

# Consumer value journey with pet in multiple service touchpoints

Jaakko Autio<sup>1</sup>, Ari Kuismin<sup>1</sup>, Minna Autio<sup>1</sup>, Henna Syrjälä<sup>1,2</sup>, Eliisa Kylkilähti<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Helsinki, <sup>2</sup>University of Vaasa

*Our paper explores how consumer value is negotiated in pet-related services. We combine the discussion on value with the standpoint of service design; the approaches of consumer journey and service touchpoints. The contribution lies in discussing how consumer value is experienced in pet-related services through and by the pet, not only within dyadic interaction between consumer and service provider. We argue that applying a consumer value journey gives a comprehensive understanding of experienced value in several touchpoints with multiple service providers.*

## 1 Introduction

In service research, the value creation has traditionally focused on service provider and its processes for customers (see Johns, 1999; Osborne; Ballantyne, 2012). The approaches have emphasized the dyadic interaction between consumer and service provider starting from the early work of Nordic school of service marketing (Grönroos, 1978; Gummesson, 1979). More recently, the idea of co-creation of value (Prahalad; Ramaswamy, 2002) in philosophical level, and activities of service design in more practical level have underlined, firstly, the importance of service provider–consumer interaction, and secondly, understanding the integratable resources of these two actors (Lusch; Vargo, 2006). In these discussions consumer interaction is seen directed by service design (Mickelsson, 2013, 536) and the examinations have focused on the consumer’s engagement in the value-creation process (Vargo; Lusch, 2004).

However, consumer value emerges not only in interaction with a firm, but also together with and in relation to other actors of everyday life (Heinonen et al., 2010; Mickelsson, 2013) such as other firms, communities and co-consumers. Many of the actors and their behaviours may not be manageable by the service providers (e.g. Gabriel; Lang, 2006). Since our empirical study takes place within context of consumption for and with pets, let’s consider an example that your dog is having hip dysplasia and needs treatment. You may have a dyadic 15 minutes service encounter with your veterinarian, but before, during and after the encounter you are also in contact with physiotherapist, dog agility community and the breeder of the dog. Different actors contribute to the service experience (Tax et al., 2013). Consumers may also use service in a way the service provider did not plan for. In other words, consumers face multiple touchpoints (Patrício et al., 2011) with several different service providers even at the same time and therefore consumer journey (Tax et al., 2013; Shove et al., 2012, 132) is layered, sometimes scattered. In this paper consumer journeys are not assumed to have a predetermined or designed order. Instead, we see consumer actively constructing her journey with companies, commercial actors, and also products, services, persons or other communities (Cova; Dalli, 2009).

Where service research has traditionally focused on dyadic interaction between the consumer and service provider, the previous research on consumers and their animal companions has to a great extent concentrated on pet owners’ relationships to their pets. This line of research originates from Human-Animal-Bond (HAB) studies, starting in 1970’s (Hines, 2003). The focus has been, for instance, on how pets are part or extensions of their owners’ selves (e.g. Belk, 1988; Hirschman, 1994; Bettany; Daly, 2008; Dotson; Hyatt, 2008). Studies seem to share an interest to endeavour how pets have been considered as objects of consumers’ love and attachment (e.g. Beck; Katcher, 1983; Belk, 1996; Voith, 1981). Jyrinki (2012) claims that attachment should be seen as multidimensional phenomenon that is constructed dynamically; thus, the pet owner does not have just one kind of relationship to her pet, but the pet may be regarded simultaneously for example as a friend and as an equipment for avocation.

As prior research has concentrated on examining the consumer-pet -relationship, it has ended up neglecting a large area of pet-related consumption. However, taken a more holistic view, it is obvious that experiences in pet-related consumption are not constructed in an isolated relationship between the owner and her pet, but several other actors, such as service providers, sellers and producers participate in constructing the consumer value too. As Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2002; 2004) have argued, value is co-created with consumers and other actors in networks (also Vargo; Akaka, 2009). However, few exceptions to this shortage in pet-related research exist; for instance the interaction between pet owner and vet has been studied (Brockman et al., 2008; Harrison-Walker, 2001). Yet, there are no studies on how interaction between the pet and the service provider influences pet owner’s consumption experience (except, see report by Coe; Adams; Bonnet, 2007; Rötzeimer-Keuper; Wunderlich, 2014).

