

How Concerned Are Hungarian Internet Users About Animal Protection? Preliminary Results of a Netnographic Study on Online Animal Protection Discourses

Állatvédelem az online térben, avagy mennyire érdekli az állatvédelem a magyar internetezőket? Egy netnográfiai kutatás előzetes eredményei

ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of online discourse surrounding animal protection in Hungary, addressing a significant gap in empirical research on this growing societal interest. Utilizing a netnographic methodology, the research analyzes 978,490 interactions across various digital platforms from January 2022 to July 2024. Overall, discourse trends are increasing in terms of mentions, comments, and interactions. While discussions on animal welfare are less prominent compared to critical social issues like healthcare and politics, they exhibit strong emotional commitments and involvement. The discourse peaks during specific events and controversies, reflecting responsive public engagement. The primary objective of this study is to identify the key themes, engagement patterns, and influencing factors shaping online discussions about animal protection. Furthermore, the study seeks to offer practical recommendations for policymakers on how to effectively harness digital engagement for animal welfare initiatives. Key themes include news articles, official statements from public figures, and user-generated content, underscoring the interactive nature of these discussions. This study contributes to academic understanding of

ABSZTRAKT

Jelen tanulmány a magyarországi állatvédelem online diskurzusának dinamikáját elemzi, hozzájárulva a növekvő társadalmi érdeklődés mélyebb megértéséhez és pótolva egy jelentős empirikus kutatási hiányt a témában. A kutatás a netnográfiai módszertant alkalmazva 978.490 interakciót elemez különböző digitális platformokon 2022 januárjától 2024 júliusáig. Összességében a diskurzusok trendjei növekvőek mind az említések, mind a kommentek, mind pedig az interakciók számát tekintve. Bár az állatvédelemmel kapcsolatos diskurzusok kevésbé prominensek olyan kiemelt társadalmi ügyekhez képest, mint például az egészségügy és a politika, erős érzelmi elkötelezettséget és involválódást mutatnak. A diskurzus intenzitása egyes állatvédelmi események és viták hatására emelkedik, ami a felhasználók erős rezponzivitását tükrözi. A kutatás elsődleges célja az állatvédelmi online diskurzusokat meghatározó kulcstémák, részvételi mintázatok és befolyásoló tényezők azonosítása. Emellett a tanulmány gyakorlati ajánlásokat kíván megfogalmazni a döntéshozók számára arra vonatkozóan, hogyan használhatók fel hatékonyan a digitális interakciók az állatvédelmi kezdeményezések előmozdítására. A kulcstémák közé tartoznak a hírek, a közszereplők hivatalos nyilatkozatai és a felhasználók által

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animal welfare advocacy in Hungary and offers practical insights for stakeholders in policy and education.

Keywords: animal protection, online discourse, emotional engagement, netnography

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in animal protection among the Hungarian population has often been discussed as a significant social phenomenon, yet, until now, no comprehensive measurement has been conducted to substantiate this assumption with empirical data. The anecdotal evidence, however, suggests a noticeable shift in societal attitudes toward animals and their welfare, reflecting broader changes in cultural values and ethical perspectives. This transformation can be observed in various domains, including the rising prevalence of companion animals in households, where pets increasingly occupy a role as family members rather than being perceived merely as utilitarian assets. This societal shift aligns with global trends that emphasize the ethical treatment of animals, the importance of animal welfare, and the recognition of animals as sentient beings. This growing awareness has been further amplified by the proliferation of digital platforms, which have created new avenues for public discourse, advocacy, and community building around animal protection issues. Social media channels, online forums, and other digital spaces allow individuals to share experiences, voice concerns, and mobilize collective action, effectively transforming the landscape of animal welfare activism.

Despite these observable trends, there remains a gap in scholarly understanding of how Hungarian society engages with animal protection on these platforms. The nature of online discourse, the topics that resonate most with users, and the broader cultural and social implications of these discussions have not been systematically studied. Addressing this gap is crucial for understanding the dynamics of animal welfare advocacy in Hungary

generált tartalom, amelyek e diskurzusok interaktív jellegére utalnak. A tanulmány hozzájárul az állatvédelmi törekvések tudományos megértéséhez Magyarországon, és gyakorlati megfigyeléseket nyújt a döntéshozók és az oktatók számára.

