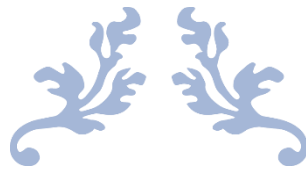


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Bachelor Thesis, 2020-2021, second semester

Liberal Arts and Sciences: Social Sciences

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# THE OWNER AND THE TOYS: CONSEQUENCES OF BUYING DOG TOYS

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## The Owner

In this day and age consumerism is a big part of the modern individual. Consumers show preferences and liking of products and brands which they associate with the categories they identify themselves with (Reed et al, 2012). For instance, if a consumer views themselves as a dog owner, it is safe to assume that they would behave in a way consistent with what being a dog owner means. Such individuals are likely to purchase dog-related products and services, in obvious contrast with people who do not identify as dog owners. Additionally, consumers prefer purchases which affirm their self of identity (Schau, 2000), for instance premium foods (providing good quality meals means owners provide good care), expensive beds (relating to providing comfort), or something else which can be considered extra, hence relating to enhancing their dog's life beyond its basic needs.

Taking into account research indicating that more time spent doing something contributes to the formation of personal identity (Reed et al., 2012), e.g., the more a person plays with their dog, the more they feel like a dog owner, toy purchasing and the following implementation of toys in one's daily life can potentially reinforce one's identification as a dog owner. What's more, in the light of perception of a dog as a child-like family member (Ridgway et al, 2008), toy purchasing can potentially influence the caregiver dimension of being a dog owner. Individuals are proven to result in item purchasing in order to demonstrate care for their child or a family member (Pugh, 2005). This phenomenon can be transferred to being a caregiver of a pet. This research attempts to bring more light into whether toy purchasing directly influences the experience of being a pet caregiver. Additionally, seeing an improvement in how a dog perceives its owner after having played with a toy, in the general well-being of a dog, and in the dog-owner interactions, can suggest that toy purchasing influences the emotional state of an owner. Similarly, if a dog does not show interest in playing with a toy, it can negatively affect the owner who spent money on the toy, hence lead to dissatisfaction, bitterness, or else, which by itself might harm the relationship from the owner's side.

## The Dog

This thesis focuses on dogs as a pet which is related to higher spending in contrast with other pets (Ridgway et al, 2007). Dogs are generally very interactive and require attention from their owners on a daily basis, with products present in most instances: dogs need to be walked every day with leads and collars; they are very playful most commonly with balls or ropes; they also play games and tricks which include giving them treats like dried food, dog bones, etc. More so, dogs are one of the most common pets (alongside cats and guinea pigs) with the number of households including them increasing (Kay et al., 2017), meaning the number of people identifying as dog owners increases, hence becoming a larger portion of the general population. This research focuses on exactly this group and its consumer behaviors with relation to dogs.

## The Purchases

On the one hand, there are the costs regarding the basic needs of a dog, such as shelter, food, veterinary care, leads, etc. Every responsible dog owner ought to provide them for their pet. On the other hand, there are also non-essential costs commonly done by owners. For example, grooming, premium food, and accessories. It is important to set a clear distinction between the two because in many cases they can overlap. One example is food:

for some dogs cheap dried kibble can be put in the category as a necessary purchase as long as the dog is fed and not starving and premium food can be put in the category of non-essential purchases, however some dogs might have specific nutritional needs depending on their individual biology or medical conditions in which cases it is essential to their lives to get food of higher price and quality (Simpson et al., 1993). Another example is grooming: some short-haired dogs might never in their lives have a need for a groomer, a shower at home is enough and a shower at a groomer is more of a luxury, however long-haired coats, causing big discomfort to dogs, might be an impossible challenge for owners to handle, hence it becoming necessary to visit a dog groomer. Whether a purchase is essential or not depends highly on the essential needs of the individual dog. This research considers essential purchases as those which are necessary for keeping a dog alive and healthy, and non-essential as those which are done with the intention of improving a dog's life beyond that.

