The Animal Welfare
Science Centre

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Educating the Public: Information or persuasion?

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Overview

- AIM – factors relevant to improving knowledge of animal welfare
- Public knowledge – beliefs, attitudes and values
- Public attitudes
  - Species preferences
  - Attitudes and knowledge
- Education vs persuasion
- Changing beliefs
  - Information credibility
  - Opinion leaders
- Nature of the message
- Some thoughts on education strategies.

Attitudes and values

- Attitudes are learned and are often invoked both in everyday use as well as in research to explain behaviour.
- One major components of attitudes is belief. A belief is a "subjective fact".
- Values, on the other hand, involve judgment and reflect a person's moral, ethical, religious or political perspectives. Values are the rules by which we make decisions about right and wrong. They often underpin beliefs.
- Beliefs (and facts) are not value free – eg welfare status of an animal depends on definition of welfare

Attitudes to animal welfare

- Animal welfare has been prominent in the media.
- Media interest is often triggered by animal rights groups or by some adverse event that compromises animal welfare.
- Attitudes studied with a view to
  - understanding consumer behavior
  - sometimes to understand the polarisation in views between animal activists and those who farm or experiment on animals
  - sometimes to gauge community values in regard to the uses of animals so that regulators and legislators can make decisions about how animals are used
- What kind of information about animal welfare should be disseminated, how, by whom and to whom?

Why are we interested in attitudes?

- Knowledge does not have direct behavioural implications unless it relates to some positive or negative aspect of the target eg “caged hens have good (or poor) welfare”
- This knowledge may not be actually true, but is taken to be true
- Beliefs that underpin attitudes are treated as facts by people
- These “facts” form part of attitudes
- Our attitudes can impact on behaviour

These behaviours may lead to changes in

- Retailer demands regarding welfare practices,
- Consumer purchasing behaviour
- Community demanding change
- Regulation/legislation/codes of practice, and
- Owner/farmer management practices for companion animals, zoo animals and farm animals

Education vs Persuasion

- Education refers to the process of imparting knowledge
- Persuasion involves convincing another person. By implication, persuasion entails the imparting of a point of view, rather than facts alone.
- Because acquired knowledge is actually belief, the communication of information that is based on the available science involves changing attitudes – ie persuasion.
- To place these matters in context, a brief overview of public attitudes will be given. Detail is limited, more in the full paper

Species preferences

- Driscoll (1995) Ratings of 33 species from 133 respondents.
- In terms of lovability,
  - primates and larger mammals were rated highest
  - spiders, insects and some mammals including rats, skunks and lions were rated poorly.
  - many food species including turkeys, chickens, lobsters and trout were rated as relatively unlovable.

Species preferences (cnt)

- Knight and Barnett (2008)
  - people tend to differentiate between animals on the basis of the perceived mental capacity –ie the "facts" about animal intelligence
  - people tended to believe that it was appropriate to use animals for certain purposes, based on their experience with that species.
  - In general, respondents had limited knowledge of animal use procedures and practice
  - active avoidance on the part of participants so that they could avoid the cognitive dissonance associated with their uses of the animals on one hand (eg eating meat) and of the practices associated with the management (eg on-farm housing and husbandry) of those animals on the other.

Species preferences (cont)

- Knight, Nunkoosing, Vrij and Cherryman's (2004)
  - people adapt their attitudes to specific contexts and may actively avoid learning about specific animal procedures and uses to minimise cognitive conflict.
- Driscoll (1995)
  - despite the argument from animal rights activists that animals should be valued in themselves, the general community clearly discriminates amongst the different species

Livestock

- Norwood and Prickett (2007)
  - 97% of 1019 respondents the US agreed or strongly agreed that "it is important to me that animals on farms are well cared for".
- Heleski and Zanella (2006)
  - surveyed 87 students from Michigan State University asked "are you comfortable with how agricultural animals in modern, intensive production system are housed and managed" around 40% of introductory students showed at least some concern, while about 70% of the animal behaviour students expressed similar concern.
  - The introductory students scored below chance in identifying cages as the main housing for egg laying chickens while the animal behaviour students scored above 80%.
  - Knowledge associated with less concern

Livestock (cont)

- Heleski, Mertig and Zanella (2006) surveyed veterinary college faculty members and animal science faculty members on their attitudes towards farm animal welfare.
  - In response to the statement, "Agricultural animals have individual temperaments"
    - 93% of VCF and 92% of ANS agreed/strongly agreed.
  - "Agricultural animals can experience something akin to boredom,"
    - 63% of VCF and 61% of ANS agreed/strongly agreed.
  - "It is important to meet the majority of behavioral needs possessed by agricultural animals"
    - 51% of VCF and 48% of ANS agreed/strongly agreed.
- Facts belief or values???

