LADY FREETHINKER.

# Animal Cruelty Goes Viral:

*A new report reveals shocking animal cruelty and torture on mainstream social media*



2026

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# Introduction

Social media holds a massive presence in our lives. More than two-thirds of the global population uses it, for an average of 140 minutes each day. With nearly 10% of our time spent scrolling, what we view on these platforms can dramatically affect our society and ourselves.

The impact of this enormous industry has spurred policymaking around the world, in efforts to protect consumers from potential harm. The United Kingdom passed the Online Safety Act, requiring platforms to take steps to remove and prohibit various forms of troublesome words and visuals. In the member states of the European Union, the Digital Services Act gives users more control over their feeds and provides mechanisms to ensure that illegal content is flagged and removed.

However, in the United States, where all of the companies tracked in this report are headquartered, the industry exists with very little regulatory oversight. Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act shields tech companies from liability for the content posted on their platforms. As such, harmful imagery and language are pervasive and persistent: For every link that is removed, it seems like ten more are added in its place.

Animal cruelty content is common and especially troublesome. Over the past year, a number of high profile animal cruelty cases were publicized by an individual or group posting their actions on social media. Most disturbingly, some of these acts were perpetrated by minors for the express purpose of going viral.

The goal of this report is to direct attention to the prevalence of animal cruelty images and videos that persist on five major social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, and YouTube. As awareness grows, hopefully, so too will calls for policy reform that will bring accountability to platform owners and end this scourge for good.





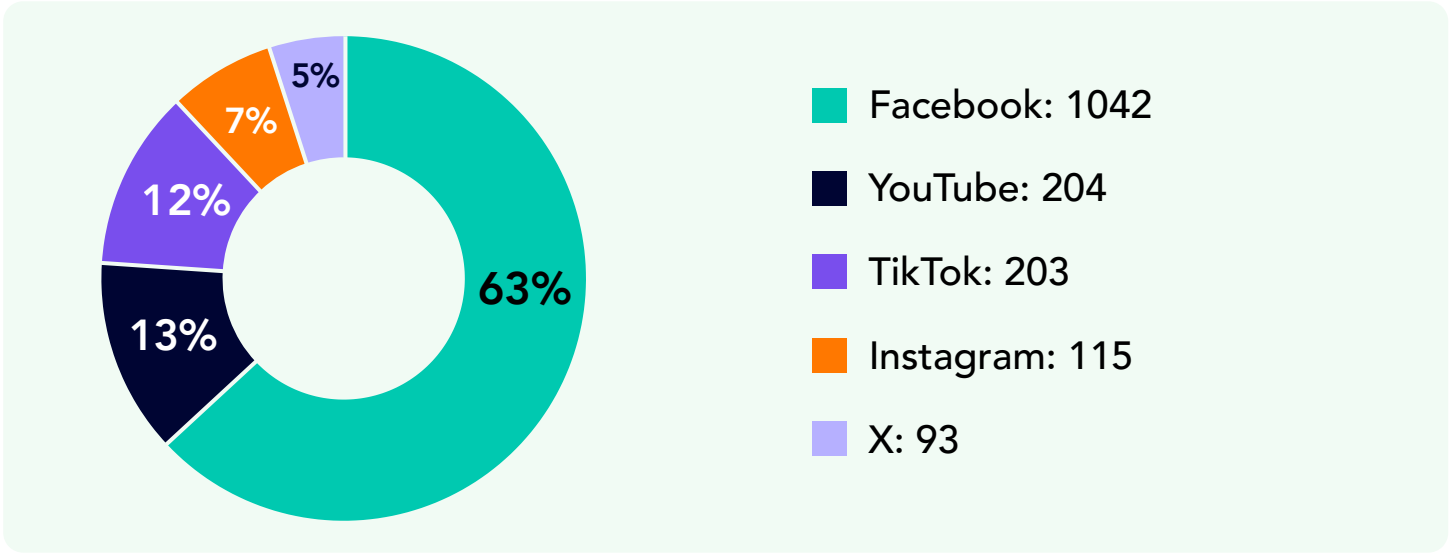
# Who We Are

Lady Freethinker (LFT) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit working to end animal suffering. LFT gives a voice to those who cannot speak out for themselves and affects meaningful, lasting change through investigative reporting and other media, citizen petitions, and partnerships with rescuers and activists on the ground worldwide. Together, we are changing the way the world sees and treats animals for the better. Learn more at ladyfreethinker.org.

