

FIGHTING BREEDS AND ATHLETES: HOW LOBBY GROUPS FRAME ANIMAL-BASED ENTERTAINMENT IN SPAIN

<https://doi.org/10.56754/0718-4867.2025.3771>

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Received on 2025-06-11

Reviewed on 2025-07-10

Accepted on 2025-07-28

Published on 2025-09-05

Abstract

Introduction: Despite growing moral concern over the use of animals in bullfighting, cockfighting, and horse and dog racing, these animal-based entertainment industries continue to exhibit significant resilience in Spain, driven largely by the strategic use of public relations. **Aims/Objectives:** To analyze the discourse disseminated by interest groups lobbying for the use of animals in these industries in Spain, with a focus on the representation of nonhuman animals, self-representation by the industries and

representation of the public, to assess how these discursive practices affect the emergence of compassion. **Methodology:** A multimodal analysis from a Critical Animal Studies perspective. We examined a sample of texts, informative materials, videos and newspaper articles displayed and disseminated by four primary interest groups: Fundación Toro de Lidia (a foundation promoting and defending bullfighting culture in Spain), Asociación de Sociedades Organizadoras de Carreras de Caballos en España / Asociación de Hipódromos (the association of horse racing event organizers and racetracks in Spain), Federación Española de Galgos (the Spanish federation governing greyhound racing and breeding), and Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español (the union of breeders of the Spanish fighting cock). **Results:** The main findings of this research highlight the interplay between spectacle, tradition, science and economic interest —mediated through the biologization and athleticization of animals— as well as the roles of Spanish nationalism, victimization narratives, and warlike framing. **Discussion:** The discourse incorporates fallacious reasoning alongside polarizing rhetoric, the instrumentalization of culture, science and tradition, and strategies of humane-washing and greenwashing. **Conclusions:** Compassion towards animals is reframed in ways that delegitimize the ethical concern expressed by citizens, while portraying the industries' own activities as the true expression of care and responsibility.

Keywords: critical animal studies, lobby discourses, bullfighting, cockfighting, horse racing, dog racing.

RAZAS DE PELEA Y ATLETAS: EL ENCUADRE DEL ENTRETENIMIENTO BASADO EN ANIMALES DE GRUPOS DE INTERÉS EN ESPAÑA

Resumen

Introducción: A pesar de la creciente preocupación moral por el uso de animales en las corridas de toros, las peleas de gallos y las carreras de caballos y perros, estas industrias del entretenimiento basadas en animales siguen mostrando una notable resistencia en España, impulsadas en gran medida por el uso estratégico de las relaciones públicas. **Objetivos:** Analizar el discurso difundido por los grupos de interés que ejercen lobby a favor del uso de animales en estas industrias en España, con especial atención a la representación de los animales no humanos, la autorrepresentación por parte de las industrias y la representación del público, para evaluar cómo estas prácticas discursivas afectan a la compasión. **Metodología:** Un análisis multimodal desde una perspectiva de Estudios Críticos Animales. Para ello se examinó una muestra de textos, materiales informativos, vídeos y artículos periodísticos expuestos y difundidos por cuatro grupos de interés principales: Fundación Toro de Lidia (una fundación que promueve y defiende la cultura taurina), Asociación de Sociedades Organizadoras de Carreras de Caballos en España / Asociación de Hipódromos (la asociación de organizadores de eventos de carreras de caballos e hipódromos), Federación Española de Galgos (la federación española que rige las carreras y la cría de galgos), y Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español (la unión de criadores del gallo de pelea). **Resultados:** Los principales hallazgos de esta investigación muestran cómo se relacionan el espectáculo, la tradición, la ciencia y el interés económico, impulsados por la biologización y “atletización” de los animales, así como el papel del nacionalismo español, las narrativas victimistas y los encuadres bélicos. **Discusión:** El discurso incorpora razonamientos falaces junto a una retórica polarizadora, la instrumentalización de la cultura, la ciencia y la tradición, y estrategias de *humane-washing* y *greenwashing*. **Conclusiones:** La compasión hacia los animales se reformula de manera que deslegitima la preocupación ética expresada por la ciudadanía. Al mismo tiempo, se presentan las propias actividades de las industrias como la verdadera expresión del cuidado y la responsabilidad.

Palabras clave: estudios críticos animales, discursos de lobby, tauromaquia, peleas de gallos, carreras de caballos, carreras de perros.

Introduction

Animal-based entertainment practices remain a widespread reality today. While zoos, aquaria, and theme parks represent the largest and most well-known sectors in this field — receiving considerable public attention and academic study as spectacles — several other significant activities also use animals for human entertainment that remain comparatively less visible and under explored. In Spain, the most prominent of these activities are animal sports, and include racing (horse and greyhound) and “fighting” (bullfighting and cockfighting¹). While all practices are correctly defined as sports, we contend the premise of bullfighting as fighting akin to Faria and Castellano’s (2024) argument regarding hunting², racing (horse and greyhound), and illegal fighting (cockfighting). Although there are varying levels of public awareness and disagreement regarding these activities, they are also increasingly subject to growing moral concern within society. The latter has become evident over the past decade through various legislative reforms, as well as independent public opinion surveys indicating that animal-based entertainment is generally viewed as being less acceptable than other animal-based practices (Díaz, 2019; Fundación BBVA, 2022). Increasing societal concern about animal welfare is also reflected in targeted, non-independent surveys, where 54 % to 85 % of Spanish respondents expressed concern about horse welfare in equestrian activities, despite generally supporting these activities if complying with welfare standards (Equine Ethics and Wellbeing Commission, 2022). In independent surveys, the rejection is particularly significant in animal-based entertainment practices at local festivals (Fundación BBVA, 2025), with activities such as bullfighting being disapproved of by most Spanish citizens (María *et al.*, 2017).

However, it is difficult to offer accurate data on the popularity and profitability of these industries. The latest official attendance report on bullfighting spectacles dates to 2021-

1 Cockfighting is illegal as an entertainment practice under national Spanish law; however, regulated “selection tests” aimed at improving the native *gallo combatiente español* breed are permitted in certain autonomous communities in order to preserve the breed and support legal export. It is not legally classed as sport or entertainment, but as breeding quality tests that require fighting. These tests prohibit betting, and there is no official registry of attendance numbers. Nevertheless, clandestine cockfighting events involving public participation and betting continue to take place in some regions.

2 This physical activity that requires effort and skill, is subject to rules and is performed for entertainment or professional purposes should be considered a sport. However, fighting involves defeating an assumed equal in a reciprocal activity of mutual aggression, and like the premise of hunting, the rules of bullfighting provide for an unequal confrontation.