In the current paper, we aim to argue through our qualitative material that the experienced value in pet-related service consumption is constructed contextually in tripartite relationship between pet owner/consumer, pet and service provider (Syrjälä et al., 2014). Our viewpoint is consumer-centric, and departs from the traditional firm-centric perspective of service research (see Osborne; Ballantyne, 2012). From this viewpoint pet owner appears in a two-fold role: consuming various products and services to the pet (Brockman et al., 2008; Harrison-Walker, 2001), and creating value journey in interaction with service providers (Teixeira et al., 2012, 364). Even though we adopt consumer’s point of view, the pet is also seen as an independent actor, who interacts and influences consumer’s feelings, activities and the value experiences.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Consumer value

Among the various discussions on consumer value (see e.g. Gummerus, 2013; Sánchez-Fernández; Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007), we lean on Holbrook's (1999, 5) definition of value as 'an interactive relativistic preference experience'. This means that value is constructed between the consumer subject and an object, for example a product (Holbrook, 1999). As Holt (1995) argues, products are not just carriers of meanings, instead meanings are created when we are using, valuing, understanding and experiencing consumption objects within various social contexts. In current research, the interest is in how consumer experiences value. However, we argue that the value experience should be seen as interactively formed. Similarly, Helkkula et al. (2012) see that value in the experience is intra- and intersubjective, the experience is individual and subjective, yet created jointly, for example in the manners that pet owners share and evaluate various consumption objects in the hobby communities.

According to Holbrook (1999) relativistic value experience refers to the subjectivity of experience and to its relation to other products, services and situations. The value experience gets structured also along consumption experiences of other consumers (Helkkula et al., 2012): when they compare the experiences of products and services with each other. To illustrate, pets' grooming services are valued in regards to previous, best and other pet owners' experiences.

Preference in experienced value in turn means favouring of certain products or services, and accordingly the value reflects for example consumer's attitude toward, or attractiveness of the experienced service. Preference may be directed towards the whole service experience, part of it or the result. (Boksberger; Melsen, 2011.) It should be taken into account that experienced value includes several types of preferences, not just economic but also for example emotional (Gummerus, 2013; Karababa; Kjeldgaard, 2013). Thus, for instance when different dog training services are sequenced, the value experiences get constructed along multidimensional preferences with emotional meanings.

The experiential nature of consumption brings feelings, emotions, play, images and other consumption related aspects meaningful to consumption (Holbrook, 2006). Consumption experience is not restricted to marketplace or buying situation, but experience may take place outside markets, still in relation to market-created products and/or services (Carù; Cova, 2003, 276). Thus, consumption experience may be carried out in dog park (outside actual markets), where dog owners share their recommendations of, say, dog collars (product in the market). This is in line with the idea that consumers experience services as journeys.

### 2.2 Consumer value journey

Alongside with the concept of experienced value, we use concepts derived from service design approach to describe the construction of consumer value in pet-related services. By service touchpoint we refer to the ways of interaction between consumer and service across multiple channels (Bitner; Brown; Meuter, 2000; Patrício et al., 2011). People, encounters, tangible elements, spaces and objects can all be seen as touchpoints (Clatworthy, 2011). A series of digital or real life touchpoints form a consumer journey that includes all the events and activities related to service, product or problem solving from the consumer's perspective (Patrício et al., 2011). The consumer journey may therefore extend over different channels, physical place and period of time (e.g. Shove et al., 2012). It may be designed (e.g. Zomerdijk; Voss, 2010), but consumers do not necessarily follow or face the journey as intended.

We set the concepts of service touchpoint and journey into context of variety of service providers, where combination of multiple interdependent services is involved in contributing to consumer's value experience (van Riel et al., 2013, 316). We take consumer-centric perspective to analyze, how consumers construct their journeys with different firms, and also with products, services, persons, co-consumers and communities (Cova; Dalli, 2009). Tax, McCutcheon and Wilkinson (2013, 2) have pointed out that service delivery is increasingly fragmented and consumers encounter several providers when using services.

In our study, the consumer value journey depicts all the experiences with different actors (e.g. vet, pet shop, insurance company) and service touchpoints (digital, real life) in time and in space. Thus, we do not restrict our exploration to any singular service or provider. As Johns (1999, 966) suggests the idea of service as a journey is not limited only in time and space but it denotes also an adventurous service odyssey. In order to grasp the journey and the touchpoints of consumer and the pet as a co-consumer we apply the concept of value wheel. The wheel illustrates what and how consumers encounter touchpoints along the service journey (Lee et al., 2013).

## 3 Data and methodology

The empirical material of this study consists of 53 personal pet owner interviews. In three of the interviews two persons from the same household participated. Research participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Merriam, 1998, 63) and during fieldwork in pet supply stores, vet clinics and communal dog parks. Altogether 38 women and 15 men took part to the interviews. The age of the respondents varies from 21 to 75 and the majority of the participants (12) are aged between 30 and 39 years. Participants are either dog or cat owners and almost everyone has at least one dog. The interviews were carried out between December 2012 and January 2014 in Southern and Western Finland by four different researchers.

