



# Entertaining Commodities or Living Beings? Public Perception of Animal Welfare at Local Festivals in South Korea

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## Abstract

Many festivals use animals in the name of continuing traditions and religious acts of historical and cultural relevance, as well as for tourist entertainment; however, the welfare of these animals has been overlooked in favor of maintaining cultural identity or making economic profits. The criticism of animal-based festivals has been growing along with the increased public awareness of animal rights. However, this change in public perception has not yet been translated into actual government policies in Korea. This study addresses the unethical practices and challenges regarding animal welfare at festivals from the perspective of visitors to understand the public perception of the need for institutional and regulatory interventions to improve the treatment of animals at festivals. An online survey (N = 1000) is conducted to examine the public perception of animals and animal welfare at festivals and how strongly online survey participants support organizer- and state-level actions to protect the welfare of festival animals. Logistic regression analyses identify gender, pet ownership, pro-animal attitude, visiting experience, sensitivity to criticism regarding animal issues, and perception of animal welfare at festivals as significant predictors of online survey participants' support for actions ensuring the welfare of animals used in festivals. Our findings also suggest that people sympathize with the need to enhance animal welfare but have low levels of sensitivity to the maltreatment of animals at festivals, indicating the existence of cognitive dissonance. Establishing guidelines and regulations for improving animal welfare can help festivals use animals in a more sustainable way and make visitors rethink and re-establish human–animal relationships.

**Keywords** Animal welfare · Animal-based festival · Animal attitude scale · Ethics · Cognitive dissonance

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## Introduction

Animals have long been a part of human history, and over time, their existence has been exposed to the growing influence of humans and human society. According to Fraser and MacRae (2011), human activities that affect animals can be classified into four types: (1) activities involving the keeping of animals, often to use them for some purpose; (2) activities that intentionally harm animals, such as slaughtering or hunting them; (3) activities that directly but unintentionally cause harm by using them in crop production, transportation, and many other purposes; and (4) activities that indirectly and unintentionally cause harm by disrupting ecological systems, such as the increase in environmental pollution and destruction of habitats.

The use of animals in festivals—such as keeping animals captive for exhibition or to release them into the wild, catching live animals for fun, killing them for consumption, and riding them for entertainment—fall under the first and second types of human activities classified above. Across various cultures, animals are sacrificed at festivals for worship and religious offerings or for consumption as food (Acharya et al., 2019). They are also used for providing entertainment at festivals, often in the name of maintaining traditions that have historical and cultural relevance (Navarro & Schneider, 2013). The use of animals in festivals has long been considered justifiable and legitimate if it does not harm the overall ecosystem or if it benefits humans in some other way; this benefit is perceived as acceptable if the only cost is the sacrifice of animals.

However, recent changes in ethical perspectives on animal rights and welfare have shaken the legitimacy of animal-based festivals. From a strong advocacy of animal rights that denies the justification of any activity involving the death, suffering, or deprivation of the naturalness of animals to a general feeling of discomfort about the mistreatment of animals, more people currently doubt the ethical soundness of animal use in festivals than they have in the past. Raising their voices against animal-based festivals, animal protection organizations have held rallies against the killing and torture of animals in the name of entertainment and tradition and demanded that governments ban festivals that cause animal suffering (PETA, 2022). Recognizing the changes in public sentiments about animal rights, companies and even zoos around the world have amended their policies and practices to assure the public that their businesses respect and protect animal welfare (Amos & Sullivan, 2017; Blakeway & Cousquer, 2018). Similarly, a number of governments have implemented policies to protect the welfare of animals used for entertainment (Shaheer et al., 2021). Specifically, in terms of festivals, animal welfare regulations have been put in place to ban animal abuse and secure festival animals' quality of life (Von Essen et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, South Korea is one of the countries where such regulatory changes have been slow in the making. In Korea, local festivals held to attract domestic and international visitors have drastically increased in number since the 1990s (Chang, 2001), many of which use animals, including fish, dogs, cows, sheep, and fowl, for visitors to catch, feed, kill, and eat on site (Ministry of

Environment, 2020). In 2020, the Korean Minister of the Environment expressed his doubts about the propriety of holding festivals such as the famous Hwacheon Mountain Trout Festival, which invites visitors to catch and kill fish. His negative comments sparked a wide societal debate on animal welfare at festivals, with local festival organizers and government ministries blaming the minister for the decrease in the number of visitors and the resultant economic loss on one end of the argument and animal protection organizations accusing festival organizers of animal cruelty on the other end (Ock, 2020). The media published provocative articles criticizing the festivals for causing a multitude of problems, including environmental problems caused by the improper use of local rivers, potential risks to public health arising from visitors touching animals with their bare hands, and the mass culling of trout and their improper disposal after use (Lee, 2019), which were accompanied by comments from politicians and celebrities.

However, the higher level of public awareness and criticism of the inhumane treatment of animals at festivals have not been translated into actual government policies in Korea. The Korean government has neither implemented guidelines nor regulations to protect festival animals from inhumane treatment as of 2022. One reason is that while public perceptions are crucial factors affecting political and policy change surrounding the welfare of festive animals, it is difficult to accurately gauge public perception from these societal debates.