2022, where 1.9 % of the analyzed population reported attendance (Ministerio de Cultura (España), 2025). According to ANOET (2024), 8.387 bulls were “fought” in bullrings in 2024. There is no consensus on the actual percentage of the gross national product. While bullfighting supporters mostly cite a study by the National Association of Organizers of Bullfighting Spectacles (Medina García-Hierro & Gutiérrez López, 2016), where the estimated percentage of the gross national product was of 0.16 % (1.604 million euros), this data has been criticised for employing fallacies, inventing data and an overall lack of scientific rigour (Gilpérez-Fraile, 2016). Bullfighting supporters argue that the number is larger (0.36 %) (Mundotoro, 2020), while animal advocates estimate that it could reach a 0.125 % at most (Zaldívar-Laguía, 2020).

The II Study on the Impact of the Equestrian Sector in Spain (Real Federación Hípica Española & CENRE Yeguada Cartuja, 2022) reports that there were 1.810 races celebrated in 2019 alone (p. 38), with 1.776 horses used, more than 120 million euros in betting, and 8.9 million euros used for advertising (p. 55). In contrast, dog racing and cockfighting events do not offer centralized specific attendance or animal use figures; to offer some context, on the one hand, Federación Española de Galgos (2024b) reports 518 greyhounds registered for the National Championship in 2025 and reports a record of 32.000 people attending the 2018 National Championship (Federación Española de Galgos, 2024a). Moreover, *Jara y Sedal*, a hunting magazine, reports a “massive following” online, where the live broadcasting of a race would reach 138.000 viewers (Pompa, 2025). On the other hand, for cockfighting, there are no official statistics or public monitorization; the news coverage on the matter is usually connected to animal welfare or betting, and in the webpage of the main association, most entries on events can only be accessed with a breeder accreditation number. It should be noted that, in practice, greyhound racing in the canodrome style (oval tracks with mechanical hare and betting) has disappeared from Spain. Instead, there are two types of greyhound racing regulated by the Spanish Greyhound Federation (Federación Española de Galgos, n.d.-a): open field racing (with a live hare) and mechanical hare racing (without public betting). Dog racing is recognized as a regulated sport and competition with its own regulations (Federación Española de Galgos, n.d.-b).

Despite growing public compassion toward animals involved in these activities — understood here as a moral emotion that arises when individuals recognize the suffering of another as significant, undeserved, and relevant (Nussbaum, 2001) — these other animal-

based entertainment industries continue to exhibit significant resilience, driven largely, if not primarily, by their promoters' strategic use of public relations. Some of the lobbying techniques that systematically shape public perception involve spinning: the selective framing, omission or distortion of facts to shift attention toward favorable interpretation (Miller & Dinan, 2008). Animal-based industries employ strategic communication and public relations spin to downplay environmental harms and animal suffering; they embrace greenwashing or humanewashing strategies to redirect the attention to positive narratives on their practices, and ideas of scientific progress and naturalness are used to support their practices, with a framing that secures public trust while masking structural violence (Almiron, Fernández & Rodrigo-Alsina, 2024; Changing Markets Foundation, 2023).

Persuasive tactics and targeted campaigns are employed not only to justify their legitimacy, but also to actively counter growing calls for their abolition or stricter regulation. For instance, animal advocates are often portrayed as emotional, unscientific, extremists, elitist outsiders, irrational and aggressive (Almiron & Khazaal, 2016; Aranceta-Reboredo & Almiron, 2024). Most of the research published so far focuses on the animal-based food industry, which justifies its actions by using false information, distracting the public with greenwashing techniques, delaying progress, and blocking climate policies (Changing Markets Foundation, 2024); it also presents itself as a victim of "anti-meat militancy," employs misleading ads, funds experts and academic institutions for greenwashing its products, and shapes public opinion with public relation campaigns (Carter, 2024). In the Spanish context, the animal-based experimentation industry negotiates societal responses to its practices through a strategy of illusory authenticity. This discourse conveniently frames the industry as altruistic and concerned about animal suffering, while portraying animal advocates as misinformed radicals (Almiron, Fernández & Rodrigo-Alsina, 2024). Conversely, the zoological park industry actively lobbies to delegitimise the ethical claims of these advocates, depicting them as ignorant and self-interested, which stands in stark contrast to the industry's self-portrayal as "modern zoos" (Aranceta-Reboredo & Almiron, 2024).

However, the discourse emitted by these industries (bullfighting, cockfighting, dog and horse racing) has been under-researched from a critical perspective.³ Of all the activities mentioned, bullfighting is by far the most critically studied practice in Spain (Codina-Segovia, 2018; Mosterín, 2010; Vicent & El Roto, 2017). In this country, bullfighting has been historically promoted by public authorities, driven by strong political motivations (Marcos, 2015). Although most bullrings are owned by public institutions, they are managed by private undertakings (p.10). Bullfighting festivities, activities, training schools, and stock breeders are supported by public authorities and receive large subsidies (p. 11). This results in the industry enjoying significant resources for lobbying and advocacy, and the legal disputes surrounding bullfighting are particularly complex (Mulà, 2018)⁴, reflecting the symbolic and political weight of the practice. In the Spanish context, Codina-Segovia (2018) identifies four discursive strategies used by the bullfighting industry: co-option of critics (“taurinización”), mitigation of public critique through censorship and distortion, intellectual disqualification of anti-bullfighting voices, and open ridicule. In other countries, critical analysis has highlighted the strategic uses of moral disengagement and neutralization techniques to sustain contested traditions. An example of this is Cordeiro-Rodrigues’ and Achino’s (2017) study on supporters of Portuguese bullfighting, which identifies specific neutralization strategies such as the denial of injury, appeals to higher authorities and loyalties, and the condemnation of the condemners.

There is also a long tradition of academic studies on the cultural representation of animals which highlight the connections between species racialization and their increased oppression, as well as breeding practices and the use of animals in colonial contexts

3 It should be noted that, unlike other worldviews studied with a critical lens in social sciences, such as the patriarchy, the philosophical viewpoint that centers human beings as the most significant entities in the world (anthropocentrism) and the discrimination of beings based on species (speciesism) are not considered as often in research.

4 As per Mulà, the most prominent attempt at prohibition occurred in Catalonia, where a popular legislative initiative led to its ban through Act 28/2010 (August 3). However, this ban was later repealed by the Constitutional Court Ruling 177/2016, following a constitutional appeal. The legal reversal was made possible by Act 18/2013 (November 12), which defines bullfight as cultural heritage. This designation has been repeatedly employed by the Constitutional Court to invalidate regional provisions aiming to restrict or abolish bullfighting, such as those passed in the Balear Islands (Act 9/2017, August 3). Bullfighting is currently constitutionally protected throughout the Spanish state. In an effort to abolish this protection, animal advocates have gathered 715,606 signatures for the popular legislative initiative titled “It Is Not My Culture” (“No Es Mi Cultura”). If passed, this initiative would amend Act 18/2013 (November 12) that currently safeguards bullfighting.

