

TRAVELLING WITH PETS... OR NOT

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ABSTRACT

Purpose- This study aims to evaluate a mostly overlooked part of tourism literature: the place of pets in pet owners' travel planning process and travelling. In this sense, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore Turkish pet owners' perceptions of travelling with pets, and the reasons behind their willingness and unwillingness to take their pets on leisure trips. This exploratory study aims to examine factors affecting pet owners' willingness to travel with their pets, to understand their perceptions of travelling with their pets, to explore reasons behind the unwillingness to have holidays with their pets and to examine difficulties of making holiday plans as pet owners.

Methodology- This exploratory research was conducted in the form of semi-structured and in-depth interviews with 52 pet owners in three big cities of Turkey (Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir). Participants of the study were selected according to the principles of criterion sampling and theory-guided sampling, which are purposive sampling methods. Conceptual analysis as a category of content analysis was employed to code the findings and identify emerging themes.

Findings- The willingness and decisions about participating in leisure and tourism activities with pets are determined by the bond between pet and owner, the value attached to the pet, and the pet's role in the family. Pet owners' demographic profiles and characteristics of their pets determine the type of pet ownership and also affect all decisions made about pets such as participating in leisure activities with pets and travelling with pets. The participants with higher emotional attachment to their pets had more willingness to take their pets with them on holiday. Pet owners' decisions about taking their pets on holiday with them are affected by some constraints stemming from their pets, themselves, or other conditions.

Conclusion- The results provide an understanding of pet owners' travel planning and travel experience including pet-related constraints, negotiation strategies of pet owners, and pet owners' willingness and unwillingness to travel with their pets.

Keywords: Pets, travelling with pets, tourism consumer, constraints-negotiation model, attachment theory

JEL Codes: D10, I83, M31

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, there have been stories of people from different cultures, who have companion animals, or pets, living together or nearby humans (Beck, 2014; Gray and Young, 2011; Savishinsky, 1983; Serpell, 1987, 1996). Individuals keep some species as "companion animals" or "pets" without looking for any utility, attribute these animals a symbolic meaning, and put them in a special position in their lives (Amiot, Bastian, and Martens, 2016: 552). Domestication of animals for practical intentions could not be considered as the only explanation behind owning animals as pets the need of individuals to bond with other species has made them choose different species as pets (Hirschman, 1994). The roots of the human-companion animal relationship and bond between humans and animals have been found in "evolutionary, psychological, and physiological processes" (Beck, 2014).

It is suggested that interactions and bonds between humans and animals, and animal companionship provide health benefits for individuals (Friedmann et al., 1980; Beck and Katcher, 1996; Beck, 1999; Wong, Yu, and Ngai, 2019). Companion animals or pets are regarded as "family members" by a great percentage of pet owners (Carlisle-Frank and Frank, 2016; Cohen, 2002; Hirschman, 1994). Individuals' relationships with their pets could be appraised based on the improved versions of the attachment theory which is used to measure attachment between individuals (Beck and Madresh, 2008; Stambach and Turner, 1999).

The amount of time and money allocated for pets is determined by pets' roles in family structures and the strength of the bond and the attachment between pets and their owners –or pet parents- (Marsh, 2019). Childhood socialization (relationships with pets during early stages of life) is also suggested as an influential factor in forming attitudes, behaviours, and preference patterns related to companion animals (Hirschman, 1994). The roles played by pets in their owners' lives can be identified as "animals as objects/products" and "animals as

companions" (Hirschman, 1994: 617). Pet owner's perception of his/her pet's role (as a friend, as a family member or as an extension of the self, as a source of pleasure, as a problem, as a mediating agent for humans between nature and culture) is considered as a significant factor in determining the owner's spending on pet (Belk, 1996; Brockman, Taylor, and Brockman, 2008; Hirschman, 1994; Holbrook, 1996).

