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# Beyond Anthropocentrism: How Journalists Make the More-than-Human World Visible in Spanish Written Media

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**Abstract**

Non-human animals are systematically excluded from public narratives, rarely recognized as sentient subjects, and instead framed within anthropocentric narratives of production and consumption; efforts to challenge this pattern and make the more-than-human world visible often encounter editorial resistance and structural constraints. This study examines how anti-speciesist journalists in Spanish written media navigate such resistance to make non-human animals legitimate subjects of news. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with nine self-identified anti-speciesist journalists, analysed through reflexive thematic analysis, the study identifies strategies organized across four non-mutually exclusive categories, namely, discursive, relational, framing, and structural, ranging from self-censorship and strategic language use to coalition-building and the creation of independent platforms. Findings reveal a key distinction between visibility strategies, which succeed in securing publication, and root-level strategies, which challenge the carnist and anthropocentric assumptions structuring newsworthiness itself. These practices reveal the pragmatism, creativity, and resilience of journalists working under structural, ideological, and normative constraints, while also highlighting the limits of anti-speciesist reporting within mainstream media. The study contributes to Critical Animal Media Studies, environmental communication, and journalism research by illuminating the intersection of ethical advocacy, professional strategy, and counter-hegemonic practice and offers recommendations for expanding coverage of the more-than-human world across ideological, editorial, and structural divides.

**Keywords:** anti-speciesist journalism; editorial resistance; media visibility of animals; critical animal studies; counter-hegemonic media practices; speciesism; anthropocentrism more-than-human world; advocacy journalism; environmental communication

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## 1. Introduction

Although billions of non-human animals are killed, consumed, or used every year, their lives and suffering are almost entirely absent from the news (Freeman & Jarvis, 2013). When animals do appear in media coverage, they are rarely portrayed as individuals with interests or experiences of their own but rather as resources within a human-centred narrative of production and consumption (Freeman, 2009; Ruiz Carreras & Fernández, 2024), often prioritizing the interests of the agricultural industry complex (Freeman, 2009; Freeman & Merskin, 2016; Khazaal & Almiron, 2016). This systematic omission is reinforced by editorial norms and ideological boundaries that define what counts as "newsworthy," raising the question of whether journalistic accuracy itself can be considered intact when nonhuman standpoints are structurally excluded from the story (Rossi, 2025b), as well as

by gatekeeping practices and professional constraints. Journalists covering animal issues face soft censorship and pressures for "balance" that frame anti-speciesist perspectives as emotional or unprofessional, revealing how structural hierarchies within journalism delegitimize non-human concerns and sustain speciesist norms (Ruiz Carreras, 2026).

Media do not merely reflect social priorities; they actively construct them. Through agenda-setting and gatekeeping processes (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), journalism determines which issues are deemed socially relevant and which are rendered invisible. As a result, news values and editorial routines play a decisive role in reinforcing dominant ideologies. Within this framework, non-human animals are systematically excluded or misrepresented as legitimate subjects of journalistic attention (Rossi, 2025a), their suffering and interests subordinated to human-centred narratives (Freeman & Jarvis, 2013; Freeman & Merskin, 2016).

This exclusion operates within what Khazaal (2021) describes as "harmful ideologies", or systems of thought that enable dominant groups to justify the subjugation of vulnerable ones. In this context, speciesism and anthropocentrism are key ideological forces shaping the journalistic field, determining which lives are ethically and narratively recognized. Speciesism, defined as "the failure, in attitude or practice, to accord any non-human being equal consideration and respect" (Dunayer, 2001, p. 5), works in tandem with anthropocentrism, a moral framework that centres human interests and experiences (Horta, 2008). As Calarco (2014) argues, these ideologies sustain a moral hierarchy that privileges human lives and silences the perspectives of other species.

While a growing body of scholarship has examined how media discourses construct animals as objects, symbols, or metaphors (e.g., Freeman, 2009; Barca, 2022; Fernández et al., 2022; Arluke et al., 2022; Molloy, 2011), much less attention has been given to how these exclusions shape the practice of journalism itself. Journalists who seek to challenge anthropocentric narratives face structural and ideological barriers that limit their ability to report on animals as sentient subjects. As Ruiz Carreras (2026) notes specifically for the Spanish case, these constraints are not only professional but also personal, and ideological, reflecting deeply embedded speciesist assumptions within newsroom cultures.

Animal-based industries such as livestock farming, hunting, and bullfighting occupy a prominent place in Spain's cultural and economic life, and debates over their regulation have grown increasingly polarized along political lines, with animal rights positions largely associated with left-leaning politics and opposition to them mobilized as a marker of conservative and far-right identity (Moreno & Almiron, 2021; Moreno, 2025).

Journalism is often understood as a profession meant to hold the powerful to account (e.g., Bennett, 1996; Hanitzsch, 2007), an expectation also codified within the profession itself.In the Spanish context specifically, the Federación de Asociaciones de Periodistas de España's Código Deontológico (FAPE, 2026) articulates journalism's duty to hold power to account and give voice to all actors. This study extends that framework beyond its conventional human-only scope, following a Critical Animal Studies perspective that identifies structural power asymmetries not only between social groups but between species (Best et al., 2007). Read through this lens, journalism's failure to fulfil its Fourth Estate or "watchdog" function with respect to human–animal relations raises the same normative concerns as its failure to hold power to account in any other domain. Drawing on Fraser's (1990) distinction between weak and strong publics, Rossi (2025b) argues that nonhuman animals occupy the far end of a continuum of journalistic misrepresentation, positioned even beyond marginalized human groups, who at least receive some degree of newsroom engagement: animals, and farmed animals in particular, remain almost entirely outside journalism's frame of ethical concern, largely unexamined by the profession itself. This failure has far-reaching consequences not only for how non-humans are treated, but

more generally, for how societies understand justice, power, and moral responsibility (Connolly, 2024), and, ultimately, for all human and non-human animals.