Public knowledge of livestock practices

- Many people do not have accurate knowledge of farming practices.
- In a commissioned survey in Australia (Roy Morgan Research, 2000),
  - more than 70% reported that they were familiar with shearing of sheep and milking of cattle
  - 25% reported being familiar with mulesing in sheep
  - 10% reported being familiar with teeth clipping in pigs.

Knowledge of livestock practices (cont)

- Coleman and Toukhsati (2006) asked respondents to identify the correct of two alternative descriptions of a range of husbandry practices carried out in the livestock industries (Table 1).
  - knowledge of such practices as tail-docking, hot-iron branding and de-horning was good,
  - many respondents did not know about mulesing, crutching, stunning and beak trimming
  - in the case of induced moulting and curfew, performed so far below chance as to suggest that there may be some misinformation in the community.

Knowledge of livestock practices (cont)

- The Eurobarometer survey of 2007
  - 69% of EU citizens claimed to have some knowledge of the conditions under which animals are farmed in their country
  - 12% said that they knew 'a lot'
  - 57% said that they possessed 'a little' knowledge
  - 28% claimed to know 'nothing at all'.

Other sectors

- Not discussed here but are in the conference paper:
  - Animal used for research purposes
  - Companion animals
  - Zoo animals
  - Wildlife

Public attitudes - summary

- Several themes emerge in relation to public attitudes towards animal welfare.
  - the public often has limited knowledge of welfare of animals.
  - in the case of farm animals, knowledge is often both limited and inaccurate
  - The distinction between knowledge and beliefs is often unclear
  - in the case of companion animals, wildlife and animals used for experimentation, knowledge in the general community is limited.
- There is a case for providing the community with factual information about the welfare of animals in all contexts.
- Community values may lead to behaviour that is detrimental to animal welfare,
  - for example in the case of people caring for semi-owned cats because they regard it as good for the animal.

Education and persuasion

- If a person has no prior knowledge of a subject, knowledge is acquired by the process of education.
- If however, the person already holds beliefs, no matter how accurate, then the process of changing these beliefs necessarily involves attitude change by persuasion.
- Similarly if there is a need to change the rules by which people make their judgments about right and wrong (ie values), then persuasion is also required.
- The mass media is the most commonly accessed source of information

Education and persuasion pathways

- The classic work by Carl Hovland in the 1950s, defined the process of persuasion
  - attitude change as a response to a communication process. the process of attitude change involves three factors,
    - the characteristics of the source of the communication
    - the characteristics of the target,
    - the message itself.

The source

- Education refers to the process of imparting knowledge
- Persuasion involves convincing another person
- It is rare that knowledge is value free, and often so-called facts are influenced by the underlying perspective of the person who imparts them.
- Indeed the issue of the trustworthiness of the source of information is a major one.
- MORI survey (2002)
  - most trusted sources were animal welfare groups and veterinarians at 45%.
  - scientists only achieved a 23% endorsement
  - universities just 17%. Among scientists, university scientists rated highest at 50%.