Before the 1980s the relationship between individuals and companion animals had been a topic of veterinary and medical studies, and then it shifted to anthrozoology (Podberscek, Paul, and Serpell, 2000). Recently, the increasing amount of money spent on pets by owners and the role of companion animals in individuals' lives have drawn the attention of researchers from other fields to this topic. Bonding between humans and companion animals, and owners' emotional attachment to their pets (Albert and Bulcroft, 1988; Bagley and Gonsman, 2005; Curb, Abramson, Grice, and Kennison, 2013; Daly and Morton, 2006; Dwyer, Bennett, and Coleman, 2006; Gosling, Sandy, and Potter, 2010; Johnson, Garrity, and Stallones, 1992), relationships between pet ownership and health -physical and mental- (Antonacopoulos and Pychyl, 2010; Bao and Schreer, 2016; Cline, 2010; Dembicki and Anderson, 1996; Watson and Weinstein, 1993), and individuals spending on their pets, and participation of pets to leisure and tourism activities with their owners (Carr, 2009; Carr and Cohen, 2009; Chen, Peng, and Hung, 2013, 2014; Dotson, Hyatt, and Clark, 2010; Gretzel and Hardy, 2015; Hung, Chen, and Peng, 2012, 2016; Kirillova, Lee and Lehto, 2015; Ying et al., 2021) have become some topics of interest.

Tourism consumers make their travel decisions regarding many factors such as destination, accommodation, travel time and duration, travel mode, activities during holidays, and budget. However, for travelers, some limitations prevent them to make their travel decisions freely, for example having a pet may affect travel decision-making and planning process deeply. In this sense, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore Turkish pet owners' perceptions of travelling with pets, and the reasons behind their willingness and unwillingness to take their pets on leisure trips.

2. LEISURE CONSTRAINTS AND NEGOTIATION

The concept of leisure constraint can be described as any restraint stemming from psychological or environmental factors which limit an individual's behaviours in leisure activities (Jackson, 1988). The concept of leisure constraints –or leisure barriers- and the relationship between leisure constraints and leisure experience –or preference and leisure participation- have been studied by researchers since the 1980s (Crawford and Godbey, 1987). Researchers have studied factors affecting leisure participation and the impact of constraints on leisure activities (Crawford and Godbey, 1987; Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey, 1991; Henderson, Stalnaker, and Taylor, 1988; Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey, 1993; Jackson and Rucks, 1995; Kay and Jackson, 1991; Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997).

Three categories of leisure constraints or barriers were identified in the model proposed by Crawford and Godbey (1987) namely structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Structural barriers are factors such as financial resources, availability of facilities, time limitations, and climate which limit an individual's participation in preferred leisure activities. Interpersonal barriers involve interactions and difficulties in finding a suitable partner for participation. Intrapersonal barriers are related to the psychological and physical situation of an individual such as anxiety, shyness, depression, poor health, age, and stress. Intrapersonal factors may create interpersonal barriers if they affect relationships and interactions (Samdahl and Jekubovich, 1997).

The traditional understanding of constraints which suggests that constraints have an intervening role in the leisure preference and participation relationship (the existence of leisure preference results in non-participation if a constraint intervenes, otherwise participation occurs) has been criticized to be simple (Crawford and Godbey, 1987). Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) suggested a hierarchical model of leisure constraints. According to this model, leisure participation is mainly related to negotiating multiple factors arranged in a sequential order and the ordering of constraints denotes a hierarchy of importance. While the most powerful constraints are intrapersonal constraints, structural constraints are considered the least powerful constraints (Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey, 1991).

Individuals do not accept leisure barriers that may prevent them from participating in leisure activities passively, but they negotiate constraints to participate in leisure (Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey, 1993; Jackson and Rucks, 1995). Instead of deciding not to participate in leisure activities, individuals try to find solutions to cope with leisure constraints.