This extension of journalism's accountability function to non-human animals raises a further question: whether journalists who explicitly advocate for a cause, several of whom identify as activists themselves, can still be understood as practising journalism. This tension is not unique to anti-speciesist reporting. Advocacy and activist journalism have a long-standing tradition within the profession, one that rejects the notion that objectivity requires the absence of a normative position (Atton, 2002; Forde, 2011; Harcup, 2005). As Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model suggests, ostensibly neutral mainstream journalism is itself already shaped by structural interests, so "advocacy" and "objectivity" differ more in the visibility of their commitments than in their presence or absence. Harcup (2005) shows this boundary functions as a continuum rather than a fixed line, along which activist-journalists operate without necessarily forfeiting either identity. Anti-speciesist journalism, in this light, extends an already legitimate journalistic lineage to a new category of subject, non-human animals, rather than departing from journalistic practice altogether.

The present study explores how anti-speciesist journalists navigate editorial resistance and manage to publish animal rights–related content in Spanish written media. Specifically, it investigates the strategies these journalists employ to overcome speciesist gatekeeping (Ruiz Carreras, 2026) and to make non-human animals visible as subjects of news.

The study seeks to answer the following research question: What strategies do anti-speciesist journalists employ to navigate editorial resistance and ensure the publication of animal rights-related news in Spanish written media? To answer it, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with nine Spanish journalists who self-identify as anti-speciesist, analysed through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to identify, in their own words, the strategies they use to navigate this resistance. In answering this question, the study advances two contributions beyond an empirical account of Spanish anti-speciesist journalism: an integrated model of resistance across macro, meso, and micro levels, corresponding to ideological, institutional, and individual dimensions of speciesist gatekeeping, and a conceptual distinction between visibility strategies and root-level strategies, that clarifies when journalistic practices expand non-humans' presence in the news without disturbing the ideological criteria that determine their newsworthiness in the first place. In doing so, the research contributes to the field of Critical Animal Media Studies (CAMS) (Almiron et al., 2018), a media-focused sub-field of Critical Animal Studies (CAS) that interrogates human–animal relations through an intersectional and non-speciesist lens (Best et al., 2007) and to broader debates on power, ideology, and professional norms in critical media and journalism studies.

## 2. Literature Review

Critical Animal Media Studies scholars have analyzed how media represent non-human animals and related issues such as veganism and animal exploitation (Almiron et al., 2018; Fernández et al., 2022; Freeman, 2009; Cole & Morgan, 2011). This body of work consistently shows that media representations rarely account for the perspectives or suffering of non-human animals (Freeman & Jarvis, 2013; Freeman et al., 2011). Animals are systematically excluded from public narratives (Rossi, 2025a, 2025b; Moreno & Almiron, 2021), and even debates that originate in concern for their suffering fail to acknowledge them as sentient subjects (Moreno et al., 2026). Even when of clear public significance, animal-related stories are often framed as "soft news", privileging human interest and dramatic narratives over policy issues, thereby trivializing animals other than humans (Arluke et al., 2022, p. 172). In this process, they often reproduce "carnist" (Joy, 2013) and anthropocentric assumptions that normalize animal use within industrial farming systems

(Freeman, 2009) or trivialize it, constructing animals as "ridiculous or pathetic or as simple objects of entertainment" (Molloy, 2011, p. 2).

Almiron and Zoppeddu (2015) identified tactics such as suppression, ambiguity, and sarcasm in press coverage that serve to reinforce carnist ideologies, while Khazaal and Almiron (2016) found that the press frequently aligns with the economic and ideological interests of the livestock industries. Similarly, studies demonstrate that media representations present animals as passive, instrumentalized elements of nature rather than as sentient beings (Almiron et al., 2018; Freeman, 2009).

Farmed animals, for example, are almost entirely absent from news coverage as subjects or individuals, as when they appear they are usually portrayed as commodities (Ruiz Carreras & Fernández, 2024; Freeman, 2009; Khazaal & Almiron, 2016). This invisibility reflects deeper ideological processes that sustain speciesist hierarchies and deny moral consideration to non-human beings.

Carnism, as theorized by Joy (2013), names the dominant belief system that renders the consumption of certain animals normal, natural, and necessary, while keeping this system itself invisible as an ideology rather than a default. Unlike veganism, which is typically marked as an identity or choice, the hegemonic ideology of carnism operates precisely by not needing to be named. Spanish press coverage reflects this pattern. Moreno and Almiron (2021) found that liberal-conservative outlets tend to adopt carnist frames that promote technological or managerial "solutions" to animal exploitation while avoiding ethical critique, with discussions of the moral status of non-human animals largely confined to opinion sections or blogs rather than integrated into mainstream reporting (p. 360). This containment strategy, permitting ethical debate only in clearly marked, peripheral spaces, allows outlets to appear balanced while insulating core reporting from any real challenge to carnist norms.

