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Author(s): Wunderlich, Nancy V.; Syrjälä, Henna; Rötzeimer-Keuper, Julia; Fennel, David A.; Emontspool, Julie

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Beyond the Human: Animals as Facilitators and Subjects of Multispecies Inclusion

Nancy V. Wunderlich

Chair of Digital Markets, Technische Universität Berlin, Straße des 17. Juni 135, 10623
Berlin, Germany; wuenderlich@tu-berlin.de

Henna Syrjälä

Associate Professor, University of Vaasa, School of Marketing and Communication,
Wolffintie 32, FI-65200 Vaasa, Finland; henna.syrjala@uwasa.fi

Julia Rötzmeier-Keuper

Postdoctoral Researcher, Technische Universität Berlin, Straße des 17. Juni 135, 106223
Berlin, Germany; roetzmeier-keuper@tu-berlin.de

David A. Fennel

Professor, Brock University, 812 Sir Isaac Brock Way, St. Catharines, ON, L2S 3A1 Canada;
fennell@brocku.ca

Julie Emontspool

Associate Professor in Consumption, Culture and Commerce, University of Southern
Denmark, Campusvej 55, 5230 Odense, Denmark; juli@sam.sdu.dk

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Policy Contribution Statement

This commentary advances a policy conversation about marketplace inclusion as a multispecies issue rather than an exclusively human concern. Existing public policy and marketing debates predominantly conceptualize inclusion in terms of human consumers' access, participation, and representation, thereby overlooking the systematic involvement of animals and human-animal ensembles in the marketplace, despite their growing economic and functional roles. By foregrounding animals as both facilitators and subjects of inclusion, the manuscript challenges anthropocentric assumptions embedded in consumer protection, labor regulation, and market governance.

The central contribution is the introduction of multispecies inclusion as a policy-relevant framework structured around three dimensions: representation, distribution, and agency. The framework advances marketing and public policy debates by conceptualizing animals as stakeholders whose interests are shaped and constrained by market structures, and by reframing animals' roles as companions, service workers, and entertainers as analytically distinct yet overlapping sites of policy-relevant inclusion and exclusion within human–animal ensembles.

The manuscript advances understanding by demonstrating how representational practices legitimize or obscure animals' roles in markets, how distributional arrangements allocate benefits and responsibilities unevenly across species, and how animals' agency remains constrained through limited opportunities for choice, withdrawal, non-participation, or retirement from market roles. By adopting a relational, post-humanist perspective, the analysis highlights how inclusion and exclusion unfold across individual animals, human-animal ensembles, and broader socio-ecological contexts.

The policy implications are relevant for multiple stakeholder groups: animal welfare and protection authorities, by identifying gaps between voluntary ethics and enforceable standards; labor, service, and access regulators, by highlighting animals' role as co-workers within human–animal service arrangements; tourism, media, and digital platform regulators, where animals are commodified for entertainment, visibility, and influence; and consumer protection agencies, by extending considerations of fairness and access to human–animal ensembles. Rather than proposing a single regulatory solution, the commentary advocates policy frameworks that operationalize multispecies inclusion.

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Abstract

Marketplace inclusion has largely been conceptualized as a human-centered concern, focusing on consumers' access, participation, and representation, while marginalizing animals. Challenging this anthropocentric orientation, this commentary acknowledges animals as facilitators and subjects of inclusion, grounded in recognition of their consciousness and moral value. Building on multispecies justice, it develops a framework with three dimensions—representation, distribution, and agency—to show how multispecies inclusion can be produced through market visibility, the allocation of benefits and burdens, and recognition of animals' capacity for choice.

To operationalize this framework, the commentary outlines three roles animals occupy in marketplaces. As companions, animals are embedded in consumption relationships shaped by human decision-making. As service workers, animals enable consumers' market access, such as in assistance and therapy contexts. As entertainers, animals perform in tourism and media industries as commodified actors. The commentary highlights how markets involving animals and human-animal ensembles expand human inclusion while constraining animals' inclusion. It argues that this occurs by normalizing commodification, externalizing costs and risks of animal labor, and curtailing agency when animals cannot rest, withdraw, or retire. It concludes with policy implications, including reframing ownership, legitimizing human–animal ensembles as units of participation, enforcing welfare standards, and institutionalizing rest and exit conditions.

Keywords: *multispecies inclusion, animal inclusion, human-animal ensembles, animal companions, service workers, animal entertainers*

Beyond the Human: Animals as Facilitators and Subjects of Multispecies Inclusion

Can – and should – marketplace inclusion extend to non-human animals? Research traditionally conceptualizes marketplace inclusion as a human-centered concern, focusing on fair access, participation, and representation of human consumers (Henderson and Williams 2013). Yet this approach may itself be exclusionary, as it adopts an anthropocentric focus that excludes non-human participants in the marketplace. However, animals play a pivotal role in markets—as consumers of products and as providers of services, including entertainment and assistance (Tallberg et al. 2025)—making them stakeholders “vital to the survival and success of the firm” (Evan and Freeman 1988, p. 58).

