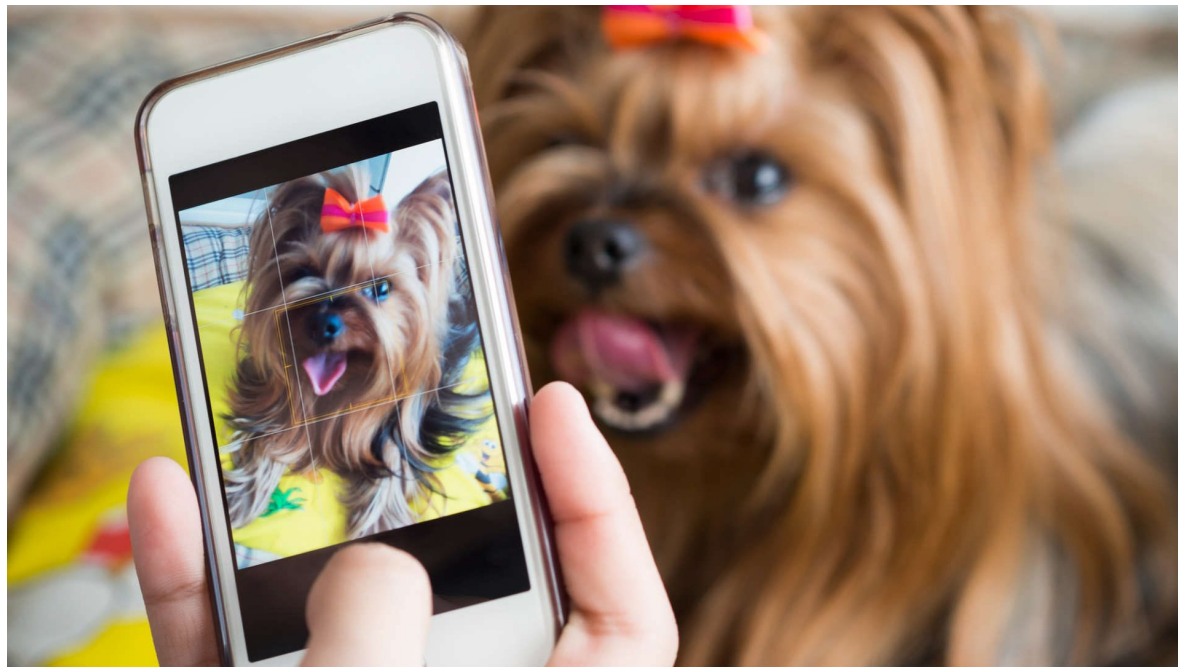


UFAW Online Animal Welfare Conference 2023



Scientific Programme

Popularity and Public Perceptions of Companion Animal Content on Instagram



(Mohanty, 2019)



(Brown, 2019)

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Background and Methods

- Social media is a popular tool for showcasing animals.
- Use of animals in social media as photo props is a concern: getting close to wild animals; anthropomorphism (Grasso, 2020).
- Anthropomorphism can contribute to negative welfare by misunderstanding an animal's behaviour & needs, leading to inappropriate care (Mota-Rojas et al., 2021).
- Assessment of the portrayal of companion animal content on Instagram is needed to determine how prolific anthropomorphism is & how it is perceived by the public.
- Seventy public companion animal Instagram accounts (dogs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, parrots, reptiles & chinchillas); ten posts from each account was assessed for their content, popularity & comments – total posts = 700



Results

- Anthropomorphic content was common across all species (Fig 1), & received more likes & comments than naturalistic content (Fig 2)
- Product promotion was popular with dog & cat accounts, & reptiles showed a similar trend
- Similar public attitudes towards anthropomorphic & natural content, as shown in comments on posts (Figs 3 & 4 next slide)

