. You won’t find antispeciesist articles in the politics or economy sections. If you’re lucky, there might be something in the society section, but only if the journalist happens to be sensitive to the topic. These instances are so rare that they remain anecdotal” (Interviewee 3).

This testimony highlights how animal-related news is framed predominantly through anthropocentric narratives, aligning with socio-cultural paradigms (Freeman 2009), and limiting the visibility of nonhuman animals as political or economic subjects. Antispeciesist perspectives remain largely confined to alternative or explicitly activist outlets such as *El Salto* or *La Marea*, and blogs of online newspapers like *El Diario*, while in major legacy media they appear only sporadically, often as isolated opinion pieces rather than as part of the broader journalistic discourse. This structural marginalization aligns with established news values that prioritize human relevance, conflict and proximity (Nibert 2002), and reinforces the invisibilization of nonhuman animals and restricts public exposure to alternative perspectives on their rights and agency.

5.1.2. Invisibility Compared to Other Social Movements

The interviewed journalists also agreed that the marginalization of antispeciesist issues in Spanish media mirrors the past treatment of other social justice movements, such as feminism. One journalist noted that the challenges in covering antispeciesist topics today resemble those faced by reporters covering gender-based violence two decades ago:

“Twenty years ago, I faced the same problems with feminism that I now face with antispeciesism. When I started working, treating gender-based violence as a structural issue rather than as an isolated incident was very difficult—especially when covering protests against sexist violence. However, that’s also why I’m optimistic about antispeciesism; I believe we will have to justify it less and less over time” (Interviewee 3).

Another journalist had a more pessimistic perspective:

“Gender perspective journalism is starting to be understood, but animal perspective journalism is light-years away. Feminism has managed to reach a point where, when a headline says ‘a woman dies,’ there are hundreds of reactions on Twitter saying ‘she didn’t die, she’s murdered!’ People react. But

when we see news headlines that don't take into account the millions of animals affected by the story, there's no reaction" (Interviewee 1).

One journalist also compared antispeciesism with other social movements, pointing out that while journalism is no longer framed as entirely objective, certain subjective perspectives are more accepted than others, and noting a double standard in how activism is perceived in newsrooms:

"No one defends the idea that journalism is purely objective anymore. However, some subjectivities are accepted—or even encouraged—depending on the editorial line. None of my colleagues have an issue with being considered activists against evictions, feminist activists or anti-racist activists. But if you consider yourself an antispeciesist activist, that's a problem" (Interviewee 9).

This observation reflects Stocking and Leonard's (1990) argument that media systems often marginalize perspectives that challenge dominant ideologies, labeling them as too complex or lacking a clear news peg. Comparing antispeciesism with the housing rights movement, the journalists noted that stories about animals often need a sensationalist angle to be published:

"For an antispeciesist piece to be published, it has to be something very new or have a particularly surprising news peg—almost like a spectacle. If you report on the 14th vigil at a slaughterhouse or the 14th case of animal abandonment at a farm, they won't publish it because 'it's not news anymore'. But there are media outlets that have the policy to consistently cover every single eviction, which I completely agree with. So why don't they do the same for these issues?" (Interviewee 3).

These testimonies illustrate how antispeciesist journalism faces not only systemic invisibilization but also a higher threshold for newsworthiness compared to other social justice topics. While issues such as feminism, anti-racism and housing rights have gained broader media legitimacy over time, animal rights coverage remains sidelined, requiring stronger news pegs to break through editorial barriers.

5.1.3. Resistance to Radical (Rooted) Perspectives

One of the interviewees highlighted the challenge of gaining media attention when advocating for a radical, root-level antispeciesist perspective, explaining that the press often rejects stories that tackle the core of the issue when it is a speciesist issue, requiring a shift toward more welfare-based approaches to be considered for publication:

"If you write from an antispeciesist, radical, as in rooted, perspective, when you write something that addresses the root of the problem, they won't publish it. No. It needs to be much more focused on welfare. [...] I've been told things

like, ‘You’ve been publishing a lot about veganism lately; mix it up, add something about dogs, cats, museums, culture, books’” (Interviewee 1).

This journalist described how content that pushes for fundamental, systemic change—such as antispeciesist writing—faces significant resistance in the media. It needs to be softened or framed in a more mainstream, welfare-oriented way to be accepted for publication, probably because of news production constraints (Tuchman 1978; Hanitzsch 2007) aligned with the hegemonic “harmful ideologies” (Khazaal 2021; Khazaal and Almiron 2016).