In recruitment, our aim was to find different kinds of pet owners, such as pet-related hobby enthusiasts that train actively e.g. agility, dog or cat shows and obedience trials as well as pet owners, who do not have any avocations or specific devotions with their pets. The participants were also recruited on the basis of dog or cat breed so that owners of different breeds would be presented. Three (3) of the interviewees are also working as professional veterinarians in private clinics and four (4) are working in a pet shop chain. Some of the interviewees are, or have been, also breeders or small kennel owners.

The interviews were guided by a semi-structured but flexible interview framework. The framework was customized to each participant depending on his or her responses (Eriksson; Kovalainen, 2008). This allowed new questions and directions to be brought up during the discussion. The interview themes covered pet owners' everyday life and pet-related (service) consumption from several angles. Interviewees were asked and encouraged to tell freely about their daily routines, possible problematic situations, service encounters and products, but also about pet-related hobbies and hobby communities. The aim was to provide in-depth understanding of pet-related consumer market (Moisander; Valtonen 2012, 249).

The research participants are seen as active subjects that actively take part to creating social meanings concerning pet-related consumption. In this sense the interviewees – as well as the interviewer – are not seen as passive objects but subjects shaping the contextual understanding of pet-related consumption (see Moisander; Valtonen, 2006). The experiences of the interviewees are understood as personal, but constructed and shaped by social interaction.

The analysis was an iterative process where data and theory driven stages altered (Thompson, 1997). In the first stage, before the actual analysis, the researchers got to know all the material gathered without specific questions in mind. At this stage we were interested in pet-related consumption in general. In the second stage, two researchers applied the Holbrook's (2006) definition of value as 'an interactive relativistic preference experience' as an analytical tool. In addition to this, consumer journey maps (Patrício et al., 2011) were used as a visualization tool to recognize and understand the actors and functions reproduced in the interviews. The analysis was deepened by discussions between all the researchers.

The article is positioned within the interpretative research paradigm (Shankar; Goulding, 2001; Moisander; Valtonen, 2012) and the interviews are interpreted as narrative stories. Whitebrook (2001, 9) has argued, that narrating is a basic human activity since persons understand their own lives as stories. We believe that consumers express something about their own way of thinking as well as the cultural norms of society through storytelling. In service design storytelling is used both as an informative and inspirational method for design (Kankainen et al., 2012), and as an approach from the company side to create stories for communicating with the consumer/customer (Vollmer, 2013).

Kankainen et al. (2012, 221) combine storytelling with customer journey by reading the consumer/customer stories, and defining the service touchpoints. The authors define that service journey is often structured on multiple service providers, networks where service providers together or without knowing each other create the consumer service experience. In this multi-channel service ecosystem, a consumer can create and influence on her own service journey. On the other hand, service provider may influence on the service experience by developing the service, prototyping it, and managing the context in which experience is happening. (Kankainen et al., 2012). Narrative stories thus enlighten how consumer arrives at a particular service journey with certain touchpoints (Vollmer, 2013, 52).

In the following chapters we analyze: 1) how consumer experience value with pet, and 2) how consumer creates value journey in a case of multiple touchpoints with multiple service providers.

#### **4 The pet co-creating consumer value**

In pet-related consumption the pet itself plays a significant role: it has been seen, for instance, as a co-consumer (Vänskä, 2014). However, the presence of this third party at the construction of consumer value varies. To analyze the multidimensional and dynamic position of the pet, we operationalize a touchpoint wheel (see e.g. Lee et al., 2013) as an analytical tool to explore consumer value. Therefore we conceptualize the wheel as a consumer value wheel. The wheel illustrates the variable position of the pet that shapes the way pet owner encounters service touchpoints and experiences value. Thus, the wheel spins. The idea of variable position of the pet is in line with the argument that the pet owner does not have just one kind of relationship to her pet but the relationship is constructed dynamically (Jyrinki, 2012).

Thus, the value wheel is usually used to make sense about customer touchpoints between a customer and a company or a brand. We contextualize the wheel to analyze the touchpoints from the perspective of value experienced by consumer during the value journey through multiple service touchpoints in regards to pet-related consumption. We follow the argument of Syrjälä et al. (2014) and situate the pet in the core of consumer value wheel as a value creator, a mediator of value (between consumer and service provider), and as an experiencer of value.