Kulcsszavak: állatvédelem, online diskurzus, érzelmi elkötelezettség, netnográfia

and for informing policy and educational initiatives aimed at promoting animal protection.

This study represents the first netnographic exploration of these discourses within the Hungarian context, employing a methodological approach that combines digital ethnography with content analysis. Through this pioneering investigation, the study not only contributes to the academic understanding of animal protection in Hungary but also offers practical insights for stakeholders, including policymakers, non-governmental organizations and educators.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Relevance of Animal Protection in Hungary

Animal protection in Hungary is increasingly recognized as a vital component of societal well-being, intersecting with issues such as pet-keeping, public health, environmental sustainability, and ethical consumerism. Over the past three decades since the political transition in Hungary, the country has established a legal foundation for animal protection issues through civil, administrative, and criminal law frameworks. International processes and influences have significantly shaped animal welfare law in Hungary, with the country's animal protection legislation reflecting EU legal harmonization efforts and demonstrating Hungary's commitment to international animal welfare initiatives. Additionally, Hungary has joined several international treaties focused primarily on species protection, and its EU accession has facilitated the implementation of detailed welfare regulations, particularly concerning farm animals.⁴

⁴ Paulovics et al. 2023.

The Hungarian Animal Protection Act, enacted in 1998,⁵ emphasizes the importance of preventing cruelty and ensuring the welfare of animals, reflecting a growing awareness of animals within the legal framework. In recent years, the penal legal environment surrounding animal protection has also been tightening, with increased penalties for animal cruelty. Today, a comprehensive system of laws and legal instruments supports the effective regulation and protection of animal welfare, incorporating both supranational and national legal sources.

Despite this differentiated legal background, discrepancies and regional variations persist in legal enforcement, referred to in the literature as the “animal welfare law enforcement gap.” This gap may stem from various factors, including (1) inadequacies in reporting legal violations, (2) misunderstandings arising from the language of the laws, (3) shortcomings in the actions and attitudes of authorities, and (4) perceived inadequacies in established legal consequences. Reducing this enforcement gap and aligning expectations with reality is a realistic goal for state governance in animal welfare.⁶

Significantly, the focus of political attention is increasingly directed toward animal protection. Until 2020, major legislative developments, such as the incorporation of animal cruelty into the Penal Code⁷ in 2004, were largely driven by societal pressure and international trends. However, from 2020 onwards, an increase in state involvement has been observed, directly influencing legislative processes. This shift reflects a growing commitment to animal welfare also at the governmental level.⁸

A crucial aspect of animal protection in Hungary is the growing importance of companion animals, particularly dogs and cats. Recent studies indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has further increased

the number of pet owners in Hungary. Vetter et al. (2022) presented a quantitative analysis based on a representative sample, illustrating the growing popularity of dog ownership in Hungary during the summer of 2021. It is noted that the proportion of dog-owning households has significantly increased, accounting for 50.4% of all households in 2021.⁹ According to recent studies, the trend remained upward in 2023.¹⁰ The growing number of dog keepers is recognized as an increasingly influential social force, with public sensitivity towards canine-related issues being demonstrated, particularly regarding the mistreatment of dogs, which elicits strong public outrage. The rising popularity of dog keeping highlights the increasing need for properly trained professionals, such as veterinarians, as well as products and services that support dog care. The 2021 survey indicates that dog owners have expressed clear expectations towards the government regarding responsible animal care issues, such as the education of children on animal welfare and the necessity for nationwide sterilization programs.¹¹

Moreover, the relevance of animal protection extends into public health, particularly regarding zoonotic diseases. The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) states that 60% of human infections are zoonotic, with 75% of emerging infectious diseases stemming from animals. Notably, 72% of the 60 emerging infectious diseases with an animal origin come from wildlife.¹² This aligns with the One Health concept, which advocates for a holistic approach to health that integrates human, animal, and environmental health.¹³

Ethical consumerism is also gaining traction in Hungary, with increasing demand for humane and sustainable products. The European Commission's Eurobarometer report reveals significant insights into public attitudes toward animal welfare across Europe. In Hungary, a substantial portion of the population expresses a strong interest in