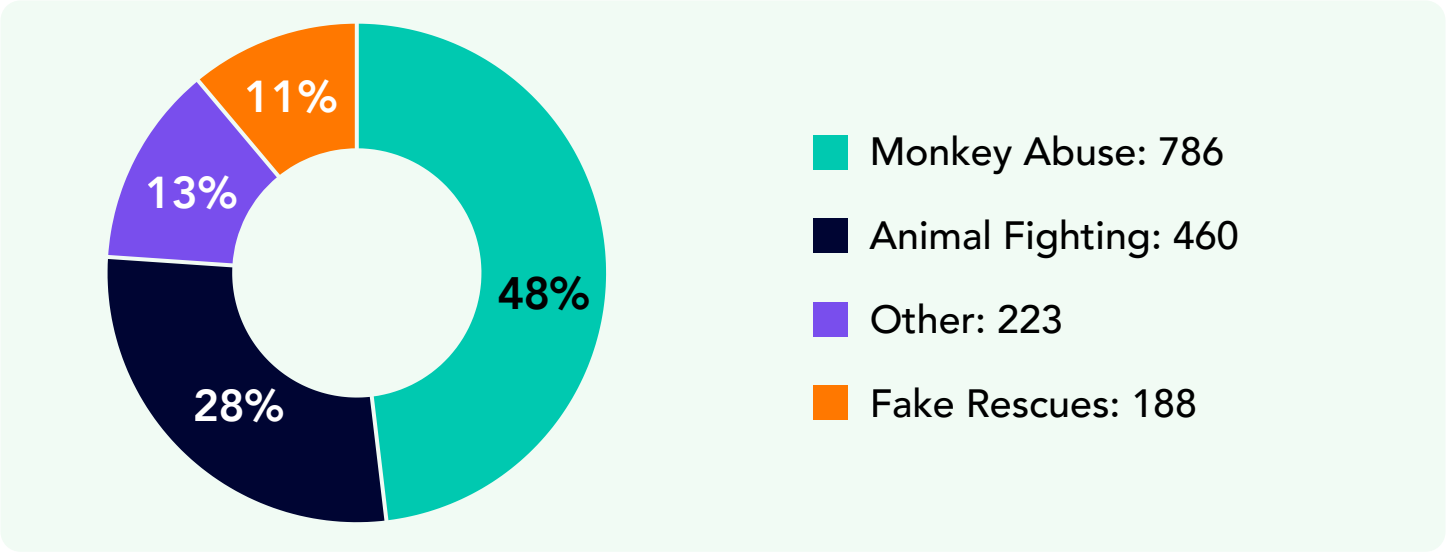
# Quick Statistics (Organized by Prevalence)

## Total Content Links: 1657

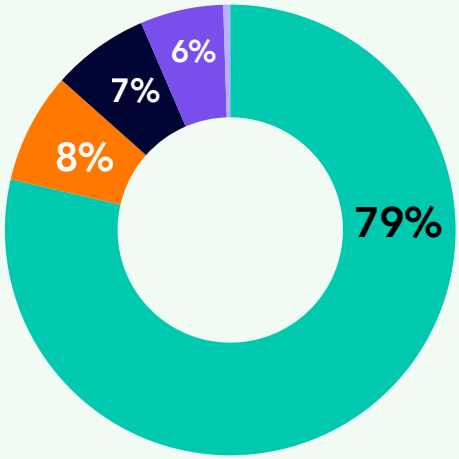
### By Platform




### By Type

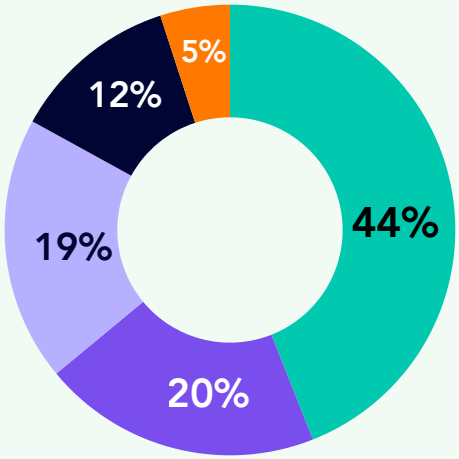


## By Platform and Type



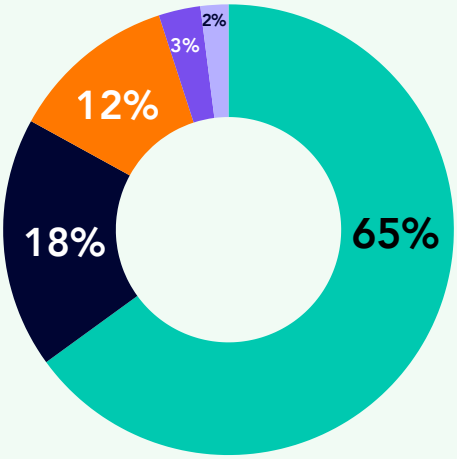

- Facebook: 620
- Instagram: 62
- YouTube: 53
- TikTok: 49
- X: 2

**Monkey Abuse**



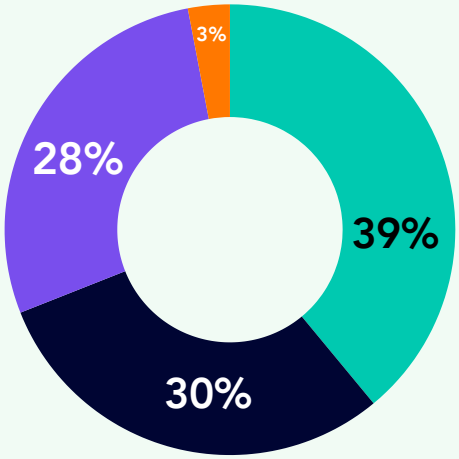

- Facebook: 204
- TikTok: 94
- X: 87
- YouTube: 55
- Instagram: 20

**Animal Fighting**




- Facebook: 145
- YouTube: 40
- Instagram: 27
- TikTok: 7
- X: 4

**Other Harmful Content**




- Facebook: 73
- YouTube: 56
- TikTok: 53
- Instagram: 6
- X: 0

**Fake Rescues**

**Total Views: 1,042,160,712**

# Research Methods





A team of four researchers collected data from five major social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, and YouTube) from May 1 to June 30, 2026. The goal was to find content depicting human-caused cruelty to animals. Researchers averaged three hours of searching per day approximately five days per week.

