

UNDERSTANDING CONSUMERS WHO SHOP WITH THEIR DOGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PET RETAILERS

Clark, Paul W.
Coastal Carolina University

Page, Jay
Defiance College

Fine, Monica B.
Coastal Carolina University

ABSTRACT

This paper explores research questions related to understanding potential differences between consumers that shop with their pets and those who do not. Areas such as loyalty levels, repatronage intentions, total spending, word of mouth intentions, time spent in store and shopping enjoyment are examined. Additionally, examining whether the shopping experience is seen as utilitarian or hedonic is addressed.

INTRODUCTION

The pet retail industry is growing at a rapid pace. Total sales in 1994 were 17 billion dollars, while actual sales in 2010 were 48.35 billion with 2011 sales projected to reach to 50.84 billion dollars. Over 18 billion dollars was spent on pet food alone in 2010. The pet retail segment has become the 7th largest retail segment in the United States, according to the U.S. Census. There are actually more pets than people in the United States, the total number of dogs alone is around 78.2 million (APPMA 2011). Many traditional retailers and service providers have begun to cater to “Man’s Best Friend”. Companies like Harley Davidson, Paul Mitchell, Old Navy, and Omaha Steaks are now offering pet products ranging from name brand pet toys, pet attire, dog shampoo and gourmet treats and food. High tech and ultra-luxury pet related products now exist in the retail world, from touch activated toys to faux mink coats and feathered day beds. Many upscale hotels are now catering not only to consumers but to their pets as well. Stays for the pet may include oversized pet pillows, special room service menu items and doggie treats.

Many pet stores like PetSmart and Pet-Co let you “shop” with your dog, but there is virtually no information in the academic world on “who” this person is and whether or not their shopping behaviors are different than pet owners that do not take their dog shopping with them. Pet owners who shop with their dogs in a pet retail store setting is one area that has not been explored in the marketing literature and is the focus of this study. How do these shoppers view the shopping experience, as hedonic or utilitarian? Are these consumers more likely to patronize

the pet retailer in the future? Are they more loyal to the pet retail store? Do they say positive things to other pet owners? Do they spend more time and money in the store when they are shopping with their dog versus those that do not have their dogs present? These questions will be the focus of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on pets or animals is quite extensive in the scholarly realm. Researchers have considered animals as philosophical and ethical subjects (Feeney 1994; Francione 1997; Franklin, Tranter, and White 2001; Goodall, and Wise 1997; Herzog 1988; Jamison, Wenk, and Parker 2000; Wise 1999), as reflexive thinkers (Bekoff 2003; Bradshaw 2004; Burghardt 1985; Russell 1995; Zentall 1999), as domestication and predation (Adair 1995; Dahles 1993; Fox 1981; Rollin 1990), as entertainment and spectacle (Armstrong 2004; Beardsworth and Bryman 2001; Hawley 1993; Lawrence 1986), in science education and therapy (Agnew 1998; Arluke 1990; Beirne 2002; Felthous, and Kellert 1987; Garner 1995). Scholars in marketing have examined animals as symbols and companions with some specific areas including animals as the extended self (Belk 1996), attitudes towards animals (Brown 2004; Brown, and Katcher 2001; Fogle 1986; Hickrod and Schmitt 1982; Hirschman 1994; Kidd and Kidd 1990; Sanders and Hirschman 1996), values and lifestyles of pet owners (Sanders 1990), the animal's role in print advertising (Erickson 1986; Spears, Mowen and Chakraborty 1996), and the impact of breed loyalty on product merchandise purchase decisions (Clark and Page 2008).

Aylesworth, Chapman and Dobscha (1999) concluded in their research that marketers have begun to identify the significance of animal companions to the lives and experiences of consumers. They developed a framework with three key stages: the acquisition stage, the consumption stage and the disposition stage. The consumption stage, which refers to the "pet-related activities owners conduct during the lifetime of the animal," (p. 388), is the stage of importance to this study. The consumption stage was further categorized as relationship, maintenance and medical. The relationship and maintenance stage are of importance to this study.