5 Act XXVIII of 1998 on Animal Protection.

6 Vetter 2024.

7 Act C of 2012 on the Criminal Code, Section 244.

8 Vetter 2024.

9 Vetter, Vizi & Ózsvári 2022, 3.

10 Nagy 2023.

11 Vetter, Vizi & Ózsvári 2022, 10.

12 WOAH 2024.

13 WHO 2023.

the welfare of farm animals. The survey indicates that 90% of Hungarians believe that the welfare of farm animals is very important (46%) or somewhat important (44%). Moreover, 79% of respondents in Hungary agree that the welfare of farm animals in Hungary should be better protected than it is now, and 81% of respondents believe that the welfare of companion animals (e.g. cats and dogs) in Hungary should be better protected than it is now. These findings underscore the recognition of the importance of humane treatment and proper living conditions for animals in Hungary.¹⁴

Animals also appear in Hungarian public discourse as subjects of anthropomorphism,¹⁵ which does not have a direct professional connection to animal protection. However, it can undoubtedly influence the field in both negative and positive ways. The tendency to attribute human characteristics and emotions to animals may shape public perceptions of their welfare, potentially leading to increased empathy. Conversely, anthropomorphism can also result in misunderstandings about animals' needs and behaviors, complicating efforts to establish effective animal protection measures.

2.2 Social Media Usage Habits of Hungarians

Hungary exhibits distinctive social media usage patterns, shaped by cultural, demographic, and technological factors. At the beginning of 2024, there were approximately 7.29 million social media users in Hungary, representing 72.4% of the country's total population. Although this figure indicates a decrease of 1.5% of the users compared to 2023, the penetration of social media remains remarkably high, with 78.9% of the total internet user base utilizing at least one social media platform. Gender demographics indicate a fairly balanced representation, with 51.7% of users being female and 48.3% male.

Diving deeper into user behavior, it's crucial to consider the specific platforms that dominate

the Hungarian social media landscape. Facebook continues to be a prominent player, boasting 5.35 million users at the start of 2024. Facebook's audience reached 53.1% of the total population. YouTube also plays a significant role in digital media consumption, with 7.29 million users reported, equating to 72.4% of Hungary's total population. Instagram, another key player, recorded 2.70 million users, which is about 26.8% of the total population. Interestingly, Instagram has seen an 8.0% increase over the past year, signaling a potential resurgence in engagement on this platform. One of the most noteworthy developments in Hungary's social media scene is the growth of TikTok. As of early 2024, TikTok had 3.24 million users aged 18 and above, reaching 39% of all adults in this age group. This represents a remarkable increase of 597 thousand users (22.6%) compared to the previous year. This platform's rise aligns with global trends of increasing engagement with short-form video content, particularly among younger audiences.¹⁶

As social media continues to play a pivotal role in shaping public discourse and community interactions, monitoring these trends will be essential for future strategies and initiatives.

2.3 Netnography as a Research Method

Netnography, a term coined by Kozinets in the late 1990s, is a qualitative research method designed for studying online communities and cultures, "online ethnography". This method enables researchers to gain deeper insights into social interactions taking place on the internet, such as the user discourse on forums, blogs, and social media platforms. The method aids in identifying consumer attitudes, preferences, and emotions, which are often utilized in examining social movements and other topics. The netnographic study of online social dialogues is advantageous because participants can be observed in their natural environment without the research situation distorting the inter-

¹⁴ Eurobarometer 2023.

¹⁵ Horváth & Mitev 2016.

¹⁶ We are social 2024.

actions.¹⁷ It relies on publicly available and accessible online communication channels as sources of information to define and understand the thought processes, behaviors, and decision-making mechanisms of online user groups. Compared to other marketing research methods, it is less costly and time-consuming, and it allows for data collection and analysis at any time and place.¹⁸ According to Pollok et al. (2014), netnography is the “unobtrusive and noninfluencing monitoring of the communication and interaction of community members to gain practical insights into their usage behaviour.”¹⁹ Netnographies can stand alone or be combined with other research methods on online communities.²⁰ This method emphasizes the importance of context, focusing not just on the content of interactions but also on the nuances of online communication.²¹ Netnography is particularly effective in capturing the subtleties of community engagement, identity formation, and collective behavior. However, there are limitations, such as its exclusive applicability to observing online communities, which narrows the scope of topics and subjects that can be studied. Moreover, general conclusions about society as a whole cannot be drawn.