5.1.4. Especially Sensitive Topics

Journalists highlighted challenges with addressing topics like animal consumption and farming, often seen as too provocative or difficult for mainstream media. One reporter mentioned that promoting campaigns against animal consumption requires framing them in sensationalist or health-related ways: “It’s hard to promote a campaign against animal consumption. You need a strong angle, like linking it to cancer risks” (Interviewee 5).

Another journalist noted that discussing issues like meat consumption is considered provocative by gatekeepers, and while aligning antispeciesist topics with feminism or environmental concerns might help, it can also create friction:

“Yes, some issues are seen as more provocative. While linking them to feminism or the environment can help introduce the topic, there might be friction. For example, if Pikara [a feminist outlet] just published an article on female farmers, and I suggest a topic on why meat consumption is problematic, there will be a conflict of views. I know it will upset part of the audience, and that’s where the problems come” (Interviewee 3).

A third journalist explained how criticizing extensive farming can upset the environmental movement, a key audience for some left-wing media: “We were seen as a novelty, but now we’re a nuisance. When we criticize extensive farming, the ecology community gets upset. It’s a constant battle” (Interviewee 4). The interviews also offered one further perspective:

“There are particularly sensitive topics—issues that resonate more with people already engaged in other social causes. These topics push them to reflect on their relationship with animals and recognize their own privileges. For instance, environmentalists are more likely to respond negatively to discussions about vegan food” (Interviewee 5).

This section illustrates how certain issues that challenge established ideologies are often perceived as highly controversial, and this resistance is even more pronounced among individuals who are already committed to other social causes, as it requires them to reflect on their own privileges and reconsider their deeply held carnist beliefs (Joy 2013).

5.1.5. *Devaluation of Antispeciesist Journalism*

Antispeciesist journalism is often trivialized, with terms like “pet journalism” used to dismiss it as superficial. This reflects mainstream media’s tendency to reduce animal rights to a sentimental issue, unworthy of serious coverage. One journalist shared that they had been told “Why care about animals when there are other issues?” highlighting how animal rights are sidelined in favor of human issues, reinforcing anthropocentrism (Horta 2008).

Another journalist noted that discussing speciesism can undermine a journalist’s credibility, suggesting that such topics are seen as irrational: “Serious journalists would never talk about animals—let alone speciesism—because their status as serious journalists would be questioned; they would be seen as entering the realm of the ‘crazy’” [in the original, ‘las locas’, in the feminine form in Spanish].

This quote demonstrates the stigma attached to discussing animal rights in professional journalism. The suggestion that discussing antispeciesism could lower one’s credibility highlights how deeply ingrained speciesism is within the profession. The idea that it might make a journalist appear “crazy” shows how challenging it can be to take a stance on animal rights without facing professional and social repercussions. Also, using the feminine form “las locas” in Spanish implies a gendered denotation of irrationality.

One reporter compared this marginalization to how local reporters or nutritionists are viewed, highlighting a hierarchy in journalism (Tuchman 1978) that privileges certain topics, and pointing to the stigma from openly identifying with progressive causes like veganism, even when the majority of the public supports animal welfare. “It’s similar to local journalists and their status—they aren’t viewed as well as correspondents. It’s like with nutritionists; a nutritionist can’t come out of the closet and say they’re vegan” (Interviewee 1).

5.1.6. *Gendered Online Harassment*

One shared experience among all the women journalists interviewed is online harassment and sexism when writing about antispeciesism. These journalists emphasize that, in addition to facing general trolling and harassment for being antispeciesist, the abuse they receive often takes on a distinctly sexist tone. One journalist explains: “Being a woman and writing about antispeciesism makes it worse. If people already take your work less seriously because you’re a woman, then if you write about these topics, they say things like, ‘Go home, you probably have a bunch of cats at home’”.

Other women journalists have also encountered comments like, “The crazy cat ladies”, “You’re going to end up alone, that’s why you care about animals”, and “Only your dog puts up with you”. These remarks highlight how online

harassment is not just targeted at their professional work but is also deeply gendered (Dunayer 2001), further marginalizing their contributions to antispeciesist journalism.