Prior to data collection, the team was fully briefed on the goals of the project, provided with step-by-step instructions for collecting data, and given access to streamlined spreadsheets in which to collect data.

The team began their research by checking whether previously discovered links were still active, only logging active links.[1] From there, the team collected content through a variety of means: searching specific search terms associated with animal cruelty, receiving reports from the public, reviewing accounts related to previously reported links, and through recommendations from the platforms' algorithms based on recent search activity.

With more animal cruelty content uploaded to each of these platforms every single day, researchers never ran out of links to log. Due to team size and time constraints, researchers were not able to log everything that was found.

# Content Regulation and Reporting Functionality

Social media platforms regulate themselves through the use of community guidelines. Community guidelines are the rules that all users of social media must follow or risk having their posts removed or their access to the platform revoked. These guidelines are partially policed by fellow users reporting harmful links to the platform.

Community guidelines are updated regularly and the changes can sometimes make it difficult for users to know what is against the rules or how to report it. Reporting features are inconsistent and advocates often express frustration with the lack of response. However, reporting is vital to limiting its prevalence. **See How You Can Help** for more ways to get involved.

[1] In Lady Freethinker's 2025 Report *Scrolling Through Cruelty*, a total of 2341 links of animal cruelty content were found. Of those, 1609 (69%) were removed, but 732 (31%) remain live and accessible. Researchers included most (669) of those links in this report's data, but did omit 63 links that did not fit the scope of this report. Though fewer links were logged for this report versus the 2025 report, just as many, if not more, links were available and found. However, research team time constraints limited the ability to log all active links. Please see the **Collaboration With Meta** section for more information on removed links.

# Data

Data collected was separated into four categories of animal cruelty content: Animal Fighting, Fake Rescues, Monkey Abuse, and the catchall category of Other Harmful Content. These categories were chosen based on how animal cruelty is often depicted on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, and YouTube. It is important to note that many of these categories tend to overlap and links were separated into the most appropriate category based on the totality of the content, including source, caption, and comments.

In addition to links to the cruelty itself and the channel or page from which it originated, the research team also collected data on how many views each piece of content had, if that information was available. Some content, including Reels on Facebook, inconsistently included view counts and therefore many of those were omitted from final totals.





## Collaboration With Meta

Lady Freethinker submitted a shareholder proposal to Meta at the end of 2025, calling on its leadership to address the rampant animal cruelty and torture present on its platforms. In early 2026, LFT and Meta reached a milestone agreement to combat such content. In furtherance of that collaboration, LFT sent Meta 329 links in March 2026, prior to data collection for this report, another 296 in July 2026 at the end of data collection and an additional 364 in August 2026 just prior to publication of this report.




## Inactive Links

Of 1657 total links collected, 534 remain active and accessible while 1123 have become inactive or inaccessible.[2] It is unclear how many would have been removed if not for LFT sending nearly a thousand links directly to Meta for review.

2 As of September 18, 2026

# Categories

- **Animal Fighting** - Animal fighting refers to any forced or staged physical conflict between two or more animals. Researchers did not include any links where the conflict could be perceived as naturally occurring. Researchers did include content that did not display animal fighting directly, but glorified or furthered animal fighting in some way. For example, videos of breeding and living spaces designed for fighting dogs and training videos for cockfighting were included.



- **Fake Rescues**[3] **-** Fake rescue videos show animals in imminent danger and a person stepping in just in time to save them. According to the Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition, of which Lady Freethinker is a founding member, fake rescue content can be identified by remembering the acronym "A.R.C."[4]

  - *Authenticity*: A true animal rescue video is usually associated with a genuine animal organization and has a follow-up on what happened to the rescued animal. A fake rescue account is likely to have multiple dodgy rescue videos, unprofessional rescue or veterinary practices, and the same "rescuer" or a blurred, masked, or otherwise unseen rescuer.
  - *Reality Check*: The circumstances of the rescue are unlikely to happen in real life or to be a random encounter captured on camera, such as an odd combination of species unlikely to meet in the wild (such as a turkey and a crocodile) or the same animals appearing in multiple different videos.
  - *Creation*: If the creator delays assisting the animal to film the situation, edits the video to make it fit a narrative, or uses multiple camera angles indicating a set-up, the rescue is likely fake.