Previous research using similar methods in Hungary primarily focuses on areas such as nutritional science,²² sports science,²³ and public health.²⁴

Netnography is especially suited for exploring complex and multifaceted topics such as animal protection and welfare. These subjects often elicit strong opinions and emotional responses from various stakeholders, including animal rights activists, pet keepers and industry representatives. For instance, netnographic studies can reveal how different communities mobilize around animal protection campaigns, the language used to frame these issues, and the strategies employed to influence public opinion and policy. By examining social media platforms where discussions around animal welfare occur, researchers can identify key themes,

emerging discourses, and the impact of grassroots movements on broader societal attitudes.

2.4 Animal Protection in the Hungarian Online Space

There is limited research available on how animal protection in Hungary compares to other topics of public interest in the digital world. A 2013 Hungarian study revealed that the internet’s open nature fosters diverse civil discourse, with platforms like Facebook enabling robust public engagement. Posts related to civil topics make up just over 10% of Hungarian users’ timelines, with cultural and environmental issues dominating and generating the most dialogue. While animal protection emerges as a significant theme, it polarizes communities and sparks division. Despite these opportunities for engagement, only a small group actively participates in discussions, while the majority engages passively through likes or views.²⁵

Another study also highlighted the role of social media in animal-related contexts, focusing on biodiversity conservation. Over a 10-month period (2020 to 2021), researchers collected 2,671 posts (photos) from Hungary’s main animal identification group on social media. These identification requests, submitted by 1,183 individuals, showcased the platform’s potential to engage the public in biodiversity monitoring and awareness.²⁶

17 Kozinets 2002.

18 Kozinets 2006.

19 Pollok et al. 2014.

20 Costello, McDermott & Wallace 2017.

21 Miller & Slater 2000.

22 Papp-Bata & Szakály 2021.

23 Jármí & Fehér 2021.

24 Gál, Soós & Szakály 2017.

25 Szűts & Yoo 2013.

26 Páll-Gergely et al. 2024.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Objective

The goal of this netnographic study was to collect, categorize, and analyze discourses related to animal protection and welfare within the Hungarian online space. The data collection for the present article focused on the following questions:

- On which platforms are these discussions about animal protection most active?
- What is the volume of discourse surrounding animal welfare compared to other public issues?
- What trends characterize animal protection discourses, comments and overall interactions?

3.2 Data Collection

The research analyzed online content over a 30-month period, from January 1, 2022, to July 31, 2024. Data sources included publicly available posts, comments, and interactions from social media platforms, blogs, and news sites. Platforms analyzed included Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, TikTok, and Reddit. A total of 978,490 online interactions were recorded during the study period, including likes, shares, and comments.

The research exclusively collects publicly available content that has been anonymized in accordance with GDPR and Hungarian legislation using Talkwalker's specialized software.²⁷ An exception to anonymity applies to the official profiles of public figures, organizations, and influencers, provided that data collection restrictions have not been imposed by Meta, X, Google, or other platform providers.

The keyword syntaxes consist of a comprehensive network of terms related to animal protection, welfare, and associated themes. They employ various Boolean operators such as "OR" and "AND", as well as proximity operators like "NEAR", to capture the complexities of these discussions. The Basic Keyword Network includes keywords such as "animal protection", "animal welfare", "animal abuse", "responsible ownership", and specific practices like "neutering" and "breeding". This network filters results to focus on Hungarian-language content (lang:hu). Additionally, the Filters section narrows the search by categorizing terms related to animal mistreatment, neutering, and issues regarding indoor and outdoor keeping. Each category incorporates multiple keywords, contributing to an extensive collection that aims to provide relevant insights into the multifaceted nature of animal welfare discourse in Hungary. In total, 47 unique keywords are utilized across the syntaxes, addressing various aspects of animal welfare and related practices.

²⁷ Talkwalker 2024.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Platform-Specific Observations

Fig. 1. illustrates the distribution of social media platforms and related digital channels in the context of public appearances of animal protection topics. Online news portals and their comments dominate the landscape, accounting for 63,903 mentions (40.8%). Blogs follow with 30,320 mentions (19.4%), and Facebook contributes 29,862 mentions (19.1%), reflecting their widespread reach and user engagement potential. Reddit ranks next with 14,204 mentions (9.1%), showcasing its role

as a community-driven platform for discussions. Disqus has 9,209 mentions (5.9%), while Twitter (X) has 7,084 mentions (4.5%), indicating a moderate presence likely due to their focus on commentary and rapid updates. Conversely, platforms like YouTube (747 mentions, 0.5%), forums (736 mentions, 0.5%), and Instagram (455 mentions, 0.3%) are less prominent in this context, suggesting that visual or niche-oriented platforms are not the primary avenues for public discussions on animal protection.

