

Proceeding Paper

The Mediating Role of Perceived Constraints between Human–Pet Relationships and Willingness to Travel with Pets: A Theoretical Framework [†]

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Abstract: Many modern families involve pets in most of their daily social activities. Yet, many of them do not involve pets when undertaking tourism activities. Drawing upon theories of planned behaviour and leisure constraint models, this study intends to examine how perceptions of their relationship with pets and perceived constraints may influence the willingness of owners to travel with pets. Focusing on reviewing multidisciplinary literature on human–pet relationship-oriented leisure trip activities with a method of theoretical analysis, this paper proposed an integrated theoretical framework based on recognized and synthesized patterns and similarities within the literature.

Keywords: theory of planned behaviour; leisure constraint model; human–pet relationship; perceived constraints; willingness to travel with pets



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1. Introduction

The role of pets in modern families is undergoing growing changes [1,2]. Pets are playing an ever more significant role in the lives of humans as close companions that breaks the traditional view of human–animal relations [1]. The phenomenon has undoubtedly been accentuated by the growth of the middle class, aging populations and shifting attitudes toward human–pet bonding. In modern families, pet owners involved pets in most of their social activities [3]. Indeed, many of them view their pets as “animal-companions with needs, wants, and rights comparable to those of other family members” [4] (p. 549). An owner’s intention to have their furry family members as companions during holidays is high, although the actualization of the dream is rather low [5].

Many studies have been conducted to investigate pet owners’ travel intentions with their pet and constraints they have encountered over the last decade [5]. Nevertheless, little has been achieved in terms of investigating human–pet relationships and the pet owner’s travel intentions with their pet [6]. This study aims to address the research gap by providing an integrated framework that examines the mediating role of perceived constraints between human–pet relationships and willingness to travel with pets. A clear theoretical research framework can uncover potential research avenues to bring pet owners’ perspectives and experiences to the core of human–pet relationship research.

2. Literature Review

This section discusses the relevant literature of the study. It starts with a discussion on the underlying literature on human–pet relationships, follow with an overview of previous studies on perceived pet-related tourism constraints. Then, it examines the willingness of owners to travel with pets. Finally, the section concludes with elaborations about how a theory of planned behaviour and a leisure constraint model support the proposed theoretical framework.

2.1. Human–Pet Relationship

Pet ownership is common in this modern living era, which is evidently seen with tremendous increments in pet ownership around the world. Since the 1990s, the term “pet” has gradually replaced the term “companion animal”, acknowledging its value derived from the relationship instead of emphasizing their practical or economic benefits [2]. Pets do not merely provide companionship; the unconditional love and support given to their owners were perceived as sources of emotional support that fulfil both physical and mental health benefits [1].

The important function of pets [7] has explained why pet ownership is welcomed despite the costs. Previous studies have shown that pets are conceptualized as social facilitators that help people in establishing friendships, and they are well known for reducing the chronic stress of loneliness, anxiety and depression in both children and adults [7]. Furthermore, it is also observed that the intensity of pet owners’ grief after their pets died is very similar to their grief for the death of a close human [8], suggesting the human–pet relationship is an authentic and meaningful emotional bond. In this study, the human–pet relationship refers to “accompanying and associating with one’s pet and the relationship between the owner and the pet that results from such interaction” [9].

Human–pet relationships have been studied in various fields of knowledge since decades ago, where pets are recognized as family members [10]. Pets served as a secure base which led their owners to pursuing activities [7], risk taking [11] and exploring the world confidently [12]. In addition, pets are safe havens where they readily offer their owners with love, support, relief, and comfort whenever they are needed [12]. Indeed, pet owners feel close to their pets. They enjoy this closeness [1].