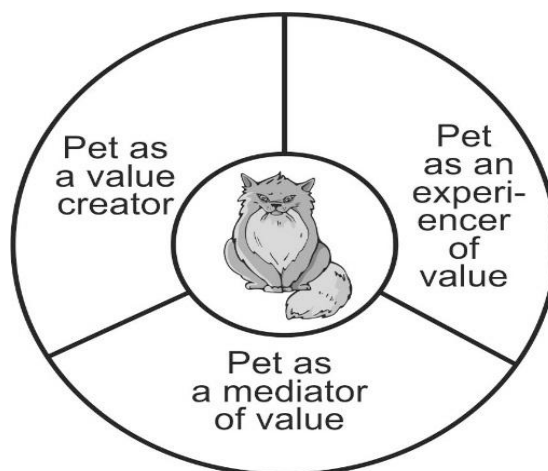


Figure 1. The consumer value wheel: Pet as a value creator, as a mediator of value, and as an experiencer of value.

Next, we study the value experience in the relation between the pet owner/consumer and the pet (Figure 1). First, (i) the pet acts as a value creator, when the value experienced by the consumer is created in the interaction between the pet and the service-provider. Second, we focus on the relationship between the pet owner and the service provider, where (ii) the pet acts as a mediator of value. Third, the pet is positioned as (iii) an active subject that experiences value. The agency, meanings and the position of the pet in the family shape the value experienced by the consumer. In chapter 5, we conceptualize and contextualize the three-dimensional (Figure 1) value experience as a value journey including multiple touchpoints with several firms and other actors.

#### 4.1 The pet as a value creator

Pet owners' descriptions of a tight-knit and close relationship to their pet speak of the consumer's value experience which is constructed in looking after the animal's wellbeing and affection toward the pet. The relationship between pet owner and pet is outlined by emotional factors linked to the pet's wellbeing: *"It makes no, you know having an animal in the first place makes no sense, unless you care about it"* [Interview 17]. When the value experience is outlined through the pet, the owner's own agency is placed in the second position and the pet's significance takes priority when the owner considers consumption decisions and use of time (Ridgway et al., 2008). An informant states: *"for wellbeing I absolutely do spend more money on the animal than on myself"* [Interview 20]. Looking after the animal's wellbeing and succeeding at it hence create value for the owner (Dotson; Hyatt, 2008). Consumers assign a separate agency for the pet, represented as independent of the owner. The pet owner constructs the position of the pet as an active subject as follows: *"(N)othing is as much fun, as watching them be so happy when they get out there to run around a bit and roughhouse with their friends"*. [Interview 22] The consumer perceives the pet as a sentient and experiencing actor. The pet as a subject of its own has resources that shape the value experienced by the owner.

The pet's active status is meaningful to the owner, as the pet is depicted as a playful actor, bringing the owner fun and joy (Holbrook, 2006). Following and interpreting the pet's actions and living with a pet create value (Beck; Katcher, 1983), making detached actors superfluous. A pet owner describes a relationship with the pet, where the owner's sense of wellbeing is essential:

It's also been kind of a lifeline, like if you're really stressed out, it's really great to see the dog having fun, rolling around in the snow or whatever. Because it can't help but it can make you feel better, because the dog is never really in a bad mood. It's pretty much in that sense, like all you have to do is go home, there's a happy dog waiting for you there, so that does make you feel good. [Interview 21]

Positioning the pet as a subject that shows affection towards its owner would appear to be pivotal to the value experience: *"Well if I think of my own pet, it loves me exactly as I am, completely like unconditionally, and loyally."* [Interview 3]. The consumer's experience of the relationship between pet and owner forms as reciprocal: both in turn are active subjects, and objects. The pet as a subject is built upon interpreting behaviour and being, and humanizing the pet (Beck; Katcher, 1983), but also of its natural aspect and qualities as an animal.

#### 4.2 The pet as a mediator of value

Above, we have examined how the relationship between consumer and pet enables the formation of a value experience. Now, we examine the relationship between service provider and pet owner, where the pet plays a pivotal role in value creation. Here, the consumer's value experience results from her interpretation of the pet's experience from the interaction with service provider.

The consumer gives and receives recommendations, and eventually decides which products and services are acquired to the pet. Thus, the pet owner defines the value experience – in relation to the service provider and through the pet. In the following quote, the consumer explains how pet's food-related choices are formed in interaction with both social media and a service provider:

He ate, when he was a puppy it was something like Royal Canin food and I, you know, when I had time I went and read all the online chat forums for what's in them and what's good and what's bad and then I came up, talking at the pet shop about what's good. So then they said that that's got the worst nutritional values like it doesn't even say what the meat content is and, then after that, I made or you know they recommended some different options where the meat content at least is really good and then the kibble, I used those but so other than that it's raw food [i.e. BARF Biologically Appropriate Raw Food] so that it's.. [Interview 32]

The service provider gives the pet owner diet recommendations, which the owner approves of, because she has 'the best interest' of the pet at heart. A pet shop does not simply sell products; it creates value for the customer through expertise – instructions, advices and recommendations.