(Anderson, 2004; Krásná, 2022; Miller, 2014; Schürch, 2020; Tregar, 2020). In this regard, animals have long been used as a proxy for human cultural identities, as symbols of nations, national identity, and human characteristics; they have also been markers of status, wealth, and power (Schürch, 2020). Specifically in the case of Spain, *Spanishness* has been historically tied to different animals, depending on the context. Aside from bulls, horses (and equestrian culture) have also been part of the spectacles used to assert social hierarchies and establish a local identity, in the context of the colonial social structures of America, for instance. According to Schürch (2020), “*Conquistadors*” merged celebratory aspects of horseback riding with the dynamics of conquest — often connected with bull runs (p. 3), or certain races performed to “show off in front of *caciques*” (p. 12). These events were used to challenge, negotiate, and fight for power positions and privileges. Some of its forms, especially *gallardia* — a “general social framework [...], a mixture of elegance, nobility and gracefulness” (p. 6) — were also seen as “a distinctive signature of Spanishness” (p. 6). Specific “qualities and traits” of the horses were connected to “noble performance”, including the “horse’s own natural expression of nobility” (Schürch, 2020, pp. 5-6).

In the case of cockfighting, despite the practice being illegal as a form of entertainment, there is a public pro-cockfighting discourse in Spain. Gómez-Pellón (2017) has analyzed this and identified how ideas of virility, *machismo*, narcissism, and domination are intertwined with the culture that has traditionally surrounded cockfighting. As the author says, this is manifested in the “permanent praise of lineage, race, and virility as their [the roosters’] best attributes” (p. 165). All of these values are very present in public pro-cockfighting discourse, as we will see.

Additionally, a doctoral dissertation on the cockfighting world in the Canary Islands (Ontillera-Sánchez, 2019) revealed the views of breeders and *aficionados*⁵ on the roosters, which according to the author evolve around their being perceived as uniquely territorial and aggressive animals; this cultural event is a result of a “natural fact” and the character of roosters, not the other way around. Moreover, the breeders define themselves as “just as

⁵ The term *aficionados* refers to those devotees who exhibit a passionate attachment to and identification with the culturally rooted traditions associated with the practices analyzed in this study. They are characterized by deep emotional investment, a sense of historical continuity, and a strong feeling of identity and belonging within a community of supporters.

much in favor of animal rights as anyone else” (p. 256), often comparing the attempts of animal advocates to ban bullfighting with the pursuit to ban cockfighting (p. 268). This dissertation provides key insights into how *aficionados* legitimise the use of animals as objects for human consumption.

Overall, however, there is a notable lack of research on the discourse produced by these animal-based entertainment industries in Spain. The aim of this paper is to contribute to filling this critical gap in literature.

2. Methodology

This paper presents the findings of an investigation into the discourse of a sample of interest groups lobbying for the use of animals in bullfighting, cockfighting, and dog and horse racing in Spain. Analyzing the discourse of these interest groups serves as an effective proxy for understanding the broader narratives of the industry, as they actively represent its interests, articulate its justifications, and defend its practices in public and political arenas. Similar approaches have been successfully employed by some of the authors of this research in previous studies focusing on other countries and sectors within the animal-based entertainment industry (Almiron, 2017; Aranceta-Reboredo & Almiron, 2024). Specifically, the main objective of this research is to understand how these industries navigate growing societal compassion toward animals and construct narratives that justify their practices. Hence, the aim is to contribute to the literature that examines how interest groups shape industry narratives and influence public perceptions from a critical animal studies perspective.

To achieve the above objective, a multimodal critical discourse analysis was conducted, this constituting a methodological approach that examines how meaning is constructed through multiple modes of communication —mainly text, but also images and audiovisual elements— within a given discourse. This approach recognizes that communication extends beyond traditional discourse, encompassing various semiotic resources that work together to convey meaning (Ledin & Machin, 2020). Our multimodal approach employed critical discourse analysis (CDA), drawing on Van-Dijk’s (2001) framework to examine power relations and ideologies in discourse, while integrating content analysis to systematically identify the main frames, as conceptualized by Entman (1993).

To this end, we developed an analytical framework that distinguishes three levels within the interest group discourse⁶: the portrayal and activities ascribed to nonhuman animals, the characterization of the industries themselves and of the public. For each level of analysis, we examined both the explicit or literal and implicit or implied arguments used, placing particular emphasis on how compassion is negotiated — whether it is encouraged or discouraged, and through which discursive mechanisms. Across the three levels, we investigated how actors are represented in terms of their identity, how actors are portrayed based on their actions, and how beliefs or opinions are justified.

Our research examined five prominent interest groups in Spain: Fundación Toro de Lidia (bullfighting), the Asociación de Sociedades Organizadoras de Carreras de Caballos en España/Asociación de Hipódromos (horse racing), the Federación Española de Galgos (dog racing), and the Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español (cockfighting). These organizations are among the most influential interest groups in Spain lobbying for the animal-based entertainment activities examined in this paper. They are all well-established, financially supported by the industry itself, and operate to safeguard its interests.

Our study corpus consisted of a sample of texts, informative materials, videos and newspaper articles displayed at the websites of the selected organizations with a corpus of 120 samples that cover the period from 2004 to 2024 (Table 1). We have also employed social media for sourcing materials unavailable in the webpage, specifically for cockfighting. While not the primary tool used for lobbying, websites offer valuable insights into the discourse employed by interest groups. Lobbying is usually hidden and consists of direct communication. However, it also takes place through coalition formation, policy briefings, public relations, media campaigns, and grassroots mobilization. Websites, on the other hand, serve as a vital platform for distributing information and reaching out to the public, acting as a primary archive for crucial messages and enhancing understanding of public communications and advocacy efforts.

⁶ This analytical framework has been developed within the COMPASS research project (PID2020-118926RB-100).

Table 1. Corpus overview

Professional sector	Name of the lobby	Source	Type of content	Date of content
Bullfighting	Fundación Toro de Lidia	Website	Text, images, videos	2015-2024
Horse racing	Asociación de Sociedades Organizadoras de Carreras de Caballos en España/Hipódromos	Website	Text, images, videos	2017-2024
Dog racing	Federación Española de Galgos	Website	Text, images, videos	2014-2024
Cockfighting	Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español	Facebook, Website	Text, images, videos	2004-2024

Source: Author's own work.

