

Profile of the Australian Kangaroo: A Media Analysis.

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Legal kangaroo killing is responsible for the most significant slaughter of land-based animals on earth. The Kangaroo industry, supported by the government's National Code of Practice, profits from the cruel treatment of kangaroos. At the same time, the community remains ignorant and misinformed.

There are five species of Australian kangaroo and wallaby that can be legally killed for commercial use and for non-commercial purposes. The 2009 Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies has been criticized by Voiceless, RSPCA Australia and other animal welfare groups for condoning cruelty. The Australian public is denied the truth about the extent of cruelty involved in relation to kangaroos and wallabies. Kangaroos have been maligned by farmers, politicians and the media alike. The attitude tide relating to kangaroos needs changing before serious damage is done to the viability of kangaroo species.

This project aimed to examine the role played by the media in the knowledge about and attitudes toward the kangaroo that Australian's have. Given the media's significant role in forming public attitudes, media content relating to Australian kangaroos over the past decade was be examined and evaluated. The results are reported and discussed below.

Method

Sample

The original proposed sample for the media analysis was to include print media, television news and current affairs stories, radio segments and a broader web search. Attempts to source media from the following outlets were made: Fairfax Newspapers, The Herald and Weekly Times, A Current Affair, Today Tonight, Four Corners, ABC News Radio, 3AW and Google. However, not all sources of media were able to be sampled due to technical restrictions.

A Current Affair and Four Corners were unable to be included as they upload only a limited number of articles all of which were found to be irrelevant to this project. Similarly, Today Tonight and 3AW were unable to be included as no articles were available online for public access. Finally, ABC Radio was excluded from analysis due to an inability to search only for news radio items through their search engine. When a search term was entered into the ABC website, it returned all items including images and products for sale, often with no context to assist with determining the meaning of the item. An attempt was made to contact A Current Affair, Today Tonight and the ABC to enquire about searching their media in a way consistent with the project's aims but only the ABC responded to the inquiry and they indicated they were unable to assist.

Procedure

The term 'kangaroo' was entered into the online search engines for Fairfax Media, The Herald and Weekly Times and Google. For the Fairfax Media and the Herald and Weekly Times websites, a restriction was placed on the search such that only articles published between the 1st of January, 2001, to the 30th of December, 2011 were accessed. Due to the extremely high volume of articles returned by this search term, the number was restricted to a randomly selected 10% of articles. This was achieved by using a random number generator to provide a representative sample of articles for analysis. Due to the random nature of the sampling method used, it is possible to extrapolate the findings of this report to all articles published on these sites.

As web pages returned via the Google news search engine are not all dated, the search was instead restricted to the first 10 articles returned. Furthermore, several search terms were included in the Google search to exclude the types of articles that were found to be returned

frequently in the searches of Fairfax Media and The Herald and Weekly Times, but which had no relevance to the aims of the project. Examples of the non-relevant terms which were excluded are: “Kangaroo Express”, “Kangaroo Island”, “Kangaroo Flats”, “kangaroo court”, “sport”, “football” and “Qantas”.

The final set of included articles was analysed and each article was assigned a valence as either *positive* or *negative* on the basis of a number of criteria. Articles were considered to have a negative valence if they supported industries that use kangaroo products, spoke of the dangers of having kangaroos around or that directly supported the killing of kangaroos. Articles were considered to have a positive valence if they expressed disapproval of any of the above topics, expressed concern about cruelty to kangaroos or presented good news stories about kangaroos.

The content of the articles was also assessed and placed into categories by theme. Each article was assigned to one or more of these categories depending upon its content. The themes included:

- kangaroo product industry,
- kangaroos portrayed as pests,
- kangaroos portrayed as an Australian emblem,
- kangaroo culling,
- whether the article mentioned specific kangaroos as opposed to a group of kangaroos and
- whether the article mentioned the method by which kangaroos were killed for commercial purposes.