In the relationship between service provider and the pet owner, value creation is negotiated via the pet, however involving also social networks and communities of the owner. Consumption objects and actions are employed as vehicles to join enthusiasts of a given hobby or a certain dog breed, to those that favour a specific retail outlet or a specific breeder. For instance, communities formed around enthusiasts of a specific breed or around a breeder are comparable to brand communities (e.g. Muniz; O'Guinn, 2001). The qualities of a pet – a given breed – or status within the family are significant when a consumer justifies the profitability of insurance:

For a puppy I'd say it's pretty important, or if for some really hard-core racing dog, then it's probably really important. But maybe for just your normal house pet, then it's not necessarily quite as important. [Interview 21]

Thus, it is not just affection towards the pet, but also the financial risk is taken into account when deciding whether to insure the pet. Getting and keeping a pet involves the threat of financial loss. Awareness of available insurance policies may also reinforce awareness of the risks, for example the conditions of puppy insurance may pinpoint the health-related insecurities such as possibility for hip dysplasia. In this manner, the insurance appears as a way externalise the risk related to acquiring a puppy. Similarly, comparing insurance quotes, acquainting oneself with indemnification regulations or picking a veterinary surgeon may be challenging decisions for a pet owner. So, in this case, the value is constructed in relationship between consumer and service provider, and the pet is positioned as a negotiating instrument.

When a consumer justifies choices such as a recommendations concerning pet food, selecting an insurance company, or purchasing dog collars from a flea market, a pet constructs as a mediator of value. The agency, which a pet owner has posited to her-/himself (e.g. as an active enthusiast) and the status that the pet owner has produced for the service provider (e.g. a speciality retailer) define the value, alongside the status given to the pet (e.g. family dog).

### 4.3 The pet as an experienter of value

In this chapter, we show how pet owner's consumption experience in relation to the producer of pet services is created indirectly through the pet's experience. When the consumer takes the pet's experience under evaluation, pet's 'dual role' is outlined, both as a consuming subject as well as an object transmitting the experience to the consumer. For instance, pet's emotions and proper treatment are of primary importance when the consumer uses veterinary services. The pet takes central role in experiencing value; so, the consumer experiences the relationship with a veterinary surgeon through the pet as the following excerpt highlights:

Everything's gone well and I've felt good about it and it's left a very positive experience for the dog, too. Not that it would matter a whole lot, but so with us it's actually a joke because it's in Munkkivuori really near us, so Hertta always goes on a walk, she walks there [laughs], to the door of the veterinary clinic because the ladies always come and give her treats out the door. [Interview 5]

The quote sums up the three-dimensional nature of relationships in pet service consumption: in addition to the relationship between consumer and service provider, understanding the consumption experience and the value experienced by the consumer requires taking into account the interpretations and evaluations made through the pet. The experience is not analyzed as separate from the pet; instead the pet is positioned 'between' the consumer and the service provider. The interview reveals how the pet is positioned as an active subject that experiences the service. It is the consumer's interpretation of the pet's experience that structures the perception of the relationship with the service provider. This functions as a resource for experiencing value in the relationship between pet owner and service provider. The consumer describes the value experienced in a service encounter through the pet: "*We go to canine massage. (...) the pleasure you feel yourself, when it looks like the dog's enjoying it, makes it worth it.*" [Interview 20]

Pet-related consumption experiences are also analyzed according to which product or service the consumer perceives as worthy of her pet. Owners highlight that not all objects of consumptions are "*good enough for my pet*".

This is related to a view, prominent in prior research, of the pet relation as an extension of the owner's self (Belk, 1988, 1996; Hirschman, 1994). The value experience occurring through the relationship between the service provider and the pet may be difficult to recognize, as the significances linked to the pet merge into the owner's self and on the other hand the owner constructs experiences of value for the pet. When the service succeeds, the social relationships between people and factors focused on the animal become hard to distinguish. An informant describes veterinary services: "We were treated well there, the dog very well". In the same spirit, value experiences regarding veterinary services are comparable to experiences of public and private health care services for people:

Hell no, not public. I use private. Because in the private sector, the differences are very similar to human health care, but in animal health care (...) the differences become more marked, so that I think in the public sector they are in a way more indifferent. [Interview 7]

The consumer describes the negative experience and the unpleasant service as indifferent. This goes against the pet owner's assumption that the relationship between pet and service provider should reflect altruistic concern for the pet (Coe; Adams; Bonnett, 2007). The technical quality and the efficiency of procedures are secondary evaluation criteria if the service is not interpreted as primarily considerate towards the pet specifically. The pet is entitled to caring service just as a human being would be. Thus, the service that is considered unpleasant in relationships between people is also considered the same in pet services.