5.1.7. Activist Journalism and Precarity

Another common experience among the interviewees is their identification as activists. They recognize that if they depended solely on this work for their livelihood, they wouldn't be able to sustain themselves: "I consider myself an activist for animal rights within the realm of journalism. My goal is to spread the message of antispeciesism, even if it means financial instability" (Interviewee 3).

The conflict between journalistic integrity (and activism) and financial survival is a constant reality for those in antispeciesist journalism. Freelance journalists, in particular, face additional burdens: "If you're freelance, you have more limitations. They require more sources on antispeciesist topics, which takes more time. Often, it's activism, not paid work" (Interviewee 3).

This highlights an additional burden placed on freelance antispeciesist journalists: the requirement for more thorough research and more sources when writing about animal rights issues. This often results in more time-consuming work without adequate financial compensation, reflecting how the pursuit of ethical, animal-centered journalism demands greater effort than typical reporting. Journalism's financial precarity extends, however, beyond this niche: "Journalism today is a very precarious practice. Clicks and ad revenue dictate journalism today" (Interviewee 4).

Another journalist describes the emotional and financial toll:

"Precarity has a huge impact. It's massive. You need to have another job [...]. Who can afford the luxury of, in their free time, sitting down to write and research? You need a level of activism and a real passion for writing. Sometimes I get messages proposing topics, and I think, I just can't anymore. I can't anymore. Precarity is the reason why journalism today is crap. Both the antispeciesist and the other" (Interviewee 1).

Financial instability forces journalists to treat their work as activism rather than a livelihood. The sheer amount of unpaid or underpaid labor involved in antispeciesist journalism, compounded by the pressure to balance multiple jobs, makes it an unsustainable endeavor for many.

5.2. RQ2. What Barriers Do Spanish Gatekeepers in Written Journalism Set, According to Journalists' Perspectives?

Table 2. Results RQ2: What barriers do Spanish gatekeepers in written journalism set, according to journalists' perspectives?

Categories of perceptions	Explanation	Example
Ideological Gatekeeping	Editorial decisions are shaped by personal beliefs and consumption habits, marginalizing content that challenges the hegemonic ideology.	"[W]hen you criticize people eating meat, eating ham, or the use of animals in medical research, it's like, 'What are you talking about?' Then, you need to explain it a lot more"
Emotionality vs. Objectivity: Double Standards	Journalism often accepts emotional appeals for human rights but dismisses similar ones for animal rights as unprofessional, using objectivity to marginalize antispeciesist perspectives and reinforce speciesist attitudes.	"Some subjectivities, influenced by the editorial line, are accepted. For example, no one minds being considered an anti-eviction, feminist, or anti-racist activist, but there's a problem if you're an antispeciesist activist."
Source Selection and Bias	There is a systemic bias in journalism where antispeciesist sources are marginalized and labeled as "radical" or "extreme," often facing gatekeepers' higher expectations for "balance" in sourcing compared to other social justice issues, demanding opposing viewpoints even when the facts are clear.	"It's not about the source, but the content—radical voices that challenge the dominant ideology are often dismissed as extreme."
Soft Censorship	Image Censorship	"Sometimes, we've been asked to remove an image because it was too graphic"
	Reclassifying Informative Articles as Opinion Pieces	"[T]hey move articles to the opinion section even when they are not opinion pieces—just because (...) they don't align with the (speciesist) ideology of those editors."
Technical Invisibilization: Structural Strategies of Suppression	Competing for Visibility: Agenda-Setting, Editorial Bias, and Ideological Resistance	"There is, without a doubt, a deliberate effort to suppress antispeciesist topics because they directly clash with the agenda-setting. When the media's agenda is clearly defined, anything related to antispeciesism disrupts that structure. There's a wall—a strong, thick wall—and it's extremely hard to break through. This kind of invisibilization is obvious to anyone in this field."
	The Role of Format and Presentation in Suppression	"On a news website's homepage, an article can be published with or without a featured image. If no image is added, it basically disappears. Which is what happens with our more radical content"
	Marginalization from Social Media	"We've also noticed how articles are shared on social media. (...) [T]here's a big difference between the outlet sharing our content immediately after publishing versus at night or at 5 a.m."
	Exclusion from Curated Content	"There's also the 'early access' newsletter for subscribers—a curated selection of articles sent at the end of the day. (...) At first, we were frequently included in this selection. Now, it's almost unheard of."
	Exclusion from Print	"Media with both print and online versions sometimes relegate 'second-tier' articles to the web, reserving the most prestigious pieces for print, excluding animal-related topics."
	Additional Barrier: Advertising Algorithms	"If we talk about the exploitation of pigs, an ad for a barbecue grill will pop up."