Many pet owners consider travelling with their pets, yet in reality not many of them involve pets when undertaking tourism activities [5]. Many studies have been conducted to understand the phenomena [6,13,14]. Ref. [13] have shown that the human–pet relationship will have impact on an owner’s intention to travel with a pet. Those traveling with their pets are more likely to see pets as members of the family [5]. Thus, we proposed:

Hypothesis 1. *Human–pet relationships will have a positive impact on willingness to travel with a pet.*

2.2. Perceived Pet-Related Tourism Constraints

The idea of taking pets along on leisure activities was first studied by Greenebaum [15] after observing the increasing degree of attachment pet owners had towards their pets. Greenebaum [15] investigated pet owners’ behaviours and the decision processes that they considered when taking their pets along to participate in leisure activities tailored for pets. The study suggested a few elements that pet owners should evaluate before making decisions, including a pet’s preferences and its abilities, as well as the venue environment and other participants’ characteristics [15]. Miller and Howell [16] further studied the reaction of other participants when they see pets participating in leisure activities where the participant’s resentments are the primary focus of the study. These resentments could be due to a previous undesirable experience, such as being chased or bitten by pets, and irresponsible owners who failed in cleaning up their pet’s waste [16]. However, the sample sizes of these two studies were small and the activities rather routine, despite lacking general applicability, and yet they provided useful insight for further research.

As per guidance, it is essential for owners to contemplate pet-related tourism constraints, such as their pet’s physical abilities, the influences of their pets that might impact on other people as well as the extra time and expenses involved [17]. Apart from the mentioned aspects, both owners and pets should undertake some training activities prior to participating in tourism activities, to shape the owner’s leisure participation behaviour [18]. Both studies had narrowed the gaps in tourism literature significantly.

In this study, perceived pet constraints refer to “factors that inhibit pet owners from including their pets in tourism activities and the obstacles that owners encounter when

they decide to include their pets" [19]. Chen et al. [19] recognized pet constraints as reasons that deter a pet owner's decisions on whether to include their pets in tourism activities; these pet constraints are then categorized into three categories: a pet's specific constraints, a pet's interpersonal constraints, and a pet's structural constraints, by altering Crawford and Godbey's [20] typology. This study also revealed that pet owners are likely to be demotivated to include pets in tourism activities if they perceive that they cannot overcome the constraints. Chen et al. [19] also proposed in their study that perceived constraints have discouraged and negatively influenced owners' intentions to travel with a pet. Prior studies have revealed that the roles of perceived constraints have an influence on pet owners' travel intentions and have been well documented in the literature on human–pet interaction [5,21]. In conclusion, pet constraints will have an impact on an owner's intentions to travel with a pet. Thus, we proposed:

Hypothesis 2. *Human–pet relationships will have a positive impact on perceived pet-related tourism constraints.*

Hypothesis 3. *Perceived pet-related tourism constraints will have a negative impact on an owner's intention to travel with a pet.*

2.3. Theory of Planned Behaviour

Most human behaviour is performed under one's own control, with rational and intention [22]. The propensity to behave sensibly is described as behavioural intention. Ajzen [22] has explained this phenomenon via the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) model. He further pointed out that behavioural intention is determined by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control [22].

Attitude refers to the psychological emotion and the positive or negative assessment that an individual conducted when engaging in certain behaviours [23], as illustrated in the TPB model. In other words, his/her behavioural intention will be more positive when he/she has a more positive attitude, and vice versa. On the other hand, subjective norms refer to the degree of social pressure felt about their behaviour, and the perceived opinions of those who are deemed important to an individual, capable of influencing his/her decision making [22]. There is a positive relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention [24], indicating that the more positive subjective norms other people perceived, their stronger their behavioural intention. Meanwhile, Ajzen (1991) defined perceived behavioural control as the perception of the possible difficulties that arise from various factors beyond one's control, such as time, money, chance, etc., that an individual has while performing a specific behaviour. Therefore, it could be understood as the likelihood of an individual in performing a specific behaviour is higher when he/she has more control over the opportunities and resources. In summary, all these three factors are illustrated in the TPB model in predicting an individual's behavioural intentions [22].

Peng et al. (2014) [24] applied the theory of planned behaviour and acknowledged that a pet owner's attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control impacted their intentions in including pets in leisure travel. The applicable theory of planned behaviour in this model is further supported by Moghimehfar et al. [25]. Moghimehfar et al. [25] have included perceived constraints in the theory of planned behaviour, and revealed that perceived constraints have an effect on intention

2.4. Leisure Constraint Model

Leisure constraints act as barriers to participation in leisure activities, which leads to non-participation whenever constraints are encountered [26]. Therefore, a holistic view of constraints in participating in leisure activities is required within the growing travel and tourism industries and the increasing number of research studies upon this topic of interest is evidently seen. It began with the leisure constraints model developed by Crawford and Godbey [20] and further elaborated by Crawford et al. [27], which

explains the underlying constraints inhibiting an individual’s desire for participation by categorising three dimensions: intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints, and structural constraints.