This study addresses the unethical practices and challenges regarding animal welfare in the context of festivals from the perspective of visitors. Specifically, this study investigates the experiences of visitors at animal-based festivals and their perception of the welfare of animals used in festivals with the aim of gauging the public demand for institutional and regulatory interventions to improve the treatment of animals at these events. An online survey is conducted on a sample of 1000 people using a questionnaire we develop to measure attitudes toward animals, the perception of animal welfare at festivals, and the support for actions ensuring the welfare of animals used in festivals. The survey data are analyzed using logistic regression models to identify the significant predictors of online survey participants' support for organizer- and state-level regulations for animal welfare. As the first study to investigate the public perception of animal welfare at festivals in Korea, our research provides interesting insights into the ethical perspectives surrounding the human–animal relationship.

## Ethical Perspectives on Animal Welfare

The ways in which human activity affects animals raise specific ethical challenges. Raising awareness about the consequences of human actions and finding alternative ways to decrease unintentional harm to animals are essential issues; animal suffering can be minimized by identifying mutually beneficial forms of human–animal interaction. According to Shani and Pizam's (2008) ethical framework, ethical positions on animal-based attractions can be divided into three aspects: environmental ethics, animal welfare, and animal rights. From the perspective of environmental ethics, individual animals have value in virtue of the contribution they make to maintaining

the integrity of the ecosystem as a whole (McShane, 2009). This view underpins the environmental stewardship in relation to animals from actions targeting individual species to policies addressing conservation at landscape scale (Fernandes & Guio-mar, 2016). The animal welfare approach, on the other hand, aims to create a balance between the interests of animals and those of human beings by accepting the use of animals for entertainment but seeking to eliminate as much animal suffering as possible. Finally, the animal rights position views animals as equals to humans; therefore, any act that harmfully affects animal welfare is morally wrong (Shani & Pizam, 2008).

In recent years, scholars have noted and argued for a ‘political turn’ in the discourse of animal rights, referring to the growing academic explorations on how political institutions, structures, and processes can be transformed to secure justice for both humans and animals (Cochrane et al., 2018; Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2011; Garner et al., 2016). The premise of this political turn is that animals have the right to a full life that is free from suffering, which can be protected if political structures dedicated to their interests are created by human society (Cochrane, 2012, 2018). In other words, it is human society that decides the scope and details of the political rights granted to animals and defines human–animal relationships (Cochrane, 2019). Citizens’ awareness of animal suffering, animal protection movements, and media attention to animal welfare motivate political actions aimed at the protection of animals, thus contributing to changing attitudes toward animal welfare in society (María et al., 2017; Shaheer et al., 2021; Sødtring et al., 2020; Yousaf et al., 2021).

In the context of tourism, including festivals, animal rights issues are sometimes represented as a conflict between local rural communities seeking increased incomes and urban outsiders introducing a new norm for animal welfare (Von Essen et al., 2020). Tourists often express discomfort upon seeing hungry and injured animals at vacation destinations, suggesting that people may generally support the cause of animal welfare (Fennell, 2013); in addition, political actions have been mobilized specifically to demand changes in the treatment of animals at tourist destinations (Shaheer et al., 2021). These demonstrations have highlighted the size of the tourism industry and its adverse impact on many animals (Fennell, 2013), which, in turn, have caused direct (e.g., decreasing visitors) and indirect (e.g., negative image) impacts on targeted destinations (Yousaf et al., 2021). Since festivals also contribute to visitors’ perceptions of local communities, especially in terms of their satisfaction and revisit intention (Getz, 1993; Hoon Kim et al., 2010; Yousaf et al., 2021), criticism and campaigns against animal-based festivals have created public pressure on animal-based festivals to discontinue activities that harm animals. For example, although bullfighting has long held political, cultural, and symbolic importance in Spain and has been associated with the country’s national identity, the public perception of bullfighting as a multifaceted animal abuse phenomenon, rather than just an important tradition and a major tourist attraction, has resulted in the banning of some of these events (María et al., 2017).

In this way, public attitudes and opinions are important for both animal welfare policy-makers and local festival marketers. However, studies on animal use in festivals have primarily examined the cultural aspects of these events (Acharya et al., 2019; Kline, 2018; Zali, 2018). The welfare of live animals used in such

entertainment activities has rarely been addressed by scholars in Korea or those abroad (Fennell, 2013); one study points out that the desire to avoid damaging cultural identity or the economic value of such events is behind the lack of academic attention to this topic (Zali, 2018). Moreover, the few studies that have addressed the issue of animals used in recreational events are based on normative discussions rather than empirical evidence (Fennell, 2013; Kline, 2018).