Carnism, in this sense, is not only a belief held by audiences but a professional default reproduced through routine journalistic and editorial choices, and Freeman et al. (2011) argue that when journalists uncritically reproduce stereotypes and dominant assumptions about human superiority, they are imposing anthropocentric values on the public rather than merely reflecting neutral fact.

Even coverage that appears sympathetic to animals can reproduce carnist logic. Ruiz Carreras and Andersson (n.d.) show that stories framing escaped farmed animals as heroic individuals generate warmth toward those specific individuals while leaving the structural conditions of confinement, and the industry that maintains them, unexamined. The exceptional animal becomes narratively rescuable precisely because the system around it is not questioned; carnism survives the story that seems, on its surface, to sympathize with its survivor.

Rossi's (2025b) interviews with 56 mainstream U.S. journalists, not previously engaged with animal representation as an ethical concern, capture how the journalistic profession constructs animal invisibility by default. Rossi found that most journalists had never considered animals as a potentially misrepresented group, and identified two clusters: one explicitly denying that animals could be considered marginalized subjects of news at all, and another recognizing this marginalization but describing it as structurally embedded rather than something newsroom practice actively contested. Both clusters converged on the same hierarchy found elsewhere in this literature, with farmed animals occupying the furthest point of exclusion. Extending Fraser's (1990) public sphere framework, Rossi (2025b) proposes a continuum running from human marginalized groups, who receive at least some newsroom engagement, to nonhuman animals, particularly farmed animals, who remain almost entirely outside journalism's frame of ethical concern.

Where Rossi's study documents this exclusion as the mainstream default, largely unexamined by the journalists producing it (Rossi, 2025a), Ruiz Carreras (2026) turns to the opposite end of that same continuum: antispeciesist journalists who have already recognized this exclusion and actively work to counteract it. The study shows that journalists who attempt to challenge carnist assumptions encounter ideological gatekeeping and demands for "balance" that recode anti-speciesist reporting as emotional or unprofessional, a demand rarely made of reporting that reproduces carnist "common sense". It further identifies how structural hierarchies within journalism delegitimize non-human concerns and sustain speciesist norms, with carnism operating at two levels simultaneously: as a frame that shapes what is published, and as a professional norm that disciplines who is permitted to challenge that frame.

Ironically, anti-speciesist journalists are frequently expected to demonstrate "balance" in their reporting. Yet Moreno (2025) shows that the asymmetry lies elsewhere: pro-animal discourse coalitions advance a broader and more diverse range of arguments, including environmental, public health, and animal suffering concerns, whereas coalitions defending animal-based industries rely primarily on economic arguments, appeals to tradition, defence of the industry, and attacks on political opponents. Moreno argues that these latter discourses function largely to preserve existing systems of animal exploitation (pp. 173–174).

The same demand for "balance" can be linked to what the UPF Centre for Animal Ethics (UPF-CAE, 2020) identifies as a form of "false neutrality" (p. 12) in its guidelines for journalists: given the stark power asymmetry between humans and nonhuman animals, treating both "sides" as equally weighted positions requiring equal airtime is not a neutral stance but an ideological one, and journalists are explicitly urged to "reflect on whether a neutral attitude is ethical" in such situation (UPF-CAE, 2020, p. 12).

Within the broader field of activist and advocacy journalism and alternative media (Forde, 2011; Harcup, 2005; Atton, 2002), anti-speciesist journalism can occupy a distinctive position, since it challenges not only political or corporate power but also the epistemological boundaries of journalism itself by advocating for non-human subjects. Drawing on theories of counter-publics and alternative media, anti-speciesist journalism can be understood as a counter-hegemonic practice seeking to redefine journalistic legitimacy and ethics to include non-humans.

While prior work has revealed how anthropocentrism shapes media discourse, less attention has been given to how journalists actively resist these ideological and institutional barriers. This study addresses this by examining the professional and discursive strategies used by anti-speciesist journalists to make non-human animals visible as subjects of legitimate journalistic concern.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three interlocking bodies of theory, organized across three analytical levels, macro, meso, and micro, to capture how structural forces and individual agency interact in shaping anti-speciesist journalism.

At the macro level, speciesism and anthropocentrism function as hegemonic ideologies that position humans as morally and intellectually superior to other animals, legitimizing their exploitation (Dunayer, 2001; Nibert, 2002, 2016; Horta, 2008; Calarco, 2014). These ideologies construct what Khazaal (2021, p. 6) calls "zones of exclusion" in which non-human animals are rendered invisible in public discourse, in part through the normalization of violence against them as natural, normal, and necessary rather than as a matter of ideology (Joy, 2013). Tuchman's (1978) concept of symbolic annihilation, the erasure of certain groups through underrepresentation or trivialization, offers a critical lens for understanding this

invisibility: language and discourse construct animals as "the other" (Dunayer, 2001), and the absence of representation itself functions as a form of erasure, since "absence equates to erasure" (Freeman & Merskin, 2016, p. 208). Visibility is therefore both an epistemic and an ethical concern: bringing animals into discourse can challenge these hierarchies, though not all visibility strategies do so equally (Ruiz Carreras & Fernández, 2024), a distinction this study returns to in its findings.