In this light, marketplace inclusion must broaden beyond an anthropocentric lens. We draw on multispecies justice (Raymond et al. 2025) as theoretical scaffolding that emphasizes the interdependence between humans and other species and highlights conflicts across three dimensions: *representation*, *distribution*, and *agency*, thereby allowing us to transcend a purely human-centered understanding of marketplace inclusion. Representation concerns how non-human animals are recognized and positioned within market structures. Distribution addresses the (un)fair allocation of market-based benefits, risks, and harms across species. Agency considers animals’ capacity for voluntary, goal-directed action and whether this capacity is recognized as morally relevant. To ground this framework, we outline three key roles that animals occupy in marketplaces and examine how they are included either independently or as part of human–animal ensembles.

First, research discusses whether companion animals are objects or subjects of consumption (Hirschman 1994). Even when animals are framed as companions or family, research typically centers on human consumers as decisive agents, particularly in consumption decisions directed toward animals. Examples include expenditure on pet food, veterinary services, and animal-related hobbies. Although animals themselves could be

understood as consuming subjects or consumers (Kylkilahti et al. 2016), they are most often treated as targets of human action.

Second, animals play a crucial role as service workers by supporting or enhancing customer experiences, whether in intimate assistance relationships, such as those between consumers and guide dogs, or in commercial settings involving therapy animals, transportation horses, or cats in cat cafés (Rimppi et al. 2026). Human–animal ensembles, such as handler–guide-dog teams or individuals accompanied by emotional support animals, thus enable access to market offerings that would otherwise be restricted, illustrating that animals can facilitate more inclusive participation for consumers with disabilities, anxiety, or mobility limitations.

Third, animals can be entertainers, whether in livestock shows, sports competitions, or performances on television, in films, or in documentaries. Entertaining encounters with non-domesticated animals take place in zoos, wildlife reserves, and tourism, with wild animals treated as objects, captives, or managed workers (Kisora and Driessen 2025). Animals become marketable performers, selected and trained to entertain paying audiences or used as tools for advertising and branding, thereby commodifying the human-animal ensemble (Shamayleh and Arsel 2025). Here, animals facilitate human inclusion through emotional engagement, distraction, novelty, recreation, and, at times, sensationalism, learning, and cultural performance.

Together, these roles provide a basis for analyzing how multispecies marketplace inclusion is shaped through the lenses of representation, distribution, and agency. Focusing on *representational inclusion*, we examine how animals and human–animal ensembles are recognized and legitimized within market contexts. Ideally, representational inclusion entails that marketplace offerings acknowledge the diverse needs of human–animal ensembles, recognize animals as central actors rather than peripheral resources, and legitimize their

consideration in market design and decision-making. In such configurations, animals are represented as stakeholders whose roles, interests, and well-being are explicitly valued and meaningfully integrated into market practices.

Our examples show that animals can contribute to human inclusion through tourism encounters, affective engagement in domestic and commercial spaces, and parasocial interactions in media contexts. Animals may also facilitate market participation by supporting individuals with specific physical, emotional, or social needs, thereby enabling human inclusion and social connection. However, animals' representational exclusion remains widespread. Many practices reinforce asymmetries between human and non-human interests, as media and marketing often portray animals as resources, symbols, or tools for value creation, rather than stakeholders with their own needs and interests. For example, marketers instrumentalize animals by deliberately assigning influencer roles to petfluencers, who are perceived as more sincere than human influencers, thereby increasing the persuasive effectiveness of social media campaigns. While such representations can reshape cultural norms around animals, they may also reinforce speciesist assumptions by prioritizing market value over animal well-being. Although representational inclusion is visible, animals are frequently excluded when their roles are insufficiently recognized, and their needs and well-being receive less legitimacy than those of other stakeholders. In these cases, animals remain present in markets but are marginalized, revealing the limits of representational inclusion in multispecies market settings.

With respect to *distributional inclusion*, animals' access to resources, protections, and benefits remains limited despite their economic contributions. Ideally, distributional inclusion would mean that animals' value creation is accompanied by equitable access to labor protections, welfare safeguards, and institutionalized benefits, as well as a fair allocation of risks and responsibilities across market actors. However, animals in working roles are rarely

recognized as employees and thus lack access to labor protections, occupational safety standards, or institutionalized safeguards, reflecting distributional exclusion. In entertainment and social media contexts, responsibility for animal welfare is unevenly enacted and often relies on voluntary standards rather than enforceable protections. More broadly, animal workers' welfare depends on national animal protection laws and providers' practices, revealing inequalities in how risks, harm, and benefits are allocated across species. Responsibility for these outcomes extends beyond owners to include producers, brands, digital platforms, and consumers, underscoring how distributional arrangements systematically privilege human beneficiaries while externalizing risks to animals.

