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Testing Animal Rights vs Animal Freedom

Research Report

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Summary of findings

This research explores the impact of framing "animal rights" versus "animal freedom" on public perceptions and attitudes towards animals. Drawing from successful strategies in other social movements, such as the Freedom to Marry and Together For Yes campaigns, our study investigates whether emphasising 'freedom' over 'rights' can shift attitudes more effectively by connecting with shared values.

Key Findings

- **Framing Effects:** The condition framing animal issues as 'freedom' resulted in slightly more favourable attitudes towards animals than the 'rights' framing. However, this could be attributed to higher baseline responses.
- **Perception of Terms:** Although we did not find an effect of framing messages in terms of freedom or rights, qualitative responses indicated a clearer and more positive understanding of 'animal freedom' compared to 'animal rights'. Participants associated 'freedom' with tangible benefits for animals such as natural living conditions and autonomy, whereas 'rights' were seen more abstractly as respect and dignity bestowed by humans.
- **Trait Influences:** A significant positive correlation was found between Human Supremacy Beliefs and the acceptance of common animal practices, highlighting an ideological barrier to changing attitudes through framing alone.

Implications

This study underscores the potential of framing strategies in influencing public attitudes towards animals. 'Animal freedom' may resonate more effectively by focusing on shared values of autonomy and welfare. However, simply using 'freedom' instead of 'rights' in short messages may not be sufficient to shift attitudes.

Introduction

This research aimed to test whether or not there was a difference in how people responded to the framing of 'animal rights' vs 'animal freedom', which was informed by our research into other social movements and campaigns. The Freedom to Marry campaign, through research and testing, found that moving away from talking about 'rights' (which gets people thinking in a legal frame) to talking about 'freedom' (which is understood as a shared value) had a marked impact on people's support for marriage equality. This has also been the case for other social movements and campaigns, such as the Together For Yes campaign in Ireland. In repealing the abortion ban, they found that moving away from messaging about 'women's rights' to shared values like 'care' and 'compassion' was a lot more persuasive.

We wanted to know if this shift in framing would have a similar effect on people's interpretation of other animals. We also wanted this to serve as a baseline study that we could repeat in the future to see whether people's interpretation and response to these framings have changed in any way over time.

Research Aim 1

We aimed to investigate whether participants perceive there to be a difference between the meaning of the terms 'animal rights' and 'animal freedom'. To test this, we had participants explain what it means for an animal to have either "rights" OR "freedoms". Participants were prompted to provide a written response to this question. Whilst this was primarily an exploratory task, we anticipated that participants would see animal rights as being related to legal issues, such as animals' entitlement within law, and animal freedom more related to moral issues, such as the desires that animals have.

Research Aim 2

We aimed to investigate the effect of directly substituting the word 'animal rights' for 'animal freedom' on participants' attitudes towards animals, with the expectation that both videos would lead to more favourable attitudes towards animals (relative to baseline) and that this pre-post effect would be more pronounced for participants in the freedom condition (relative to the rights condition).

Research Aim 3

Our third aim was to investigate the role of three trait variables in relation to attitudes towards animals. As such, we investigated Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), Human Supremacy Beliefs (HSB), and Solidarity With Animals (SWA). We expected that baseline attitude towards animals would correlate positively with SDO and HSB, such that participants scoring high on HSB and SDO would endorse common animal practices to a greater extent than those scoring low on these measures. We expected to see the inverse relationship with solidarity with animals.

Method

Design and procedure

The experiment used a 2 (Message framing: Rights vs. freedom) x 2 (Phase: Pre-test vs. post-test) mixed design. Participants were also asked about their understanding of rights or freedoms. Whether they were asked about rights or freedoms was counterbalanced with their framing condition. Participants first answered demographic questions, followed by an open question about how they perceive rights/freedoms, the SDO scale, the HSB scale, the SWA scale, and the acceptance of animal practices scale. They then watched a short video, which argued for animals having either rights or freedoms. Both videos were identical except for whether the word "rights" or "freedoms" was used. After watching the video, they then answered the acceptance of animal practices scale again (post-test phase). The specific video they saw (message framing) was between subjects (each participant only saw one framing), whereas the test phase was within subjects (all participants did both test phases). Descriptions of the scales used and the script for the videos are described in the materials section below.

Materials

Demographics

How old are you? Please specify in years e.g., "23"

[textbox]

What is your gender identity?

- Man
- Woman
- Non-binary/gender non-conforming
- Other [textbox]

- Prefer not to say

What is your ethnicity?