## Enrichment

The concept of enrichment can also enhance the experience of being a caregiver to one's dog. The idea of enrichment is to provide good experiences for the dog and by doing so enhancing their general well-being (Bender et al., 2019). Buying toys is one of the ways this can be done. For instance, the benefits of buying a food puzzle can be that the dog's feeding is slowed down, which is healthier, moreover, the dog is mentally stimulated, its confidence is boosted, it uses its scent, which is an enjoyable behavior, it gets some energy out, and it is calmer afterwards. All those benefits the owner provides by buying a toy. There is a significant variety in enrichment toys available for purchasing, each one claiming to be good for one's dog. The reason behind buying them might be getting something nice for the dog, however seeing the positive consequences might affirm the feeling of having taken care of the dog.

## Reasons behind dog toy purchasing

Enrichment for dogs, which can be considered on-essential but rather an enhancer of a dog's life, is also nudged by pet in-store marketing (Chandon et al., 2009) and producers' marketing (Paul et al., 2012). Evidently, pet stores are fashioned for humans and the placement of items is done in a way to ease owners into choosing them for instance by placing them in an area where customers are prone to look at first. The design of the toys is also a contributing factor for people choosing them. This is made evident by the wide range of colors whilst dogs can see only yellow and blue, meaning the goal is to make them more appealing to the owner who purchases them. The growth of the market for pet toys over the past few decades has led to stores and producers implementing their own ways of influencing consumers into purchasing their stock (Chen et al., 2012). This can be seen as an external influence on buying. An internal influence can be considered to be the one coming from the owners themselves.

Common driving forces for non-essential dog item purchasing are attachment (feeling close to the dog and wanting to make him/her a gift), desire for interaction (items to play with and interact) and treating the dog as a family member (purchasing toys as one would for a child) (Chen et al., 2012, Jyrinki, 2011). However, there is little emphasis in research on how these purchases might alter the experience of being a pet owner, in other words, what are consequences on the owner *after* the purchase. A purchase driven by the desire to bring happiness to one's dog and resulting in success is likely to lead to the owner's satisfaction in themselves as a caregiver. More so, the desire for interaction can lead to buying interaction toys, which, depending on whether the dog engages in them, might strengthen the dog-owner relationship. Clearly, the purchases have expectations that come with them, in other words, the item-related experience does not end with its purchase.

## The dog's response

Notably, the consequences of a purchase can potentially be influenced by the dog's response. The dog engages in play with the new toy and the dog completely ignoring a toy that costs the owner money, are two different responses that might leave the owner feeling differently. Investment in dog toys without getting anything from the dog's side can be frustrating. Additionally, the owner spends money on a toy that the dog destroys within minutes, leaving the owner feeling in a negative way (disappointment, anger, etc.). On the other hand, if the dog seems to really enjoy a certain toy, it only confirms the owner's expectations when they have brought it and leading to content. Furthermore, if a dog is not usually interested in toys, the owner might not purchase any at all. Thus, it would be unwise to not consider the dog's response to toys while doing this research since it might result in a significant factor on how toy purchasing influences the experience of being a dog owner.

## Problem statement

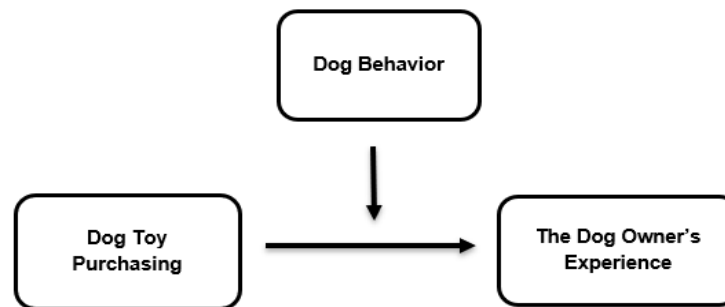
Essential pet related costs are applicable for every pet owner, however, with the increasing market for non-essential pet services and items, there has been an increase in owners' consumption (Chen et al., 2012). More so, nowadays more and more people add pets to their domestic spaces (Kay et al., 2017), which indicates a growing population of pet owners. Whereas there has been research on the causes behind pet-related purchasing (Chen et al., 2012, Hung et al., 2011, Park et al., 2019), there is no deep insight into the consequences of such purchases. One obvious assumption is that buying interactive toys will lead to increased dog-owner interaction time. However, if the dog does not show interest in a toy, there will be no new interactions and potentially harm the relationship because the owner spent money on something the dog does not appreciate, it can create frustration towards the dog, or it could result in dog toys piling in the household without anyone using them but at the same time satisfying the owner's desire to spend on their pet. Naturally, the dog's response is important to consider while focusing on the owner's experience.