The source (cont)

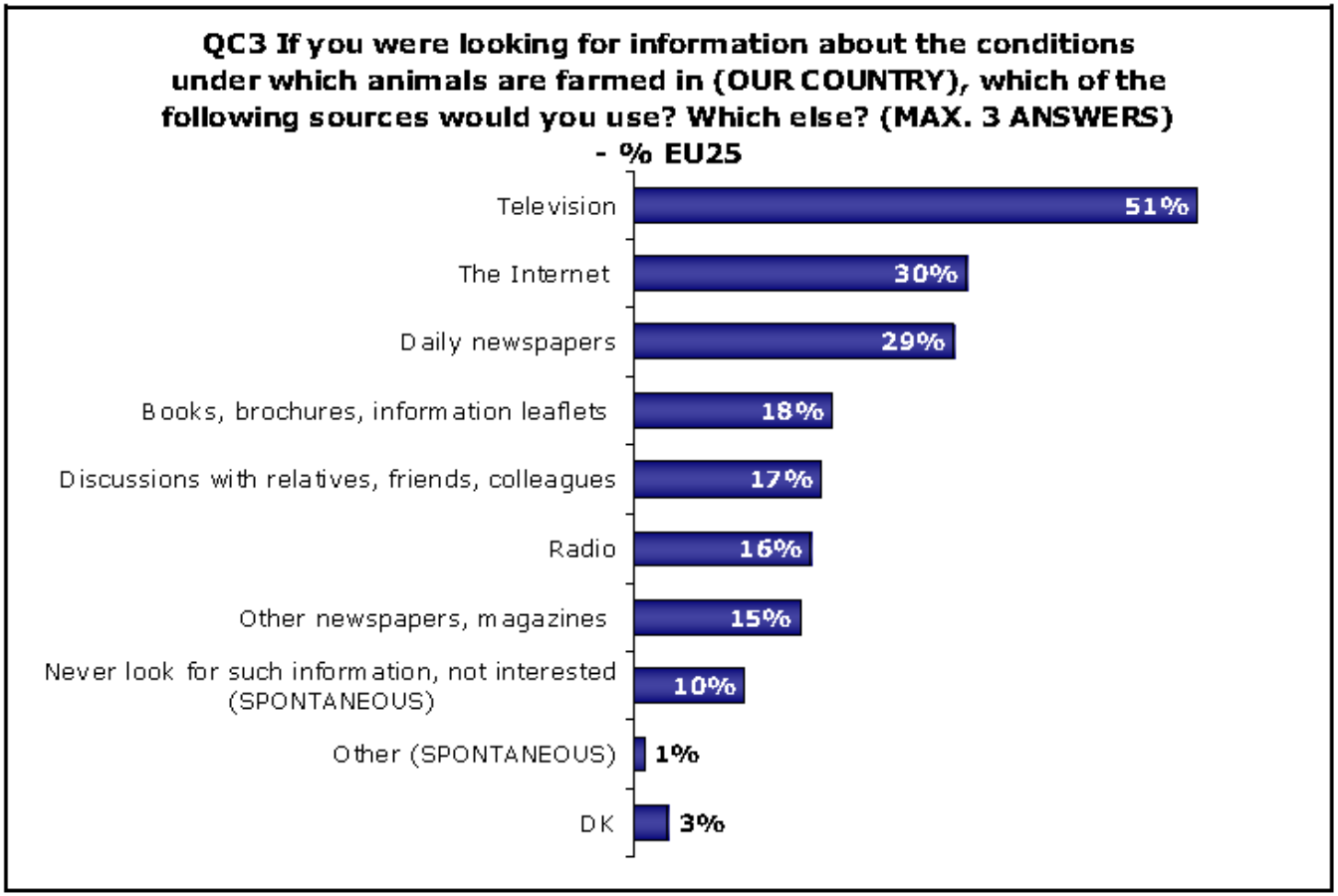
- Generally, people prefer to receive their information from the mass media.
- Coleman and Toukhsati (2006)
  - Most information regarding animal welfare issues had been obtained from television, animal welfare organisations, magazines, radio talkback, friends and family and newspapers
  - substantially less information was obtained from formal education, government advertisements and the internet.
- MLA (2002) TV and newspapers most preferred with animal rights groups prominent in preferences
- Eurobarometer (2007)
  - television to be the most preferred source of information by EU residents followed by the internet and newspapers.