UTILITARIAN AND HEDONIC

It is important to understand who shops with their dog. One scenario would be that when a consumer shops with their dog they view it as "work" (Fischer and Arnold 1990; Sherry, McGrath, and Levy 1993). The pet owner is there to purchase pet products in a competent and effective manner to achieve their goals with as little irritation as possible (Childers et al. 2001). This type of shopper would therefore be identified as a utilitarian shopper. Shopping with a dog could be viewed as somewhat of an irritation since you have to prepare the dog to take with you and put up with it as you shop in a store.

The other approach would be to look at the pet owner as a consumer who is seeking a fun and enjoyable time when they are shopping with their dog. This is another method to classifying consumers. (Bloch and Bruce 1984; Sherry 1990; Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994). These hedonic consumers see shopping as an adventure and the potential entertainment in shopping (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982). Do consumers who shop with their dogs have a fun time or does the pet detract from the task at hand? This leads to the following research question:

RQ1: Are consumers who shop with a dog in a pet store driven more by hedonic motivations or utilitarian motivations?

LOYALTY AND REPATRONAGE

Loyalty is very important to retailers. Loyal consumers purchase more merchandise than other consumers, are easier for marketers to reach and say positive things about the company. Profitability is impacted favorably by loyal customers due to lower costs of maintaining the relationship (Harris, and Goode 2004; Srinivasan, Anderson, and Ponnnavolu 2002).

Loyalty has been defined in many ways in the marketing literature. Brown (1952) created a taxonomy of customer loyalty that classified loyalty into undivided, divided, unstable and no loyalty. Others have suggested that loyalty should be viewed at four levels which are comprised of cognitive, affective, conative and action. For this paper, loyalty is defined as the as a deeply held commitment to repatronize a particular retailer or service (Oliver 1999). Loyalty is extremely important to the pet retail industry. Pet retailers need to determine who their loyal customers are. This leads to the following research question:

RQ2: Do consumers who shop with their dog have a higher level of loyalty towards the pet retailers that allow animals in the store versus stores that don't allow their pets inside?

RQ2a: Do consumers that shop with their dogs demonstrate a higher level of loyalty to a retailer than a customer that doesn't shop with their pet?

Repatronage intentions indicate the probability that a customer will visit a retail store again in the future and make purchases (Jones and Reynolds 2006). This is very important to pet retailers as they continue to find ways to fuel their growth. Do pet owners who shop with their dogs in a pet store plan on visiting the store again in the future more often than those that don't shop with their dogs? Is this potential relationship with repatronage intentions moderated by hedonic versus utilitarian shopping? This leads to the following research question:

RQ3: Does shopping with your dog positively affect future repatronage intentions?

WORD OF MOUTH

Positive word of mouth is very important to retailers. Positive word of mouth is defined as casual, affirmative communication about a retailer with other consumers (Gremler 1994). Word of mouth has been shown to influence many variables in the consumer behavior and marketing realm. Word of mouth may actually reduce the impact of cognitive dissonance and influence switching behavior, perceived justice, and satisfaction. It also impacts repurchase intentions, teenage purchase decisions, behavior in general, perceived risk, loyalty, and consumer risk taking. (Bone 1995; Bush, Bush, Clark and Bush 2005; Gelb 1995; Gremler 1994; Herr, Kardes and Kim 1991; Moshe 2003; Wangenheim 2004; Webster 1991; Westbrook 1987 and Woodside and Delozier 1976). It is important to pet retailers to determine who is spreading positive word of mouth about their store. This leads to the following research question:

RQ4: Will consumers who shop with their dog engage in positive word of mouth with other dog owners more so than shoppers without their dogs?

TIME AND MONEY SPENT IN STORES

The amount of time a consumer who shops with their dog spends in a store is important to determine. Do they spend more or less time in the store when they shop with their dog? Another area of importance is to attempt to determine if consumers spend money more when they shop with their dog. This leads to the following research questions:

RQ5: Do consumers who shop with their dog in a pet store spend more time in a pet retail store than when they do not have their dog with them?