5.2.1. Ideological Gatekeepers

Ideological gatekeeping in the media often stems from structural and personal values, internal conflicts, and consumption habits influencing editorial decisions. For example, one interviewee shared an interaction with an editor regarding

animal consumption: “I was talking with the editor of a media outlet, and he told me, ‘I eat organic meat only a couple of times a week.’ I replied, ‘If we all did like you, we would need three planets for cows to roam freely in order to have enough meat like that for everyone’” (Interviewee 3).

This type of gatekeeping reflects the boundaries of acceptable discourse within certain ideological frameworks. A different journalist noted the heightened resistance when addressing animal experimentation, which often sparks more controversy than issues like bullfighting or hunting, as it directly implicates personal behavior:

“Another very thorny issue is animal experimentation. It generates more divergence. It’s much easier to position yourself against an oppression when you’re not part of the oppressive side. Positioning yourself against bullfighting, hunting, animal cruelty or even zoos isn’t easy, but it generates less controversy because [...] they don’t feel directly involved. But when you criticize people eating meat, or the use of animals in medical research, it’s like, ‘What are you talking about?’ Then, you need to explain it a lot more” (Interviewee 3).

In this context, ideological gatekeeping marginalizes or dismisses perspectives that challenge the status quo. Media outlets and society often resist antispeciesist content because it disrupts the dominant ideologies, particularly when these practices benefit large industries like meat and pharmaceuticals (Khazaal and Almiron 2016). This gatekeeping isn’t just about differing opinions—it’s about maintaining an ideological position that normalizes animal exploitation, which is also the hegemonic ideology.

5.2.2. Emotionality vs. Objectivity: Double Standards in Journalism

The concept of objectivity in journalism is often invoked as a standard to measure the legitimacy and credibility of reporting, but it can also hinder coverage of topics like antispeciesism. While subjectivity is accepted in areas like housing rights, feminism and anti-racism activism, gatekeepers may dismiss antispeciesist journalism as biased, even when the work adheres to rigorous journalistic standards.

“No one defends the idea that journalism is purely objective anymore. However, some subjectivities are accepted—or even encouraged—depending on the editorial line. None of my colleagues have an issue with being considered activists against evictions, feminist activists or anti-racist activists. But if you consider yourself an antispeciesist activist, that’s a problem” (Interviewee 9).

At the same time, informative articles are accused of being emotional particularly when they challenge societal norms, though emotional responses to human rights violations are deemed acceptable. One journalist discusses the double standard:

“If you’re a journalist specializing in human rights, entering the realm of animal rights could harm your credibility. It could add emotional weight to your reporting, making you seem like someone driven by emotion rather than reason, yet speciesism is far more emotional [...]. They can cover war stories emotionally, but if you cover animals, you’re seen as unprofessional” (Interviewee 1).

This reveals how emotional appeals are accepted in human rights journalism but rejected in animal rights reporting, reflecting how deeply entrenched speciesism influences journalistic standards and public perceptions.

5.2.3. Source Selection and Bias

In journalism, selecting and using sources is crucial for credibility and accuracy. Proper sourcing verifies facts, prevents misinformation and offers a well-rounded view. However, in antispeciesist journalism, gatekeepers create barriers for how sources are handled, especially on topics like animal consumption. These barriers are evident in how certain voices are dismissed or undervalued. As one journalist explains, there’s a clear double standard in the expectation of “balance”, particularly for antispeciesist issues:

“Certain sources are made invisible. With other topics, like feminism, a single source may be used without seeking opposing views, but when writing against the animal-industrial complex, I have to get a source from those I’m criticizing [...]. They demand a balance not required in other areas” (Interviewee 3).

While social justice causes like feminism face fewer sourcing requirements, antispeciesist journalism is expected to include opposing viewpoints, particularly from industries that exploit animals. This creates additional challenges and reflects a systemic bias against antispeciesist perspectives. Another journalist agrees:

“When we target a specific sector, they ask us to speak to them. But we have the facts—documents, police reports court rulings. If they want to comment, let them, but we’re reporting facts, not opinions. In other areas of journalism, this isn’t required, so why should it be for us?” (Interviewee 5).