The initial process of gathering and analyzing texts was conducted simultaneously, following an iterative approach to ensure analytical depth. Data collection ceased upon reaching saturation, i.e. when no new themes or insights emerged from the material, indicating the dataset was sufficiently comprehensive. After an initial coding process using individual sheets, the sample and codes were uploaded to Atlas.ti.

To enhance reliability and analytical convergence, the texts were independently examined by the first two authors of this paper, both of whom are trained in qualitative text and audiovisual analysis within a CDA framework. To ensure consistency and validity, each researcher randomly cross-verified a selection of the other's sample, allowing for inter-coder verification and alignment of interpretative frameworks.

3. Results

3.1. *The representation of nonhuman animals*

The main frames that emerge in the lobbies' representation of the animals used are *biologization* and *athleticization*. Closely linked to both is *fetishization*, which transforms animals into objects of desire or symbolism. This process serves to obscure their suffering and mask the power dynamics inherent in their selection, exploitation, control, and exhibition. Fetishization further objectifies animals and serves to justify their use, masking and intertwining it with aesthetic, cultural, and biological appreciation.

3.1.1. *Biologization*

By *biologization*, we refer to the tendency to attribute certain biological characteristics to exploited animals and exclusively value them, linking these traits inextricably to their exploitation, as if such exploitation were a natural consequence of these animals' fundamental behavioral and genetic attributes. This term has been previously used by Noske (1997) to refer to the connection of the essence of animals to their biology, and argued by Colling, Parson and Arrigoni (2014) as the reification and cultural objectification of animals that allows their industrial exploitation and does not allow animals to be active subjects with agency (p. 67).

Through biologization, the animals' participation in the entertainment industry is portrayed as natural, and sometimes even necessary for their well-being and survival. This constitutes one of the primary discursive strategies used by the lobbies studied.

The above strategy can clearly be seen in the naming of the animals used, which are classified by means of technical taxonomies: "brave breed", "extensive cattle", "fighting livestock", "cattle farming", "fighting bulls". These terms employ metonymic expressions that reframe animal categories and practices, shifting the focus from the animals as sentient beings to exploitative functions based on their presumed biological inherent qualities, thereby justifying their use. By embedding these classifications within a rhetoric of conservation and scientific knowledge on breeding practices and knowledge, the discourse constructs an image of objectivity and expertise, naturalizing their exploitation as a logical extension of their biological characteristics.

In relation to this, two key themes emerge within the biologizing frame: the heritage and purity of the breed; and the role of genetics and science in its management. There is a strong emphasis on concepts such as “pure breed”, the geographical origin of the breeds, and their specific “varieties”. At the same time, information is provided regarding collaborators involved in the process, including specific research groups, such as the Qualified Animal Genetics Centre (Genetic Evaluation), Animal Molecular Genetics Laboratory (Filiation Analysis) and even one more directly connected to reproduction, the Germplasm Bank (gene bank). This carefully curated distinction emphasizes their perceived cultural and economic significance, framing their exploitation as critical to heritage preservation.

Furthermore, this biologization shifts the agency away from humans and onto the animals themselves, while the role of humans in shaping and perpetuating these *breeds* is not obscured but instead highlighted. The desire to maintain these characteristics — which is akin to conservationist discourse⁷ — distracts from ethical concerns surrounding their treatment. This reductive categorization objectifies and fetishizes the animals in a way like industrial production: it focuses on the pursuit of the ideal specimen, prioritizing specific traits over the animal’s wellbeing and interests. For example, Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español mixes specific traits of physical appearance with skills:

In American books that specialize in the subject, they also deal with the Spanish breed, characterizing it for its combativeness [...] Thus Fabres and Uribe describe them as fencers, of great skill with the *cachos*, good at fencing and dodging, of great attack and vigor and good endurance, even valuing them as superior to the ‘old English game.’

Historical references invoke notions of antiquity and nationality, such as the origins of the *sports* connected to the categorization of the animals involved, and the relevance of their development within the Mediterranean region. Moreover, the *scientificist* criteria are interwoven with cultural narratives that ascribe almost mythic status to bulls, roosters, particular dogs, and *wild* animals. The *combatiente Español*, for example, is portrayed as a living embodiment of an ancestral legacy. Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español even mentions an Athenian Law that “mandated that a solemn cockfight be held every year

⁷ While they share rhetorical aspects, there are clear differences between breed and species conservation discourses, mainly because of the groups involved and the ties of breed preservation to national discourses.

in that Greek city, which young citizens were forced to attend to remember its symbolism and to learn the fighting morals of these birds”. As illustrated here, biologization is often reinforced by appeals to tradition, framing these practices as critical to cultural heritage and biodiversity preservation.

There is also an implicit appeal to Spanish nationalism and identity in the texts produced by Fundación Toro de Lidia and Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español. Racial ideology is particularly present in the discourse of the latter, where complaints of “crossbreeding” (*cruces*) reflect a rejection of non-Spanish genetics. Breeding with “foreign breeds” is described as a “lack of ethical rigor” that produces a “hybrid animal”, accompanied by a list of morphological traits that the “defenders of the ‘Spanish Fighter’” are instructed to watch for:

It can be said that we are entering a new stage in which the value of the breed is put before everything else, in short, the culture of an ancestral bird is put before everything else. [...] The description of the history of the breed highlights both the geographical origin and the temperament connected to the use of the animal; they come from the wild Mediterranean rooster (fighting races of the Mediterranean). (UCRIGA, n.d.)

Moreover, this association extends the cultural and “iconic” status of roosters by portraying them as objects of beauty and desire. Much like beauty pageants, these contests emphasize physical attractiveness and idealize public display and celebration through competitions such as *Mister Gallo*.⁸ This process assigns exaggerated symbolic, emotional, and cultural value to animals, thereby reducing their complexity and subjectivity. This fetishization is further reinforced by elements of exoticism, orientalism⁹, and historical mystique. The lineage of the species is traced back to a “very remote origin, on the Asian continent”, with descriptions linking the birds’ existence to “noble practices,” including “breeding and fighting by the maharajas, who to this day own seigniorial and ancient hen houses”.

⁸ A beauty pageant for roosters.

⁹ Orientalism refers to a Western tendency to portray Asian countries and customs in a stereotyped, fetishized and often patronizing manner, typically serving to reinforce colonialist or Eurocentric ideals.

It is worth noting that many of the roosters featured in these pageants have been given names that reflect an aesthetic appreciation of traditionally masculine attributes and epic characters, such as titan (*titán*), shark (*tiburón*), Thor, Ragnar, Achilles (*Aquiles*) or Corleone, and the little lord (*el señorito*) among others.