At the meso level, these macro-level ideologies are enacted through institutional mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion: gatekeeping, framing, and journalistic routines. Gatekeeping theory (White, 1950; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009) explains how news selection and filtering processes determine which stories become visible, intertwined with agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which shapes not what audiences think but what they think about; both processes systematically marginalize non-human perspectives. Framing theory (Entman, 1993) explains how selected stories are then structured to promote particular interpretations, with the distinction between episodic framing, which individualizes suffering, and thematic framing, which situates it within broader socio-political structures (Iyengar, 1991), particularly relevant to animal coverage. These mechanisms are further shaped by normative journalistic orders, political, economic, and professional (Bennett, 1996), and by journalistic routines that rely on official sources and institutional pressure to constrain the diversity of perspectives reported (Tuchman, 1978; Hanitzsch, 2007). Core news values such as balance, authority, and dramatization frequently distort complex issues, as in climate change coverage (Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Iyengar, 1991): first-order norms marginalize perspectives lacking an obvious "news peg" (Stocking & Leonard, 1990), while second-order norms demand equal representation of opposing sides regardless of credibility (Entman, 1993). Balance has genuine epistemic value in contexts of real empirical or political contestation, but applied uncritically to the power asymmetry between humans and non-humans, it can function not as neutrality but as an implicit endorsement of the status quo (UPF-CAE, 2020).

At the micro level, journalists employ strategies of resistance and ethical negotiation within these structural and institutional constraints (Atton, 2002; Fraser, 1990). This is where anti-speciesist journalism connects to the broader tradition of alternative and oppositional journalism, which challenges mainstream media's institutional constraints and amplifies marginalized voices while rejecting traditional objectivity (Atton, 2002; Forde, 2011; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). This democratic-participatory strand, however, is not representative of alternative media as a whole: some alternative journalism, in Spain as elsewhere, leans right, and can act as a source of opposition to anti-speciesist claims rather than support for them, a dynamic consistent with the right-wing discourse coalitions described in the Results below (Moreno, 2025). Harcup (2005) notes that the boundary between alternative and mainstream journalism is increasingly understood as a continuum, along which activist-journalists blur the line between journalism and activism. Anti-speciesist journalism sits within this continuum as a radical ethical practice, radical in the etymological sense of the Latin radix, "root", that seeks to redefine the scope of journalistic responsibility beyond the human.

Read together, these three levels situate anti-speciesist journalism as both a site of ideological struggle and a form of counter-hegemonic practice: it contests speciesist norms at the level of belief (macro), works within and against the institutional mechanisms that determine visibility (meso), and enacts resistance through individual professional strategy (micro).

## 4. Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative design based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with nine Spanish journalists who self-identify as anti-speciesist and explicitly incorporate

those values into their journalistic work. For the purposes of this study, anti-speciesist journalists are understood as individuals who advocate for the rights of non-human animals, challenge anthropocentric norms, or problematize animal exploitation in their reporting. Seven participants work as independent or freelance journalists, while two are employed by a media outlet and a news agency. Despite variations in gender, experience, and media reach, all participants shared the defining characteristic of actively integrating anti-speciesist values into their journalistic practice.

Given the small size of this professional niche, standard anonymization was considered insufficient: even minimal demographic detail could make participants identifiable to one another. This is a distinct concern from participants' anti-speciesist identity itself, which, as noted above, is already public and known professionally; what required protection was not the fact of their stance but their specific, individually attributable accounts of editorial conflict, institutional pressure, and professional risk, which could carry real reputational or professional consequences if traceable to a named individual. No individual demographic or biographical information is therefore reported beyond the aggregate sample composition described earlier, and quotations are not attributed to individual participants through numbering or pseudonyms, since a traceable identifier could still allow statements to be pieced together and an individual inferred. This approach was judged necessary to protect participants' professional standing and encourage candid reflection on sensitive topics such as editorial conflicts and institutional constraints.

The research adopts a social constructivist epistemology (Prasad, 2018) and an inductive qualitative approach (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018), aiming to capture how journalists construct meaning through their professional practices. A dialogical interview approach was adopted, viewing the interview as a site of co-construction of knowledge (Frank, 2005). This approach, inspired by Freire's (1970/2018) concept of dialogical learning, recognizes that meaning emerges through interaction between researcher and participant. The researcher's professional background in journalism informed a reflective and engaged interview style, consistent with Haraway's (1988) notion of situated knowledge.

A purposive sampling strategy (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) was used to identify information-rich cases: participants with direct experience in anti-speciesist journalism in Spain. Initial participants were identified through the researcher's professional network, followed by snowball sampling aiming to reach further journalists within this relatively small professional niche (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Interviews were conducted via Zoom and focused on verbal communication only. They were conducted in Spanish. Analysis was based on the original Spanish transcripts, and all quotations presented in this article were translated into English by the researcher. Data saturation was reached when no new themes emerged (Guest et al., 2006).

Interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), identifying patterns that emerged inductively from participants' narratives. Following Braun and Clarke (2019), this involved iterative coding, theme development, and interpretation grounded in participants' accounts. Through this coding process, four strategy categories (discursive, relational, framing, and structural) emerged inductively, as recurring patterns in participants' accounts; which were subsequently organized in relation to the three analytical levels outlined in the Theoretical Framework, namely, macro, meso, and micro, to clarify their relationship to broader ideological, institutional, and individual forces.

