

## **The Stock Report: Analyzing Holiday Season News Releases from PETA**

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### Introduction/Literature Review/Need for Research

The number of animal activism groups skyrocketed during the 80s, and today we are still seeing their articles shared through the media (Blankfield, 2010). A prominent activism group, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), is recognized across the world for their animal rights content involving an array of animals and livestock (Pandey, 2025). In previous works, livestock is defined as cattle, poultry, sheep and goats, and swine (Beaver & Golab, 2023, Chapter 11), which will serve as the definition throughout this abstract. Literature suggests the discussion around livestock welfare has increased and how stakeholders frame animal welfare is growing in importance (Croney, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to identify how often animal agriculture, specifically livestock, is mentioned in PETA news releases as well as what sources the organization used in these articles.

### Theoretical Framework

This study utilized framing theory which suggests audiences can be influenced by the way information is delivered (Goffman, 1974). Shen and Bigsby (2013) elaborated on this theory suggesting the type of evidence and message sidedness affect audience reception. There are four types of evidence, statistical, testimonial, anecdotal, and analogical. Message sidedness consists of one-sided and two-sided messages. Framing tells audiences how to think about issues (VanBoxtel et al., 2022). With PETA covering a wide variety of topics, their messages are written from an animal rights activist viewpoint, thus making it an appropriate framework to inform this study. While the current study did not identify the specific types of evidence or sidedness, it used these ideas to guide the research objectives and data coding.

### Methodology

This study utilized a content analysis methodology. PETA publishes many news releases in a year's time. In order to gain insight to their content, while also keeping in mind the time allotted for data analysis, we narrowed the sample to news releases published between November 1 and December 31, 2024. These dates were chosen as consumption of seasonal foods has been shown to be relevant due to religious holidays (i.e., Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc.; Spence, 2021). We then divided the selected articles among two coders and used a codebook created *a priori* to answer the research objectives using the theoretical framework and literature (Goffman, 1974; Shen & Bigsby, 2013; Spence, 2021; Steede et al., 2019). Coded variables included: (a) Did the article discuss animals?; (b) What species was the focus?; (c) Did the article include pictures?; (d) Did the article cite a source (i.e., quote, research, etc.)?; and (e) Was the source internal, external, or both? Coders coded 10% of the articles ( $n = 23$ ) and Krippendorff's alphas were calculated to ensure reliability using ReCal 0.1 Alpha for 2 Coders with all variables reaching a reliability of 0.80 or higher (Riffe et al., 2014). Finally, frequencies and percentages were calculated using Microsoft PivotTables.

### Results

We analyzed a total of 235 new releases. Of these, 108 (46%) referenced livestock specifically. The majority of messages ( $n = 53$ , 22.5%) referenced poultry (see Table 1). Some articles referenced multiple species ( $n = 45$ , 19.1%), with 19 (42%) of the multiple species including

livestock. Those messages which did not focus on livestock species referenced exotic, aquatic, and celebrities. A common theme found among the articles was a technique where the group writes one article, then makes many articles with the same information but slightly changing it such as changing the city the group is trying to reach.

**Table 1**

*Frequency of species referenced PETA news releases (N = 235)*

Species	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Poultry	53	22.5
Multiple Species	45	19.1
Cattle	25	10.6
Pig	4	1.7
Horse	3	1.3
No Animal Specified	3	1.3
Sheep	2	0.8
Goat	1	0.4

Most articles ( $n = 188$ , 80%) included pictures; however, researchers noticed some of the pictures were repeated across different articles. For sources, only one (0.4%) did not mention a source. Of the articles that did include sources ( $n = 234$ , 99.6%), the majority were of PETA origin ( $n = 162$ , 69.2%). Seventy-one (30.3%) sources included an external source in addition to citing PETA ( $n = 71$ , 30.3%). We found one article (0.4%) only included an external source.

### **Conclusions/ Implications/Recommendations/Impact**

Through this study, we identified that PETA does create messages surrounding livestock; however, it is not their sole focus. Of the species found discussed, poultry was the most common. There is an opportunity for the poultry industry (and other industries referenced) to continue to release information to show the other side of the message. Of the frames outlined by Shen and Bigsby (2013), many of the articles used one-sided messages, only stating a source originating from PETA. The organization uses framing as a powerful tool to highlight the livestock industry as cruel to influence consumer behavior (Blankfield, 2010).

This study serves as a foundation for the agricultural industry to see what messaging exists. It was limited to two months; thus, it is recommended to replicate this study on a larger scale. The current study focused on the months of November and December. Thus, future researchers should apply this methodology to a wider range of dates. Other future research could explore how readers perceive the trustworthiness of the evidence outlined by Shen and Bigsby (2013). Additionally, industry professionals could use these findings to strategize communication efforts to effectively highlight their operations.

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