The function of this framing is trifold: it justifies exploitation by asserting that the animals' use aligns with their inherent nature, reduces moral scrutiny by attributing agency to biological characteristics, and reinforces an anthropocentric hierarchy — a fundamental prerequisite for sustaining these practices.

3.1.2. *Animals as athletes*

Closely related to frame of biologization, yet distinct from it, is that of *animals as athletes*. This discursive strategy legitimizes animal *performance* by shifting it away from notions of domination and into the realm of sportsmanship, discipline, and partnerships. Overlooking other qualities, this framing presents animals' training and drive as expressions of agency or will. In the examined discourse, animals are depicted as subjects to be classified, measured, bred, and “trained” to achieve specific outcomes. For example, when describing dogs, different breeds are portrayed as follows: “A docile dog, very tame and very fond of the people he lives with. They can be easily trained”. Similarly, *toros bravos* (Spanish fighting bulls), Spanish fighting roosters, horses used for racing and dogs used for hunting and racing are portrayed as having inherent qualities — aggressiveness, speed, endurance, nobility, or a competitive spirit — that naturally align them with activities such as bullfighting, cockfighting, racing, and various forms of spectacle.

This argument strategically reinterprets human-driven selective breeding as a natural and necessary process, rather than as a calculated act of genetic manipulation for entertainment purposes. It also downplays the artificial conditions in which these animals are encouraged -or even forced- to perform according to human expectations. Advocates contend that these breeds exist because of their unique traits, implying that their continued breeding and use in spectacles are essential for their conservation. The discourse legitimizes their exploitation by stressing that these characteristics have been developed over generations. It creates a narrative where the animals *need* these events to preserve their identity or existence. The defense of their right to exist becomes intertwined with the justification for their exploitation. This logic is particularly evident in practices such as bullfighting and

cockfighting, where the ability to breed and the health of the breeders are considered of special importance.

The sample analyzed contains several discussions regarding personal and economic investment in training bulls, roosters, and dogs. This effort is paired with the idea of mutual benefit and development for both the nonhuman “athlete” and their trainer. Horses, greyhounds and bulls are portrayed not only as athletes but also as iconic. The *animals as athletes* frame constructs nonhuman animals as performers and artists, disciplined bodies whose physical excellence is achieved through human guidance and training. Industry actors consistently use language that evokes the spectacle of these events, the rigorous preparation involved, and the emotional bonds that supposedly develop between the animals and their trainers.

An illustrative example of the above can be found in how Federación Española de Galgos (FEG) presents greyhounds. Described as a trained and dignified athlete, the greyhound’s development is portrayed as a structured process of both physical and psychological refinement. Their performance is depicted as the product of meticulous and dedicated training. FEG highlights specific critical stages in the greyhounds’ lives: “once that age is reached, it is time to begin the work of molding and shaping the athlete”. Here, the individual is not merely trained - they are sculpted through dedication, expertise, and time.

Moreover, this narrative of transformation intersects with the biologizing frame, positioning dogs as symbols of status. Accompanied by photographs, the history of hunting with greyhounds is both admired and romanticized, enveloped in a sense of historical mystique. This practice is linked to Greece and Rome, as well as to emperors and philosophers — figures portrayed as “great men” and “experts”, including kings, popes, and caliphs. The theme of epic grandeur is further reinforced through the naming of the dogs, with names like *Ares*, *Medusa*, *Tiger (tigre)*, *Kratos*, *Zeus*, *Rolo*, and *Valdor*, among others.

The discourse surrounding greyhound racing further reinforces this framing. Races are depicted in competitive and theatrical terms, with expressions such as “the spectacle of the race of the sprinters” and “the open field modality gathers the power struggle of a pack of greyhounds facing a share in the heart of nature.” The term “power struggle” obscures the asymmetry between predator and prey within a controlled, human-engineered environment, embedding the event in a narrative of both natural and sportive confrontation.

Notably absent is any mention of the hare's experience; the discourse focuses solely on the performance, strength, and instincts of the dogs, which are framed as elite sprinters. The hare is reduced to mere descriptions of behavior or size within competitive dynamics, stripped of all subjectivity and defined solely by their role in the spectacle.¹⁰

Moreover, the emphasis on the “constant review of the obtained results” mirrors practice of high-performance sports training. This vocabulary reinforces the notion that these animals are engaged in a scientifically managed path toward excellence. This aspect of scientific management is particularly prominent in the case of *fighting roosters*, which are portrayed not merely as participants in traditional spectacles, but also as the very embodiment of them.

Human dedication to nonhuman animals is presented as a narrative of shared purpose, rather than one driven by economic interests. The notion of investment in the animals being “unlimited” and even surpassing expected benefits reinforces this idea, suggesting that the relationship is not exploitative or profit-oriented, but rather a collaborative effort aimed at achieving peak performance.

In the case of horses, the cultural and symbolic capital that horseracing holds in Spain positions athleticization at the intersection of economic interests (betting) and elite spectacle (enjoyment, VIP experiences, prestige). Horses are described in terms of genetic lines and performance metrics, where the commodification is intertwined with notions of athletic development. Framed as a recreational activity, gambling is unique to the context of horse-racing and presented as a matter of strategy, while animal labor is reframed as a form of *partnership*. The athlete frame naturalizes the performance of the horses and elevates the prestige of gambling by portraying it as a form of economic investment, which provides a striking contrast to the ethical concerns, illegalization, and negative social perception of gambling in cockfighting. This narrative effectively obscures the coercive nature of horse training, the associated fatalities, and the structural role of profit within the sport.

¹⁰ As an illustration of the contrasting ways in which different species are described and considered within the same context, FEG's evaluation of hares is particularly revealing: “That the hare's direction of fleeing is correct or that the size of the hare is good, i.e. the hare is not too young and small, also known as a half hare.”

Ultimately, the exaggeration of the cultural and symbolic status of trained animals in all these industries constitutes a strategy of commodification - one that aestheticizes and idealizes their roles while omitting the structural realities of domination, coercion, and exploitation. By elevating animals as icons, athletes, or heritage symbols, the discourse detaches them from their sentience and lived experience, reducing them to vessels of human meaning and value.

3.2. Self-representation of the industry

While the economic dimension of the industries promoted by our sample is sometimes emphasized - citing alleged benefits for local and national economies- it is not the primary mode of self-representation. Rather, four interrelated dimensions are foregrounded: the framing of their practices as being sustainably necessary through science, tradition, and policy; their representation as being inseparable from cultural legacy; the use of caring (humane) narratives to reframe ethically contested activities; and the construction of a victimized industry, which at the same time resists unjust criticism and ideological persecution.

3.2.1. Sustainability through science, tradition and policy

The interest groups in the sample use scientific rhetoric and strategically reference tradition and policy frameworks to present their activities as sustainable.