## 5. Results and Discussion

Covering animal rights issues in Spanish written media presents significant challenges, often leading to the marginalization, invisibilization, or misrepresentation of non-human animals (Ruiz Carreras, 2026). To overcome these obstacles, Spanish anti-speciesist journalists

employ a range of strategies to navigate editorial resistance and ensure that animal rights news reaches the public and are portrayed more accurately in Spanish-written media. These strategies can be grouped into four non-mutually exclusive broad categories, corresponding to the macro-meso-micro analytical model outlined in the Theoretical Framework. The first, discursive strategies, operates at the level of individual language and self-presentation; the second, relational strategies, operates through interpersonal networks within the newsroom; the third, framing strategies, shapes how animal issues are packaged and connected to other concerns; and the last one, structural strategies, addresses where and through what channels animal-related content reaches the public. Tables 1–4 summarise these four categories and the specific strategies identified in the interview data. While presented separately for analytical clarity, these strategies are frequently combined in practice.

**Table 1.** Discursive strategies.

| Strategy | Description | Illustrative Quote |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Self-Censorship | Downplaying anti-speciesist framing when pitching stories to increase acceptance while retaining the intended angle in the published piece. | "I self-censor; I downplay the anti-speciesist part, but then, although I fulfill my promise with what I proposed, I go full throttle with anti-speciesism." |
| Strategic Language Choices | Using language strategically to grant animals greater agency, even when topic or angle is fixed. | "Sometimes, I can't choose the topic, not even the approach. However, I can choose not to use the term 'pet,' for example." |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on interview data.

**Table 2.** Relational strategies.

| Strategy | Description | Illustrative Quote |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Leveraging Editorial Relationships | Building relationships with receptive editors to improve pitching opportunities and navigate editorial preferences. | "You learn who the editors are that accept these topics, and how you need to pitch to them. [. . .] You end up developing more personal relationships, where an exchange of favors or ideas can sometimes take place." |
| Avoiding Right-Wing Media | Avoiding right-leaning outlets as a pragmatic response to a polarized media landscape. | "I never pitch stories to that kind of media." |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on interview data.

**Table 3.** Framing strategies.

| Strategy | Description | Illustrative Quote |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Cross-Issue Framing | Framing animal issues through more widely accepted topics such as health, ecology, or feminism. | "Relating it to other topics, like health, I think helps." |
| Integrating Animal and Human Narratives Without Comparison | Presenting animal and human suffering as interconnected rather than competing narratives. | "With the Dana at first, we were all shy to mention non-humans; we aimed to tell the animal story alongside the human one." |
| Crafting the Perfect Pitch | Tailoring stories to editorial preferences, emphasizing pets, spectacle, or individual animal identities. | "What you need are certain ingredients in the recipe [. . .] It should be about pet-ism, it should be surprising, it should have something spectacular." |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on interview data.

**Table 4.** Structural strategies.

| Strategy | Description | Illustrative Quote |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Cross-Sectional Approach | Combining mainstream coverage with dedicated spaces in niche media and news agencies. | "We created a blog within an alternative media outlet to ensure consistent coverage without negotiating with gatekeepers." |
| Creating Independent Platforms | Establishing independent outlets and leveraging niche platforms to expand reach. | "I decided to start [alternative media] because there were no better alternatives." |
| Collaboration and Syndication | Sharing resources and coordinating coverage among anti-speciesist journalists. | "To create an alliance of anti-speciesist journalists, with shared databases, agreeing not to waste all our time covering the same thing." |

Source: Author's own elaboration based on interview data.

### *5.1. Discursive Strategies*

#### 5.1.1. Self-Censorship to Increase Acceptance

Self-censorship is a common strategy. One journalist explains that when pitching animal rights stories, they often tone down the anti-speciesist aspect to increase acceptance:

"My needle-eye is that they accept the topic. When I pitch it, I self-censor; I down-play the anti-speciesist part, but then, although I fulfill my promise with what I pro-posed, I go full throttle with anti-speciesism."

Another journalist mentions that the presence of human-centric news, such as natural disasters affecting humans (e.g., the Dana storm, the October 2024 Valencia floods), complicates the inclusion of animal-related topics, as mainstream media are often unwilling to highlight non-human animal suffering when human issues are prioritized, which prompts her self-censorship, or her toning down:

"How are we going to talk about animals with what's happening with humans, for example with the Dana case? You're unsure how to tell it because the risk of rejec-tion is very high."

Other journalists acknowledge that they do not say everything they would like to say: "I bite my tongue a lot. More and more. I'd be much more hardcore, as an activist, but this could be seen as unprofessional."

#### 5.1.2. Strategic Language Choices to Assert Agency and Individuality

Language is a critical tool in animal rights journalism, and functions as a form of resistance available even when topic and angle are not. One journalist mentions avoiding terms like "cattle" or "pet" to frame animals in a more respectful, agencialist way.

> "When we talk about anti-speciesist journalism, we're not just talking about the content but about a specific use of language. Sometimes, I can't choose the topic, not even the approach. However, I can choose not to use the term 'pet,' for example. I've always taken advantage of that margin of maneuver."

This margin of maneuver echoes Dunayer's (2001) argument that language constructs animals as commodified "others" and that refusing this vocabulary is itself a small but consequential act of resistance. It also aligns with Entman's (1993) account of framing as occurring at the level of word choice, not only story selection: even where journalists cannot determine what is covered, they can shape how animals are linguistically positioned within it, asserting agency and individuality against a commodifying default. This is precisely the opposite that mainstream journalists are currently doing, as Rossi (2025b) shows that at least in U.S.A., journalists are reproducing this commodifying default largely

without reflection, whereas the current sample treats this linguistic terrain as a site of deliberate resistance.