- Asian or Asian British
- Black, Black British, Caribbean, or African
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- White
- Other ethnic group [textbox]
- Prefer not to say

What is your nationality?

- British
- Other [textbox]

How would you define your political orientation?

- Extremely liberal
- Moderately liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate or neutral
- Slightly conservative
- Moderately conservative
- Extremely conservative

What is your highest educational qualification?

- Entry level award, certificate (ELC), diploma, ESOL, essential skills, or skills for life
- GCSEs (or equivalent)
- A levels (or equivalent)
- Undergraduate degree (or equivalent)
- Postgraduate higher degree e.g., Masters or PhD (or equivalent)
- Other [textbox]

Dietary Classification Scale Piazza et al. (2018): Below are different dietary categories. How would yourself? Select the category that best describes your eating habits with regards to animal products.

- Meat lover - "I prefer to have meat in all or most of my meals"
- Omnivore - "I eat meat and other animal products like dairy and/or eggs"
- Semi-vegetarian or reducetarian - "I eat meat, but only on rare occasions or only certain types of meat"
- Pescatarian - "I eat fish and/or seafood, as well as dairy products and eggs, but no other meat"
- Lacto- or Ovo-vegetarian - "I eat dairy products and/or eggs, but no meat or fish"
- Strict vegetarian - "I eat no animal products, including dairy and eggs, but would not consider myself full vegan"
- Dietary vegan - "I eat no animal products, including dairy, eggs, honey, gelatine, etc."
- Lifestyle vegan - "I never consume any animal products, and avoid all non-food animal products, including leather, silk, wool, cosmetics containing animal ingredients, etc."

Perceptions of rights and freedoms

To begin, we would like you to consider what it means to you, for a non-human animal to have "rights/freedom"? Using the text box below, please write your response. Please consider the semantics of the word "rights/freedom" and what animal "rights/freedom" might look like in practice. Please write in as much detail as possible. Do not worry about spelling, punctuation or errors. Write down whatever comes to mind. We are asking you to write a minimum of 2 to 3 sentences.

Short social dominance orientation scale

This section is about societal structures. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements from "1 - Strongly disagree" to "7 - Strongly agree".

- In setting priorities, we must consider all societal groups
- We should not push for equality of societal groups
- The equality of societal groups should be our goal
- Superior societal groups should dominate inferior groups

Human supremacy belief scale

This section is about your beliefs regarding animals. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements from “1 - Strongly disagree” to “7 - Strongly agree”.

- The life of an animal is just not of equal value as the life of a human being
- Animals are inferior to humans
- There is nothing unusual at all in the fact that humans dominate other animal species
- We should strive to more equality between humans and animals
- In an ideal world, humans and animals would be treated on an equal basis
- It is important that we treat other animal species more equally

Solidarity with animals scale

This section is about your feeling of connection to animals. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements from “1 - Strongly disagree” to “7 - Strongly agree”.

- I feel a strong bond toward other animals
- I feel solidarity toward animals
- I feel close to other animals
- I feel a strong connection to other animals
- I feel committed toward animals

Acceptance of animal practices scale

This section is about common animal practices here in the UK. Over the next few pages, you will read about a number of common UK government- or RSPCA-regulated animal practices. Please consider each practice and rate the extent to which you agree that the following practices are acceptable from “1 – Strongly disagree”, to “7 – Strongly agree”.

- It is standard practice in the UK for dairy cows to have their calves taken away from them within 24 hours of birth, so their milk can be sold for human consumption.
- It is standard practice in the UK for male chicks to be killed soon after they hatch as they cannot produce eggs.
- It is standard practice in the UK to castrate newborn calves, sheep, and pigs by testicle crushing without anaesthetic. This practice is done to improve the tenderness of the meat, and reduce the risk of injury to farmers.
- It is standard practice in the UK to test any new ingredient in household products on animals, such as rabbits. This includes putting toxic and corrosive chemicals onto the skin and into the eyes of animals.
- It is standard practice in the UK for new pharmaceuticals for humans to be tested on animals, such as mice, dogs, and monkeys. These animals can be given cancer, infected with viruses or brain-damaged in an attempt to recreate human diseases and assess the effectiveness of the treatment.
- Shooting birds is a popular blood sport in the UK, which involves wild birds, such as pheasants, grouse, and partridges, being driven out of hiding towards shooters and being shot.
- In the UK, horse racing is a popular form of entertainment. Horses are forced to run at excessive speeds and jump over unnecessarily high obstacles. The races result in a high number of injuries and horses being subsequently euthanised. Horses that are no longer deemed profitable due to injury, being too old, or too slow are discarded, destroyed, or slaughtered for meat.
- In zoos, wild animals are kept in captivity for the whole of their lives without access to their natural habitat. These animals have no choice over most of their decisions, including what to eat and where to sleep.
- Domesticated animals, including dogs and cats, are bred for the purpose of being

companions for humans. These animals have no choice over their day-to-day routines, as humans control every aspect of their lives, including when and what they eat, and whom they interact with.