Buying toys for one's dog can be self-rewarding - the owner can feel like a good caregiver providing the dog with good toys and it can improve their emotional state (e.g. content, satisfaction, joy). Moreover, buying toys can be a significant event in creating or enhancing the identification of being a dog owner: the response can be "I buy dog toys because I am a dog owner", which could possibly transfer into "the more dog toys I buy, the more I feel like a dog owner." Additionally, buying toys might strengthen or weaken the dog-owner relationship but that is only an assumption not supported by research. Naturally, the consequences of introducing new toys are aimed at enhancing the dog's life, however these toys are produced and sold to the *owner*. How the owner experiences the consequences of purchasing dog toys is the focus of this thesis.

Dog owners are the most likely group of pet owners to purchase toys for their pet (Jyrinki, 2012). Whereas there has been research done on the reasons behind such type of consumerist behavior (Jyrinki, 2012, Ridgway et al, 2007, Chen et al, 2012), there is not enough insight into how toy purchases influence specifically the *dog owner's* experience subsequent to the purchase. This research aims to bring more insight into the dimensions influenced by such purchases. This research will look into the phenomena of dog toys and the dog owner experience in order to examine the relationship between the two. Additionally, since the dog's response to a certain toy could influence the relationship, this research will look at the dog behavior towards toys and whether it is a significant positive or negative moderator.

Therefore, the problem statement of this thesis is: **Does dog toy purchasing influence the dog owner's experience, and does dog behavior influence the relationship?**

## Model



## Research questions

The main research question of this study is **“How does dog toy purchasing influence different dimensions of the dog owner’s experience?”** The sub-questions of the research are phrased as following:

RQ1: What defines dog toy purchasing?

RQ2: What defines the dog owner’s experience?

RQ3: Does dog toy purchasing influence the dog owner’s experience and in what way?’

RQ4: What defines dog behavior with regard to dog toys?

RQ5: Does dog behavior have an influence on the relationship between dog toy purchasing and the dog owner’s experience?

## Relevance

Researching the consequences of toy purchasing for dog owners will bring insight into this significant group of the general population. The group of dog owners increases and so does the market for dog-related items and services. It can bring light into new consumerist aspects of the effects owning a dog has on individuals. Linking consumerist behavior, which is a significant part of the current consumerist society, to the dog owning experience, which is something more and more people take part in, can be beneficial for understanding purchasing behaviors for non-human companions, specifically dogs but not limited to them, and it can give a starting point for further research within these topics.

Knowing the consequences of buying toys, one can gain useful knowledge into how to advertise them. This is not applicable only for stores and producers but also for dog experts (e.g. veterinarians, trainers, etc.) which advise buying enrichment toys. More so, there might be societal implications, for instance whether buying toys harms the dog-owner relationship making it more likely for owners to give up their pet to shelters or leaving them on the streets. In conclusion, this thesis considers the topic worthy for research and able to provide significant insights that relate to the society.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

It is uncontroversial to say dog owners will buy dog items, such as kibble, leads, and toys. Not only does the population of pet owners grow, but so does the market for pet-related products (Patronek et al., 1995). Advertisements, availability and exposure constantly remind owners that they can improve their pet's life by buying more toys, they can enhance the dog-owner experience by playing together using different products or services, more so the life of the owner could improve by getting better quality, for example, leash which will last a long time, instead of buying cheaper ones every once in a while. Additionally, there are a lot of unwritten rules and expectations shaped by society and dog trainers that dogs *should* have a bed or crate, dogs *should* have chewing bones, dogs *should* go on long walks, and dogs *should* have toys. It is logical to assume that an individual exposed to all the information about pet products and services in different aspects of their life (friend groups, television, stores, etc.) could think "I *should* buy toys for my dog."