## Materials and Methods

### Questionnaire

We developed a questionnaire comprising four sections. In the first section, online survey participants are asked to state their experiences at festivals where animals are the main subjects or are exhibited or used for activities such as catching, killing, eating, feeding, or racing. Questions in the first section cover survey participants' experiences of animal-based festivals, namely, their reason for visiting, their participation in animal-based activities, their revisit intentions, and their perceptions of the welfare of animals used in festivals. Perceived welfare status is assessed using the following question: "Do you think the organizers of animal-based festivals care about animal welfare?" Online survey participants respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (definitely do not care about animal welfare) to 5 (definitely care about animal welfare). Sensitivity to festival animal welfare issues is assessed via the following yes/no question: "Have you avoided visiting animal-based festivals owing to societal criticism of animal suffering at these festivals?"

The second section of the questionnaire elicits survey participants' attitudes toward animals and their perception of animals' cognitive and sentient abilities. Online survey participants' sensitivity to pain-causing activities involving animals is measured using the following question: "How much pain do you think the following activities cause to animals?" The participants' responses are measured on 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (the activities do not cause any pain at all) to 5 (the activities cause severe pain). Online survey participants' pro-animal attitude is measured using the Animal Attitude Scale (AAS-10), one of the most widely used tools to investigate the ethical and behavioral aspects of human-animal interactions (Herzog et al., 2015). The AAS-10 consists of 10 statements rated on 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Furthermore, online survey participants' perceptions of the cognitive and sentient abilities of different species (primates, companion animals [dogs and cats], livestock [cattle and pigs], birds, reptiles and amphibians, fish, cephalopods, shellfish, crustaceans, and insects) are measured using 4-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (definitely do not have these abilities) to 4 (definitely have these abilities).

The third section assesses online survey participants' support for actions to secure and improve the welfare of animals used in festivals. The online survey participants are required to indicate their support ("yes" or "no") for organizer-level actions ("Do you agree with reinforcing animal welfare standards at festivals?") and state-level actions ("Do you agree with administrative regulations for the use and welfare of

animals at festivals?”). Online survey participants who choose “yes” are additionally asked to indicate the reason for their support for improving animal welfare at festivals.

The final section records online survey participants’ demographic data, including gender, age, educational level, household income, pet ownership, and political orientation (conservative, moderate, or progressive). To verify the effectiveness of the questionnaire and that it does not take too long to complete, we conducted an expert-developed pretest and group debriefing with the authors, coworkers, and a research company to determine if there were any unclear instructions, skipped items, or refusal or inability to answer, as well as the appropriateness of the scales and response options (Ruel et al., 2016).

### **Online Survey Participants and Data Collection**

We conducted an online survey from September 29 to October 13, 2019, through an online survey agency using the quota sampling method based on age, gender, and administrative region. A total of 1000 samples were collected, and a confidence level of 95% was considered with a sampling error of  $\pm 3.1\%$ . Before conducting the survey, we received ethical approval from the authors’ affiliate institution’s institutional review board (IRB No. 2008/003-018). All respondents participated anonymously and provided informed consent prior to completing the survey.

### **Statistical Analysis**

At the preliminary stage, we performed descriptive and comparative analyses, such as *t* tests, ANOVA, and correlational analysis. We utilized two logistic regression models to examine the factors that affect willingness to support regulations for animal welfare at festivals. The odds ratios were calculated in the logistic regressions to assess the independent variables’ predictive probabilities for online survey participants’ agreement to support organizer- and state-level actions to enhance animal welfare at festivals. SPSS version 24 was used for the analysis.

## **Results**

### **Online Survey Participants’ Characteristics and Attitudes Toward Animals**

The online survey participants’ characteristics are presented in Table 1. Among the 1000 respondents, 50.4% were women, 52% were aged under 50 years, 70.8% were receiving or had received a university education, and 58.1% belonged to the US \$2000–\$6000 monthly income group. For reference, the average monthly household income in 2020 in Korea was US \$3915 (Statistics Korea, 2021). In terms of political orientation, moderates were the largest group (41.8%). Approximately 40% of the respondents reporting having owned pets within the last five years.