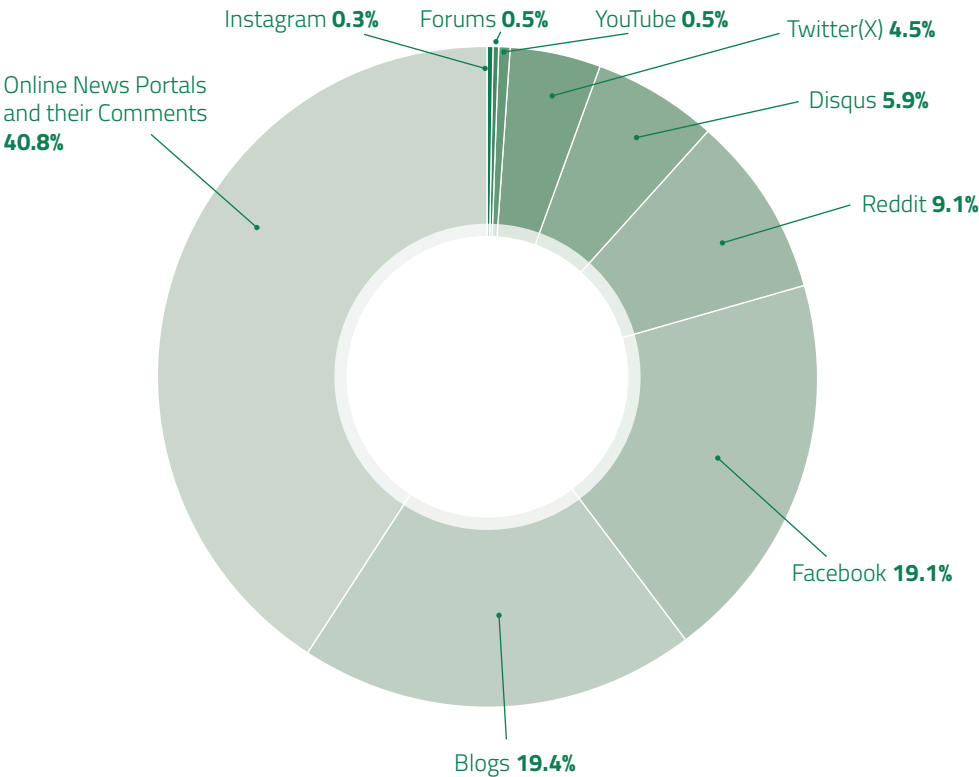


Fig. 1. The Proportion of Social Media Platforms in Public Mentions of Animal Protection (in Percentages, N = 156,520).

Overall, text-heavy, interactive, and news-focused channels lead the dialogue, highlighting their effectiveness in raising awareness and engaging audiences. Nearly one-fifth of public interactions occur on Facebook. (However, the study does not account for discussions in closed or private groups, which limit lawful data collection.) While less popular than Facebook, X showed steady growth in user activity, particularly in discussions involving international perspectives on legal protection of animals. Reddit enjoys growing popularity in Hungary and is playing an increasingly significant role in public discourse. On this platform, vibrant debates about animal protection issues unfold across various comment threads. Reddit holds a unique position in the social media landscape, particularly among younger generations, who consider it the most reliable online platform with significantly less misinformation and fewer fake profiles. Instagram was primarily used for sharing personal content, with limited engagement in broader public or political discourse. However, posts by influencers and public figures occasionally highlighted animal welfare topics, attracting significant user interaction. YouTube and TikTok facilitated active discussions in comment sections under videos by organizations, activists, or influencers. TikTok, in particular, gained prominence among younger users, with a growing number of short videos addressing animal welfare campaigns and issues.