Results and Discussion

The final sample of media articles was taken from the Fairfax Newspapers, the Herald Sun Newspapers and a web search on Google. The sample totalled 1,313 articles of which 309 mentioned the animal “kangaroo” (see pdf copies of the articles on enclosed USB stick). A total of 77 of these articles referred to kangaroos as an Australian emblem. Of the remaining articles, 66 expressed positive views of kangaroos while 91 articles denigrated kangaroos or supported the killing of them. The remaining 75 articles presented mixed views of kangaroos or mentioned them incidentally, and were thus not assigned a valence.

Articles were categorised as *mentioning kangaroos incidentally* if the mention of kangaroos was not relevant to the message that the article was conveying. Some examples of incidental mentions of kangaroos are an article about the Queensland floods that mentions footage of kangaroos escaping the flood (Herald Sun 3247), an article about a zoo that lists kangaroos among the animals in residence (Herald Sun 3299) and an article about politics that mentions the kangaroos on the grounds of Canberra airport (Herald Sun 3365).

Agreement between two independent judges (raters) for the assignment of valencies to the articles was assessed by calculating inter-rater reliability. This was done for 7.6% of the articles. It was found that there was 79.1% agreement between the two independent judges regarding whether the articles had a positive view of kangaroos or a negative view of them. This level of agreement is considered to be very good (Landis & Koch, 1977) as it represents a very close level of agreement between the two raters on which articles were judged to have positive and which were judged to have negative valence.

Articles with a Negative Valence

Articles with a negative valence fell mainly into five categories:

- those about industries that require the death of kangaroos;
- kangaroos as a road safety hazard;
- kangaroos attacking people;
- culling kangaroos;
- and
- kangaroos disrupting sporting events.

Sixty-three percent of negative articles involved industries using kangaroo products and 10% were concerned with kangaroos as a road safety hazard. Articles about kangaroos attacking humans made up 4% of negative articles while culling and disruption of sporting events were each represented in 2% of articles. The remaining 21% of articles were concerned with topics that were only represented once such as an article about kangaroos being involved in a tug of war (Google 57), an article about aboriginal hunting methods (Herald Sun 4211) and an article about using kangaroos in experiments on curing skin cancer (Fairfax 1245). The proportions of negative articles according to category are shown visually, in Figure 1.

Of significance is the fact that the largest proportion (63%) of media articles involving kangaroos that had a negative valence or portrayed kangaroos in a manner that does not support their welfare and/or supports their killing, were articles that involved industries that use kangaroo products such as the Kangaroo Industry. This is not surprising, given the vested interests that such industries have in conveying a negative view about the kangaroo to the public.

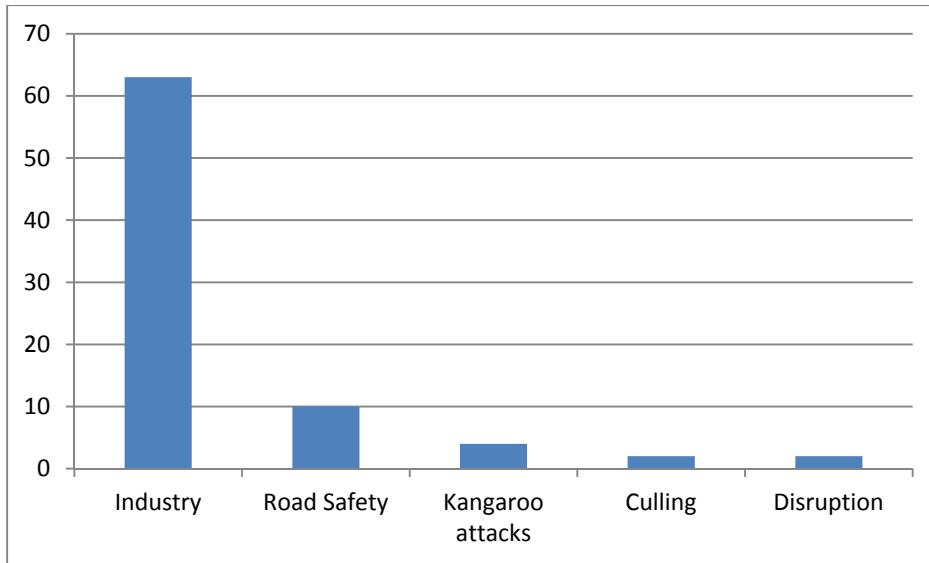


Figure 1.

