

The representations of Animals in the Swiss information media, 1978-2007. From the “nice pet” to the “threatening other”

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Key words

Animals, social representations, media, miscellaneous news, fear, risks, sociology

Aim of the study

The project aims at describing the contrasted images of animals portrayed in the Swiss media. In a first phase, these images were analysed over the period 1978-2007 in the written press and in TV broadcasts. In a second phase, the main images produced by the media were discussed with the publics, ie the Swiss population – through a focus groups methodology. In a third phase, media images of animals related to avian flu and dangerous dogs were further analysed.

Material and methods

Phase 1: corpus of newspapers and TV news from the 3 main linguistic regions of Switzerland (n=4480).

Phase 2: 10 focus groups (64 participants) conducted in the 3 main linguistic regions of Switzerland.

Phase 3: selection of a specific corpus combining newspapers, TV broadcasts, radio broadcasts.

Results and significance

In Phase 1, we showed that besides an increase of animal representations in the media over the 30 years period, 5 main animal figures could be identified (undesirable, shown, victim, utilitarian and companion). Their evolution over time and their distribution among different types of newspapers have been analysed. In Phase 2, we observed a large variety of attitudes towards animals, with a predominance of ecologist and moralist attitudes and a limited focus on negative images of animals. In Phase 3, analysis of the volume of: media coverage, actors of the debate, tensions in discourses and images showed that: avian flu has been mostly described as a global public health threat, with a focus on the potential pandemic and little attention given to infected animals; the dangerous dogs crisis was described as an anthropozoological crisis, centered on the human-animal relation and treated at the local level.

Publications, posters and presentations

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Project 2.07.04

Project duration September 2007-February 2009 (18 months)