- Many domesticated animals, including dogs and cats, are bred to have a specific shape and distorted physical features that are considered pleasing for humans. This can result in debilitating health problems, such as breathing problems from flattened faces, back deformities from unnaturally elongated spines, and arthritis in larger breeds.
- Animals' skins are commonly used for clothing and soft furnishings. Often these animals are bred specifically for the leather industry.
- To profit from wool, sheep have been bred so that they have thicker coats and do not moult naturally, so must be shorn every year.

Video script

In many countries across the globe, 'human [rights/freedoms]' are enshrined in law. These are intended to protect [rights/freedoms] that are considered fundamental to human existence, such as the [right/freedom] to expression, the [right/freedom] to avoid torture, and the right to life.

Animal rights advocates believe that animals should have similar fundamental [rights/freedoms].

The phrase 'animal [rights/freedoms]' refers to the moral principle that, just like humans, animals deserve the [rights/freedoms] to life and to choose how they live, without being exploited or killed.

Yet these basic [rights/freedoms] are routinely violated by industries that profit from exploiting animals.

These industries breed animals as pets, use them for food and clothing, in 'blood' sports and

other human entertainment, and in scientific experiments. They also routinely destroy animals' homes and habitats.

Those who campaign for animal [rights/freedoms] believe that animals should have the [rights/freedoms] to live their lives without these kinds of exploitation, for example by not being bred and killed for profit, eaten, hunted, experimented on, or having their homes and habitats destroyed, but instead have the [rights/freedoms] to live their lives as they choose.

Link for rights video - <https://vimeo.com/769004319>

Link for freedom video - <https://vimeo.com/772049842>

Participants and demographics

Participants were recruited using Prolific. No participants were excluded. We had an attrition rate of roughly 10.5%. That is, 19 out of the initially recruited 180 participants completed the baseline but failed to complete the post-test survey.

For analysis, we had 161 participants, who were assigned to one of two conditions: animal rights (n=78, 48.4%) and animal freedoms (n=83, 51%). Overall, the sample had a slight over representation of female-identified participants (n=102, 63.4%) to male-identified (n=57, 35.4%). One participant indicated a gender-identity other than those listed and one preferred not to say. Gender-identity did not differ significantly between conditions $\chi^2(3, N=161) = 5.192, p = .158, \text{Cramer's } V = .18$.

Age of the sample ranged from 21-85 years old, $M=41.86 (SD=13.69)$. Age distribution was not-significantly different between conditions, $F(1,160) = .174, p = .677, \eta^2 = .03$.

Regarding ethnicity, the vast majority of the sample indicated that they were White/Caucasian (n=139, 86.3%), nine participants were Asian (5.6%), seven Black (4.3%), four mixed or multiple ethnic groups (2.5%), one (.6%) indicated an ethnicity other than those listed, and one preferred not to say (.6%).

Regarding nationality, the vast majority of the sample indicated that they were British (n=138, 85.7%), 23 (14.3%) indicated another nationality.

Regarding political orientation, the majority of the sample indicated being either moderately liberal (n=46, 28.6%) or moderate/neutral (n=44, 27.3%). A further 30 participants indicated that they were slightly liberal (18.6%), 17 slightly conservative (10.6%), 16 moderately conservative (9.9%) and eight extremely liberal (5%). On average, on a 1-7 scale, where 1 indicated extremely liberal, and 7 extremely conservative, the sample was slightly left-leaning $M=3.40$ ($SD=1.39$). Political orientation was not-significantly different between conditions, $F(1,160) = .051$, $p = .822$, $\eta^2 = .00$.

Regarding education level, the majority of the sample indicated having completed an undergraduate degree or equivalent (n=71, 44.1%). A further 34 participants indicated having completed a postgraduate degree (21.1%), 29 A Levels or equivalent (18%), 24 GCSE's or equivalent (14.9). A further two participants indicated an education level other than those listed (1.2%) and one at entry level (.6%). Education level was not-significantly different between conditions, $F(1,160) = .010$, $p = .920$, $\eta^2 = .00$.