With regard to the scientific rhetoric, practices such as bullfighting and cockfighting are presented as being biologically essential to the conservation of specific species within animal husbandry. For instance, both Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español and Fundación Toro de Lidia present their breeding techniques as indispensable to the preservation of genetic heritage, emphasizing conservation and biodiversity protection. This is articulated through references to initiatives such as the “improvement and conservation of domestic animal genetic resources” and the “protection and promotion of native breeds”, which include activities like “morphological and functional assessment”, “genetic selection for breed purity”, and “selective breeding and lineage studies” aimed at maintaining specific animal breeds. It is worth noting that most of the industries are connected to universities, political parties, research institutions, or other socially legitimizing platforms — such as agricultural fairs, livestock exhibitions, or breeders’ associations.

Tradition is also implicitly framed as a dimension of sustainability by aligning the industries' longstanding practices with the notions of environmental stewardship. This framing presents traditional livestock management as being indispensable in maintaining certain ecosystems such as *dehesas*¹¹ and preserving biodiversity, often citing examples such as the presence of lynx populations in these areas. Fundación Toro de Lidia and Gallo Combatiente Español further justify animal breeding and captivity by appealing not only to species conservation but also to the preservation of cultural heritage.

The lobbies also frame industry activities within an institutional context, specifically through references to policy frameworks. For instance, they remind us that the ecosystems these industries claim to help preserve have been recognized by European authorities as a space of “high natural value and a necessary lung” for the continent. Fundación Toro de Lidia, in particular, frames its practices within the sustainability principles of major agricultural political frameworks such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Mentions of participation at prominent agricultural fairs and animal exhibitions also contribute to positioning these practices as socially and commercially acceptable, or even desirable.

3.2.2. A cultural legacy

The discourse of the lobbies studied constructs a narrative that equates the activities they promote with culture and portrays culture as an inherent and immutable expression of national identity. With bullfighting at its core, practices such as cockfighting, *wild* animal spectacles, and greyhound racing are framed as cultural traditions whose legitimacy is portrayed as immune to external criticism. In this way, the concept of culture is instrumentalized — treated as sacrosanct, established, documented, and legally protected. This framing ties legitimacy to historical continuity and to the collective will of “millions of people”, as Fundación Toro de Lidia describes it, positioning any form of criticism as unwarranted interference in a sovereign cultural practice. At the same time, a paradox emerges within this representation: while these practices are presented as culturally dominant and widely embraced, the discourse simultaneously invokes a sense of victimhood, portraying supporters as a persecuted minority.

¹¹ A *dehesa* is a traditional agro-sylvo-pastoral system in the Iberian Peninsula characterized by open woodlands of oak trees used for grazing livestock, farming, and forestry.

Within this context, animals are valued primarily as instruments for expressing human culture, rather than recognized as beings with volition, agency, or personhood. The only traits acknowledged and praised as unique and valuable are those that can be exploited for entertainment purposes. For example, fighting roosters and bulls are valued for their capacity for aggression and strength. Their role in the human-animal relationship is framed in terms of their contribution to preserving a specific cultural legacy — often intertwined with appeals to economic benefit, biodiversity, or species conservation.

3.2.3. Caring as humane(washing) rhetoric

The discourse emitted by the interest groups in our sample employs narratives centered on care, responsibility, and emotional bonds with animals, aiming to portray their practices as humane and “committed to the environment and animal welfare”. These strategies are used to reframe contested practices in a more favorable light.

On the one hand, part of the language is crafted to evoke care, understanding, and affection. Sentences such as “we must have much patience, understanding, and affection with our puppies” project an image of tender care toward animals. On the other hand, the emphasis on the continuous learning process of trainers is used to frame the relationship as methodical and ultimately beneficial for the animals, even when referring to situations where “the error [...] forces us [trainers] to make a correction”, phrase that alludes to disciplinary measures or punishment.

The primary strategy for responding to criticism — whether actual or anticipated — is to highlight compliance with welfare standards and to portray opponents as uninformed. Often with a tone of condescension, critics are invited to visit the farms “discreetly and without publicity” in order to “truly understand the rural reality and the care of the ecosystem”.

In the cases of greyhound racing, horse racing, and cockfighting, the dominant discourse emphasizes animal welfare, highlighting controlled breeding programs, veterinary oversight and check-ups, training, and compliance with welfare laws. This portrayal of care is closely tied to a conception of animals as athletes or economic investments.

3.2.4. Victimhood and resistance

The lobbies' narrative constructs a polarized view of the debate on animal use, portraying the industry as both a victim and a force of resistance against an allegedly intolerant, hypocritical, and coercive animal defense movement.

On the one hand, supporters of bullfighting and cockfighting enthusiasts are presented as systematically persecuted, unfairly censored, and ideologically discriminated against. Fundación Toro de Lidia is the primary interest group promoting this discourse, followed by Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español. The discourse employed by these lobbies' frames criticism as "attacks", equating terms used to describe bullfighters — such as "murderer" or "torturer" — with defamation. Criticism is described like hypocritical, demagoguery, or even a crime of prevarication (e.g., Fundación Toro de Lidia). Through this rhetorical strategy, advocates of bullfighting and cockfighting are recast as victims of cultural intolerance, with their "honor" and "privacy" portrayed as needing protection. It is worth noting that promoters of greyhound and horse racing do not adopt this narrative of victimization and martyrdom.

On the other hand, another key discursive feature is the use of polarizing language that delegitimizes animal rights activism by portraying it as an "ideology" that is "wrongly associated" with compassion or goodwill. The narrative advanced by Fundación Toro de Lidia characterizes animal activists as misguided, radical, populist, and even anti-democratic or "psychopaths" who challenge long-standing traditions. Thus, the lobbies' self-constructed oppositional identity also fosters a sense of rebellious resistance against what is framed as a superficial and trend-driven "sale of identities" and the rise of ideological "isms'." This leads us to the next level of our analysis.

3.3. The public and the industry: a complicated relationship

The audience addressed by the discourse is neither monolithic nor merely potential clients. They include spectators, policymakers, activists, followers, and society. Examining how the interest groups speak to and about such a diversity reveals that the public is simultaneously constructed as a market to be cultivated, a political audience to be persuaded, and, particularly in the case of Fundación Toro de Lidia, a threat to be managed due to the influence of animal advocacy. Two rhetorical strategies frequently employed in this context are warlike framing of conflict and an appeal to exclusivity.

3.3.1. Warlike rhetoric and conflict framing

Fundación Toro de Lidia and Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español frequently adopt a bellicose tone, employing epic and warlike rhetoric as a means of self-motivation and empowerment. This includes a discourse marked by the language of defense, attack, and exhortations to “fight back”. Opposing politicians and members of society are framed as antagonists, while supporters are urged to defend their traditions. The debate is often portrayed as a battle in which they and their followers must remain resilient and stand their ground.