Sources of animal welfare information

Source	% 1994	% 2000
Television	53	59
Newspapers	43	47
Animal welfare organisations	23	14
Friends/relatives	19	17
Personal knowledge	15	14
Farmers/farmer organisations	11	9
Primary/secondary education	10	10

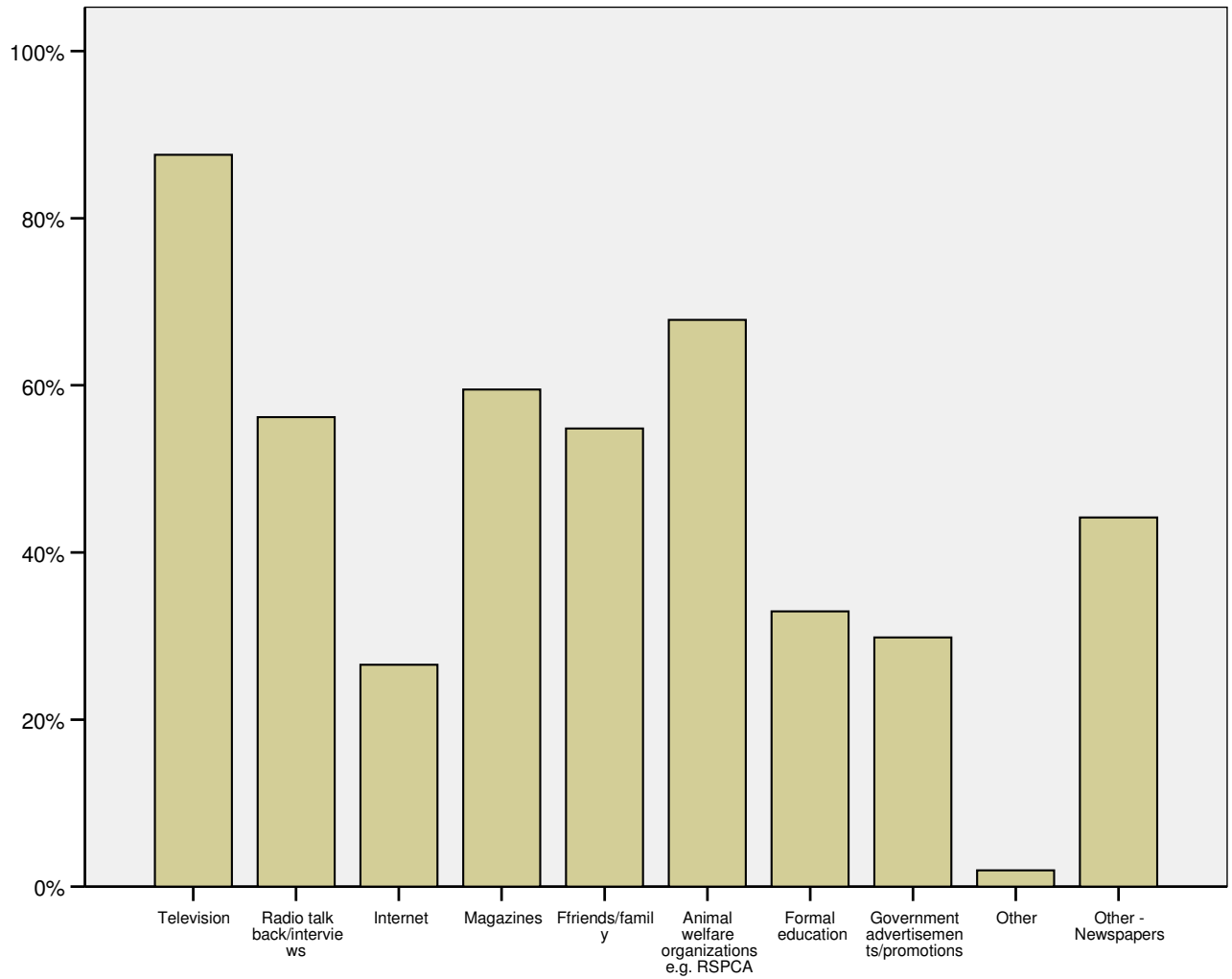
(MLA,2000)

Sources of animal welfare information



Eurobarometer 2007)

Sources of animal welfare information



Coleman and Toukhsati 2006

The source (cont)

- Findings suggest that changes to community knowledge might best be served by documentary style presentations via the mass media.
- This would tend to diminish the credibility issues associated with "experts" while at the same time capitalising on television as the most preferred and most used source of information.
- A counter view arises from the fact that stakeholders such as agricultural producers or animal rights groups, when involved in a controversial issue will find media coverage of an issue to be relatively disagreeable (Gunther, 2001).
- As a result, they will see public opinion on that issue as contrary to, or at least incompatible with, their own opinions. This tends to polarise those individuals who are most actively involved.
- Hence the mass media is probably not the best means of communicating with highly involved stakeholders.