- **Monkey Abuse** - Monkey abuse videos show primates, usually captive macaques, abused, tortured, and/or killed. These primates are shown as "pets" and are sometimes dressed in small human clothing. In this report, we have included abuse toward wild or seemingly wild primates in this category.



[3] Researchers did not include blanket links to fake rescue organizations on social media, though that issue is consequential and continues to grow in prevalence. For more on this rising trend, please see the Dog Scamming Kingpins.

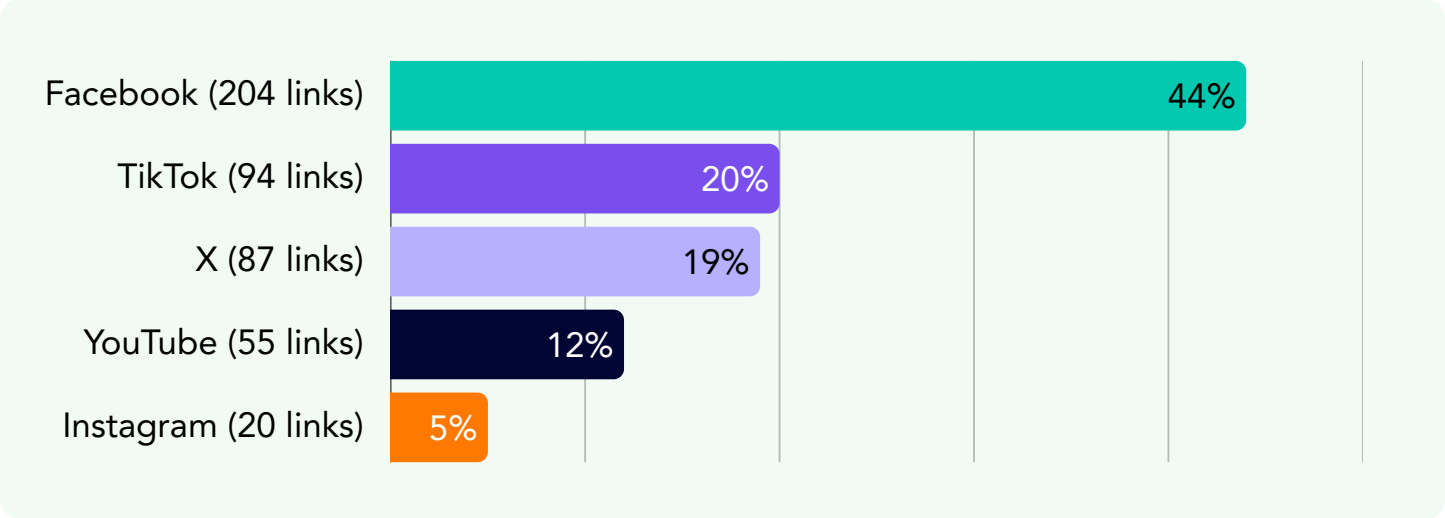
[4] Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition. *SMACC Spotlight Report: Spot the Scam: Unmasking Fake Animal Rescues.* October 2024.

- **Other Harmful Content** - "Other Harmful Content" is a catchall for anything that doesn't quite fit into the designated categories. It generally includes some form of physical abuse of an animal and, occasionally, extreme psychological abuse. Researchers found a broad range of content in this category which is discussed in detail below.



# Animal Fighting

Animal fighting content made up the second largest category of the report at 28% (460 links) of total animal abuse content on social media platforms. Researchers found (in order of prevalence):




The types of content found on each of these platforms can be broken down into the following subcategories: Cockfighting (40%), Dog Fighting (27%), Snake Interactions (22%), Ram Fighting (8%), and Other (3%).

- Cockfighting content was largely traditional in nature, often shot in countries where cockfighting is still legal.





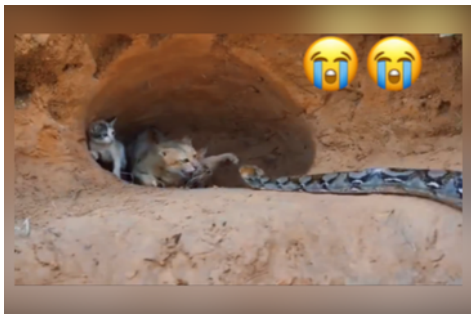


- Dog fighting content included dog fights from around the world, both where it is legal and where it is illegal, and included dogs fighting each other as well as other animals, primarily pigs.





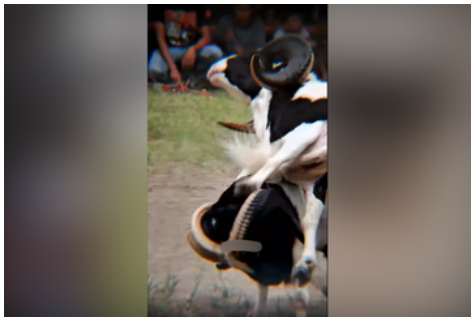
- Snake interaction varied, with cats and kittens the most common prey but included multiple different species.



- Organized fights between rams, categorized as Ram Fighting, accounted for nearly 10% of animal fighting content.