Across many market contexts, animals' capacity to act and influence market outcomes remains significantly constrained. Ideally, *agential inclusion* would entail that market environments are designed to accommodate animals' interests, grant them meaningful opportunities to express preferences, influence interactions, and opt out of expected performances, thereby respecting their autonomy and dignity. In practice, however, markets rarely provide such opportunities. Animals are seldom able to influence their own consumption choices or withdraw from market roles, reflecting persistent agential exclusion. While relationships with companion animals increasingly reflect attempts to respect agency, for example, by offering choices during activities such as dog walking, such considerations are far less prevalent in professional market contexts. These limitations raise ethical concerns, such as in entertainment markets where animals are used for non-essential purposes and continue to perform despite restricted autonomy (Fennell 2022).

Together, these patterns of representational, distributional, and agential exclusion highlight that multispecies inclusion in markets cannot be achieved through symbolic recognition or voluntary ethics alone. Building on the ideal and exclusionary states identified across the three dimensions, Table 1 translates these analytical insights into actionable public

policy implications. Across animals' roles as companions, service workers, and entertainers, the table outlines interventions that reframe ownership and legitimize human–animal ensembles as units; enforce welfare standards and redistribute the costs and benefits of animal labor; and institutionalize rest, withdrawal, non-participation, and retirement as legitimate market outcomes. While these measures operate through human governance and regulatory arrangements, they challenge the treatment of animals as passive resources and reposition them as stakeholders—and, in some contexts, as co-workers or participants in human-animal ensembles. They aim to enhance inclusion for both animals and the humans whose participation depends on them, and extend agency considerations beyond individual animals to broader ecological systems, such as plants, soils, and habitats, whose interests are affected by market activity but cannot be directly articulated.

–Insert Table 1 here–

Table 1. Public Policy Implications for Multispecies Marketplace Inclusion

Representational inclusion <i>How animals and human–animal ensembles are recognized and legitimized in markets</i>	Distributional inclusion <i>How benefits, costs, and responsibilities are allocated across species</i>	Agential Inclusion <i>How animals’ capacity for choice, withdrawal, and non-participation is acknowledged</i>
Reframe ownership as a socially accountable responsibility rather than a private consumer right, challenge commodification and objectifying portrayals of companion animals. Launch global social media campaigns using powerful examples such as animal hoarding, puppy mills, and exotic pets. Create a certification system that recognizes human–animal ensembles as legitimate units of consumption, enabling access and participation through animal-assisted support (e.g., emotional support animals in care homes, hospitals, or assisted living facilities). Implement binding certification schemes recognizing service animals as co-workers with needs and limits rather than tools (e.g., accredited guide dog programs or regulated sled dog operations). Enforce content disclosure, define representational standards, and restrict animal performance to increase transparency about the circumstances under which media material is created. Introduce “no animals were harmed” practices in entertainment. Regulate wildlife representation through independent certification or third-party governance, conditioning market visibility on compliance with exclusionary standards to limit harmful imagery and claims through regular oversight.	Provide ownership support mechanisms and educational initiatives that enforce welfare standards (e.g., subsidized veterinary care, access to training and education) and demonstrate how investments in animal welfare enhance well-being for both animal and human-animal ensembles. Institutionalize responsibility for healthcare, insurance, rest-times, and retirement, redistributing the costs and risks of animal labor across organizations and public systems (e.g., compliance with working-hours and veterinary standards) by requiring companies to engage animal welfare reporting as a part of their sustainability reporting. Include animals in labor laws and regulations, containing limits on working hours, mandatory rest times, retirement and pension funds, and lifetime care obligations that grant entertainment and service animals co-worker status. Introduce mandatory reinvestment of revenues from wildlife encounters into wildlife conservation, habitat protection, and rehabilitation, to redistribute economic benefits from wildlife markets toward animals and ecosystems that bear the costs of commercialization.	Promote awareness by organizing educational programs on consent proxies, stress signals, and withdrawal indicators to recognize animals as sentient actors and encourage everyday choice opportunities (e.g., activities, food, social interaction); institutionalize such awareness through mandatory owner education or licensing requirements (e.g., “dog driver’s licenses”). Introduce a certification system for minimum standards for rest periods, task rotation, and age- or health-related withdrawal from service, supported by guidance and training materials shared via promotional campaigns to help handlers and consumers recognize species-specific signals of stress, fatigue, and refusal within everyday service interactions. Ban by law animal performances that cause chronic injury over time, for example, due to species-inappropriate movements and postures. Doing so, such bans recognize that coerced performances undermine agency and thereby deny animals equal market inclusion. Enforce regulations that define exit conditions for animals and prioritize non-participation as an ethical standard, granting animals agency and reinforcing their rights to withdraw from interactions.

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