

FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE ANIMAL PROTECTION THROUGH NETNOGRAPHY: INSIGHTS FROM HUNGARIAN ONLINE DISCOURSES

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Keywords: netnography, animal protection, sustainability, digital discourse, One Welfare

JEL Classification: Q01, Q57, Z13

1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigates the relationship between online discourse and the development of a sustainable animal protection mindset in Hungary through the lens of netnography [1]. While sustainability is a growing pillar of global animal welfare initiatives, its integration into public perception and everyday practice often occurs informally – particularly through digital interaction. The aim of the research is to uncover how online discussions reflect and shape public attitudes, emotional involvement, and behavioural responses related to animal protection, and how these contribute to long-term societal commitment under the One Welfare framework [2].

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study applied netnographic methodology using Talkwalker [3], a digital monitoring software, to collect publicly available data from a wide range of platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Reddit, TikTok, news portals). The research period spanned 31 months (January 1, 2022 – July 31, 2024), covering 156,208 unique mentions and 978,490 user interactions. Data was categorized using Boolean-based keyword networks focusing on topics like animal cruelty, neutering, responsible ownership, and ethical issues. This mixed-method qualitative analysis identified thematic clusters, emotional tones, and user engagement dynamics to assess how discourse volume and participation changed over time.

3 RESULTS

The discourse showed a steadily rising trend, with significant peaks around emotionally charged or controversial events (e.g. cases of animal abuse, celebrity involvement, government announcements). Compared to hyper-politicized topics like healthcare or education, animal protection generated slightly lower volume but higher user engagement per mention, especially in comments. Facebook and online news portals dominated the space with the highest volume of content and engagement. Reddit emerged as a vibrant forum for informed,

debate-oriented discussions, especially among younger demographics. TikTok and YouTube saw growing influence through short-form video campaigns [4], particularly among youth audiences. While less popular than Facebook, X showed steady growth in user activity, particularly in discussions involving international perspectives on legal protection of animals [5]. Most-discussed subtopics included animal cruelty, sterilization, animal protection campaigns, and NGO activities. Companion animals, especially dogs and cats, dominated both in appearance and interaction volume. Emerging sustainability themes (e.g. ethical consumerism, responsible breeding, lifestyle choices) were less frequent but showed deep involvement where they appeared.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Netnography proved to be an effective method for uncovering authentic, user-driven narratives on animal protection in Hungary. The study reveals that digital communities are not only arenas of emotional expression but also potential agents of cultural change. Emotional engagement – particularly visible in comment threads – emerged as a critical mechanism for internalizing sustainable animal welfare values. A clear opportunity lies in shifting from outrage-driven peaks to sustained, positive storytelling to maintain momentum and foster long-term behavioural change. This research highlights the need for strategic alignment between advocacy campaigns and digital discourse trends, with emphasis on educational content, myth-busting, and interactive participation formats. Future studies may explore cross-cultural netnographies, the role of algorithmic curation, and the longitudinal effects of emotional narratives on sustainable animal welfare behaviour.

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Acknowledgement

The author wishes to express her gratitude to Ynsight Research for conducting the research.

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