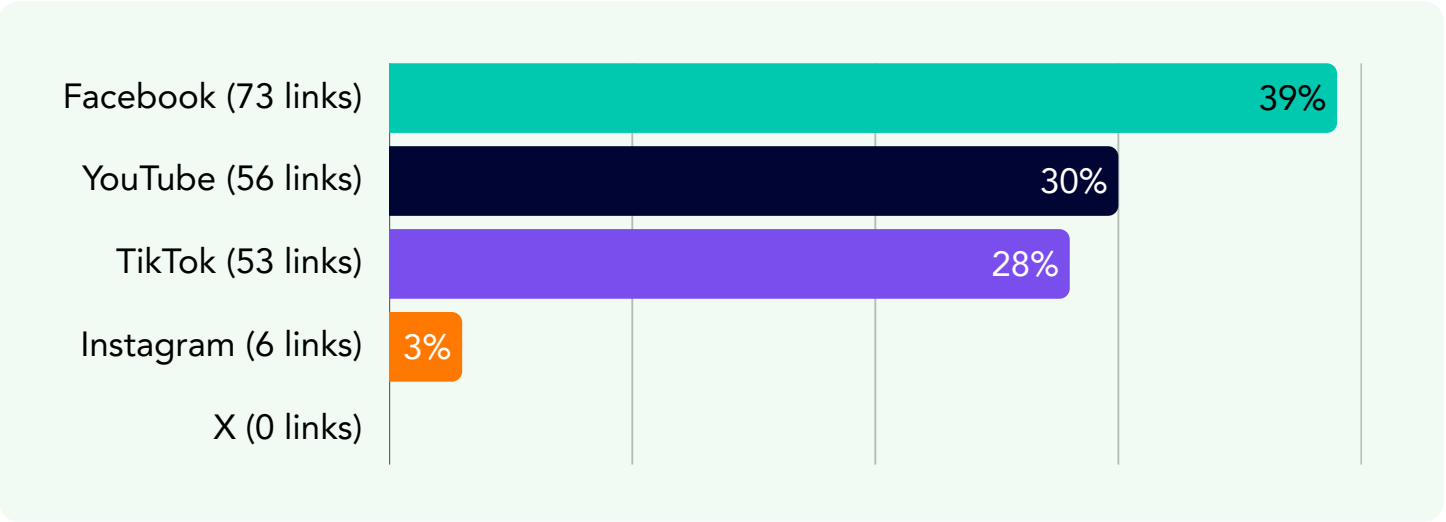
- Other odd pairings of animals were filmed in staged fights, including large reptiles, roosters with ducks, and birds of prey with chickens.





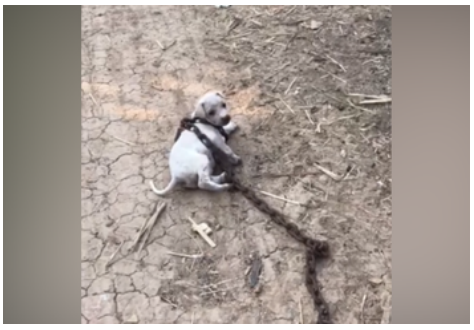
# Fake Rescues

Fake rescue content was the smallest category of the report with 188 videos included, making up 11% of all found content. This type of content is created by someone actively putting an animal in a perilous situation in order to film the miraculous rescue or recovery of that animal. Researchers found (in order of prevalence):




Fake rescue content can be subcategorized in the following ways: Abandoned (34%), Rescue from Other Animal (27%), Bagged/Bound (19%), Buried/Trapped/Stuck (11%), and Other (9%).

- The most common fake rescue videos featured an animal, usually a dog or cat, that had supposedly been abandoned, often in a precarious place such as a roadway or railroad tracks.

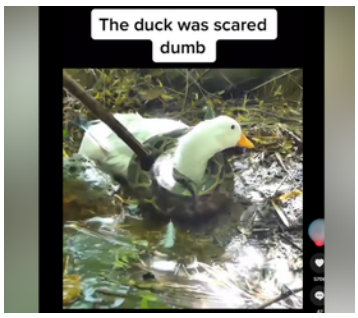







- Animals being “saved” from other animals was the second most common fake rescue content subcategory, usually involving a predator animal and a prey animal, though two predators were featured in some videos, as seen below with a komodo dragon and a crocodile.




- Videos depicting animals who have been tied into bags or had their mouths and/or legs bound came in at the third most common this year, with most content featuring dogs.

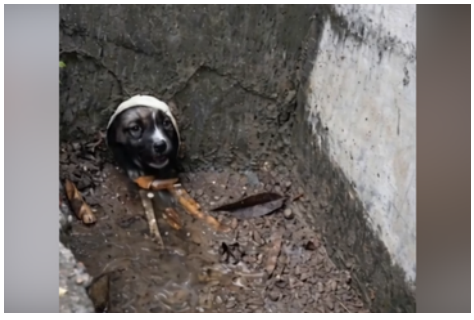








- Slightly less common than videos with animals who are bound or put into bags were videos of animals buried or stuck in various circumstances.