### *5.2. Relational Strategies*

#### 5.2.1. Leveraging Editorial Relationships for Effective Story Pitching

Establishing and maintaining contact with gatekeepers is a crucial strategy for anti-speciesist journalists. Just as in other areas of communication, having a personal and professional network is vital. One journalist emphasizes this by saying, "I rely on personal contacts. You build relationships with editors; you see who's more open, who's less open to anti-speciesist topics."

This reflects the importance of cultivating relationships with key individuals within media organizations, particularly editors who decide which stories are published. Over time, journalists learn who is receptive to animal rights issues and how to tailor their pitches accordingly. Another participant explains:

> "Over time, you learn who are the editors are that accept these topics, and how you need to pitch your ideas to them. Ultimately, you end up developing more personal relationships, where an exchange of favors or ideas can sometimes take place."

This insight highlights how building personal networks goes beyond professional connections; it often involves negotiating and finding mutual ground, which can significantly increase the chances of having content published. Such exchanges reveal how anti-speciesist journalists must navigate not only institutional constraints but also interpersonal networks, developing trust and reciprocity to gain visibility for their work. These practices can be understood as forms of relational gatekeeping, where personal connections and affinities influence access to publication opportunities.

This relational dimension is further underscored by another journalist:

> "If you have a friend who works in a media outlet who can get you in, then maybe you can get in; if you don't know anyone, you don't get published. It has to be the journalist, you need a person, an individual who has something there like 'I want to get this out,' and this is still activism. We are always depending on that factor, that journalist who feels like publishing that."

These testimonies highlight how personal relationships within editorial structures can act as informal channels of advocacy. The capacity to publish often depends less on institutional openness than on the presence of individual allies within the newsroom willing to use their discretion to promote anti-speciesist perspectives.

#### 5.2.2. Avoiding Right-Wing Media Because of Perceived Closeness

Another recurrent strategy among the interviewees is the deliberate avoidance of right-leaning media outlets. Instead, they focus on pitching their stories to publications with progressive or left-wing orientations, where there is a perceived openness to discussions on animal rights and anti-speciesism. As one journalist explained, "I never pitch stories to that kind of media," a statement that reflects a unanimous sentiment across participants.

Although some have described this as a form of self-censorship, the journalists themselves interpret it as a pragmatic choice rather than a constraint. "I self-censor when choosing the media. I choose media where I know the acceptance will be greater, meaning left-wing outlets," said one respondent, framing the decision as a necessary adaptation to ideological realities within the Spanish media landscape.

The rationale behind this selective targeting becomes clearer in the words of another journalist:

> "I don't know of anyone that publishes in right-wing media; if a few years ago it was already difficult, now they are completely taken over by this discourse that the populist far right has imposed—that the rural sector is animal exploitation, and that there is no countryside without hunting, no countryside without livestock farming, and no culture without bullfighting. Fighting against that right now, and even more so in right-wing media, is very complicated."

This statement illustrates how anti-speciesist journalists perceive right-wing media as deeply aligned with cultural and economic interests that normalize animal exploitation. This perception aligns with Moreno and Almiron's (2021) finding that liberal-conservative Spanish outlets confine ethical debate over animal exploitation to opinion sections and blogs, insulating mainstream reporting from any real challenge to carnist norms. Moreno's (2025) subsequent analysis of discourse coalitions offers a possible explanation for why this divide is perceived as unbridgeable rather than merely uncongenial: pro-animal coalitions draw on a broad and varied set of arguments, spanning environmental, public health, and animal suffering concerns, while coalitions defending animal-based industries rely narrowly on economic argument, appeals to tradition, and attacks on opponents (Moreno, 2025, pp. 173–174). Right-wing outlets aligned with the latter coalition may therefore be structurally, not only ideologically, resistant to the kind of cross-issue argumentation anti-speciesist journalism depends on, offering little discursive space for the multi-issue framing described elsewhere in these results. Within a polarized environment, avoiding right-wing outlets is not merely a matter of ideological preference but a strategic response to structural hostility and the perceived impossibility of meaningful dialogue in such contexts.

### *5.3. Framing Strategies*

#### 5.3.1. Cross-Issues Framing Approach

Another strategy is to frame animal rights content in relation to other popular issues like health or other social justice issues such as ecology or feminism. By connecting anti-speciesist news to broader, more accepted topics, journalists make it easier to introduce terms like "vegan" or "anti-speciesist" without immediate rejection. One journalist notes that pitching animal rights stories alongside environmental concerns or feminism made them more palatable to media outlets.

> "Relating it to other topics, like health, I think helps, although it's a shame that just the anti-speciesist aspect isn't enough, [. . .]; this way, the outlet gets used to talking about the topic, readers get used to hearing about it, and terms like vegan, anti-speciesist, etc."

Other journalists coincide with this experience:

> "I've always had to contextualize my stories linking the story to the environment [. . .] the same goes for, say, feminism [. . .] I assumed that if I pitched a purely anti-speciesist topic, they wouldn't be interested."

This tactic also responds to an obstacle Rossi's (2025b) mainstream U.S. Journalists named but did not act on: one participant observed that "it takes time to warm up to different ideologies and separate animals from food," yet described this as a fixed feature of audience reception rather than something newsroom practice could address. The journalists in the present study have effectively operationalized that same observation into a deliberate editorial strategy.

#### 5.3.2. Integrating Animal and Human Narratives Without Comparison

Journalists strategically frame animal rights issues as complementary to human suffering rather than opposing it. One journalist recalls covering the Dana storm by highlighting animal suffering as part of the broader tragedy: families not only lost their homes but also searched for missing non-human companions:

> "With the Dana at first, we were all shy to mention non-humans, we aimed to tell the animal story alongside the human one—not as a contrast, but as part of the same reality. People lost everything and were also looking for their dogs."