3. ATTACHMENT THEORY

Attachment is described as "sustaining psychological connectedness between human beings" (Bowlby, 1982). Attachment theory suggests that individuals try to find and sustain a physical and emotional bond with some figures who provide them comfort and protection (Maharaj, Kazanjian, and Borgen, 2018; Sable, 2013). Attachment theory is often applied to explain the relationship between infant and caregiver, the bond is structured on the safety feelings and connection (Bowlby, 1982). "Attachment" was seen as a result of evolutionary processes, so children have an innate drive to form attachments with their caregivers when they are born (Bowlby, 1982.) However, some behavioural theories suggested that attachment was learned based on the relationships between the caregiver and the child.

The human-animal attachment has also been explained based on attachment theory. The Darwinian approach was proposed to human-animal attachment and this evolutionary interpretation suggested that as a result of the evolutionary adaptation process of cats and dogs, those animals developed neotenous features (juvenile qualities) to manipulate humans and adapted to the relationship between caregiver and child (Archer, 1997; Chur-Hansen, 2010; Dowsett, Delfabbro, and Chur-Hansen, 2020; Kaminski et al., 2019).

4. TRAVELLING WITH PETS

In modern societies, leisure becomes more important and valuable for individuals and an increasing number of individuals own pets and attach to them, so this creates a dilemma for pet owners while making plans for their leisure activities (Chen, Hung, and Peng, 2011). The

main question for pet owners is whether they take their companion animals with them when they participate in leisure activities or travel. Adding pets to travel plans has been a mostly overlooked area in leisure and tourism research. Different aspects of the relationships between humans and pets and the joint participation of owners and pets in some events have been explored by researchers from different fields such as veterinary sciences, medicine, nursing, psychology, sociology, anthropology, recreation and leisure, marketing, and tourism.

Pets, as domesticated animals, satisfy individuals' psychological needs for bonding, attachment, and building relationships in the forms of companionship, friendship, love, and affection (Podberscek, Paul, and Serpell, 2005). The role played by pets in individuals' lives as friends, and family members also makes them leisure and travel partners (Ying et al., 2021). Pets have an enormous impact on their owners' daily lives shaped by human-pet bonding, attachment level, and anthropomorphism (Dotson and Hyatt, 2008; Kurdek, 2008; Shore, Douglas, and Riley, 2005; Serpell, 2003). In tourism literature, researchers have studied individuals' intentions and willingness to travel with pets by focusing on owners of dogs as pets (Chen, Peng, and Hung, 2013, 2014; Dotson, Hyatt, and Clark, 2010; Hung, Chen, and Peng, 2012, 2016; Ying et al., 2021).

Constraints related to travelling with pets are categorized as pet-specific constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints (Chen, Peng, and Hung, 2013). A pet owner's willingness to negotiate these constraints is determined by the bond between companion animal and owner, and the level of attachment to the pet (Hung, Chen and Peng, 2012).

Most of the pet owners see themselves as pet parents and pets are regarded as children by their owners (Cohen, 2002; Greenebaum, 2004; Serpell, 2003; Steiner et al., 2013; Volsche, 2018; Volsche and Gray, 2016). Like couples with children who make plans for leisure activities in advance (Fodness and Murray, 1999), pet owners also plan their leisure activities beforehand (Chen, Hung, and Peng, 2011).

5. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study aims to explore Turkish pet owners' perceptions of travelling with pets, and the reasons behind their willingness and unwillingness to take their pets on leisure trips. The objectives of this study are to examine factors affecting pet owners' willingness to travel with their pets, to understand their perceptions of travelling with their pets, to explore reasons behind the unwillingness to have holidays with their pets and to assess difficulties of making holiday plans as pet owners.