- A wide variety of content made up the Other category, including videos depicting infestations of parasites on the same dog over and over, appeals to donate to fake organizations, and one video that showed a puppy being pushed from a height with a leash attached, hanging until another dog "saves" the puppy.

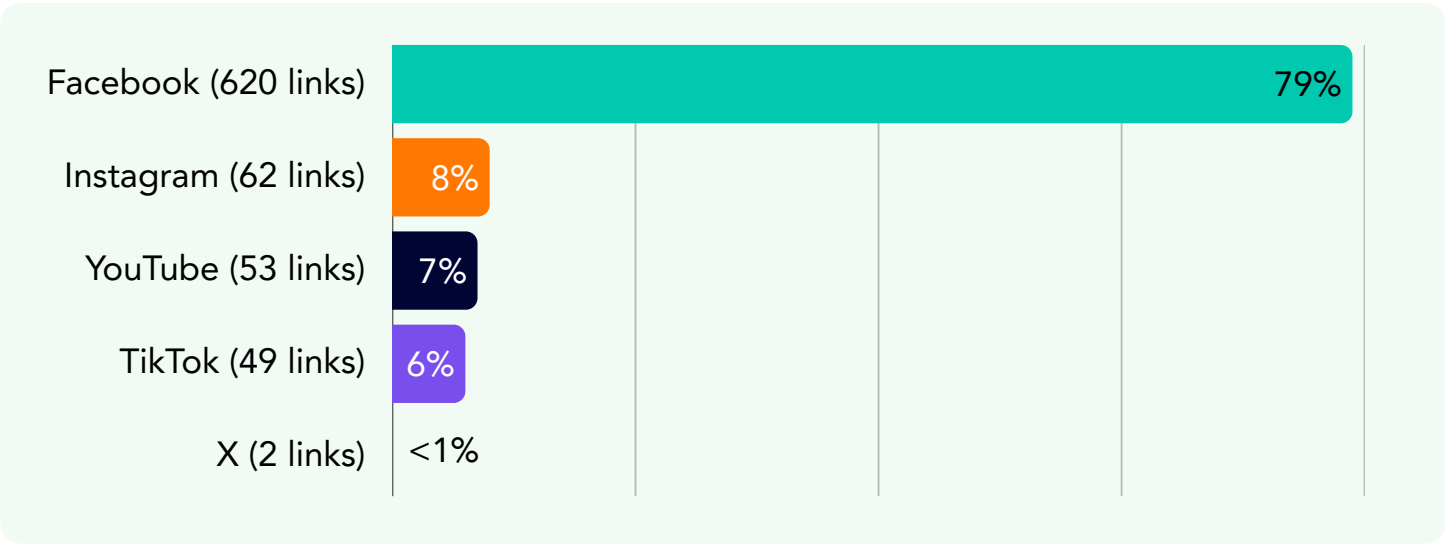






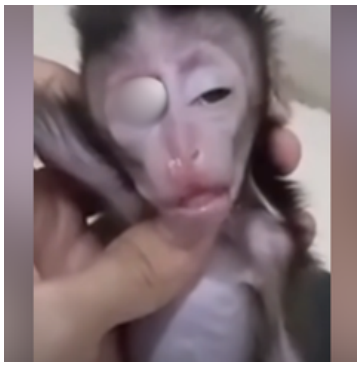

# Monkey Abuse

Monkey abuse content made up the largest percentage of found content with nearly half (48%) of content coming from this category, totaling 786 links. Researchers found (in order of prevalence):

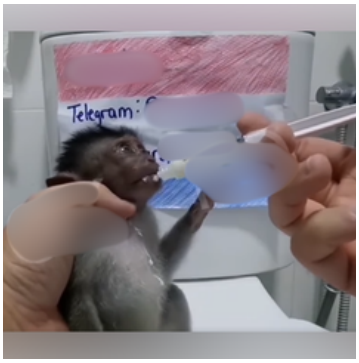



Monkey abuse content can be subcategorized in the following ways: Physical Abuse by Humans (34%), Buried/Stuck (32%), Animal Attacks (19%), and Other (15%). Almost every category of monkey abuse included some element of Telegram advertisement, whether outright in the video, in the caption, or on the account itself.

- Physical abuse by humans remained the largest category of monkey abuse content, with more than a third of all links containing some form of physical abuse, including one image of a monkey with a nail through their eye socket and several featuring signs that indicate the abuse was commissioned for Telegram.





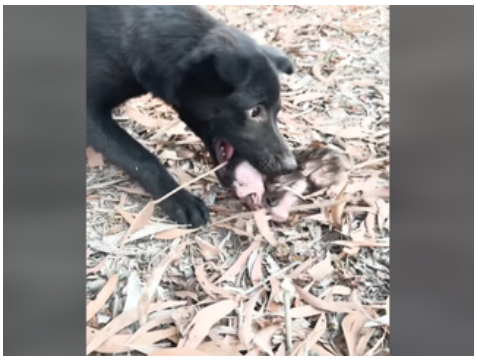



- Monkeys buried or stuck came in as the second most common type of monkey abuse content, once again with Telegram advertisements present.