This other journalist highlights a key issue in antispeciesist reporting: the expectation of balance by seeking opposing views, even when the facts are clear. “It’s not about the source, but the content—radical voices that challenge the dominant ideology are often dismissed as extreme” (Interviewee 1). The labelling of antispeciesist sources that challenge the hegemonic speciesist ideology as radical or extreme to dismiss them represents an ideological barrier in journalism. The journalist’s comment conveys how media gatekeepers may be unwilling to accept or amplify perspectives that go against the grain of dominant societal values—in this case, harmful ideologies (Khazaal 2021) related to human

dominance over animals. The “radical” label serves to delegitimize antispeciesist sources, further marginalizing them within the media landscape.

5.2.4. Soft Censorship

Censorship is often associated with explicit restrictions on content, but the interviewees describe more subtle mechanisms, called here “soft censorship”, that limit the visibility and impact of antispeciesist discourse. These mechanisms include image censorship and the strategic reclassification of articles as opinion pieces rather than news.

5.2.4.1. Censorship of Images

“Sometimes, we’ve been asked to remove an image because it was too graphic. We interpreted this as a suggestion rather than a direct order, aimed at making the article more appealing rather than repelling readers. [...] You never know what will be more effective in attracting people to activism—offering a positive alternative or confronting them with the brutal reality of a slaughterhouse” (Interviewee 5).

This statement highlights the dilemma activists and journalists face in choosing between shock tactics and positive framing. Censoring graphic images is often justified by concerns over audience reception, but it also sanitizes the reality of animal exploitation. While emotional reactions to graphic content vary, studies show that such images often play a key role in adopting veganism and activism (Cole & Morgan 2011; Fernández 2020). Media reluctance to publish explicit images may reflect not only audience concerns but also an implicit bias against antispeciesist narratives.

5.2.4.2. Censorship Through Reclassification as Opinion

“There’s a form of censorship, a mechanism used by speciesist editors, where they move articles to the opinion section even when they are not opinion pieces—just because they go to the root of the problem in a way that may seem too radical or because they don’t align with the speciesist ideology of those editors” (Interviewee 6).

Relegating factual articles to the opinion section subtly delegitimizes the information, framing antispeciesist views as biased rather than legitimate. The distinction between news and opinion is crucial to journalistic credibility, and misclassification influences how readers perceive the reliability and importance of a topic (Herman & Chomsky 1988).

This practice reflects a broader pattern of ideological gatekeeping, seen with other social justice issues, where challenges to dominant power structures are reframed as personal viewpoints rather than objective reporting. Such “soft censorship” operates through editorial discretion, limiting the reach and

perceived legitimacy of antispeciesist discourse. Unlike direct suppression, it hides behind journalistic norms, making it harder to identify and contest. Decisions about which images to publish and where to place articles align with agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw 1972; McCombs & Valenzuela 2020) and framing (Entman 1993), shaping both what is covered and how it is interpreted.

5.2.5. Technical Invisibilization: Structural Strategies of Suppression

Structural invisibilization can serve as a subtler mechanism for marginalizing specific perspectives. This phenomenon does not remove content outright but diminishes its visibility through editorial choices and social media strategies. The following testimonies from journalists describe the ways in which antispeciesist discourse is sidelined within media outlets.

5.2.5.1. Competing for Visibility: Agenda-Setting, Editorial Bias and Ideological Resistance

Antispeciesist writers face significant challenges in the competitive media landscape. While having a blog within a mainstream outlet offers access, visibility is increasingly limited. “They give us a space, but it’s becoming more competitive. There are more sections and topics fighting for attention. We have to fight for visibility” (Interviewee 5).

This reflects a structural invisibilization, where topics are not silenced but overshadowed by an expanding media landscape. As outlets grow, activists struggle to maintain visibility due to prioritization processes favoring dominant narratives. Beyond competition, editorial choices appear to deprioritize content with ideological implications. One journalist observes: “We do notice that we’re given less visibility. [...] Sometimes, we can’t help but suspect that it has to do with our content. If you publish an article against hunting, for instance, it gets far less visibility than other types of articles” (Interviewee 4).

This suggests agenda-setting as a mechanism of exclusion, where not only the issues covered but also their prominence are shaped (McCombs & Shaw 1972; McCombs & Valenzuela 2020). Antispeciesist content’s consistent lower placement indicates structural deprioritization.