All participants reported following a diet that included the consumption of animal products. The vast majority (n=111, 68.9%) reported following an omnivorous diet (i.e., "I eat meat and other animal products like dairy and/or eggs"). A further 28 participants (17.4%) identified as a meat lover (i.e., "I prefer to have meat in all or most of my meals"). 21 (13%) identified as a semi-vegetarian or reductarian (i.e., "I eat meat, but only on rare occasions or only certain type of meat") and one (.6%) a pescatarian (i.e., "I eat fish and/or seafood, as well as dairy products and eggs, but no other meat"). Diet classification did not differ significantly between conditions $\chi^2(3, N= 161) = 1.478$, $p = .687$, Cramer's $V = .09$.

The two groups did not differ in any of the other attitude variables before the test (Social dominance orientation [$p = .92$], human supremacy beliefs [$p = .12$], solidarity with animals [$p = .28$]).

Results

Research aim 1

The first aim was to understand whether there were differences in participants' understanding of animal rights or animal freedom. We analysed the qualitative responses by using Relative Insight (<https://relativeinsight.com/>), which uses AI to analyse written text. By comparing two data sets (in this case, participants writing about either rights or freedoms), it quantifies the rates at which participants tend to discuss different topics, emotions, and use different types of language. Table 1-2 lists the insights from the analysis of the freedom and rights data sets respectively.

Overall, we found that when asked about how they understand the concept of freedoms for animals, participants were much more likely to think about how animal freedom specifically affects animals. For example, by having freedom, they would have a different environment, ability to move, and freedom of choice. In contrast, the public seems to have a weaker understanding of rights, perceiving it as a more nebulous construct. Instead of talking about how rights would affect animals specifically, rights are perceived as giving respect and dignity, without entailing specific behaviours. They are also perceived as something humans bestow upon other animals, rather than an intrinsic feature.

Table 1. Insights identified from the Relative Insight analysis. The middle column indicates how much more frequently this theme was identified in the freedom data set relative to the rights data set.

Freedom insights	Relative frequency	Example
Where, when, and how: Participants tended to think about the specifics of how freedoms would affect animals.	5.2x	"To have freedom, they must be in an environment where they can be their natural selves. Where there are no external factors"

Natural environment: Living a natural life, and in an environment that reflected the animals' natural home resonated frequently.	1.9x	"Freedom would be roaming in their natural habitat or with lots of space for domesticated animals. They would not be caged/cooped up. They could engage in natural behaviours."
Ability to move: The ability to move, and have the choice about where and when to move.	2.6x	"...that have total freedom are wild animals, they can go where they want, when they want, eat what they want, they are in total control of their actions."
Their homes should reflect a suitable place for them, and meet their needs.	4.1x	"An animal should have the freedom to live in the habitat it is suited for and live a life where it is not fearful or overly anxious."
Freedom of choice: They should have the freedom to choose how they live their lives.	9.2x	"...interact with other animals of the same species. The ability to choose when to eat and to live in a clean environment."
Captivity and restrictions: They should be free from cruel and restrictive living conditions.	5.0x	"Means an animal lives in the wild and free to roam at will. In other words, it is not held in captivity against its will."

Table 2. Insights identified from the Relative Insight analysis. The middle column indicates how much more frequently this theme was identified in the rights data set relative to the freedom data set.

Rights insights	Relative frequency	Example
Greater use of the word "We": Thinking about animal rights evokes people's sense of our responsibility to them.	31.3x	"...be treated like humans as they also feel pain and we need to look after them. We cannot be cruel to animals and abandon them without food. If an animal is injured we need to try and help."
Respect and dignity:	3.3x	"To me animal rights mean that animals are

Perceptions of animal rights reflect the abstract concepts of respect of dignity.		treated with respect and dignity. That they have the right to live peacefully without anyone causing harm to them."
Rights as gifts: Rights are perceived as something which we bestow upon other animals.	12.0x	"I think the owners of cats and dogs should give rights to their pets, such as a spare room or a bed and a seat at the dinner table and 2 square meals a day."