This exploratory research was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews with 52 pet owners in three big cities of Turkey (Istanbul, Ankara, and Izmir) during the summer and early fall of 2019 (between 01 June 2019 and 30 September 2019). The duration of each interview ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. Participants of the study were selected according to the principles of criterion sampling (participants who meet a certain criterion) and theory-guided sampling (participants who exemplify theoretical constructs), which are purposive sampling methods (Palys, 2008; Palinkas et al. 2015). To increase the sample size, snowball sampling was also adopted. Participants of the study were selected among individuals who were over 25 to make certain to include individuals making their livings, who have been taking care of their pets for a sufficiently long period to exclude ones who newly adopted a pet, and who have been participating in tourism activities. Participants were found with the help of veterinary clinics and volunteers for animal rights and protection; individuals who accepted to participate in this study were reached and met in person. Interview questions were prepared after the review of relevant literature on pets, animal companionship, travelling with pets, leisure constraints and negotiation theory, and attachment theory. The interviews yielded 328 pages of transcripts. Conceptual analysis as a category of content analysis, which allows the text data gathered in qualitative research to be reduced and analyzed through the process of coding and identifying themes and meanings (Patton, 2002; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Haggarty, 1996) was employed to code the findings and identify emerging themes. In order to ensure the reliability of the research and minimize coding errors, two other researchers were asked to read, analyze, and code the raw data.

In this study, it was observed that the last 6 interviews provided no new ideas, therefore, it was decided that data saturation was reached. All of the interviews were recorded after getting the verbal consent of the participants.

To determine the place of pets in pet owners' travel planning process (travel plans), to explore the factors which influence their decisions about their pets when they make their travel plans, and to analyze how their perceptions of pets affect their holiday plans; the following questions were asked to the participants:

1. Please tell me about your pet (type and number of your pet/s, characteristics of your pet/s, your relationship with your pet/s, why you own your pet/s, how you perceive your pet/s, the role your pet/s play in your life...)
2. Do you travel with your pet?
3. Why do you take your pet/s with you when you travel? If you travel with your pet what type of difficulties do you face during your travel planning process and your travel? How do you solve these problems?
4. If you don't travel with your pet/s, why? How do you feel when you leave your pet/s behind? What are the arrangements you make for your pet/s before you go on a holiday?

6. FINDINGS

The first part of the semi-structured interview includes questions that intend to encourage pet owners to talk about their pets. After talking about the main point of the research, participants were asked to tell about their pets (type and number of pet/s, characteristics of pet/s, relationship with pet/s, the reasons behind owning pet/s, perceptions of pet/s, and the role of pet/s in owner's life).

The second part of the semi-structured interview questions includes questions to understand how pet owners make their travel plans and the place of their pets in their travel plans (while travelling with their pets how pet owners perceive difficulties, risks, and travel experience, and if their pets are not included to their travel plans what type of arrangements they make for their pets and how they feel when they leave their pets behind during their travel).

The participants varied in age (ages 26-72), gender (27 women, 25 men), education, income, presence of children, marital status, type (cat, dog, and cat/dog), and number of pets owned. The participants consisted of 30 dog owners (3 of them had more than one dog), 17 cat owners (6 of them had more than one cat), and 5 dog and cat owners (2 of them has 1 dog and two cats, 3 of them had one dog and one cat).

The participants were first asked about their pets and it was seen that they were talking about their pets enthusiastically. While describing their pet ownership, the participants demonstrated two main motives: valuing their pets as individual beings (family members or friends) and owning a pet as an instrument of self-manifestation. When the participants were asked whether they took their pets on holiday with them; 14 out of 30 dog owners responded positively; 8 out of 17 cat owners responded positively; 2 out of 5 dog/cat owners responded positively. Only two of the pet owners (one small-size dog owner and one cat owner) said that they took their pets with them when travelling abroad. Upon examination of the findings, two main themes have emerged from the "participants' travelling with their pets" namely "pet-related reasons" and "owner-related reasons". The main theme "pet-related reasons" contains four subthemes namely "pet's well-being", "pet's health", and "pet's safety", "pet's attachment to the owner". The main theme "owner-related concerns" contains three subthemes namely "owner's attachment to the pet", "having a good time with the pet", and "concerns about pet's well-being".