4.2 The volume of discourse surrounding animal protection compared to other public issues

The findings of the research underscore that discussions related to animal welfare maintain a significant presence in online discourse, highlighting its relevance among Hungarian Internet users. Throughout the study period from January 1, 2022, to July 31, 2024, a total of 156,208 online mentions related to animal welfare were recorded, resulting in nearly one million interactions (978,490) from users. This volume is noteworthy within the context of public discourse; however,

it is important to contextualize it alongside other pressing societal issues. When compared to more politically charged or ideologically divisive topics, such as healthcare, elections, education, and the climate crisis, which typically generate millions of interactions and appearances, the discourse on animal welfare appears to be of lesser prominence. In comparison, during the three-month period of the 2021 Hungarian opposition primary election, the research revealed an impressive level of engagement, with more than 4.5 million individuals reacting to the topic of the primary election online in various forms.²⁸ This suggests that while animal welfare is an important subject, it does not attract the same level of sustained attention as some of these other critical topics. The nature of engagement in discussions about animal welfare, however, tends to evoke strong emotional responses, indicating that the topic resonates deeply with a segment of the public.

It is crucial to recognize that the trend in animal welfare discourse is not uniform across the analyzed period. The volume of discussions tends to spike around specific events, high-profile cases, or significant news related to animal welfare. This indicates that Hungarian internet users exhibit a heightened interest in animal welfare, particularly when confronted with negative reports, controversies, or crises in the field. For example, cases of animal abuse or large-scale rescues often catalyze intense online discussions, which can draw attention to the importance of animal welfare and the need for protective legislation. This phenomenon suggests that while the core interest in animal welfare exists, it often gains traction primarily during times of distress or heightened awareness.

The data collection process reveals that the discourse on animal welfare can be categorized into six major themes:

²⁸ Ynsight Research 2024.

- 1. Edited news related to animal welfare: these stories form a critical foundation for online discussions, often serving as starting points for further exploration and debate among users.
- 2. Official public social media posts related to animal welfare: posts from public figures, such as the Prime Minister and both ruling and opposition politicians, significantly influence public discourse, as these statements can shape perceptions and initiate conversations.
- 3. Publications from organizations and shelters focusing on animal welfare: non-governmental organizations and animal shelters play a crucial role in raising awareness and providing vital information, thus engaging users in discussions that often lead to action and support.
- 4. Comments from users on articles, posts, and shares concerning the above themes: the high volume of user comments reflects strong involvement and identification with animal welfare issues, indicating that users feel a personal connection to the subject matter.
- 5. Dialogues formed in thematic forums or comment threads (e.g., Reddit): these platforms provide a space for in-depth discussions and exchanges of ideas, allowing users to engage with one another.

6. Conversations taking place in open and some closed animal welfare-focused groups: these groups create a dedicated environment for sharing information, experiences, and strategies for advocating animal welfare.

The analysis of user comments reveals that there is a high ratio of comments relative to appearances, approximately three comments for every mention. In comparison, discussions surrounding climate issues tend to have a much lower ratio, often one comment for every ten appearances. This discrepancy indicates that animal welfare is a topic that resonates personally with users, prompting them to share their thoughts and experiences actively. Users seem to identify strongly with animal welfare issues, demonstrating personal connections that motivate them to contribute to discussions. Users often express well-formed and assertive opinions on the subject, leading to vibrant debates in comment sections.

4.3 Emerging Trends

Based on the research findings, it can be clearly stated that the online discourse related to animal protection was ongoing throughout the examined period. Certain periods experienced spikes in the number of discussions on the topic, indicating a significant increase in trend and relevance. The following two figures illustrate the trends in overall mentions (Fig. 2.) and comment threads (Fig. 3.).

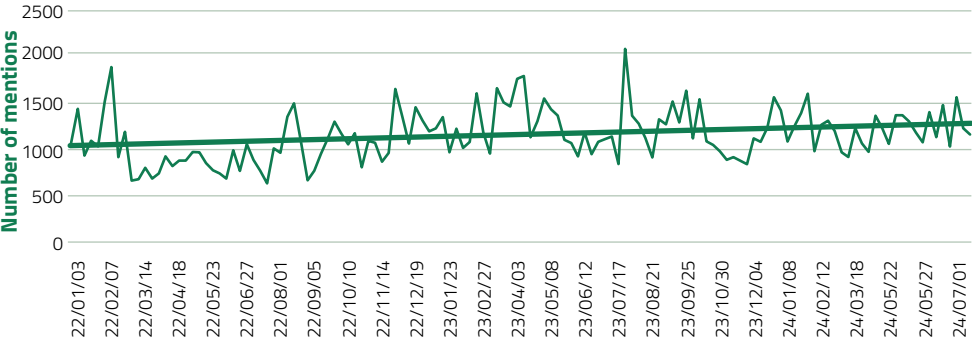


Fig. 2. Trends in Overall Mentions of Animal Protection (N = 156,208)