Another journalist notes that amid declining rights and freedoms, it is increasingly difficult to prioritize animal-related issues, as human crises dominate media coverage. To navigate this, some journalists avoid direct comparisons between human and animal struggles, ensuring that animal rights are recognized as "something that is also a reality worthy of the news," meaning treated as important and newsworthy in their own right, not as secondary or comparative to human struggles.

This differs from the frame extension in the Dana quote above, where the animal story was folded into the human one as a shared reality. Here, animal suffering is reported alongside human suffering without leaning on the human angle for its newsworthiness. A journalist covering companion animals displaced by a storm, for instance, might either interweave the animal narrative with residents' own losses, or report the animals' situation as newsworthy in its own right, alongside, but not dependent on, the human story.

This strategy resists the zero-sum logic typically imposed by episodic news values (Iyengar, 1991), whereby nonhuman suffering is treated as competing with, rather than coexisting alongside, human suffering for scarce editorial space. By refusing the comparative frame altogether, journalists sidestep a debate in which animal issues are almost always positioned as secondary, without requiring editors or readers to explicitly rank the two.

#### 5.3.3. Crafting the Perfect Pitch: A Combination for Media Success

One journalist outlines a strategic formula for increasing the chances of publication:

> "What you need are certain ingredients in the recipe to have a better chance of getting published. It should be about 'pet'-ism, it should be surprising, it should have something spectacular. [...] Another ingredient is naming the animal, [...]. Another is focusing on the intelligence of animals from unusual species, for example, in the series My Octopus Teacher. In the end, it's not anti-speciesist at all, but it helps the strategy; stories that have something surprising, something spectacular."

This perspective reveals a pragmatic approach to navigating editorial priorities and audience engagement factors. The participant's own assessment that this approach "is not anti-speciesist at all" points to a distinction between strategies that succeed in making animals visible within existing news values, and strategies that challenge the ideological criteria determining newsworthiness itself. This recipe also reflects a precise, strategic reading of the same hierarchy Rossi (2025b) found mainstream journalists to hold largely unreflectively: when asked generally about animal coverage, her participants overwhelmingly referenced "pets" and animals living in the wild, turning to farmed animals only when directly prompted. Where Rossi's journalists simply reproduced this preference as an unexamined default, the participants quoted here exploit it deliberately, treating "pet"-like framing and spectacle as leverage to secure publication for content that would not otherwise pass editorial thresholds. While this strategy helps introduce animal rights topics into mainstream media, it also highlights the constraints journalists face in advancing a fully anti-speciesist discourse.

### 5.4. Structural Strategies

#### 5.4.1. Cross-Sectional Approach to Amplify Coverage

A cross-sectional approach involves navigating multiple media spaces, from general newspaper sections to niche platforms, while also leveraging news agencies to amplify animal rights coverage. Some journalists advocate for a dual strategy: pushing for anti-speciesist content in mainstream sections like Politics, Economy, and Society while securing dedicated spaces, such as blogs, where anti-speciesist activists can act as gatekeepers:

> "Initially, I believed animal-related news should be present across all sections: Politics, Economy, Society, Culture, rather than confined to niche anti-speciesist spaces. However, this proved nearly impossible, so we created a blog [. . .] to ensure consistent coverage without negotiating with gatekeepers."

Another journalist agrees: "Ideally, you want that double strategy: having a niche, like a blog, for example, that is clearly anti-speciesist, while ensuring mainstream sections incorporate this perspective."

Finally, news agencies occupy a distinctive position here: rather than being simply one more outlet within a cross-sectional strategy, their syndicated wire content can be republished across multiple Spanish media outlets, meaning that shaping how an agency frames non-human issues could have effects across many outlets at once rather than a single publication. As one interviewee notes:

> "News agencies in Spain don't just lack anti-speciesist content—they don't even recognize it. Building relationships with key people there could significantly improve visibility."

#### 5.4.2. Creating Independent Platforms to Skip Gatekeepers

When mainstream media fails, alternative journalism emerges. Some journalists choose to create their own media outlets or contribute to existing niche platforms with established readerships. This allows them to control the narrative and avoid the limitations imposed by mainstream media: "I decided to start with [alternative outlet] because there were no better alternatives offering this kind of information in a fair and non-speciesist way."

And why not connect it to larger media, perhaps not mainstream but alternative:

> "We then took it further with its online version, which is still running. Integrating our media into [bigger outlet] provided us with a much larger platform to reach people who don't yet have an anti-speciesist perspective."

This trajectory, from a standalone platform to integration within a larger alternative outlet, illustrates the counter-public model described by Fraser (1990): rather than seeking legitimacy within mainstream gatekeeping structures, journalists construct parallel spaces of visibility, which can later serve as a bridge toward broader audiences without requiring negotiation with mainstream editorial gatekeepers.

#### 5.4.3. Collaboration and Syndication for Resource-Sharing, Visibility, and Legitimacy

Some interviewees see great potential for collaboration and suggest sharing and networking contacts with other anti-speciesist journalists, viewing it as essential for effectively covering topics and reaching broader audiences.

> "Collaboration among us is essential. The key is that the topics get covered, and covered well, so that as many people as possible, from different beliefs and positions, are exposed to this kind of information."