## 5 Consumer value journey with pet

Above, we examined the value experienced in pet-related services through the changing position of a pet in relation to pet owner/consumer and service provider. All the positions define pet as a kind of co-consumer (see Vänskä, 2014) next to or sometimes even equal to the pet owner/consumer. Pet may create value to the pet owner as such e.g. bringing joy and fun, pet may negotiate or mediate value experience to the owner e.g. status in a breed community or dietary decision-making, or pet has its own, active value experience e.g. pet feels good, enjoys playing.

As a consumer, the pet owner generally seeks the most appropriate available solution for the pet, and wants to be a 'good parent' for the pet. 'Parenthood' can be reached through choosing a service journey that result in desired aim, e.g. a recovered dog. As a co-consumer, the value position of the pet differs depending on individual touchpoints during the journey or even depending on the whole service journey. According to Rawson et al. (2013, 4) consumers, however, do not care about singular touchpoints but they value more the experience across multiple touchpoints and multiple channels over time. Sometimes the pet is in the frontline of value experience (recovered, happy dog), creating value for the pet owner (joy about a recovery of the dog) or standing aside but having a mediating role in value experience (the value from choosing a good expert). Consumers also structure their service journey culturally and in network with other consumers.

Pet ownership, activities with and consumption for the pet have different contents in relation to various touchpoints of different providers, e.g. together with organizations, communities and networks (Figure 2). The pet owner's relationship with a service, such as a community of enthusiasts, brings out the social aspects of experience and its multi-faceted unfolding. The understanding 'of the right kind and essential' pet-related consumption is constructed socially within one's own reference group or through expert advice from breeders or vets, for example. The shared traditions of the community, the sense of belonging, the value structure and a moral obligation towards group members become apparent when observing the instrumental role of the pet in the value experience (Muniz; O'Guinn, 2001).

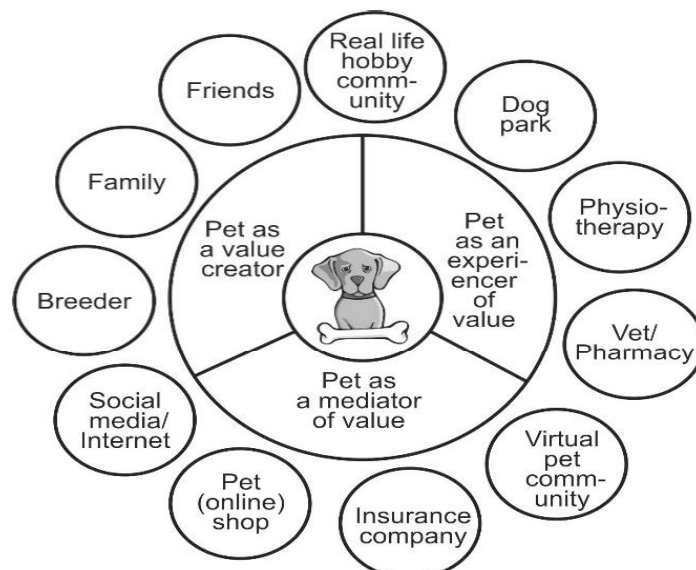


Figure 2. Consumer value wheel through pet and service touchpoints.

As the spinning value wheel (figure 2) reveals, touchpoints in pet-related consumption show fragmentation of active actors in the service delivery (see Tax et al., 2013, 454–455), and we may reckon opposing interests between the actors. Certain actors are not, however, locked to certain position of the pet when experienced, but actors in the figure and their places present an illustration of possible relations. If we consider a case of a dog with a leg injury the obvious starting point of consumer journey would be to meet the vet, probably the one that has been sending you advertisement regularly. However, the interest of a pet owner/consumer is to make the journey from sickness to health suitable for her needs, wealth, use of time, and taking the dog's 'wishes' and previous experiences into consideration. The journey may, thus, start by contacting the breeder, a friend from pet-related hobby club or pet shop, googling or asking the Facebook community about the best expert in dog leg injuries (see Patrício et al., 2011). Owner may also contact an insurance company, a pharmacy, a physiotherapist etc. before even meeting the vet.