Categories of negative valence articles by percentage

Articles with a Positive Valence

The majority of articles with positive valencies fell into three categories;

- 6% were stories about people trying to save kangaroos,
- 20% mentioned kangaroos in the context of enjoying nature,
- 21% of positive articles protested about cruelty towards kangaroos,
- 53% of articles raised themes that were only represented once.

Articles raising themes that were only included once include an article about preventing people from entering an area in order to protect kangaroos from dog attacks (Herald Sun 2270), an article that mentioned the biology of the kangaroo in a positive light (Herald Sun 3428) and a story about a family who saw a kangaroo at Christmas (Google 6).

It is noteworthy that the proportions of articles that portray the kangaroo positively or that express concern for the welfare of the kangaroo are not as markedly different across categories

(see Figure 2 below) as is the case for those with a negative valence. With the negatively valenced articles, there is a disproportionately larger percentage of articles concerning kangaroo industries.

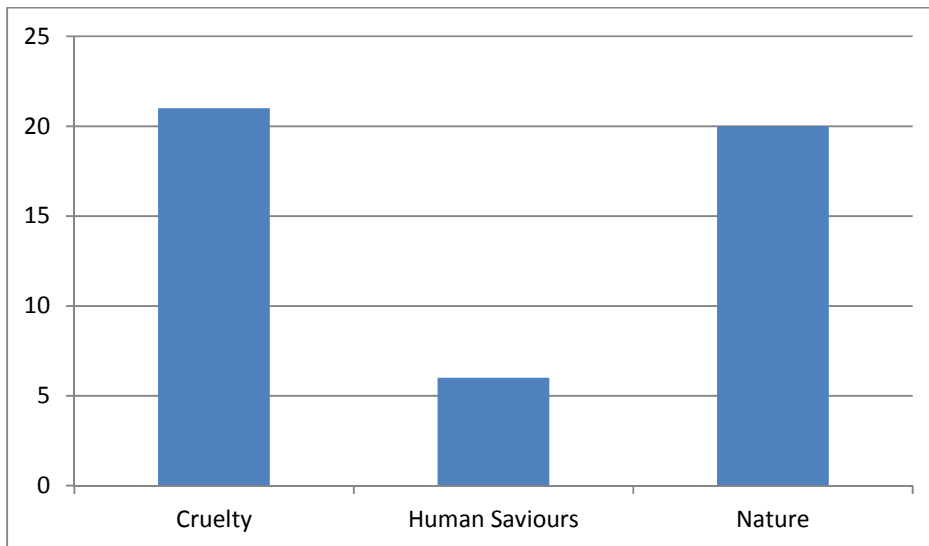


Figure 2. Categories of positive valence articles by percentage

An interesting but perhaps not surprising finding was that significantly fewer articles with negative valencies referred to individual kangaroos than those with positive valencies, $t_{(187)}=3.418$, $p=.001$, as can be seen in Figure 3 below.

Description of Article Content.

A total of 61 articles were concerned with industries that use kangaroo products. This included 39.3% of articles that were advertisements or exposes of locations that used the fact that kangaroo meat was on the menu as a selling point. A further 13.1% mentioned eating kangaroo meat as an aside as in an article about exporting Cane Toads as food which referenced the success of the kangaroo industry (Herald Sun 1265) and an article about Ashton Kutcher eating

Kangaroo meat (Herald Sun 1202). Around the same number (8.2%) of articles was written about kangaroo leather products as exports. A total of 18.0% of articles was concerned with the benefits of eating kangaroo meat and 31.3% of article topics that were only raised once included, for example, eating kangaroos as an 'Australian' thing to do on Australia day (Fairfax 1311) and the possibility of kangaroo meat being diseased (Fairfax 72).