## Dog Toy Purchasing

The market of pet services has significantly increased over the past decades (Chen et al., 2012). Hence, the production and advertisements of dog toys has increased and is reaching more and more dog owners. Dog toys purchasing can be nudged by product design (Roozenburg et al., 1995)), in-store marketing (Chandon et al., 2009), and/or advertisements and communities saying buying toys demonstrates care for the dog. Since it is owners who purchase the toys, it is natural that these consumer-targeted strategies apply. One instance is the wide range of colors, shapes and designs of toys for which the dog wouldn't care but the owner would enjoy. Let's take a more specific example that demonstrates this: An avocado toy is usually in green and brown colors both of which the dog does not see, its shape is as of any other stuffed toy the dog might have and it is safe to assume that the design of an avocado, which is a fruit the dog might not be familiar with at all, is made for the owner.

There are many reasons behind why an owner would purchase toys for their dog (Beverland et al., 2008). Some owners might see it as a necessary cost (the belief that a dog needs to have toys) and others can see it as a luxury cost that can improve the well-being of the dog by providing a good experience (e.g., releasing energy, enriching the dog's life, keeping it occupied, dog-owner interaction, etc.). Dog toy purchasing can be seen as an act of caregiving, investment in the dog-owner relationship and a source of joyful interactions with one's dog.

Purchasing dog toys is something almost all if not all dog owners would do. Dogs are a very interactive pet and playing with toys is a common way of engaging in an interaction with them. Most common examples are playing fetch with tennis balls, tugging a toy or playing tricks with treats. Since there is a very high probability of dog owners purchasing dog toys, this research finds it interesting to investigate how doing so influences their experience of being a dog owner.

## The Dog Owner's Experience

### The dog owner as a caregiver

Dog owners ought to take care of their pets. This might include meeting the dog's essential needs, like food, water, shelter, etc. However, it is becoming more and more popular to bring attention to the non-essential needs of a dog, whether that is that a dog needs to go on long walks, be fed with premium food, or have toys to play with. Dogs especially are a playful pet much so that, according to some research, owners see them as child-like part of the family or the household (Ridgway et al., 2007). Owners tend to see themselves as more than just an owner



taking care of a dog but as a parent figure (Greenebaum, 2004). If we look at the dog-owner relationship as similar to child-parent relationships, then we can assume that some of the experience as a parent overlaps with the experience of being a dog owner. For instance, Pugh (2005) suggests mothers buy toys as a substitute for giving care. We can translate this to dog owners by saying they make up for not having time or energy to spend time with their dog by buying them toys to occupy the dog or to provide a reason for dog-owner interaction. On the other hand, one might consider buying toys as proof of thinking and caring for the pet so much so that they go out of their way to buy them something nice. In other words, buying toys might enhance the caregiver part of being a dog owner.

## The dog owner as a consumer

When talking about dog owners as consumers, it is important to note that consumption values might have an influence on their purchase-related decisions. (Chen et al., 2012). Firstly, there is the value of the functionality of the product: will the dog enjoy it, will it enhance its life, will it enhance the dog-owner relationship. Secondly, emotional value might be linked to the product: does the owner feel better about themselves for buying it, does the owner feel closer to the dog because of having played with a newly bought toy, etc. Finally, the value of product quality: will the toy last, is it good enough to engage the dog long-term, is it safe for the dog, etc. On the other hand, dog owners have numerous reasons for buying toys for their dogs (Beverland et al., 2008). They might feel as if buying toys is a replacement for giving care, a new toy could enhance the dog-owner relationship, a new toy could better the dog's life by presenting a joyous play, or simply the owner might think they ought to buy toys because they are "a dog owner" and that is what dog owners do. Therefore, there is a link to be explored between how an individual experience being a dog owner with regard to buying dog toys. This material side of dog owning can be caused by many things both deprived from the owner as an individual and the market. Identity is proven to be a driving force for behaviors that are linked to how one sees oneself (Reed et al, 2012). Hence, it is logical to assume that dog owners are likely to have consumer behaviors consistent with their identity as dog owners.