The participants who preferred travelling with their pets were asked which factors they considered while planning their travel with pets. When travelling with pets, destination, accommodation, and means of transport were chosen based on the pet friendliness criterion. The participants who preferred travelling with their pets were asked which factors they considered while planning their travel with pets. When travelling with pets, destination, accommodation, and means of transport were chosen based on the pet friendliness criterion. The meaning of pet friendliness were asked to the participants, the answers were as follows: "places where pets are allowed", "accommodation facilities which pets are accepted and welcomed", "means of transport which pets are accepted and treated well", destinations where laws and regulations are suitable to travel with pets", "safer destinations for pets (no health threats, no hostile environment, and no risk of pets being stolen), "safe accommodation for pets" (window screens and safe door locks), "enough space for pets (places for walking and larger rooms), "destinations, accommodation facilities, and means of transport where I feel comfortable when travelling with my pet", "destinations, accommodation facilities, and means of transport where I feel safe and secure when travelling with my pet" and "availability of health facilities such as veterinary clinics". Upon examination of the findings, two main themes have emerged from the participants' perceptions of "pet friendliness" namely "pet-related concerns" and "owner-related concerns". The main theme "pet-related concerns" contains three subthemes namely "pet's wellbeing", "pet's comfort", and "pet's safety". The main theme "owner-related concerns" contains four subthemes namely "allowance of pets", "comfort of pet's owner when travelling with pet", "safety of owner when travelling with pet", and "destination-related legal issues".

When the participants were asked whether they took their pets on holiday with them; 16 out of 30 dog owners responded negatively; 9 out of 17 cat owners responded negatively; 3 out of 5 dog/cat owners responded negatively. Although some of the participants had the desire to have holidays with their pets, some obstacles made them leave their pets behind. When the participants were asked why they did not travel with their pets, the reasons why they did not prefer taking their pets were as follows: "difficulties in finding pet-friendly accommodation", "quality concerns about pet-friendly accommodation", "limited choices of accommodation", "concerns about pet's safety (worries about pet's being stolen, lost or hurt)", "pet's unwanted and unexpected behaviors during travel", "pet's misbehaviors during holiday", "health concerns about the pet (pet's old age, pet's motion sickness, pet's anxiety in an unfamiliar environment, pet's health issues), "pet does not like to travel", "owner's worries about pet's behaviors in an unfamiliar environment (problems with other people and animals)", "difficulties in taking care of pet in an unfamiliar environment", "difficulties in sparing time for the pet during holiday", "other people's perceptions about pets", "fear of hostility towards the pet", "pet's discomfort in an unfamiliar environment", "difficulties in finding veterinary clinic for the pet when needed", "difficulties in finding a suitable means of transport", "damage which might be done by the pet and related costs", and "difficulties of travelling abroad with pet". Three main themes have emerged from the "participants' unwillingness to take their pets on holiday with them" namely "pet-related concerns" "owner-related concerns", and "structural concerns". The factors of Pet Owners' Tourism Constraints Scale ("pet's specific constraints, "pet's interpersonal constraints", and "pet's structural constraints") developed by Chen, Peng, and Hung (2014) can also be partly applied to identify the themes. The main theme "pet-related concerns" contains four subthemes namely "pet's wellbeing", "pet's comfort", "pet's health", and "pet's characteristics". The main theme "owner-related concerns" contains six subthemes namely "worries about pet's wellbeing", "worries about pet's comfort", "worries about pet's safety", "difficulties in taking care of the pet during holiday", and "concerns about other people's perceptions of the pet, and "reactions towards the pet". The main theme "structural constraints" contains four subthemes namely "accommodation-related concerns", "travel-related concerns", "cost of travelling with pet", and "legal issues".

The participants were asked how they feel when they left their pets behind while going on a holiday. The participants answered that they missed their pets and worried about their pets. The themes emerged from "pet owners' emotions due to leaving the pet behind" have been "anxiety", "missing", "discomfort", "distress", "guilt", "unhappiness", and "worry". 8 pet owners said that sometimes they shortened the length of the holiday because they missed their pets. The intensity of these emotions is determined by the strength of the owner-pet bond and attachment.