**Table 1** Online survey participants' characteristics and pro-animal attitude ( $N=1000$ )

| Individual characteristics              |                     | <i>N</i> | Pro-animal attitude<br><i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) | Sig        |
|---|---------------------|----------|---|------------|
| Gender                                  | Men                 | 496      | 31.7 (5.1)                                    | $t=-8.142$ |
|   | Women               | 504      | 34.4 (5.3)                                    | $p<.001$   |
| Age                                     | Under 30 years      | 168      | 33.9 (6.1) <sup>a</sup>                       | $F=3.706$  |
|   | 30–39 years         | 160      | 33.7 (4.8) <sup>a</sup>                       | $p<.005$   |
|   | 40–49 years         | 192      | 33.0 (4.8) <sup>ab</sup>                      |            |
|   | 50–59 years         | 199      | 33.1 (5.2) <sup>ab</sup>                      |            |
|   | 60 years and above  | 281      | 32.2 (5.7) <sup>b</sup>                       |            |
| Political orientation                   | Conservative        | 248      | 32.1 (5.8) <sup>a</sup>                       | $F=16.08$  |
|   | Moderate            | 418      | 32.6 (4.9) <sup>a</sup>                       | $p<.001$   |
|   | Progressive         | 333      | 34.4 (5.3) <sup>b</sup>                       |            |
| Pet ownership (within the last 5 years) | No                  | 602      | 32.3 (5.1)                                    | $t=-5.5$   |
|   | Yes                 | 398      | 34.2 (5.6)                                    | $p<.001$   |
| Household income (monthly)              | Under \$2000        | 105      | 33.2 (6.3)                                    | n.s        |
|   | \$2000–4000         | 282      | 33.6 (5.4)                                    |            |
|   | \$4000–6000         | 299      | 32.9 (5.3)                                    |            |
|   | \$6000–8000         | 157      | 32.8 (4.4)                                    |            |
|   | \$8000–10,000       | 87       | 32.6 (5.7)                                    |            |
|   | Over \$10,000       | 70       | 32.7 (5.7)                                    |            |
| Educational level                       | Elementary school   | 3        | 27.2 (2.5)                                    | n.s        |
|   | Middle school       | 11       | 34.2 (5.0)                                    |            |
|   | High school         | 164      | 33.0 (5.4)                                    |            |
|   | University student  | 115      | 32.8 (5.1)                                    |            |
|   | University graduate | 708      | 33.1 (5.4)                                    |            |
| Total                                   |                     | 1000     | 33.1 (5.4)                                    |            |

Mean values sharing the same superscript letters (<sup>a, b, ab</sup>) are not significantly different at  $p<.05$  based on Tukey's honest significant difference (HSD) test. *M*=mean, *SD*=standard deviation

The total AAS-10 score indicates online survey participants' pro-animal attitude, with a higher score indicating stronger ethical concerns about animal use. The mean AAS-10 score was 33.1 ( $SD=\pm 5.4$ ). The AAS-10 scores differed significantly based on gender ( $t=-8.142$ , Cohen's  $d=0.25$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), age ( $F=3.706$ ,  $\eta^2=0.015$ ,  $p<0.005$ ), political orientation ( $F=16.08$ ,  $\eta^2=0.031$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and pet ownership ( $t=-5.5$ , Cohen's  $d=0.17$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Specifically, women showed higher pro-animal scores than men. Online survey participants younger than 30 and between 30 and 39 years showed higher AAS-10 scores (33.9 and 33.7, respectively), while those older than 60 years had a significantly lower score than other groups (32.2). Political orientation also affected attitudes toward animals: conservatives had a lower score (32.1) than both moderates (32.6) and liberals (34.4). People without pets (32.3) tended to have lower pro-animal attitudes. Among the AAS-10 questions, online survey participants showed the highest agreement on two items: "It is morally wrong to hunt wild animals just for sport" (4.04) and "The slaughter of

**Table 2** Online survey participants' perceptions of animals' cognitive and sentient abilities ( $N=1000$ )

| Species                           | M (SD)            |                  |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
|                                   | Cognitive ability | Sentient ability |
| Insects                           | 2.46 (0.8)        | 2.81 (0.9)       |
| Shellfish and crustaceans         | 2.35 (0.8)        | 2.71 (0.9)       |
| Cephalopods                       | 2.51 (0.8)        | 2.86 (0.9)       |
| Fish                              | 2.50 (0.8)        | 2.85 (0.8)       |
| Reptiles and amphibians           | 2.69 (0.7)        | 3.07 (0.8)       |
| Birds                             | 2.83 (0.7)        | 3.21 (0.7)       |
| Livestock (cattle and pigs)       | 3.18 (0.6)        | 3.47 (0.6)       |
| Companion animals (dogs and cats) | 3.51 (0.6)        | 3.65 (0.5)       |
| Primates                          | 3.55 (0.6)        | 3.67 (0.5)       |

**Table 3** Online survey participants' sensitivity to animal pain-causing activities ( $N=1000$ )

| Activities  | M (SD)     |
|---|------------|
| Catching fish (e.g., goldfish and trout) in a trough with bare hands    | 3.51 (1.0) |
| Relay racing with loaches using hands                                   | 3.61 (1.1) |
| Touching reptiles (lizards, snakes) with hands                          | 3.23 (1.0) |
| Pig-racing event  | 3.33 (1.0) |
| Getting on a pony   | 3.20 (1.1) |
| Using cattle to plow a field  | 3.01 (1.0) |
| Interacting with a goat, feeding it, and taking pictures with it        | 2.25 (1.1) |
| Fishing and extracting sea creatures from the water                     | 3.56 (1.1) |
| Watching a bullfight  | 4.17 (0.9) |
| Releasing farmed fish into a wild environment                           | 2.30 (1.2) |
| Releasing farmed butterflies  | 2.01 (1.1) |
| Steering/gathering livestock (e.g., rabbits, goats, and miniature pigs) | 2.82 (1.1) |
| Throwing live clams into a basket                                       | 3.13 (1.2) |
| Putting a live octopus in boiling water                                 | 3.85 (1.3) |
| Observing reptiles (lizards, snakes) trapped in mobile showrooms        | 2.86 (1.1) |

whales and dolphins should be immediately stopped, even if it puts some people out of work" (3.97). Although we also analyzed the potential differences in online survey participants' perceptions and attitudes by region (i.e., the administrative region of their residence), no significant difference was identified for this variable.