Thus, the consumer value journey consists of events, actors, and activities which occur in different channels, physical places and time (e.g. Shove et al., 2012). Tax et al. (2013) discuss that some companies actively leave it to consumers to create their own combined service offering, their own journey. Below, we can read a story, how an owner of a Rottweiler creates his and his dog's journey concerning well-being, health, and medication:

Pet owner: We do look at them **websites, discussion forums**, although there's no such forum left where some idiot's are not trying to stir things up, but when you always leave those out you do have proper ones, plus one great thing is of course the fact that we have a good **breeder**, where we got ours from, a wonderful person, and we're good friends with her, so we can always get good advice from there, and of course we know **a lot of Rott people**, we're in the local **Rottweiler club** so, there's a whole bunch, and you know with **social media**, you do it so fast, you don't even have to **call**, so you can just type up a message and...

Researcher: And someone responds there then.

Pet owner: Someone responds, there are common sites, or then you can go there, like **Facebook** has totally, like incredibly useful, Facebook's great with all this.

Researcher: What would be your primary source of information, what would you use if you needed some information on a health-related issue?

Pet owner: If I ... you know I am such a web person, I could **check it out on the web** but, not for that long I wouldn't... I'll call, and I'd call the breeder, who's had Rotts for 30 years, and then I have... [Interview 2]

In the citation multiple persons, communities and actors come to play together and have intertwined effect to the value experience, even though they may not be designed to do so. In this manner, the citation gives voice to the fragmented nature of consumer experience concerning pet's wellbeing. However, it also shows how a narrative can act as an organizer for the fragments (Deighton, 1992). Similar to a narrative the concept of service journey gives order and structure to incidents (touchpoints) that may otherwise seem even chaotic (Kankainen et al., 2012). The journey is not predetermined, but rules of thumb and previous experiences do exist. They help, when consumer e.g. has to evaluate, what is relevant and irrelevant information and from where to get it.

During the journey different actors and influencers interact with each other, when consumer links them together and to other everyday life activities of pet owner. Consumer has a decisive role in creating or sometimes also co-creating the service provider network (see Tax et al., 2013, 456). However, consumer has also a possibility to discard the expected or supposed journey: in the story above, the Rottweiler owner might be indifferent to the existing health information by e.g. trusting the breed's general healthiness. Some consumers may also choose a journey planned by some service provider on the way of the journey, such as breeder who has tight recommendations concerning the food, or an insurance company that oblige its customers to use particular veterinarian. Narratives understood as told service journeys thus enlighten how consumer arrives at particular solution or stage (Vollmer, 2013, 52).

To illustrate the layered nature of consumer service journey with pet as a co-consumer, we draw Figure 3 on the basis of the Interview 3 that unfolds the value journey with pet in multiple service touchpoints. The journey depicts a case of a sick pet that requires actions from the pet owner. To the figure we have summarized the touchpoints with actors having influence on the progression of consumer journey and contributing to the overall value experience. The black line connects these actors in the figure. In addition, we have listed actors that are mentioned but somehow rejected or ignored – they however shape the significance of the actors included in the journey. This confirms our argument that service encounters or touchpoints do not take place in isolation but always in relation to other actors and actions of everyday life (see Mickelsson, 2013).

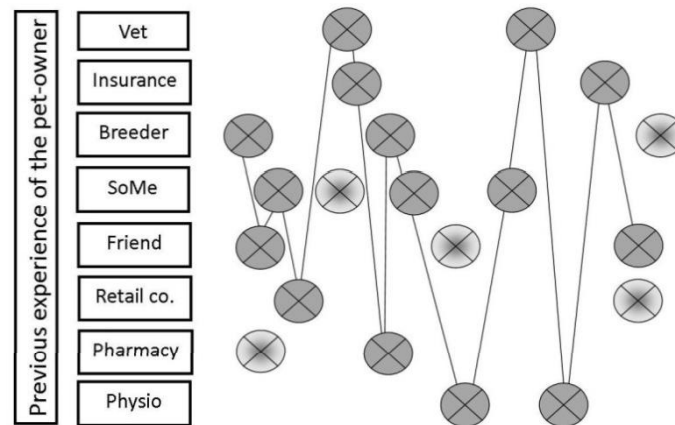


Figure 3. Consumer value journey: recovery of a sick pet.

The consumer value journey with pet is contextual and has a history. The journey does not begin from a blank slate: “When Daisy was small, she did not have anything special; however it did suffer from ear infections few times”. [Interview 3] The pet has been sick before, and the journey takes shape in relation to previous experiences. By choosing or accepting certain touchpoints with providers, the pet owner and pet as a co-consumer construct or repeat a journey that serves best at the aim to heal the pet. The value-creating journey can be defined as a set of interlinked actions that are having a shared purpose or unifying factor, and which consumers apply to create value to themselves or to co-consumers. For instance, the figure 3 shows how opinion seeking is linked to choosing the best veterinarian, using the medicine, and selecting the specialized physiotherapist, asking advices from the breeder, friends, close salesperson at pet shop, and browsing the social media. The actors may be separate, but they are not experienced separately.