Another journalist proposes creating a coalition of anti-speciesist journalists, where shared databases and coordinated efforts could ensure that resources are used efficiently:

> "It would be great to create an alliance of anti-speciesist journalists, with shared databases, and being strategic with the little time we have."

This collaborative approach reflects an awareness of the challenges within the field and the need for solidarity to advance anti-speciesist perspectives in the media. Considered alongside strategy of creating independent platforms (Section 5.4.2), this points to a further structural response beyond any single platform: a networked infrastructure of resource-sharing among a professionally dispersed and resource-constrained group of journalists, addressing a constraint (limited individual capacity) that no single independent platform can solve alone.

## 6. Conclusions

Anti-speciesist journalists in Spanish media employ strategies across four non-mutually-exclusive categories: discursive, relational, framing, and structural.

At the discursive level, journalists downplay anti-speciesist framing when pitching stories to increase acceptance, a pragmatic tactic that nonetheless sits in tension with journalistic integrity; strategic language choices, avoiding terms that reify animals as property, serve as a subtler, complementary form of resistance available even when journalists cannot control a story's topic or angle. At a relational level, cultivating relationships with editors and gatekeepers helps secure publication over time, while selectively targeting progressive outlets, and avoiding right-wing media, reflects the stronger structural and ideological opposition anti-speciesist perspectives face there.

At the framing level, journalists shape how animal issues are packaged for publication. A cross-issue framing approach allows journalists to integrate animal rights into widely accepted social justice concerns, such as environmentalism, feminism, or public health, making these topics more palatable. Many also frame animal and human suffering as interconnected rather than competing for scarce editorial space. Journalists additionally craft pitches emphasizing spectacle, surprise, or emotional appeal, an approach one participant acknowledged was "not anti-speciesist at all, but it helps the strategy," an admission that distinguishes visibility strategies, which succeed in getting content published, from root-level strategies, which challenge the carnist and anthropocentric assumptions structuring newsworthiness itself. This category contains the clearest examples of both: cross-issue framing and non-comparative solidarity framing edge closer to root-level change, while the "recipe" approach remains a visibility strategy by the participant's own account.

At the structural level, journalists place animal rights stories across mainstream sections rather than confining them to niche spaces, leverage news agencies to shape coverage upstream, establish independent outlets when mainstream platforms prove insufficient, and pursue collaboration to address resource scarcity through shared networks.

These strategies demonstrate the pragmatism, creativity, and resilience of anti-speciesist journalists in Spain. Returning to the question posed in the Introduction, these findings suggest that the watchdog function, where it exists at all for non-human subjects, currently operates unevenly: the most publishable strategies tend to be less transformative at the root-level, and are concentrated in the framing category, meaning that journalism is currently more capable of increasing animal visibility than of contesting the ideological criteria that determine animal newsworthiness in the first place. This distinction between strategies that secure publication and strategies that unsettle the ideological criteria for newsworthiness offers a portable analytic tool for Critical Animal Media Studies and journalism studies more broadly, applicable beyond the Spanish case to any con-

text where journalists advocate for structurally marginalized subjects against entrenched newsroom norms.

These practices also recall techniques used in public relations and advocacy communication, such as relationship-building with gatekeepers, audience targeting, and message framing. Although these journalists operate within a framework of critical and activist journalism rather than corporate or institutional PR, their strategic awareness suggests that anti-speciesist journalism not only negotiates editorial resistance but also redefines the boundary between reporting and activism, engaging in a form of strategic moral communication aimed at shifting public discourse from within.

## 7. Recommendations and Future Directions

The findings point to structural changes needed to integrate anti-speciesist perspectives into the media landscape. Relational strategies could extend beyond ideologically aligned outlets by identifying sympathetic allies in more diverse media environments; structural strategies could be strengthened through formal collaboration and syndication networks among anti-speciesist journalists; framing strategies could be examined for whether visibility tactics such as spectacle or cross-issue framing can function as entry points toward more direct anti-speciesist claims rather than remaining an end in themselves; and discursive strategies could draw more systematically on existing resources such as the UPF Centre for Animal Ethics (UPF-CAE, 2020) guidelines on non-commodifying language.

## 8. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is based on interviews with nine self-identified anti-speciesist journalists in Spain. This small sample means the strategies identified here should be read as an in-depth account of this specific professional niche rather than as a generalizable prevalence claim; a useful next step would be a larger-scale survey of anti-speciesist journalists or a matched comparison with the mainstream, unreflective journalists studied by Rossi (2025b) to test how far these strategies extend beyond the participants interviewed here.

The study relies on journalists' self-reported accounts of their strategies rather than on analysis of the published texts these strategies produce, meaning that the actual editorial or audience effects of these strategies remain outside its scope. Content analysis of published output, tracking whether strategies such as cross-issue framing or the "recipe" approach correspond to measurable differences in reader engagement, editorial pushback, or a given outlet's coverage over time with a longitudinal study, would help establish whether these strategies work as journalists believe they do.

A further avenue for future research would be to compare these strategies with those used in other counter-hegemonic advocacy journalism, such as LGBTQ+, feminist, or racial justice reporting, to identify which travel across movements.

Finally, the findings are geographically and politically situated within the Spanish media landscape, and the extent to which they transfer to other national or ideological contexts remains an open question. Comparative research across other Southern European or differently polarized media systems could test whether the four strategy categories identified here hold more broadly, or whether different institutional conditions produce different strategies altogether.

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