As shown in Table 2, our survey participants believed that primates and companion animals (dogs and cats) have higher cognitive and sentient abilities than other species. Conversely, fish, the animals most generally used for festivals in South Korea, were not recognized as equally cognitively competent or sentient as primates or companion animals, thus demonstrating a statistically significant mean difference ( $p < 0.000$ ).



Online survey participants perceived different levels of pain among animals used in festivals (Table 3). In response to the 15 listed activities, the survey participants answered that “watching a bullfight” caused the most severe pain to animals (mean=4.17/5), followed by “putting a live octopus in boiling water” (mean=3.85/5). The online survey participants considered “releasing farmed butterflies” to cause the least pain to animals (mean=2.01/5). These results appear to reflect differences according to species and media influence (i.e., recent concerns about cephalopods, negative images of bullfighting, and nature-friendly images of releasing or petting animals).

### Experience of Animal-Based Festivals and Perceived Animal Welfare Status at Festivals

In total, 66% of the online survey participants had visited animal-based festivals. As presented in Table 4, the primary reason for their visit was to enjoy leisure time with their family. Among those who had visited the festivals, 47% ( $n=312$ ) reported having participated in animal-based activities. They recalled participating in activities such as “catching animals by fishing or gathering” ( $n=142$ ), “catching animals with bare hands” ( $n=105$ ), and “feeding animals” ( $n=105$ ).

Approximately 40% of the online survey participants believed that organizers of animal-based festivals adequately cared about animal welfare, i.e., that the welfare of animals used in festivals was adequate (definitely care about animal welfare: 6.6%; probably care about animal welfare: 32.4%), while approximately 30% did not (probably do not care about animal welfare: 23.2%; definitely do not care about animal welfare: 5.7%; Table 5). A mean difference was observed in terms of the perceived welfare status of festival animals between online survey participants with prior experience of visiting animal-based festivals and those without ( $t=-2.346$ ,  $p<0.05$ ); the group with prior experience scored higher ( $M=3.16$ ,  $SD=\pm 0.99$ ) than the group without prior experience ( $M=3.00$ ,  $SD=\pm 1.07$ ). Most of the online survey participants who visited animal-based festivals were willing to revisit such festivals in the future (80.5%). However, those who perceived the welfare of animals used in festivals as being low were less likely to revisit such festivals (Pearson’s  $r=-0.215$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). Two-thirds of the online survey participants were reluctant to visit animal-based festivals owing to societal criticism of animal suffering at the festivals.

**Table 4** Reasons for visiting animal-based festivals ( $N=660$ , multiple-choice)

| Reasons   | <i>N</i> |
|---|----------|
| To enjoy leisure time with family                                       | 459      |
| To enjoy activities involving animals (observing, riding, eating, etc.) | 189      |
| To give my children local cultural experiences                          | 133      |
| To engage in ecological and environmental activities                    | 77       |
| Other reasons   | 10       |

**Table 5** Perceived welfare status of festival animals (% ,  $N=1000$ )

| Organizers definitely do not care about animal welfare | Organizers probably do not care about animal welfare | Normal | Organizers probably care about animal welfare | Organizers definitely care about animal welfare |
|--|--|--------|---|---|
| 5.7  | 23.2   | 32.1   | 32.4  | 6.6   |

### Support for Actions to Secure and Improve the Welfare of Animals Used in Festivals

Online survey participants' level of agreement with actions for strengthening animal welfare standards at the organizer level and the state level (through administrative regulations) indirectly indicated their support for improving the welfare of animals used in festivals. Most online survey participants supported organizer- and state-level actions for animal welfare at festivals (77.3% and 77.2%, respectively). As shown in Table 6, the survey participants supported these actions because they believed that "causing unnecessary suffering to animals is unethical" ( $n=552$ ) and that "treating animals recklessly is disrespectful to life" ( $n=480$ ).

### Logistic Regression Analysis: Support for Actions to Secure and Improve the Welfare of Animals Used in Festivals

Questions regarding support for organizer- and state-level regulations for animal welfare at festivals were answered in binary form ("yes" or "no"). Therefore, we used logistic regression models to examine significant factors affecting online survey participants' support for these actions. The following variables were entered into each model to determine the effect of the predictors: individual characteristics (gender, age, educational level, household income, pet ownership, and political orientation), attitude toward animals (total score on AAS-10 and perceived animal cognitive and sentient abilities), and experiences at festivals (visiting experience, sensitivity to issues surrounding the welfare of animals used in festivals, and perceived welfare status of festival animals).