This conflict-centered discourse is highly emotive and rhetorically forceful, relying on personalized, urgent, and motivational appeals. The tone becomes particularly alarmist when addressing legal reforms related to animal welfare within their respective industries; Fundación Toro de Lidia frames such changes as existential threats and cultural assaults, with the former warning of the erosion of national identity and individual freedoms.

However, the concept of freedom is selectively appropriate. The industry simultaneously positions itself as a defender of individual choice and national identity, while adhering to definitions of culture that marginalize alternative viewpoints grounded in ethical criticism. This is evident in the types of testimonials featured on websites such as that of Fundación Toro de Lidia, which emphasize that the issue is not a matter of personal preference — whether one likes “bulls” or not — but something deeper and culturally intrinsic.

I am not a fan of bullfighting, I have been to the bullring many times, but I have not been able to get hooked on the passion. Well, all this becomes secondary for me when they try to put an end to the bullfighting festival by imposition, because this attack on Freedom [sic] is an attack on everyone. To some it may seem a purposeless motive, but it is because of this attack that I am a supporter of bullfighting.¹²

12 Original in Spanish: “Cuando esta corriente afecta a la tauromaquia, afirma Borja Sémpér, ya no va de si te gustan o no los toros, sino que implica un ataque a la libertad: “yo no soy taurino, he ido muchas veces a la plaza, pero no he conseguido engancharme a la pasión. Pues bien, todo esto pasa a un segundo plano para mí cuando se pretende acabar por imposición con la fiesta de los toros, porque ese ataque a la Libertad es un ataque contra todos. A algunos les parecerá un motivo pueril, pero por ese ataque yo soy taurino”.

This warlike language is further amplified through public calls for solidarity, which are employed by Fundación Toro de Lidia and Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español. Exclamations such as “Cocker! Now more than ever we must be united to maintain our tradition!” contribute to a discursive construction of community by addressing cockers — the fans of cockfighting (Gamecock Fowl, n.d.) — directly. Participation in a specific cultural practice is thus reframed as a collective urgent act against a perceived existential threat.

3.3.2. VIPs and unique experiences

Horse racing stands out for its approach to public engagement because of how differently it addresses the citizenry. Rather than appealing to moral concerns, the discourse is strategically segmented into consumer profiles, with a particular emphasis on VIP clients and experiences. From “gastronomic experiences” to “exclusive lounges”, tickets are marketed not merely as access to a sporting event but as entry to a curated spectacle, where the primary service is premium leisure consumption. Ethical concerns or dissent are notably absent from this narrative — promoting a fade of consensus and acceptability through the lens of welfarism.

4. Discussion

Firstly, our analysis offers new insights into how the objectification of nonhuman animals is discursively constructed by the interest groups in the industries studied, showing that they are framed not merely as selectively bred beings but as symbolic carriers of cultural, athletic, or emotional value that obscure their sentience and suffering.

Animals are classified as utilitarian objects, valued only for exploitable traits while ethical considerations and animal welfare are systematically marginalized. The industries in question use logic that presumes a particular breed exists for a specific purpose simply because it is already being used that way and then reinforce this usage pattern to justify its continued exploitation — without providing any independent rationale for why such use should be deemed acceptable in the first place. This logic exemplifies a “begging the question” informal fallacy. Such genetic and behavioral selection is commonplace throughout the industrial animal complex — from “laboratory animals” and breeds engineered for optimizing meat, egg or dairy yield for human consumption, to the “bravura” of fighting bulls and the so-called Spanish “fighting cock”. This reflects what Lázaro-Terol

(2025) describes as the “racialization” of animal exploitation, and what has been thoroughly examined by Ruiz-Carreras (2024) as the suppression of individuality in the dairy industry.

As a result, animals are biologized and perceived not as sentient individuals but as functional components of a broader cultural and economic system. Our work builds upon the questioning and discussion of the discursive power of biology as a determinant of who someone is at an ontological level (Franklin, 2001; Haraway, 1997); the analysis conducted on animal representation for this study reveals that nonhuman animals are seldom portrayed as *themselves*; rather they are imbued with symbolic meanings and values: “*toros*” are not merely bulls but embodiments of fandom; roosters are recast as symbols of *wildness*, bearing the weight of their historical use; racing dogs and horses are framed as athletes. Consequently, criticism of practices such as bullfighting or cockfighting is reframed not as raising ethical concerns about animal suffering, but as perceived attacks on cultural identity.

Such discursive strategies prevent the public from perceiving animals as being capable of serious suffering or as victims of an undeserved fate, thereby obstructing the emergence of compassion. Compassion requires the recognition that the other is an individual capable of being harmed, that the suffering is serious, and that it could plausibly affect anyone, including oneself — thus enabling empathy (Nussbaum, 2001). Objectification through biologization and athletization obstructs the ability to see animals as sentient beings like us, thereby hindering the connection necessary for the emergence of compassion.

Secondly, another key feature of the discourse emitted by the studied lobbies is legitimization of the industries they represent as rational and authoritative actors. This is achieved by framing them as bearers of scientific expertise and/or professional credibility, often underscored through partnerships with philosophers and academic institutions. The narrative suggests that only this so-called “voice of reason” is capable of accurately interpreting and safeguarding traditional customs, which the lobbies claim their industries embody. This strategy of self-legitimization is accompanied by a parallel delegitimization of critics, particularly animal advocates who are mostly portrayed as ideologically motivated, emotionally biased, and lacking proper understanding. *Ad hominem* arguments are central to this strategy, as concerns raised by animal rights advocates are dismissed as stemming from ignorance or hidden economic interests aligned with other “industries”. This polarizing strategy -in which the industry claims expertise and reason, while animal advocates are framed as irrational - is a common feature of the discourse emitted by interest groups in

other sectors of the animal industrial complex (Almiron, Fernández & Rodrigo-Alsina, 2024).

Central to their rhetoric is the dual claim of representing both the authentic voice of the people and the embodiment of scientific and legal authority. Their discourse navigates between the popular and expert spheres, each reinforcing the other. By assigning an exploitation-driven purpose to animals, legitimizing their own role and delegitimizing any position associated with animal advocacy, these groups reframe the debate in such a way that the ethical implications of animal exploitation are relegated to the margins of the dominant narrative — mirroring the dynamic described by Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Achino (2017) in the context of Portuguese bullfighting.