Most dog toys are sold in pet stores and sometimes in veterinary offices, as well as online. Their placement in the store and their appearance are shaped to influence the owner into wanting to buy them. Naturally, dogs cannot enter stores and choose items to purchase, but also, they see only two colors (yellow and blue), hence feeling indifferent to all the color variations presented in stores. It is the owner assessing, choosing and purchasing dog toys, hence it is logical that the toy's appearance is targeted towards the owner. The dog would not care for the fact its chewing toy is in the shape of an avocado, however the owner might find it charming seeing the dog play with a fake avocado. With relation to dog toys, store and producers' use strategies to nudge consumer behavior similar to other types of stores and products (Fam et al., 2011). The closest similar example could be parents choosing toys for their newborns - again, the child might not understand it plays with a toy avocado, but the parent could enjoy it. An item can become more desired by making it in bright colors, adding interesting details, creating diverse shapes, making it new and different and selling it as innovative (Boothroyd, 1994).

### *Enrichment and the Dog Owner*

The increasing popularity of "enrichment" can be a nudging force behind owners' into toy purchasing behaviors. The concept of enrichment refers to providing more diverse and mentally stimulating activities in dogs' lives to make them happier and increase their well-being (Barcelos et al., 2020, Collins et al, 2006, Grajfoner et al., 2017). It can also be referred to as providing activities aimed at specific dog behaviors which are not likely to be undertaken in a household environment: for example, hiding treats in a snuffle mat or in various places within the household for the dog to "hunt" using its sense of smell. Whereas there are many low to no cost alternatives, there are many enrichment items and experiences that cost a considerable amount of money. One example are

food toys, such as kongs, snuffle mats, lick mats, food dispensers, stuffed bones, food puzzles, treat balls and more. Purchasing those instead of making an alternative at home is an easy solution that does not require much effort from the owner. This fits with the consumer value of convenience over cost (Feichtinger et al., 1988).

Another convenient enrichment example are the toys that leave the dog occupied by itself for a certain amount of time. These could be stuffed toys, squeaky balls, toys made for destroying, chewing toys, toys attached to walls, etc (with some overlapping with food toys). More commonly these are used to separate the dog from the owner when the owner has something to do or is not up for interaction. However, these toys can also have a positive influence on dogs which haven't learned to spend time by themselves, hence exhibiting negative separation behaviors when their owner is away. One last example of enrichment items are interaction toys. Those are usually intended to be shared with both the dog and the owner. Some such toys are tug toys, balls, frisbees, etc. These toys potentially provide fun game time for both dog and owner, however there are instances where the dog wants to play with a toy at inappropriate times, thereby annoying its owner.

Another common way of enrichment that shouldn't be ignored are enrichment activities. These might include walks in a park, dog training classes, dog daycare, dog dates, etc., and they don't necessarily include interaction with the owner. Again, those activities have cheap to no cost alternatives, however, as mentioned, individuals commonly prefer convenience over price consequently going for more expensive alternatives. For instance, there are many dog training videos online, however one might go to a dog trainer to spare themselves the effort (note this is not training for specific problems or learning needed behaviors which can be assigned to the necessary category of dog related costs), or instead of going on a long walk, one might drive by car to a dog-friendly park and let the dog walk or run by itself. Those activities have a potential impact on the dog owning experience, whether that is by strengthening the dog-owner relationship via the shared experience, or by yet again fulfilling the role of a caregiver via giving the dog a good experience, or else. However, it is important to note these can be caused by numerous factors some of which out of the owner's control (e.g., lack of appropriate walking area nearby creating the need for a car ride). Moreover, it could be difficult to group enrichment activities into necessary and unnecessary purchases (unlike item purchasing) due to the high influence of context (e.g., immediate surroundings), therefore this research focuses only on *toy purchasing*, acknowledging that cost related *activities* are a broad and various topic.