The prediction ratios (percentage of classification accuracy) of online survey participants' support for organizer- and state-level action were 82.8% and 77.8%, respectively. As seen in Model 1 in Table 7, significant variables for online survey participants' support for organizer-level action were gender (women), pet ownership, pro-animal attitude, experience visiting animal-based festivals, and sensitivity to animal welfare issues. Among these variables, the experience of visiting animal-based festivals had a negative effect, indicating that online survey participants who had visited animal-based festivals tended to be less supportive of organizer-level actions for the welfare of animals used in festivals. This outcome is quite counterintuitive; one might expect that festival visitors may have witnessed poor animal conditions when visiting festivals and, subsequently, come to support festival regulations. This result may be caused by a selection bias in the survey, namely, people

who are sensitive to animal welfare support regulations and avoid visiting such festivals. Alternatively, the result shows people's ambivalent attitudes toward festival animals; i.e., people may want to have close encounters with festival animals even if they are uncomfortable with the way they are treated. We discuss this issue in more detail in the discussion section.

In Model 2, we also found that gender, pro-animal attitude, experience visiting animal-based festivals, sensitivity to the welfare of animals used in festivals, and perceived welfare status of festival animals were significantly related to online survey participants' support for state-level actions for the welfare of animals used in festivals. Women who had not visited animal-based festivals, those with higher pro-animal attitudes and sensitivity to the welfare of animals used in festivals, and those who perceived that the festival animals were poorly cared for were more likely to support state-level actions. Pet ownership, which was significant in Model 1, had a nonsignificant relationship regarding support for state-level action in Model 2.

## Discussion

### The Public's Cognitive Dissonance About Animal-Based Festivals

According to our findings, Koreans visit animal-based festivals chiefly to enjoy leisure time and experience local culture with their family or friends. Some even intend to engage in ecological and environmental activities at local festivals. In our study, 66% of the online survey participants had already visited animal-based festivals; most of these online survey participants (80.5%) were willing to revisit such festivals. Nevertheless, they perceived the need for better animal treatment and reported that animal welfare standards should be increased by festival organizers (77.3%) and/or governments (77.2%). Generally, people seem to have an ambivalent attitude toward positive experiences with animals and animal welfare. Even though people want to visit festivals, they do not necessarily want to participate in cruel activities involving animals. This further highlights the importance of creating and enforcing effective guidelines for animal welfare at local festivals (Shani & Pizam, 2008).

**Table 6** Reasons for supporting actions ensuring the welfare of animals used in festivals ( $N=773$ , multiple-choice)

| Reasons   | <i>N</i> |
|---|----------|
| Causing unnecessary suffering to animals is unethical                                     | 552      |
| Treating animals recklessly is disrespectful to life                                      | 480      |
| I feel uncomfortable when I see the suffering of animals                                  | 381      |
| Treating animals recklessly is not good for human development or education                | 366      |
| Animal abuse is banned by law, even if it is culturally acceptable at festivals           | 261      |
| There is a risk of infection through contact with animals kept in poor welfare conditions | 231      |
| Treating animals inhumanely is criticized worldwide                                       | 108      |
| Other   | 6        |

**Table 7** Logistic regression analysis: support for organizer- and state-level animal welfare actions

| Variables  | Model 1   |        |                 |  | Model 2   |        |                 |      |
|--|---|--------|-----------------|--|---|--------|-----------------|------|
|  | Support for organizer-level actions for animal welfare at festivals |        |                 |  | Support for state-level actions for animal welfare at festivals |        |                 |      |
|  | B   | SE     | OR              |  | B   | SE     | OR              |      |
| <i>Individual characteristics</i>                      |   |        |                 |  |   |        |                 |      |
| Gender (woman = 1)                                     | .532  | .185   | <b>1.702**</b>  |  | .508  | .175   | <b>1.662**</b>  |      |
| Age  | .011  | .064   | 1.011           |  | -.053   | .060   | .949            |      |
| Education level  | .136  | .110   | 1.146           |  | .185  | .101   | 1.204           |      |
| Household income                                       | .002  | .069   | 1.002           |  | .075  | .066   | 1.078           |      |
| Pet ownership (yes = 1)                                | .388  | .190   | <b>1.474*</b>   |  | .216  | .177   | 1.241           |      |
| Political orientation (Conservative)                   | -.185   | .244   | .831            |  | .044  | .228   | 1.045           |      |
| Political orientation (Moderate)                       | -.205   | .215   | .815            |  | -.028   | .200   | .973            |      |
| <i>Attitude toward animals and animal welfare</i>      |   |        |                 |  |   |        |                 |      |
| AAS-10   | .151  | .022   | <b>1.163**</b>  |  | .079  | .019   | <b>1.083**</b>  |      |
| Perception of animals' cognitive ability               | .035  | .024   | 1.035           |  | -.026   | .022   | .975            |      |
| Perception of animals' sentient ability                | .043  | .022   | 1.044           |  | .034  | .022   | 1.034           |      |
| <i>Festival experience</i>                             |   |        |                 |  |   |        |                 |      |
| Previous visits (yes = 1)                              | -.391   | .197   | <b>.677*</b>    |  | -.447   | .185   | <b>.640*</b>    |      |
| Sensitivity to festival animal issues (yes = 1)        | 1.345   | .180   | <b>3.836***</b> |  | 1.319   | .172   | <b>3.738***</b> |      |
| Perception of the welfare of animals used in festivals | .127  | .097   | 1.136           |  | -.294   | .091   | <b>.745**</b>   |      |
| Constant   |   | -7.288 |                 |  |   | -2.211 |                 | .908 |
| N  | 1000  |        |                 |  | 1000  |        |                 |      |
| Classification accuracy (%)                            | 82.8  |        |                 |  | 77.8  |        |                 |      |
| $\chi^2$ (df)  | 256.603 (13)  | ***    |                 |  | 154.585 (13)  | ***    |                 |      |
| Cox & Snell R <sup>2</sup>                             | .226  |        |                 |  | .152  |        |                 |      |
| -2 log Likelihood ratio                                | 814.918   |        |                 |  | 909.254   |        |                 |      |