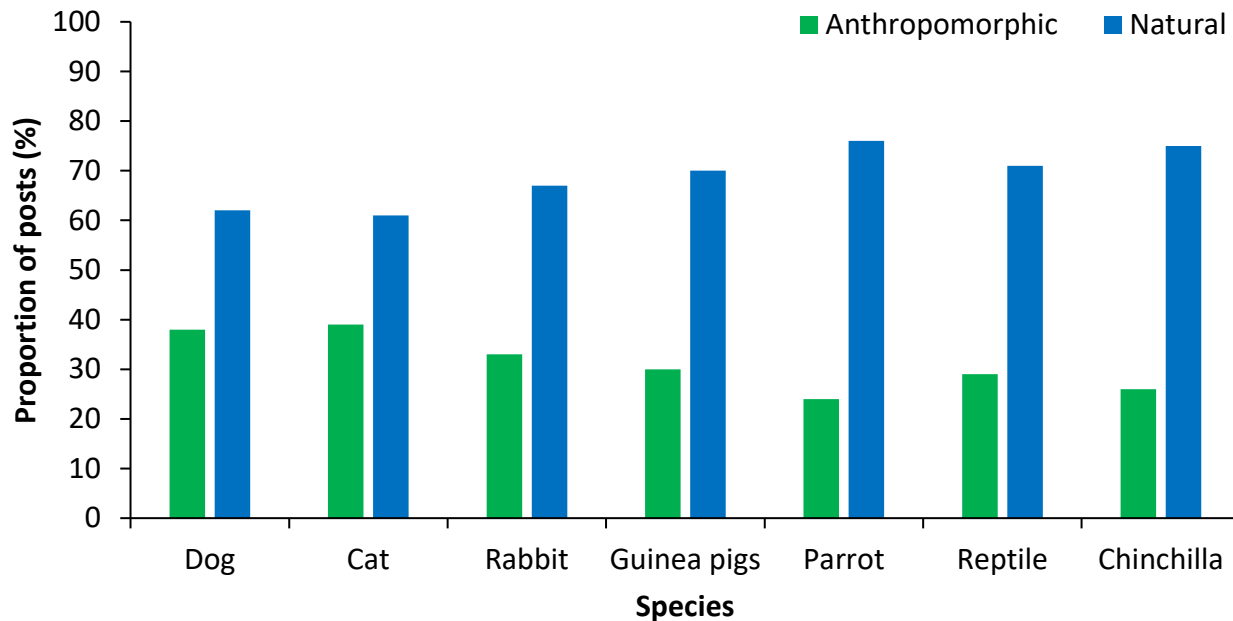


Fig 1. Commonality of anthropomorphic and naturalistic content across all species

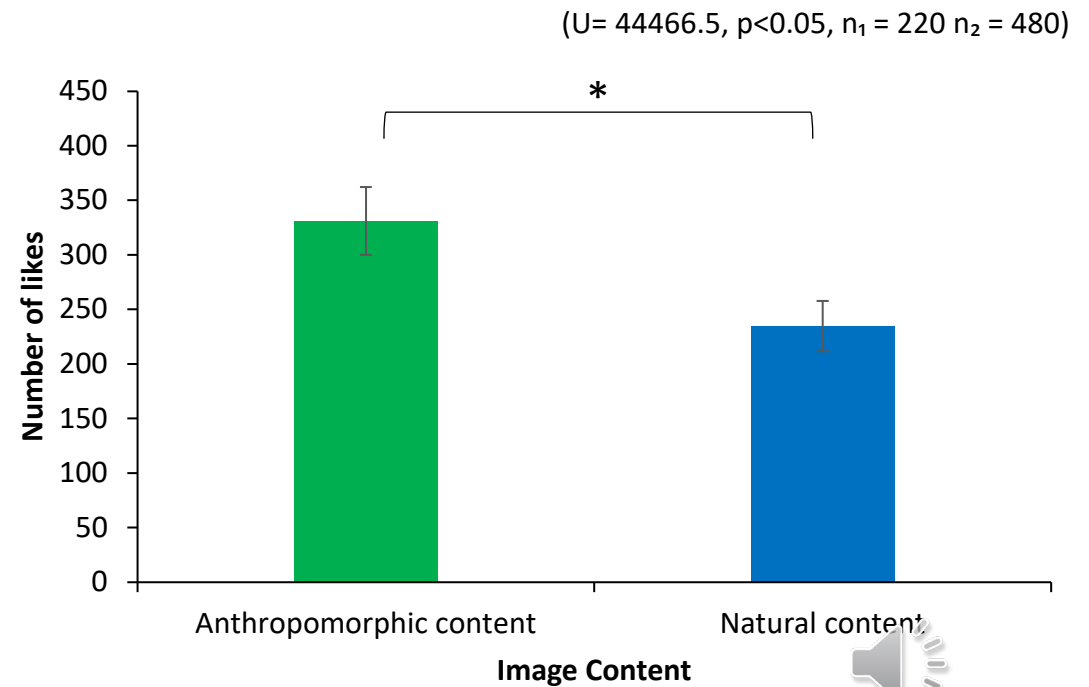


Fig 2. Mean number of likes from anthropomorphic and naturalistic content

Conclusions



Fig 3. Frequency of words commented at least 10 times from anthropomorphic content (Wordclouds, 2022)



Fig 4. Frequency of words commented at least 10 times from naturalistic content (Wordclouds, 2022)

- This study suggests a need for concern regarding companion animal content on Instagram.
- Popularity and lack of awareness of anthropomorphised posts are concerning as it increases the potential for undiagnosed stress.
- Animal welfare is potentially compromised in the desire for greater popularity.
- Social media organisations must carefully manage the potentially harmful animal imagery associated with anthropomorphism, as it may impact animal welfare and behaviour.

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