The participants were asked about the difficulties they faced while travelling with their pets, the answers were as follows: "finding a suitable accommodation", "choosing the right vehicle to travel", "planning", "making a detailed holiday plan", "preparation process (packing pet's

food, toys, bed, cat's litter, medicine, vitamins, comb, box, planning a veterinary visit, etc.)", "pet's adaptation to a new environment (especially for cats)", "presence of other animals (worries about pet's reaction, adaptation, and concerns about pet's health)", "worries about the safety of accommodation in case of leaving pet there alone", and "other people's reactions at the destination".

The participants were asked how they cope with these difficulties, the answers were as follows: "gathering information in advance", "making detailed holiday plans in advance", "using a private car as the vehicle", "preferring vacation houses or hiring villas as an accommodation", "choosing small tourism establishments", "asking friends / the connected others about the destination, the hotel", "asking about accommodation facility's pet-friendly services in advance", and "being prepared for surprises anyway".

The participants who did not take their pets with them on holiday said that they made some arrangements for their pets before they went on a holiday. The arrangements were as follows: "finding someone (family member, friend, neighbor) who takes care of the pet", "finding a pet boarding facility/pet hotel for the pet", "arranging a veterinary visit to make sure that pet is healthy", "buying needed supplies for the pet (food, cat litter, treats, vitamins, medicine, etc.), and "spending quality time with the pet before going on a holiday".

Some of the participants (7 dog owners, 8 cat owners, and 2 cat/dog owners) said that they also took care of stray cats and dogs regularly. In Turkey, it is ordinary to find many strays (cats and dogs) in the streets, and those animals are loved and looked after by volunteers. The participants who took care of strays suggested that they made some arrangements for strays before they went on a holiday such as "finding someone who takes care of strays (family member, neighbor, friend) or hiring someone", "buying food –and medicine if needed- for strays", "if there is an animal with a specific health condition, giving instructions in advance", and "leave the phone number of the veterinary clinic to be used in case of emergency".

7. CONCLUSION

The willingness and decisions about participating in leisure and tourism activities with pets are determined by the bond between pet and owner, the value attached to the pet, and the pet's role in the family. Pet owners' demographic profiles and characteristics of their pets determine the type of pet ownership (Aylesworth, Chapman, and Dobscha, 1999) and also affect all decisions made about pets such as participating in leisure activities with pets and travelling with pets. The willingness of participating in leisure and tourism activities with pets was found to be higher among single participants, married participants without children, and upper-middle or higher-income groups since they were more eager to negotiate with leisure constraints.

The participants with higher emotional attachment to their pets had more willingness to take their pets with them on holiday. These participants also considered their pet's well-being, health, comfort, and safety while planning their holidays. The participants who did not take their pets on holiday with them either had concerns about their pet's safety, comfort, well-being, and health, or concerns about their comfort during a holiday.

Pet owners' decisions about taking their pets on holiday with them are affected by some constraints stemming from their pets, themselves, or other conditions. Pet owners, whether or not they take their pets on leisure trips, have to make some arrangements for their pets. Despite some difficulties of taking their pets on travel with them, pet owners find some solutions to cope with these difficulties, because they like spending time with their pets. The leisure constraints of travelling with pets contain difficulties in finding accommodation and suitable means of transportation, pet-related concerns, and pet owners' concerns related to travelling with their pets. The emotional attachment between pets and pet owners increases pet owners' willingness to take their pets on holiday with them, so they can deal with difficulties. For most of the pet owners, travelling with their pets was said to be an enjoyable experience which their pets also liked. Pet owners who do not take their pets with them on holiday make this decision either because of their pet-related concerns or their worries about their inability to cope with constraints. Participants mostly prefer their own vacation houses to stay with their pets during the holiday or hire villas for comfort. They use their cars as a means of transport to cope with travel difficulties.

This study provides a basis for future research on pet owners' willingness or unwillingness to travel with their pets. In the tourism literature, travelling with pets has been a topic that has been examined mostly by the research conducted among dog owners. Understanding the expectations of this increasing travel segment will provide some opportunities for tourism marketing professionals to satisfy these consumers' needs.

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