In this way, compassion itself is reframed. While compassion is understood as a moral emotion (Nussbaum, 2001), the discourse delegitimizes the compassion expressed by animal advocates by portraying them as ignorant, irrational, and ideologically driven, redefining it as misplaced sentimentality. In contrast, the industry is positioned as a rational, authoritative voice operating within legal frameworks and longstanding cultural traditions. Thus, emotional concern for animals is no longer viewed as a valid ethical stance but instead framed as an obstacle to reason, tradition, and national identity.

Thirdly, the interest groups studied appeal to traditional values and national identity. The results show how actors are represented in terms of their identity, and how their beliefs or opinions are justified. As identified in the neutralization strategies employed by bullfighting supporters in Portugal (Cordeiro-Rodrigues & Achino, 2017), the use of emotional appeal and powerful cultural symbols is not confined to bullfighting. Indeed, it is also distinctly present in the discourse of Unión de Criadores de Gallo Combatiente Español. Invoking national heritage builds upon the idea that any challenge to their practices is not merely a policy disagreement but an affront to the core of their cultural identity.

Within this context, the notion of freedom is invoked not only as a defense of cultural continuity but also as a matter of freedom as a product for consumption. Those who question or oppose these practices are frequently characterized as radical or, more bluntly, as ignorant, suggesting that true freedom lies solely in the preservation of tradition and the ability to choose from different products. The latter aligns with pro-market discourses in

which consumer choice is elevated as the ultimate expression of personal liberty, effectively displacing deeper ethical or political debates (Žižek, 2011).

Prior research on the discourse of industries based on animal-exploiting practices has identified emotion as a central component in their communicative strategies. Emotion serves two main rhetorical functions: to seduce or elicit an emotional response from the audience, and to persuade by lending credibility to the message (Charaudeau, 2013). In our analysis, we identified narratives that “humanize” exploitative practices to ease consumer concerns, often minimizing the emotional impact of animal suffering by portraying it as necessary or even ethical (Stucki, 2017). For example, the influence and pressure exerted by bullfighting pressure groups in response to criticism is evident in the recent case involving Public Basque Radio Television (EITB) and its coverage of the *Sanfermines*, when a journalist remarked that bulls would be “fought and murdered” after being run. This remark was followed by demands connected to the attack “to the freedom of all Basques” (Jordano, 2025). Additionally, Fundación Toro de Lidia condemned the journalist's remarks, stating that “accusing the bullfighters of murder could constitute a crime of calumny, as set out in article 205 of the Penal Code” (Hervas, 2025). This aligns with what several critical scholars have identified as humane washing, effectively turning compassion on its head: the industry presents itself as the compassionate actor, while framing criticism as unjust attacks that position the industry itself as the true recipient of public compassion.

Finally, the interest groups examined engage in care-washing and green-washing strategies. These organizations construct an image of environmental responsibility by referencing rural landscapes, *dehesas*, and human-shaped ecosystems, while romanticizing traditional animal agriculture or husbandry practices as inherently sustainable and deeply rooted in cultural heritage. Such representations deflect attention from the environmental impacts and ethical concerns associated with these practices in contemporary contexts (Moreno & Almirón, 2024), and the self-portrayal is not based on their actions, but an idealized version of the industry. The use of vague terminology — such as “natural” or “ecological” — contributes to a misleading perception of the industry’s sustainability, consistent with broader green-washing practices (Nemes *et al.*, 2022; Somany, 2023) and positioning the industry as the caretaker of animals and their habitats, thereby portraying itself as the truly compassionate actor.

5. Conclusions

This paper has analyzed the discursive strategies of four leading interest groups representing Spain's animal-based entertainment sectors, including bullfighting, cockfighting, and dog and horse racing. While specific rhetorical tactics vary across sectors, all groups consistently promote anthropocentric narratives that prioritize human interests over animal welfare. Despite differences in tone or framing, these discourses share three fundamental features: they systematically obscure animal suffering, objectify nonhuman animals, and inhibit the emergence of public compassion toward them.

Although the anthropocentric perspective itself is not new, this study offers the first detailed account of how it is strategically deployed across these specific industries in Spain. It identifies distinct discursive strategies through which interest groups undermine public compassion — most notably the biologization and athletization of animals, alongside the instrumentalization of science, culture, tradition, economic arguments, and nationalism. These strategies are further reinforced by polarizing rhetoric and warlike framing. Furthermore, this paper has also explored the self-representation of the identity and actions of these four interest groups, and how the ideologies behind their actions are justified and legitimized.

All things considered, the analysis reveals how these discourses rely on fallacious reasoning, such as circular logic and *ad hominem* attacks, and use polarizing rhetoric and strategies of humane-washing and greenwashing. Culture, science, and tradition are instrumentalized to legitimize contested practices and shift the focus away from ethical concerns.

Such representations obstruct compassion toward animals by reframing their exploitation as culturally meaningful, biologically necessary, or mutually beneficial. This objectification and symbolic elevation detach animals from their lived experiences and emotional realities, making it more difficult for the public to recognize them as sentient beings worthy of moral consideration. By embedding animals within narratives of heritage, spectacle, or natural purpose, these discourses normalize harm and discourage empathetic responses, ultimately desensitizing audiences to their suffering.

Limitations

This study examines a selected sample of interest groups rather than the full spectrum of organizations involved in lobbying for the entertainment industry in Spain. Additionally, our

analysis is based solely on the content of their websites, which may not fully capture the breadth of their lobbying activities, including offline strategies, direct political engagement, or informal influence networks. Future research could expand the sample and incorporate additional sources, such as policy documents, interviews, or social media content, to provide a more comprehensive picture of the industry's discourse as conveyed through its interest groups.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the members of the Center for Human-Animal Studies at Edge Hill University for their support, valuable feedback and insights on the research during and after the stay of the lead author. Special thanks to Prof. Claire Parkinson, whose attention, conversation and support guided the process from the first draft.

Funding

This work is part of the COMPASS Research Project (Lobbying and Compassion: Interest Groups, Discourse and Nonhuman Animals in Spain), PID2020-118926RB-100. The research is funded by the grant for predoctoral contracts for the training of doctors PRE2021-099988, supported by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (Spain), and funded by MCIN/AEI/10.13039/501100011033 and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. The funders had no role in the study design, data collection, analysis or interpretation, manuscript writing, or decision to publish the results.

CRedit — Contributor Role Taxonomy

Olatz Aranceta-Reboredo: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, project administration, writing —original draft— review and editing.

Leire Morrás Aranoa: data curation, formal analysis, investigation, and writing — review & editing.

Núria Almiron: conceptualization, funding acquisition, methodology, validation, visualization, writing — review and editing.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to the qualitative nature of the analysis. However, the authors are open to sharing selected materials upon reasonable request for academic and research purposes.

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