Characteristics of the message

- These include
  - the order of the arguments,
  - one versus two sided arguments,
  - the type of appeal and whether or not an explicit or implicit conclusion is provided.
- In the case of animal welfare, the audience ranges across a wide range of interest groups and it would be inappropriate and even counter-productive to use an explicit persuasive approach, particularly if this was broadcast over the mass media.
  - this is because, based on what we know of media effects, the various interest groups would have a tendency to see such messages as being hostile to their interests.
  - This suggests that a more appropriate strategy would be to provide non-didactic information.

Characteristics of the audience

- People tend to defend their attitudes, in part, by *attributing* attitudes to those who are seen to oppose them and, by arguing against these attributed attitudes, to defend their own attitudes.
  - For example, Kemdal and Montgomery (2001) argued that people make attributions about the causes of others' attitudes on the basis of internal and external causes.
  - Researchers see themselves as motivated by external causes , e.g. "Animals are the best and only model for studies of integrated physiological systems or mechanisms" but see animal rights people as showing "Ignorance about the importance of biological processes for society".
  - Animal protectors, however, attribute researchers with having "A blind belief in causality research" but believe themselves to be motivated by concern for the prevention of animal suffering and unnecessary animal experiments

Media effects - processes

- Two processes are thought to govern perceptions of media influence:
  - The hostile media effect
  - Persuasive press inference

Hostile media effect

- People who are highly involved in a controversial issue will find media coverage of an issue to be relatively disagreeable.
- Such partisans will see public opinion on that issue as more contrary to, or at least less compatible with, their own opinions.
- This tends to polarise those individuals who are most actively involved – as practitioners or as opponents an aspect animal management.

Gunther et al. (2001)

Persuasive press inference

- People believe that even a small sample of views represents the population at large.
- The notion of perceived reach – people assume that others are exposed to media coverage similarly to themselves.

Education :
Individual vs community change

- Generic mass media is a long-term approach
- Opinion leaders provide a more targeted approach
  - Do they exist and who are they?
- Individual the most effective for relatively rapid change
  - Extension activities or outreach from veterinarians
  - Who's for cats campaign
  - Prohand
- Education in schools
  - Alignment with curricula

Conclusion

- In summary,
  - Beliefs form a major component of attitudes and attitudes have a role in determining how people behave as consumers and as citizens.
  - their behaviour in turn affects the commercial viability and even the sustainability of animal industries.
  - beliefs are “subjective facts”, that is matters that individuals consider to be true.
  - community attitudes to animal welfare are often based on limited knowledge that is largely acquired from the mass media, perhaps filtered by opinion leaders.

Conclusion (cont)

- Education (persuasion) strategies relating to welfare issues depend on the target group and the desired outcome.
- Target groups include farmers, post farm gate handlers including veterinarians, carers of companion animals, transport drivers and abattoir workers, legislators and regulators, retailers as well as the general community including school children.
- Each of these target groups may not be homogeneous, but nevertheless has identifiable needs for knowledge and/or skills relevant to welfare.

Conclusion (cont)

- The approach that is likely to be most effective is to provide appropriately targeted dispassionate and factual information.
- Given that the mass media is the preferred source of information, outside of formal courses, the use of science-based media coverage and informed ethical debate is likely to have the best effect, albeit over a fairly long time frame.
- Targeted education strategies for particular stakeholder groups may be tailored to the individual and therefore produce change over a shorter time frame.
- In addition, government as an "honest broker" has a role in disseminating the values that should govern animal welfare (eg AAWS "duty of care") and this should be both a reflection of community views and current thinking amongst ethicists. This sets a mileu in which certain basic values are acepted as the norm and to defuse the spin merchants.

Thank you