## The owner's relationship with the dog

The relationship between a dog and the owner consists of their interactions and co-living together. Whether that relationship is strong depends on whether these experiences are positive. More specifically, if the owner and the dog spend enjoyable time together, then it is likely their relationship will be strong. Opposingly, if the dog and the owner have many conflicts in their day-to-day interactions, the relationship can be negative and/or very weak.

Many things can have an influence on the dog-owner relationship (among which are toys). One of those things is the communication between the two – if it is a source of frustration and misunderstanding, it is natural to assume the relationship will be harmed; however, if the communication is clear and positive, the relationship can result in being strong. Another influencing factor is the time spent together and how it is spent. For instance, if the owner makes possible to play every day with their dog or make walks a pleasant and fun experience, the relationship will naturally be good. On the opposite side, if the owner does not have the time and will to interact with their dog, they can get annoyed with the need of the dog to play. Notably, what is considered “bad habits” can also strengthen the relationship. One such habit is giving food from the table to the dog. This is seen as a positive interaction from the dog's side and usually as a sign of care from the owner. Another factor can be the owner's approach towards the dog. Praise, rewards and sweet talk can bring the two closed together, while punishments and sharp language as a form of discipline can bring them apart.

Toy purchasing can also be seen as the owner's investment in the relationship. Spending money on interactive toys typically comes with the expectation of interaction with the dog. The end result of the purchase is usually a shared joyous play time which brings dog and owner closer to one another. However, in this context, toy purchasing can also harm the relationship. The owner invests money and time to buy a toy to which the dog might show little to no interest, leaving the owner feeling disappointed, bitter, or perhaps angry. The owner might feel that their effort to bring something to the relationship with their dog is unsuccessful or unappreciated which, naturally, leads to a negative experience.

Finally, interactive toys but also toys in general can be seen as tools for communication between the dog and the owner. The owner might communicate their care and affection by buying new toys for the dog or by introducing a new toy both of them can play with. Communication is a significant part of a relationship; hence it is uncontroversial to assume the dog owner would invest in it.

## The owner's emotional state

Owning a pet takes a significant part of the daily life of the individual. Similar to how co-living with different individuals can have an effect on how person feels, it is safe to assume co-living with a dog would do the same. For example, if a person lives with an irritable and messy roommate, they would feel frustrated due to conflicts that might occur in the household. Similarly, if a dog owner has a dog which destroys their furniture, barks a lot, engages in rough play, etc., they would feel frustrated anytime the dog does one of those behaviors. More so, if the dog's needs (such as walks, play, need of attention) are an annoying yet necessary task, the owner would experience those daily tasks in a negative way.

Opposite to feeling negatively, the owner might find joy and satisfaction from having a dog. Experiences such as cuddles, play, a warm welcome back home from the dog, can all be contributing to the emotional state of the owner. Nonetheless, the question whether purchasing toys specifically influences the emotional state of the owner remains.

As beforementioned, doing a successful purchase can create a feeling of satisfaction. Seeing positive results from having bought a dog toy can lead to a positive emotional state. More so, a dog toy can create a joyous interaction between the dog and the owner. Seeing a dog enjoy a new toy can create a feeling of content with oneself because they provided something good for their dog. On the other hand, not achieving the expectations that come with buying a toy (like the dog playing with it), can be disappointing. Disappointment often appears in consumers when they purchase a product that does not fulfill its function (Feichtinger et al., 1988). With dog toys, the fault is likely not in the producer but placed either on the dog for not engaging with it or destroying it, or on the owner for not buying something the dog would show interest in. In such cases the emotional state of the owner can go further than only disappointment and go into bitterness, anger, frustration, or simply indifference as a consequence of accepting things as they are.

