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Affect of Dog-Human Companionship to Purchase Criteria of Dog Apparel Across Dog Owner Segments in Taiwan

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Keywords: Dog-human companionship, purchase criteria, dog apparel, Taiwan

Introduction. The dog companionship is an integral aspect of life in Taiwan (a Chinese society), with approximately 25% of families having a dog (Wu, 2016). Dogs are seen as human's best friends, and dog owners believe they are not giving but receiving love and companionship from dogs. Past research showed how pet owners shop for their pets relates to the nature of their relationships with their pets (Dotson & Hyatt, 2008). However, the consumption behavior of dog owners was commonly studied on dog food. No research investigated the relationship between dog-human companionship and purchase criteria of dog apparel in any countries. According to the EKB model (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1995) of consumer decision-making behavior, individual factors contribute to consumers' decision-making. Based on the EKB model, the purpose of the study was to understand how dog-human companionship affects dog apparel purchase criteria and behavior. The present study investigated 1) dog apparel preferences, 2) effects of demographics (sex, age, and disposable income) on different segments of dog owners based on the dog-owner companionships, and 3) dog apparel purchasing criteria across different segments of dog owners based on dog-owner companionship.

Method. A reliable scale of dog-human companionship was adopted from Dotson and Hyatt (2008). Clothing purchase criteria scale was adapted from Hsu and Burns (2002). The survey used the "translation and back translation" procedure to develop a Chinese survey. A pretest was followed to ensure clarity of the survey. The formal online and paper survey methods were employed into the study. A formal paper survey was distributed to 400 dog owners in pet stores and veterinary hospitals national wide.

Results. Descriptive analysis was employed to measure preferences of dog apparel. The most preferred dog apparels are costume and seasonal items (37%), jacket (20.20%), t-shirt (10.90%), and sweater (5.50%), respectively. Exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation was utilized to form factors based on the following criteria: eigenvalues ≥ 1 , and factor loadings above .50 for a given factor but below .30 on other factors. K-mean cluster analysis was employed to tap three groups of dog-human companionship from high to low scores (dog people, dog parents, and pet owners). The first model used multinomial logistic regression to investigate the effects of demographics (sex, age, and disposable income) on different segments of dog owners based on dog-owner companionship (see Table 1). Females had a marginal significance between dog people and pet owners. The second model employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to investigate the relationship between different segments of dog owners and purchasing criteria of dog apparel (see Table 1). Disposable income was associated with purchasing criteria of dog apparel on the functional perspective. Comparing to the segment of pet owners, the segment of dog people was related to functional and design purchasing criteria of dog apparel.

Comparing to the segment of pet owners, the segment of dog parents was only associated with functional purchasing criteria. Purchasing criteria of price, brand, and manufactory countries were not significance criteria and not reported in the table 1.

Table 1
The Regression and SEM Results

	Model 1 ^a		Model 2 ^b	
		Dog parents	Function ^o	Design ¹
Female	.923 (.519)†	.476(.544)	.085 (.062)	-.011(.072)
Age	-.019 (.024)	-.012 (.025)	.091 (.061)	.044 (.071)
Not enough ²	-.550 (.667)	-.324 (.711)	-.142 (.065)*	-.034 (.075)
Just enough	-.370 (.560)	.161(.585)	-.139 (.066)*	.015 (.076)
Dog people ³			.677 (.104)**	.437 (.124)**
Dog parents			.384 (.108)**	.201 (.126)

n = 243

† < .1; * < .05; ** < .01

^a Multinomial regression with dog-human companionship group as the outcome; ^b SEM ($\chi^2(67) = 96.7, p < .05; CFI = .970; TLI = .960; RMSEA = .043$) with two latent variables (design and function) as the outcome; Reference group is the pet owners;

^o This latent variable includes fabric, comfortable to wear, quality, size/fit, and safe; ¹ This latent variable includes color, pleased to others, appropriateness, and style/design; ² Reference group for allowance is people with some saving; ³ Reference group for companionship is the pet owners.

Conclusions. Among different likes of dog apparel, the most popular items of dog apparel are costume and seasonal items and jackets in Taiwan. The study found female dog owners have a tendency over males to embrace the dog-human companionship experiences between the group of dog people and the group of pet owners. Females are more likely to have a great dog-human companionship and tend to be dog people instead of pet owners. People with high disposable income evaluate functional features (fabric, comfortable to wear, quality, size/fit, and safe) as important purchasing criteria. The group of dog people is more likely to measure both function and design features (color, pleased to others, appropriateness, and style/design) as important purchasing criteria than other groups. The group of dog parents is more likely to stress only on functional features of purchasing criteria. Based on the preference results, dog apparel marketers in Taiwan and/or Chinese societies should develop more costume and seasonal items, jackets, and t-shirts than other apparels to provide customers more choices. Marketers in Taiwan and/or Chinese societies should focus on females who tend to be dog people, have strong dog-human companionship, high disposable income, and provide them functional features. Even though dog owners did not measure brand as important purchasing criteria, marketers should promote their brands by providing both functional and design features to their target customers.

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