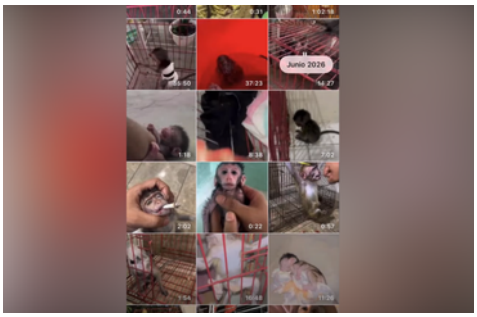


- Real or perceived attacks on monkeys by other animals made up about one-fifth of all monkey abuse content, primarily dogs or snakes attacking monkeys, but other animals were also included.





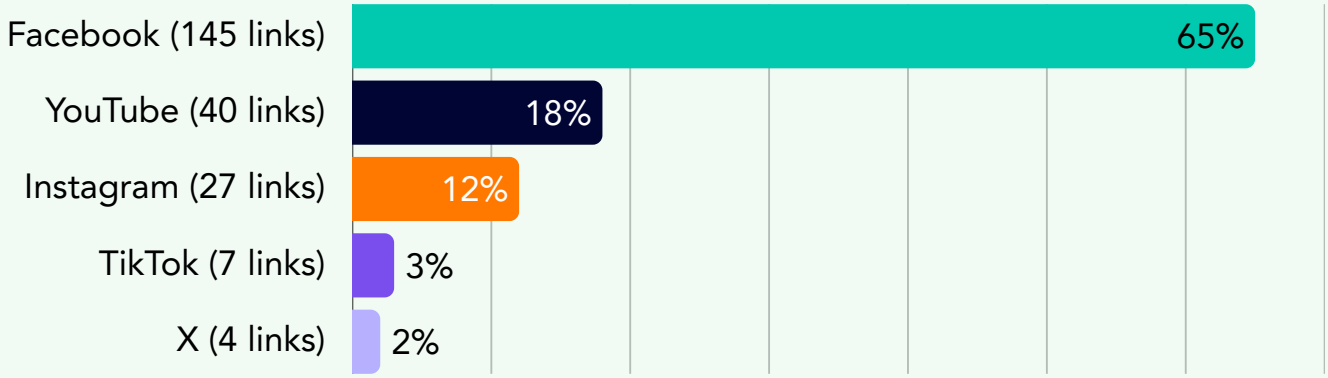
- The Other subcategory included mostly Telegram advertisements, monkeys suffering without any visible cause, and other mistreatment such as forcing a baby monkey to smoke a cigarette.





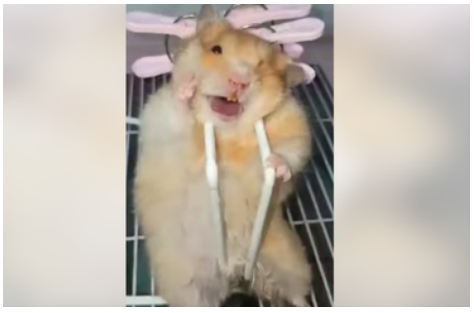
# Other Harmful Content

Other harmful content made up 13% of result data, with a total of 223 links. This category contains violent or graphic content involving animals that would offend an ordinary person, including sexual content involving animals. Researchers found (in order of prevalence):




Other harmful content can be subcategorized in the following ways: Abuse of Companion Animals (49%), Crush/Fetish (19%), Abuse of Wildlife (12%), Live Animals as Food (9%), Abuse of Farmed Animals (6%), and LabGerm (5%).

- Nearly half of this category featured abuse of companion animals, often dogs or cats, but sometimes included small mammals such as hamsters.

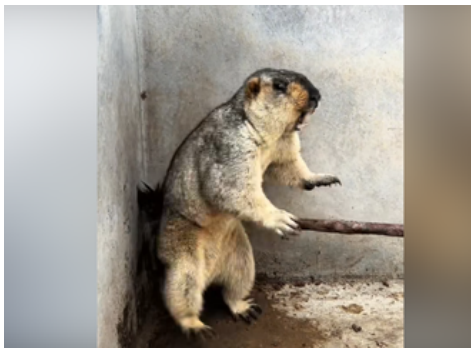
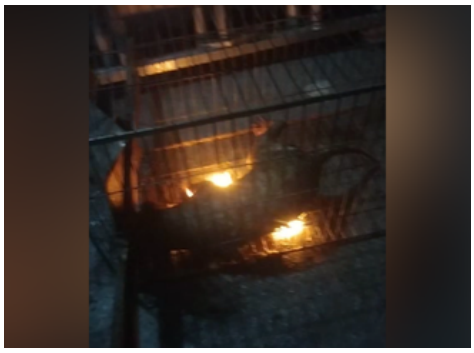




- Nearly 20% of this category included crush or fetish videos and images, significantly more than investigators found in the previous year. This content usually serves to advertise more extreme content available for purchase. The photos below depict crushing of a bird, a rabbit, and a rat.