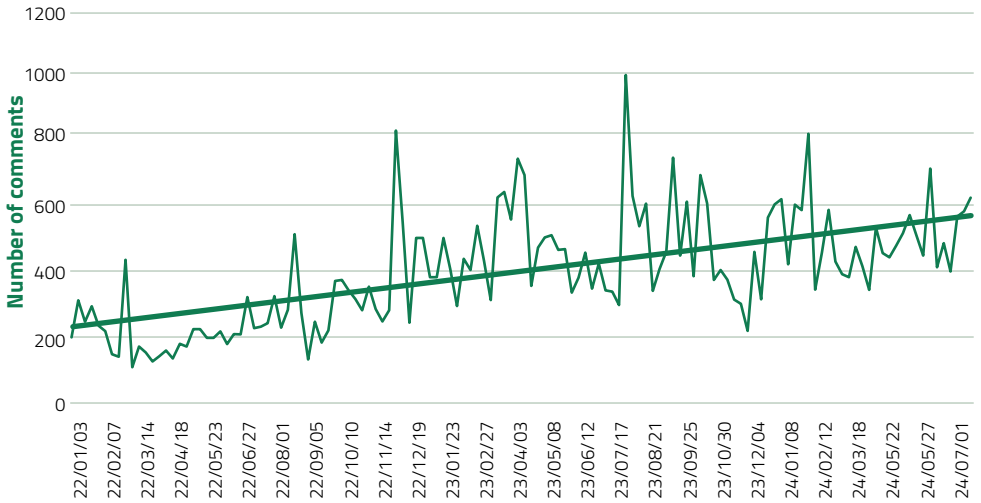


Fig. 3. Trends in Comments about Animal Protection (N = 54,744)

During the examination period, a slight increase can be observed in the overall trend of the discourse (Fig. 2.), while — as illustrated in Fig. 3. — a sharper rise was noted in the case of comments.

Fig. 4. depicts the interactions related to animal protection and animal welfare. A total of 978,490 interactions were recorded in the online space during the examined period.

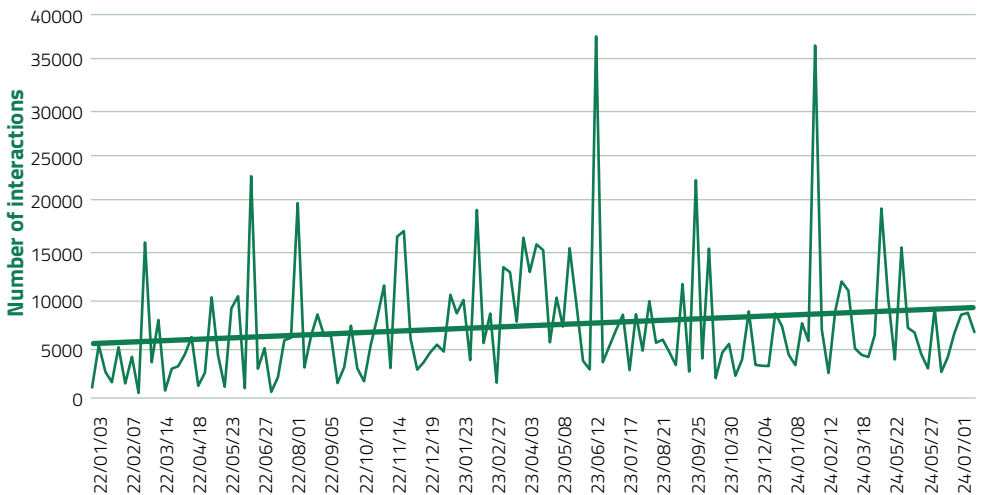


Fig. 4. Trends in Overall Interactions regarding Animal Protection (N = 978,490)

In addition to comments, the rate of shares is also notably high, indicating that the topic resonates with and mobilizes the online community. The literature shows that sharing content on one's profile indicates higher engagement than a simple reaction or even a public comment.²⁹

This summary analyzes the recorded spikes in overall interactions related to animal welfare, focusing on specific events due to space constraints:

- On June 20, 2022, it was reported that Budapest's bee meadows had thrived over a year, leading to a significant increase in biodiversity, including the emergence of a beaver family. Additionally, an interview with Minister of Justice Judit Varga highlighted her role in the Joint Cause for Animal Protection Foundation and emphasized the importance of animal welfare.
- On August 10, 2022, animal rights activists protested against the breeding of French Bulldogs due to a reported decrease in their life expectancy, raising concerns about the artificial maintenance of unhealthy dogs. Concurrently, environmentalists expressed their worries regarding a firewood legislation.
- On November 28, 2022, a policewoman discovered and saved a puppy while patrolling in Monor.
- On February 17, 2023, Budapest Mayor Gergely Karácsony shared a post about adoptable animals at a shelter.
- Between April 4–8, 2023, the Hungarian Government reaffirmed its commitment to animal protection in a post, while an article by Qubit featured singer-songwriter Manuel expressing his willingness to go to great lengths for his dog, despite not wanting children.
- On June 23, 2023, certified dog behavior therapist Krisztina Lányfalusi discussed dog behavior therapy, noting that breaking a window may be necessary in some cases when a dog is trapped in a car, although caution is required. Additionally, a dog named Dolly exhibited fear of going outside due to previous abuse.

- On October 4, 2023, the World Animal Day was celebrated with a charity initiative by Lidl. Later, on October 20, Manuel repaid 20,000 forints that he had stolen from a shelter donation six years earlier.
- On February 9, 2024, animal rights advocates called for the removal of carousel horses.
- On April 17, 2024, opposition representative Ákos Hadházy criticized businessman Lőrinc Mészáros, questioning why animal rights activists had not protested against barbaric practices, specifically referencing a hunting ground's regulation issues.
- Finally, between May 6–8, 2024, the Hungarian Government announced a non-repayable grant of 500 million forints for animal protection organizations and those working with rescue and guide dogs. Gergely Karácsony announced the launch of the "Kutyapest" adoption program in Budapest, which included an increase in kennel capacity by 30% over four years.

Overall, it can be concluded that during the examined period, the increase in discourse volume of mentions, comments and overall interactions was driven by the following topics:

- News related to animal cruelty and abuse;
- Information regarding animal testing;
- Specific measures and announcements;
- Responsible pet keeping practices and the associated responsibilities;
- Actions and planned events by animal protection organizations, such as collaborations with companies on World Animal Day, neuter campaigns, and informational outreach;
- Extreme views and statements made by animal rights advocates, such as proposals from PETA;
- Campaign messages, posts during parliamentary and local elections.

²⁹ Tenenboim 2022.

5. CONCLUSION

This research highlights the increasing prominence of animal protection in Hungary and the significant engagement it generates among the public. A key focus of this study is the innovative methodological approach that analyzes social media interactions, revealing how animal welfare discussions are evolving within the public sphere. Social media platforms, especially Facebook, play a pivotal role in fostering these conversations, indicating a growing interest in animal welfare issues among a wide audience.

The findings underscore the necessity of promoting positive narratives and constructive news related to animal protection. As discussions surrounding animal welfare gain traction, it is crucial for advocates and content creators to shift their focus toward sharing uplifting stories and successful initiatives. This emphasis on positivity can help to cultivate a more favorable public perception of animal welfare, encouraging broader participation and engagement.

Furthermore, this research highlights key moments when public engagement with animal protection peaks, such as major cruelty cases, legislative changes, or high-profile advocacy campaigns. These insights can guide future initiatives by suggesting optimal timing for awareness campaigns, such as aligning educational programs with these peak periods to maximize outreach. Additionally, the identified discussion trends suggest a need for more targeted digital content – such as expert-led Q&A sessions, myth-busting posts about animal welfare, and interactive campaigns encouraging responsible pet ownership. These practical applications can strengthen advocacy efforts and enhance public engagement in animal welfare projects.

In conclusion, the growing interest in animal welfare reflects a broader societal shift toward recognizing its importance. Future research should

focus on tracking changes in public attitudes toward animal welfare over time and analyzing discussions across different social media platforms to enhance audience engagement strategies. Investigating demographic differences in engagement with animal welfare content can also improve campaign effectiveness. Additionally, assessing the impact of positive narratives on public behavior and exploring effective storytelling techniques will further enrich the discourse.

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