RQ6: Do consumers who shop with their dog in a pet store spend more money in a store than when they do not have their dog with them?

RQ7: Do consumers who shop with their dogs spend more money on a shopping trip than those who do not shop with their pet?

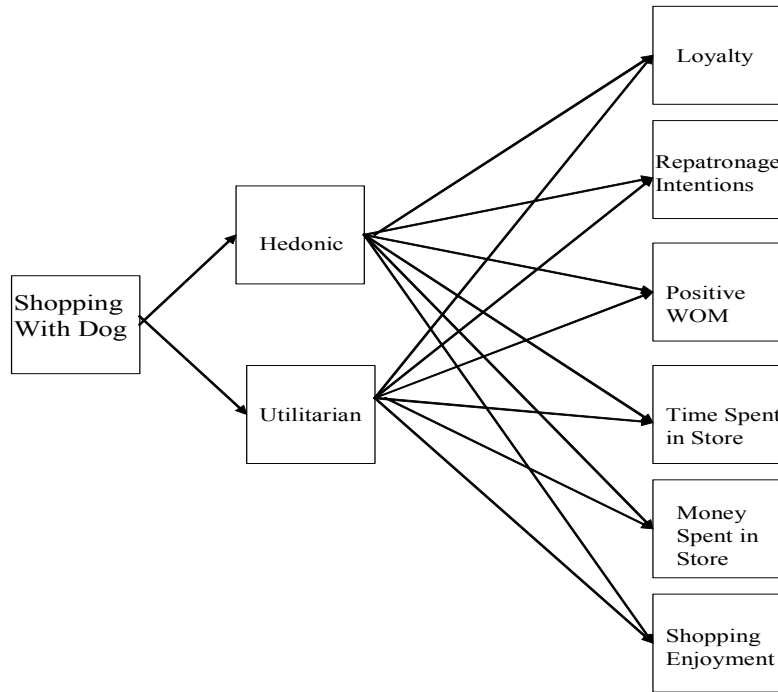
RQ8: Do consumers that shop with their dogs buy more impulse items than those without their dogs present?

METHOD

Existing scales found in the literature will be modified to test for utilitarian motivations, hedonic

motivations, loyalty, positive word of mouth and repatronage intentions. A survey will be developed to collect data for the proposed research questions along with demographic information and other relevant information such as what type of dog is owned, pure breed or mixed breed etc. The surveys will be administered to consumers who either shop with their dog in pet retail stores or don't shop with their dog. Potential collaboration with a pet retailer who allows pets in the stores could be of great use to the study.

PROPOSED MODEL



DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The pet retail industry is under explored in the scholarly world and discovering who shops with their dog may be extremely important to pet retailers. This paper will provide an insight into who shops with their dog in pet retail stores and potential differences between shoppers that do not bring their pets with them. Several managerial implications could come from the findings that will be of importance to pet retailers and impact how they conduct business in the future. The major pet stores such as PetSmart and PetCo seem have a utilitarian type of atmosphere in their stores. If it is found that consumers who shop with their dogs in a pet store are more hedonic and spend more money in their store, then many changes might be suggested in regards to the atmospherics of pet stores. Stores could create a more fun and inviting layout of their store with interactive areas for pets and their owners to enjoy. Ideas could include incorporating an area where dogs can play with new toys that come out and even sample new products. Promotional areas such as end caps could incorporate sound and scent displays that excites and engages the

dog as they shop in a pet store creating a more fun adventure for them and their owner. Existing store layouts may need to be modified to make pet stores more fun and inviting for both pet and owner alike. If it is found that consumers who shop with dogs spent more money and time in a pet store and are more loyal, then promotional programs need to be developed that bring more dog owners and their dogs into pet stores. Doggie discount nights need to be created that give consumers who bring their pet shopping with them discounts and specials throughout the evenings. Loyalty programs specific to these shoppers could also be created to encourage them to shop with their dog. Promotional campaigns would need to be developed that show how fun it is to shop in a pet store with a dog.

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