Crawford and Godbey [20] described how intrapersonal constraints arise when a participating decision is purely affected by individual psychological states that influenced preference, leading to non-participation; this could be due to anxiety, religiosity, stress, and perhaps lack of interest. The fact that intrapersonal constraints are derived from psychological state, they are considered relatively unstable and may alter within a short time frame [28].

In contrast to intrapersonal constraints, interpersonal constraints interact with both preferences and participation, and they occur due to the unavailability of other people (friend, family member, or partner), preventing an individual from participating when a strong preference for a at least one co-participant is required in the activities of interest [20]. Interpersonal constraints are probably due to change across different life stages, which are highly dependent on marital status, family size, and types of activities [28].

Lastly, structural constraints are the prevailing factors between leisure preference and participation [20]. Lack of budget, time, and opportunity, or even bad weather could be contributors to structural constraints [28]. Apart from describing the dimensions embedded in leisure constraints, the leisure constraints model also suggested that they are hierarchical in nature, therefore intrapersonal constraints must be negotiated first, followed by interpersonal constraints and structural constraints [27].

As guided by the hierarchical model of leisure constraints established by Crawford, Jackson and Godbey [27], detailing intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints, a pet-related tourism constraints model was proposed by Chen et al. [19], where the constraints were modified for the following three categories: a pet’s specific constraints, a pet’s interpersonal constraints and a pet’s structural constraints. These modifications were necessary because the role of pets is to be included in examining the possible constraints, rather than focusing solely on pet owners. Therefore, a pet’s specific constraints refer to a pet’s abilities; a pet’s interpersonal constraints describe other participants’ perceptions and reactions towards pets, and lastly a pet’s structural constraints indicate the extra resources required to travel with pets. Thus, we proposed:

Hypothesis 4. *Perceived constraints mediating the human–pet relationship and willingness to travel with pet.*

3. Theoretical Framework

The preceding discussion reveals a theoretical framework with hypotheses capturing the formation of pet owners’ intentions to travel with pets (Figure 1). This framework is an extension of the theory of planned behaviour model and leisure constraint model, wherein the human–pet relationship and perceived pet-related tourism constraints are incorporated to capture how these two factors can impact pet owner willingness to travel with pets. Previous studies have shown that the theory of planned behaviour model [17] is a suitable model to examine the intention to travel with pets. Authors have used the theory of planned behaviour model and leisure constraint model in this study.

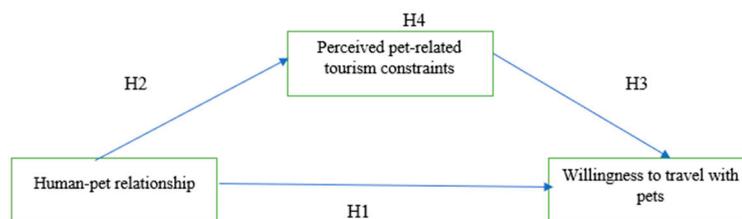


Figure 1. Theoretical framework with hypotheses.

4. Discussion

Figure 1 introduced a theoretical framework with hypotheses for modelling travelling with pets based on existing literature. It has emphasized the need to consider human–pet relationships when trying to understand pet–owner intentions to travel with pets. It is proposed that the relationship among these key variables can be understood in terms of the theory of planned behaviour model and leisure constraint model. In this study, the human–pet relationship is an emotional mechanism that facilitates pet-oriented leisure trip activities.

Scholars can empirically test the proposed framework by either using a quantitative research methodology approach, such as a questionnaire survey, or qualitative methods. They can also use mixed methods to compare the findings and provided useful insights for further research.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, we have systematically reviewed and theoretically analysed the construct of the human–pet relationship, perceived pet-related tourism constraints, and willingness to travel with pets. We have drawn on different theoretical perspectives to develop an integrative conceptual framework to understand human–pet relationship-oriented leisure trip activities. A theoretical framework has been developed to describe the key components and relationships. We hope that our review provides a clear framework for future research on human–pet relationship-oriented leisure trip activities and will spur further scholarly investigation into these three constructs.

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