Another journalist highlights economic interests driving this trend:

“An article was published, but you have to scroll through eight screens to find it. They’re hiding our articles—even in a supposedly sympathetic outlet. Imagine what it’s like in other media. They’re burying us, covering us up, and they’ve been doing it for years [...] just in case an advertiser gets upset or a subscriber cancels their membership” (Interviewee 5).

This suggests that invisibilization is both a result of media expansion and an active strategy to balance editorial freedom with financial interests (Bennett 1996; Herman & Chomsky 1988).

While competition explains some invisibilization, others point to ideological resistance within media institutions:

“There is, without a doubt, a deliberate effort to suppress antispeciesist topics because they directly clash with the agenda-setting. When the media’s agenda is clearly defined, anything related to antispeciesism disrupts that structure. There’s a wall—a strong, thick wall—and it’s extremely hard to break through. This kind of invisibilization is obvious to anyone in this field” (Interviewee 1).

This comment, supported by others, suggests a dual-layered process: structural barriers limit visibility, while ideological resistance actively excludes content that challenges dominant economic and political interests. This aligns with theories of hegemonic media control, which argue that even progressive media outlets are constrained by economic dependencies, such as advertising revenue and subscriber retention (Tuchman 1978; Hanitzsch 2007; Herman & Chomsky 1988).

5.2.5.2. The Role of Format and Presentation in Suppression

Visibility is not only determined by what is published, but also by how it is presented. In digital journalism, layout and design decisions—such as whether an article appears with a featured image—can significantly impact readership. “On a news website’s homepage, an article can be published with or without a featured image. If no image is added, it basically disappears. Which is what happens with our more radical content” (Interviewee 5).

This echoes research on visual gatekeeping, which explains how images function as cognitive anchors that capture audience attention (Fernández 2020). The absence of a visual component subtly but effectively reduces engagement, creating a form of invisibilization that is difficult to challenge because it operates through seemingly neutral design choices rather than explicit editorial rejection.

5.2.5.3. Marginalization from Social Media

A similar dynamic is at play in the use of social media, where reach is based on timing and engagement. “We’ve also noticed how articles are shared on social media. We lack concrete proof, but there’s a big difference between the outlet sharing our content immediately after publishing versus at night or at 5 a.m.” (Interviewee 5).

Although difficult to attribute to deliberate suppression, if articles are systematically shared during low-traffic hours, their potential impact is diminished, reinforcing structural barriers to visibility.

5.2.5.4. *Exclusion from Curated Content*

A more formalized mechanism of invisibilization occurs through curated content selection, such as subscriber newsletters. “There’s also the ‘early access’ newsletter for subscribers—a curated selection of articles sent at the end of the day. (...) At first, we were frequently included in this selection. Now, it’s almost unheard of” (Interviewee 1).

While this exclusion is framed as a logistical decision, it aligns with the broader trend of marginalizing antispeciesist content. This further illustrates the shift from initial inclusion to gradual invisibilization, reinforcing the idea that structural mechanisms—not outright bans—are the primary tools of suppression.

5.2.5.5. *Exclusion from Print*

A concern among interviewees is the distinction between print and online publications, with print media seen as more prestigious. This hierarchy affects the visibility of topics like antispeciesism. “I have never had anything antispeciesist published in print, except in *El Salto*” (Interviewee 9).

Antispeciesist journalists’ struggle to access print media suggests the issue is about visibility and perceived legitimacy. Infoanimal, a specialized outlet, is an exception, emphasizing that general print media are less open to such topics. “Media with both print and online versions sometimes relegate ‘second-tier’ articles to the web, reserving the most prestigious pieces for print” (Interviewee 6).

The classification of antispeciesist content under an editorial hierarchy where online platforms are seen as less prestigious questions its seriousness within traditional journalism. “Sometimes, they publish something online almost out of charity, but they would never publish it in print” (Interviewee 3). This comment underscores that online publication may be treated as a concession, not a genuine endorsement, signifying a symbolic gesture rather than integration into editorial priorities.

The print/online distinction reflects gatekeeping (Shoemaker & Vos 2009) and agenda-setting theories (McCombs & Valenzuela 2020). Print media’s limited space and higher costs curate content, reinforcing dominant narratives and excluding topics that don’t align with mainstream priorities. The relegation of antispeciesist discourse to online platforms reflects both economic constraints and ideological resistance.