A total of 40% of articles concerning the benefits of eating kangaroo meat espoused the environmental benefits of eating kangaroos as opposed to livestock. The next most popular category was that concerned with the potential health benefits of eating kangaroo meat. These comprised 33.3% of these articles. Lastly, 26.7% of articles on the benefits of eating kangaroos suggested that they are treated more humanely than farm animals. A visual breakdown is presented below, in Figure 4.

The method by which kangaroos were culled or killed commercially was mentioned in five articles. These articles all put forward the view that the death of the kangaroos used in these industries is humane. One article was written about culling kangaroos; detailing that they are tranquilised before being injected with a lethal drug. The other three were about killing kangaroos for industrial purposes; stating that the prescribed death was one shot to the head, and argued that it is a humane way to die.

Although many of the articles related to kangaroo killing and the kangaroo industry were rated as having a negative valence, given their impact on the kangaroo, 13.2% of articles involved the culling of kangaroos or the industrial use of kangaroos but were categorised as having a positive valence. They were rated positively because they espoused pro-kangaroo welfare arguments (these were among the 21% of articles classified as having a positive valence as represented in Figure 2 above). For example, one article presented an argument based on

direct opposition of the commercial killing of kangaroos. Issues raised in other articles included inhumane treatment of kangaroos prior to culling, the concern that culling could wipe out entire populations of kangaroos, questions regarding whether the death count of a cull was accurate, concerns about contamination of the kangaroo meat and the suggestion that kangaroo meat tastes bad and is inferior to other meat sources.

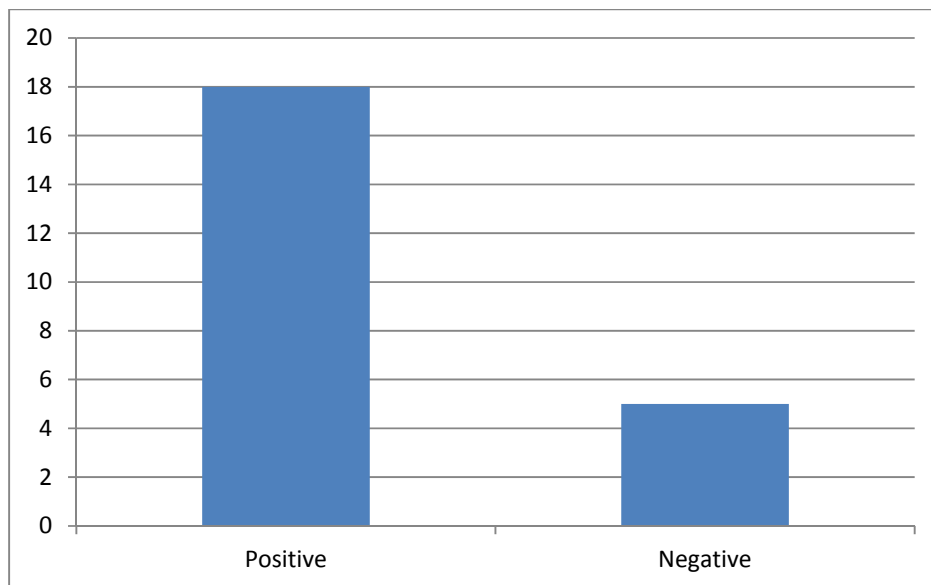


Figure 3. Comparison of the frequency of mention of single kangaroos in positive and negative valence articles.