In our case of a sick pet, the pet owner/consumer tries to be as good and responsible ‘parent’ as possible to her pet. Constructing or repeating journey that creates value then equates with executing proper ‘pet parenthood’. Like Johns (1999, 966) points out, from consumer perspective the concept of journey denotes more than just a passage through space or time. The journey may, for instance have a nature of an adventure that allows consumer a position of an explorer that hunts for bargains (see Gabriel; Lang, 2006). Applying a value journey as a temporal sequence hereby gives more comprehensive understanding of experienced value in several virtual and real life touchpoints, and with multiple service providers.

## 6 Conclusions

We have explored consumers’ experienced value in, firstly, through and by the pet, and, secondly, as a value journey in time and space. Article participates to the discussion on experienced consumer value in Holbrook’s (1999; 2006) theoretical framework. Our findings show how pet owner/consumer experiences value through the pet along consumer journey in series of multiple service touchpoints with different service providers. We argue that understanding consumer value requires expanding the traditional focus of service research on service provider and dyadic interaction between consumer and firm. According to our study, also other actors and activities of everyday life play a significant role in how value emerges and consumers experience it. In particular, in the current context, pet becomes a pivotal actor, taking variable positions along the consumer value journey.

In other words, consumer value journeys are complex and often unplanned including touchpoints with several providers, services, communities and people even at the same time. This reflects that consumers are actively constructing their journeys by using, sometimes misusing, choosing and refusing services. Service design can shape the journeys, but activities and relations beyond the scope of service provider can have a major impact. From provider-centric perspective there may be a certain ‘moment of truth’ of experiencing the service in service encounter (e.g. Lewis; Mitchell, 1990), but from consumer perspective ‘the moment’ extends over a prominent period of time and with variety of actors like other providers (Johns, 1999, 966–967).

Further, our findings support that the concept of service touchpoint referring to dyadic interaction between consumer and service provider (Patrício et al., 2011) should be reconsidered. According to our findings, touchpoints in the context of pet-related consumption represent rather a tripartite relationship between pet owner/consumer, pet and service provider. The pet has a role as an active co-consumer (also Vänskä, 2014): it participates in the negotiations and experiences on consumer value. In our study, three active positions of the pet are recognized: pet as a value creator, pet as a mediator of value and pet as an experiencer of value. The pet is a co-creator of consumer value, though it may not be included in the service design or concept. The tripartite relationship in service touchpoints show that service interaction and value experience is as much about the actors (including other people and animal companions) who are not taking part to the immediate interaction as those that are.

Even though our findings are context-specific (Moisander; Valtonen, 2012) they give a reason to consider also other contexts than pet-related consumption to hold tripartite relations. For instance, tripartite relationship has analogies to



consumption for elderly or children, as they can also be seen as vulnerable co-consumers (Rötzmeier-Keuper; Wunderlich, 2014). Similarities can also be found from car-related consumption: also cars need to be fed, cleaned and taken care of, but they can also be loved (Huefner; Hunt, 1994). Cars are sometimes described as ‘reliable, and a good partner’. Our study and these few samples from different contexts point out that consumer-centric ways of exploring consumer value are needed as they may considerably differ from procedural approaches like ‘blueprint’ or ‘service script’. In everyday life, consumers do not meet a consistent chain of service stages along the time axis in isolation but the journey appears as a layered, sometimes scattered set of touchpoints experienced inseparably.

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**Authors:**

Jaakko Autio, doctoral student  
University of Helsinki  
Department of Economics and Management  
P.O. Box 27, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland  
[jaakko.a.autio@helsinki.fi](mailto:jaakko.a.autio@helsinki.fi)

Ari Kuismin, doctoral student  
University of Helsinki  
Department of Economics and Management  
P.O. Box 27, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland  
[ari.kuismin@helsinki.fi](mailto:ari.kuismin@helsinki.fi)

Minna Autio, senior lecturer  
University of Helsinki  
Department of Economics and Management  
P.O. Box 27, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland  
[minna.autio@helsinki.fi](mailto:minna.autio@helsinki.fi)

Henna Syrjälä, assistant professor  
University of Helsinki, University of Vaasa  
Department of Economics and Management, Department of Marketing  
P.O. Box 700, University of Vaasa, Finland  
[henna.syrjala@uva.fi](mailto:henna.syrjala@uva.fi)

Eliisa Kylkilähti, doctoral student  
University of Helsinki  
Department of Economics and Management  
P.O. Box 27, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland  
[eliisa.kylkilahti@helsinki.fi](mailto:eliisa.kylkilahti@helsinki.fi)