OVERLAPPING ATTRIBUTES OF ANIMAL WELFARE AND SUSTAINABILITY: POTENTIAL INFLUENCE ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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This study belongs to the first stage of a project aiming to analyze how overlapping attributes might affect purchase decisions for animal products. The main goal is to understand the intersection between two attributes impacting consumer behaviour: sustainability and welfare. Consumers tend to understand sustainability as a one-dimensional problem (environment) and prioritize it in their purchase decision-making processes. Welfare is a multidimensional concept influenced by culture and context and prone to perceptual discordance. Therefore, the possibility of consumers viewing welfare and sustainability as conflicting choices could compromise its marketability and, hence, the animals' wellbeing. We first performed a bibliometric study to analyze the available literature, clarify tendencies and identify research gaps. We searched for scientific publications in English, published between 2000 and 2022, considering the following keywords as inclusion criteria: Farm animal, Welfare, Sustainability and Consumer. We found 747 documents and reduced the scope by revising suitability of inclusion criteria within the abstracts. A full review of the resulting 138 papers to ensure adequacy led to the final 46 papers included in the analyses. Papers were classified according to year of publication, animal species, journal and area of publication, and authors' origin and expertise. We then performed automated content analysis (quanteda, tidyverse and topicmodel R packages) to generate text corpus statistics (number, relative weight and frequency of unique words and keywords) and visualize lexical dispersion plots and similarity graphs amongst documents. We also attempted Latent Dirichlet Allocation topic modelling on our textual data. Finally, we performed and agreed on a qualitative thematic analysis, using the inductively developed category system. Most frequent unique words were product_, consum_, food_, anim_, sustain_, meat_ and welfar_, while density of information per paper followed a positive lineal correlation. Three main groups of papers were detected, two were closely related and homogeneous and the third one was distant and heterogeneous. None of the LDA models explored included our three main areas of interest together and tended to present topics in isolation or grouping welfare-sustainability or sustainability-consumer. Our thematic analysis centered around categories related to food labelling information and preferences (regarding either welfare or sustainability, but often both attributes are mixed unclearly) and its links to willingness to pay. The conflict between sustainability and welfare from a consumer perspective was hardly considered, but we found references to lack of interest on social aspects of sustainability, preference for sustainability over welfare labels and confusing information regarding sustainable intensification.