- Depictions of wildlife abuse came in third most common, with varying degrees of cruelty: from simple harassment to burning or butchering alive.


- Live animals being treated as food continues to plague social media. Some content in this category contained animals being cooked alive, such as a pufferfish covered in hot oil and bats in a pan, while other content included animals being eaten alive, such as the crab below.





- Abuse of farmed animals made up 6% of the content, including a horse struck, a pig's face stomped on, and a calf's ear cut. The lower percentage in this category is likely due to omitting slaughter videos, which are common across all social media platforms.





- Lastly, LabGerm videos, discussed below in the **Emerging Trends** section, made up only 5% of content in this category. However, these videos are growing in popularity and it is likely that their prevalence will grow with time. Below, fish are subjected to various painful "experiments," including being inflated with an air pump, drowned in dish soap, and cut in half and sown onto another fish.





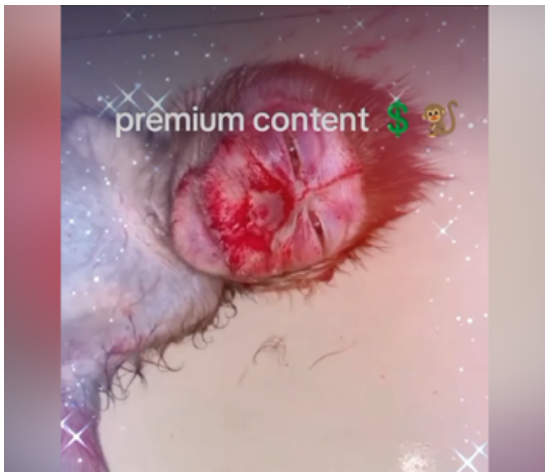


# Additional Analysis

## Emerging Trends

Social media both tracks and mirrors societal trends. Unfortunately, several animal abuse trends have emerged on social media, which is reflected in the data and in news stories from around the world.

While collecting data for this report, researchers found accounts using social media platforms to advertise more extreme, and more abusive, content available off-site. Several accounts posting animal cruelty directly linked to or listed Telegram channels[5] and several listed WhatsApp numbers to contact for more extreme and even custom, made-to-order content. All but two of these accounts consistently post monkey abuse and/or crush imagery. The lucrative nature of these images and videos and the ability to use well-trafficked social media platforms to advertise the sale of even more graphic content impedes the ability to stop its spread.




2026 has seen numerous cases of animal cruelty that stem from the creation of animal cruelty content on social media platforms, including some not tracked in this report. Disturbingly, minors are increasingly becoming the perpetrators of this cruelty. While researchers collected data for this report on social media platforms based in the United States, China-based social media platforms exploded with horrifying videos of the brutal killing of a stray dog named Wang Wang and her puppies.



[6]

Four boys under the age of 14 tortured Wang Wang and her two-week-old puppies with sticks before killing the puppies, pouring accelerant on Wang Wang, and setting her alight, burning her alive. The boys filmed this incident and posted it online. News and images of Wang Wang and her puppies' deaths spread rapidly, leading to a global demand for justice, but not before traumatizing every person that had the misfortune of viewing the agony of her and her puppies' final moments.

[5] 137 total links/8% of all content

[6] Vuk Valcic/Alamy

Lastly, a trend that started on Chinese social media has made its way to more far-reaching social media platforms, including Instagram. "LabGerm," or Pleco Cruelty, has burst on the scene as the newest trend in online animal cruelty. These videos feature small animals such as fish (primarily Pleco fish, hence the name), snails, and insects being tortured, for example having organs removed while fully conscious, under the guise of "science experiments." Researchers found a total of 12 "LabGerm" videos, all on Instagram. While that only makes up less than 1% of total content logged, the trend has only just started and it can unfortunately be expected to continue to grow.






# How You Can Help

We all have a role to play in ending the pervasiveness of animal cruelty content on social media. Policymakers must continue to seek effective regulation in this space. Social media platforms must continue to develop effective reporting and removal functions for harmful content. As advocates, we must continue to make our voices heard to decisionmakers both in government and private industry to bring about foundational changes in how animal cruelty content is handled.

If you find animal cruelty on social media platforms, the most important thing you can do is to **not engage**. Do not comment and do not share. Every view or click teaches the platform's algorithm that the content is promoting user activity and interaction, leading to it spreading further and reaching more screens. Instead of engaging, you should:

- Report it to the platform using the reporting function. It's not perfect, but every report creates a public record and helps hold platforms accountable by flagging problematic content.
- Report it to the authorities if you can make out any useful information, such as where the acts occurred and/or who committed them.
- Report it to Lady Freethinker directly via our Reporting Form. Our investigators review and track every link that is reported to us and take further action whenever possible.



# Conclusion

As a society, we spend an enormous amount of time on social media platforms. What we consume there can have significant impacts on our everyday lives and on the lives of the animals with whom we share the planet. Digital media depicting animal cruelty is pervasive and the harm it causes is both real and preventable. By raising awareness and continuing to advocate for better regulation, we can stop retraumatizing people with harm that has already happened and prevent future harm from occurring.