AAS-10 = Animal Attitude Scale-10; Sensitivity to festival animal issues = "I have avoided visiting animal festivals owing to the societal criticism of festivals in which animals undergo suffering"; SE = standard error; OR = odds ratio  
 \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

The results of our logistic regression revealed that gender, pet ownership, pro-animal attitude, prior experience of visiting animal-based festivals, and sensitivity to the welfare of animals used in festivals are associated with people's intention to support organizer-level actions for animal welfare at festivals (for example, guidelines implemented by festival organizers). Furthermore, gender, pro-animal attitude, prior experience of visiting animal-based festivals, sensitivity to the welfare of animals used in festivals, and perceived welfare status of festival animals were found to predict support for state-level actions (for example, legislation for mandatory measures). Specifically, we found that women are more supportive than men of strengthening animal welfare standards at both levels, providing further evidence of gender differences in animal-related attitudes reported by prior studies (Herzog, 2007; María, 2006; María et al., 2017; Miranda-de la Lama et al., 2013). Previous studies have suggested that gender differences in animal-related attitudes arise from the difference in how men and women perceive animal-based activities in Western societies; while men tend to recognize animal-based activities as typically masculine pursuits, women associate animal use with recreational animal care activities, including feeding and petting (Von Essen et al., 2020; Weibel-Orlando, 2008). In our results, pet ownership, which can also be linked to caring for and responsibility toward animals, was a significant predictor of support for organizer-level actions. However, pet ownership did not significantly predict support for state-level interventions for animal welfare. Pro-animal attitudes were another significant predictor of support for action at both levels, while perceptions of animals' cognitive and sentient abilities were not significant in our models.

Perceived animal welfare status at festivals significantly predicted online survey participants' support for state-level actions. However, only 28.9% of the survey participants felt that festival animals were poorly cared for. This low percentage could be related to the most commonly used species at festivals in South Korea, that is, fish. People seem to easily ignore the suffering and welfare of fish, a species that they perceive to have lower cognitive and sentient abilities. Due to their lower popularity and "invisibility" (O'Sullivan, 2016), fish are often considered less deserving of protection than high-visibility animals, such as companion animals or farm animals. The online survey participants (28.9%) who perceived festival animals' conditions to be poor tended to support state-level actions more strongly than those who did not. Furthermore, online survey participants who had previously visited animal-based festivals tended to evaluate animal welfare status more positively than those who had not, while the latter tended to support organizer- and state-level actions to enhance animal welfare at festivals more than the former. This outcome is consistent with the findings of a previous study (Shani & Pizam, 2009), in which visitors acknowledged ethical dilemmas about animal use but alluded to general justifications for animal-based tourist attractions; thus, they showed evidence of cognitive dissonance. This tendency occurs due to the dissonance between rapid social changes in attitudes toward animals and the traditional culture underlying animal-based festivals (Shani & Pizam, 2009). Such cognitive dissonance can undermine people's intention to actively prevent animal maltreatment at festivals.

Notably, 59.5% of the online survey participants reported that they had been hesitant to participate in animal-based festivals owing to societal criticism of cruel

animal-based practices. Our regression models showed that responsiveness to societal evaluations of animal issues led to a higher probability of people supporting both organizer- and state-level actions for the welfare of animals used in festivals. Previous studies have indicated that individuals are currently more concerned about animal welfare than they were in the past (Mkono & Holder, 2019; Shaheer et al., 2021; Shani & Pizam, 2009). Therefore, it can be said that people are increasingly dissatisfied with the irresponsible use of animals in recreation activities when those activities cause suffering, which is a feeling that has been leading them to demand a more ethical and careful approach to such activities.