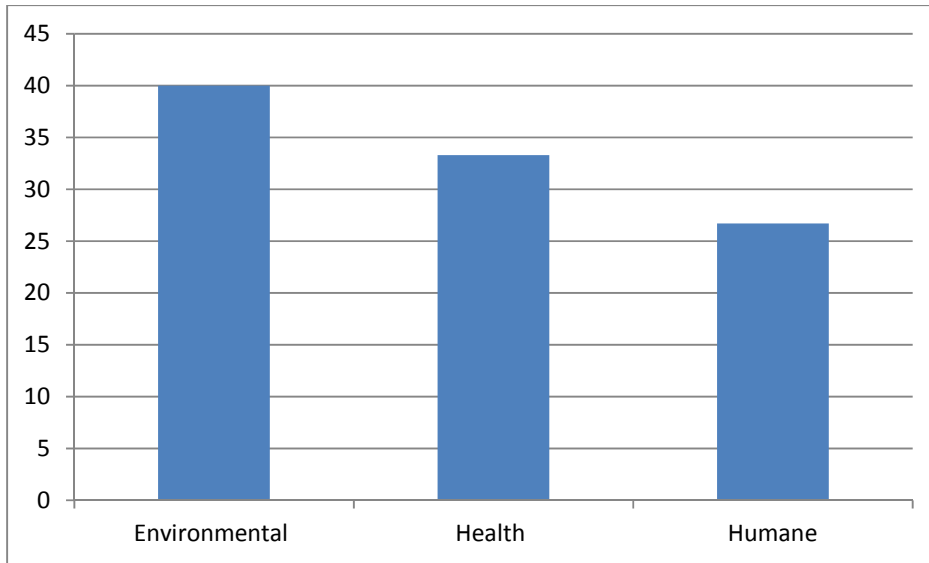


Figure 4. Proposed benefits of kangaroos consumption by percentage.

On the whole, the currently reported media analysis of the Australian kangaroo revealed that articles concerning the use of the kangaroo for industrial purposes dominate the media. Both positively and negatively valenced articles that related to the kangaroo industry represented the largest categories of media articles although this was most clearly true for the negatively valenced articles, with the clear majority being related to the kangaroo industry.

Concluding Comments

Fewer articles conveyed kangaroos in a positive light compared to those that denigrated them or that supported the killing of kangaroos. This media analysis showed that paradoxically, the majority of information that the public receives about kangaroos in the media conveys them in a negative light, despite them also being our national icon.

Significantly fewer articles that portrayed the kangaroo negatively referred to individual kangaroos when compared to those that portrayed the kangaroo in a positive light, indicating that it is easier to portray kangaroos negatively if they are de-individuated. Of relevance here are processes proposed in Albert Bandura's Moral Disengagement theory (Bandura, 1990; 1999). According to Bandura, certain cognitive mechanisms (i.e. ways of thinking) can explain why and when even people who otherwise have normal or even high moral standards sometimes behave in ways that could be considered reprehensible. Bandura and colleagues (1996) specified four points in the behavioural process at which disengagement can occur. By "reconstructing the conduct, obscuring personal causal agency, misrepresenting or disregarding the injurious consequences of one's actions, and vilifying the recipients of maltreatment by blaming and devaluing them" (p. 364) self-sanctions can be disengaged.

Thus, it is easier to transgress the moral code of behaviour (i.e. kill or create suffering) if the moral value of the target is redefined so that an individual's or a society's moral standards no longer apply. Another mechanism is to blame the victim (i.e. the kangaroo is a pest) and in this way justify the perpetrator's behaviour (i.e., the kangaroo industry). Pejorative stereotyping and indoctrination aid in the use of this mechanism (Bandura, 1978).

Articles on the method of killing for industrial purposes falsely claimed that kangaroos are killed humanely. Even the government's code of conduct is misleadingly entitled the "National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies". Describing the killing of Kangaroos, particularly the killing of joeys is indeed questionable. In fact, there are large parallels between Canada's controversial seal hunt and Australia's kangaroo killing. In both, large numbers of animals are killed for what is clearly economic profit and in both, little regard is given to the welfare of the animal, particularly the young who are clubbed to death. The

difference is that Canada's seal hunt is opposed by the majority of Canadians, and indeed by most countries around the world, while Australians have been kept ignorant about the cruelty being condoned by their government.

In conclusion, this media analysis has revealed that messages reaching the community about kangaroos is strongly biased toward the views portrayed by the kangaroo industry and supported by Australian government documentation. A strong recommendation, therefore is to provide unbiased and factual information about the Australian kangaroo that is attractive to the media. Change can only come about if the public is made aware of the hidden cruelties of the kangaroo industry.

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