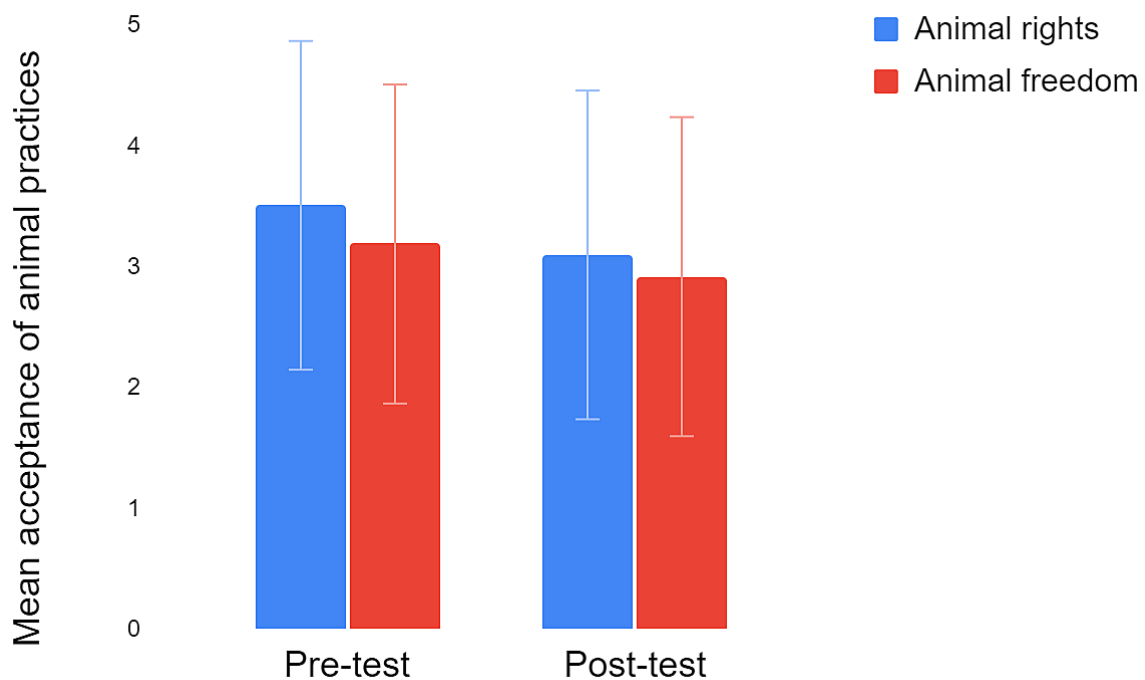
Research aim 2

Our second research aim was to test the effect of directly substituting the word 'animal rights' for 'animal freedom' on participants' attitudes towards animals.

We conducted a 2 (Condition: Rights, Freedom) X 2 (Time: Pre-test, Post-test) mixed measures ANOVA (plus Condition*Time interaction term), with attitudes towards animals as our dependent variable. The main effect of time was not significant, $F(1,321) = 3.668, p = .056$, nor was the interaction between Condition*Time, $F(1,321) = .292, p = .590$ (means reported in Table 1).

There was a significant effect of condition $F(1,321) = 6.565, p < .05$, with participants in the rights condition ($M=3.35, SE=.096$) endorsing common animal practices to a greater extent than those in the freedom condition ($M=3.01, SE=.093$). However, the difference should be approached with caution, given the significant differences between these two conditions at baseline [$F(1,160) = .5482, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$].

Figure 1. Mean scores on the Animal Practices Acceptance scale as a function of condition. Error bars represent standard error.



Unfortunately, we had a bias in our samples at baseline; those in the rights condition endorsed common animal practices to a greater extent than those in the freedom condition. This meant that although we found a main effect of Condition in our ANOVA (again, participants in the rights condition endorsing common animal practices to a greater extent than those in the freedom condition), we cannot be sure that the significant effect is a result of the experimental manipulator a result of this bias at baseline. There was no main effect of Time here, nor an interaction between Condition*Time. Both conditions saw a slight reduction in the endorsement of common animal practices over time. Participants in the animal rights condition reported a larger mean difference than those in the animal freedoms condition. However, this difference was not statistically significant. Instead, it seems that SDO supersedes our Condition variable in explaining shifts in the endorsement of common animal practices pre- and post-test. Endorsement of common animal practices increasing by .419, for every one unit increase in SDO.

Research aim 3

Our third aim was to investigate the role of three trait variables (Social Dominance Orientation, Human Supremacy Beliefs, and Solidarity With Animals) to predict the acceptance of common animal practices. We found a small significant positive correlation between Human Supremacy Beliefs and mean baseline scores on the Animal Acceptance scale [$r = .169$, $p = .033$], but not with Social Dominance Orientation [$r = .034$, $p = .669$], or solidarity with animals [$r = -.063$, $p = .428$].