### **Making Sustainable Festivals for Animals, Humans, and the Environment**

Concerns about negative public reactions or the perception of potential festival visitors can lead to the presence of a self-regulation mechanism among animal-based attraction organizers (Mkono & Holder, 2019; Shaheer et al., 2021). However, beyond local or organizer-level actions, visitors may emphasize the role of tight external controls, such as legal and other institutional measures, as key driving forces for the ethical use of animals in tourist attractions. Public trust in the legal system for animal welfare may ease people's ethical concerns regarding animal-based festivals (Shani & Pizam, 2009). Furthermore, enhancing public awareness of the welfare of festival animals—regardless of species—can motivate people to rethink festival practices and re-establish human–animal relationships. Turning festivals into occasions in which animals are not used but are instead cared for is an ideal option; this option is supported by our findings that women, pet owners, and those who have a pro-animal attitude are interested in caring for, rather than using, animals. Educational and family activities during festivals, including this component of care, can thus attract visitors with an interest in sustainability, leading to a “one welfare” principle that holistically encompasses animals, the ecosystem, and society (Garcia, 2017; McBride & Baugh, 2022).

Other than living with pets, festivals and exhibitions are the main contexts in which people interact directly with animals in modern society. People's desire to see and interact with animals in zoos or during other activities is long-standing and reflects their need to get back in touch with nature (Carr & Broom, 2018). Moreover, when engaging in activities outside of their everyday routines, such as traveling, recreating, and visiting festivals, people become *experiential tourists* who seek to add value to their lives and tend to be more flexible and open to new experiences, knowledge, and insights that would not have occurred to them otherwise (Kline, 2018). In this sense, encountering animals at festivals provides opportunities for people to evoke self-reflection on human–animal relationships. However, in addition to causing animal suffering, the presence of poor conditions during animal-related activities or events can lead to the spread of infectious diseases (Conrad et al., 2017; Steinmuller et al., 2006) and carry a potential risk of environmental degradation; this possibility further highlights the crucial need to change public perceptions and influence policy-making on the caretaking of animals at festivals.

In summary, raising awareness of the ethical problems associated with animal-based festivals through the media and social network platforms could strengthen public awareness and sensitivity to animal welfare practices (Shani & Pizam, 2009; Von Essen et al., 2020). Public awareness of and demands for higher animal welfare standards at festivals are expected to motivate local festivals to improve the ways they involve animals to attract visitors. However, establishing guidelines and legislation for higher animal welfare standards at festivals requires widespread public support, as these regulations can limit the economic benefits of festivals for local communities.

### Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Despite this study's findings, there are some limitations that should be mentioned. First, whether having a pro-animal attitude is a direct predictor of online survey participants' support for intervention on either level is unclear. According to Von Essen et al. (2020), individuals' positive attitudes toward animal rights or environmental sustainability in their daily lives are not related to their actual participation in animal-related activities. Moreover, pro-animal attitudes are known to be stronger among women (Apostol et al., 2013; Herzog et al., 1991), vegetarians (Herzog et al., 1991), and people who own companion animals (Apostol et al., 2013). Therefore, an analysis of the parametric effects between sociodemographic and psychological factors and pro-animal attitudes is necessary in future research. Furthermore, this quantitative study with descriptive data and results has limitations in describing in detail the various experiences of online survey participants during their visits to festivals. Further studies should perform a multilayered and in-depth experience analysis using qualitative research methods to explore the moment when animals come to be perceived as live and sentient creatures rather than tools of entertainment; this approach would help identify methods for affecting such a change in perception.

### Conclusion

Animals are often used at festivals in cruel ways, revealing the violence inherent in human–animal relationships (Fennell, 2013). Despite the legality of using animals for human entertainment, animals should not be abused or killed unnecessarily. The concern for the suffering of animals has led to the initiation of political actions beyond the individual level to realize ethical and relational commitments (Cochrane, 2012); in recent years, political communities have been recognizing the moral obligation to change practices that inflict suffering on animals. In South Korea, despite cultural tolerance and the desire to get closer to nature at festivals, festival visitors have become more aware of the ethical dilemma posed by the use of animals in festivals, especially through frequent media reports on the inhumane treatment of festival animals and information shared within social network communities (Park, 2022). However, few regulatory changes have been made to address this issue. Against this background, this study responds to the need for an empirical

investigation into Koreans' perceptions of animal welfare at festivals and their intention to support animal welfare interventions through policy-making. Based on this, we aim to understand how to motivate visitors to take more responsibility for the welfare of animals at such festivals (Shani & Pizam, 2008).

Our findings confirm that the Korean public supports the strengthening of animal welfare standards and regulatory interventions related to animal-based festivals. However, although people care about animal welfare issues and are reluctant to engage in activities that may harm animals, they still want to visit festivals where they can see and interact with animals. A better understanding of such public perception toward animal welfare and animal-based festivals could create the necessary societal pressure on festival organizers to change the way animals are used at these events and induce them to develop activities that engage visitors to care for animals. For legislators and politicians, the insights from this study underscore the urgent need to design, strengthen, and improve animal welfare policies.

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**Data Transparency** The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

**Code Availability** Not applicable.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Ethics Approval for Research Involving Human Participants** This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of Seoul National University (IRB No.2008/003-018).

**Informed Consent** All participants provided informed consent before participating in the survey.

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