5.2.5.6. *Additional Barrier: Advertising Algorithms*

Advertising algorithms pose an obstacle to antispeciesist messaging by promoting ads that contradict the content’s message. For example, “There’s an

added handicap, the visibility we give to the content we are fighting against. If we talk about the exploitation of pigs, an ad for a barbecue grill will pop up. This happens constantly” (Interviewee 4).

These algorithms, driven by search patterns and content associations, redirect attention to ads that reinforce the industries being criticized, distorting efforts to raise awareness about animal exploitation. Rather than supporting antispeciesist content, they prioritize commercial interests, creating additional barriers to spreading the message.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The interviews with Spanish antispeciesist journalists highlight the systemic marginalization of antispeciesist perspectives in Spanish written journalism. Coverage of nonhuman animals remains predominantly anthropocentric, with mainstream media framing stories around human concerns—such as pet ownership, conservation and health—rather than addressing nonhuman animals’ rights and agency.

Journalists identified several barriers to antispeciesist journalism, including the resistance to radical perspectives, the devaluation of animal rights issues, and the precarious nature of the field. While welfare-oriented approaches to animal rights gain some media traction, more systemic critiques of speciesism face significant opposition. The lack of coverage in mainstream outlets leaves only the more leftist publications, such as *El Diario* and *El Salto*, followed by *La Marea* and *Publico* as platforms for these perspectives.

The trivialization of antispeciesist journalism as “pet journalism” reflects a broader pattern of dismissal, with journalists reporting that discussing speciesism can undermine their credibility and lead to perceptions of gendered irrationality or extremism. Many antispeciesist journalists identify as activists, driven by ethical convictions rather than financial stability. Their work requires additional research and sourcing, yet it remains undervalued and underfunded compared to coverage of more conventional journalistic topics.

Several interviewees compared these struggles to the early marginalization of feminist discourse, suggesting that while antispeciesist journalism currently faces resistance, broader acceptance may develop over time if strategic framing and stronger news pegs help integrate these perspectives into mainstream reporting.

The barriers faced by Spanish journalists covering antispeciesist issues stem from a complex interplay of ideological, emotional, technical and structural factors. Ideological gatekeeping plays a central role, as gatekeepers resist perspectives that challenge deeply entrenched norms around animal consumption and exploitation. Editorial decisions are often influenced by personal

consumption habits and hegemonic ideologies, reinforcing existing power structures tied to industries that exploit animals.

Antispeciesist journalists are frequently dismissed as emotional and biased, even though emotional appeals are widely accepted in other advocacy journalism, such as human rights or feminist reporting. Additionally, these journalists face a higher burden of balance, often being required to include opposing viewpoints from sources that exploit animals, a demand not as rigorously applied to other social justice issues.

A form of soft censorship further restricts antispeciesist journalism. This includes the removal of graphic images under the justification of audience retention and the relegation of informative articles to opinion sections. Even sympathetic platforms struggle to provide consistent exposure for antispeciesist content due to editorial prioritization of other issues. Structural choices, such as the placement of articles in less visible sections or without photos, further contribute to the invisibility of these narratives.

What the outlets post on their social media platforms also presents ideological resistance, with journalists observing that content challenging speciesist norms is less likely to be shared.

Despite demographic diversity among antispeciesist journalists in Spain, their shared identity results in a remarkably uniform experience of media barriers. This suggests that ideological forces shaping journalistic practices transcend individual differences, creating consistent constraints on antispeciesist reporting.

Visibility in media extends beyond publication. It depends on strategic placement, framing and timing. Journalists must navigate these factors to ensure that antispeciesist content reaches audiences in meaningful ways. However, their autonomy remains constrained by editorial pressures, requiring them to negotiate their positions within dominant media structures.

These findings underscore the need for structural changes in journalistic practices to ensure that animal rights and antispeciesist perspectives are fully integrated into the media landscape, aligning with the growing public interest in these issues.

This study reveals the tension between journalists' awareness of systemic marginalization and their strategies to navigate editorial resistance. Future research should explore the strategies antispeciesist journalists use to maintain resilience and increase nonhuman animal visibility, focusing on framing techniques, the role of independent media and the broader impact on public discourse surrounding nonhuman animal rights.

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