## The Relationship between Dog Toy Purchasing and The Dog Owner's Experience

This research asks the question whether purchasing dog toys can have any effects on how the dog owner experiences being such. As beforementioned, being a dog owner means being a consumer, a caregiver and creating a relationship with the dog. Doing only the necessary for one's dog might mean the owner is having the minimal experience of being a dog owner – if the owner only walks and feeds the dog, then they do not really spend much of their daily time acting as a dog owner. However, if the dog owner invests time and money into

different dog-related activities and items, they consequently spent more time acting like dog owners – they play with their dog, they go on long walks with it, they teach it, etc. One aspect that can influence such experiences is dog toy purchasing.

Purchasing a toy comes with the expectation that either the dog will play with it, or the owner and the dog will both interact with it. The fulfillment of this expectation can potentially confirm and enhance what being a dog owner is for the individual. Namely, having made a successful purchase, having taken care of the non-necessary needs of the dog, and having invested in the dog-owner relationship. These purchases might make it so that the owner creates a tendency to behave in a dog-owner way more and more often since the positive results have shown to be beneficial and pleasant.

On the other hand, toy purchasing can have the opposite effect on owners if the consequences are negative. Expecting play and/or interaction and receiving indifference from the dog can be very disappointing. Other than disappointment, the owner might feel like their effort and investment have been pointless and a waste. More so, if the dog destroys a toy, the owner might feel angry with it similarly because the expectation is not met and the consequence is negative. Relating to that, it is probable that the owner, influenced by different factors, might still go into purchasing toys with the hope that the consequence will be different. Such acts can be justified by trying new type of toy, perhaps non-destroyable, having trained the dog which will not destroy it from now on, or mere hope that this time it would be different. Another reason for buying yet again dog toys is that these purchases could be an equivalent of expressing care and closeness to the dog. Hence, purchasing dog toys can potentially influence the dog owning experience even after one unsuccessful purchase, hence continuing the experience of disappointment.

This research is interested in exactly how dog toy purchasing influences the dog owning experience. Some of the assumptions are that it could lead to being satisfied with being a dog owner, to disappointment, or have different effects depending on what toys are bought. The latter includes knowledge of the dog and the dog's individual personality because it can show different preferences to different toys and hence determine the dog-owner experience with a toy.

## Dog behavior

Dogs have individual preferences towards different activities, behaviors and toys (*Absolute Dogs*). This contradicts the belief that every dog is the same and would react in the same way presented with the same situation. In this respect, it is important to consider dog behavior as an important factor when discussing dog toys.

Dog behavior is mostly determined by the individual dog's past experience (*Absolute Dogs*). For instance, if a dog has had a positive experience with an interactive toy, it is of high probability that the dog would engage with a new interactive toy when presented with it. On the other hand, if the dog has never shown interest in toys, it is safe to assume it will not when presented with a new one. However, dog behavior is not as easily determined when the dog is put in an ambiguous situation (*Absolute Dogs*), e.g., if the dog has never seen a toy and then presented with one. Dogs in such situations may choose a random behavior with the expectation of receiving a rewarding rather than a negative experience, that is, to avoid a negative interaction with the foreign object (or toy). In these situations, the owner might influence the dog's choice of behavior by communicating to it what the object is (a toy) and what it can be used for. Here the quality of the dog-owner communication can play a significant role. Good and clear communication might lead to play with a new type of toy whereas a bad communication might lead to frustration due to the misunderstanding and ambiguity of what the owner wants from the dog. Another factor for the consequent dog behavior when presented with a new toy is usually dependent on the dog's individual personality – if a dog is playful, it might show interest in a new toy; if it is a

rather calm dog, it might choose to ignore it; if the dog prefers a certain type of play and is not interested in other types (e.g., interested in playing catch with balls but not interested in tug toys), its behavior depends on what kind of play the toy provides.

Notably, dog behavior should not be taken as a constant variable. Dog owners inevitably will own dogs with different personalities and preferences. Hence, it would be ignorant of this research to not take dog behavior into consideration when examining the dog owner's experience as a consequence of dog toy purchasing.

## Dog behavior as an influencer on the relationship between dog toy purchasing and the owner's experience

As beforementioned, dog behavior is not a constant variable but is rather dependent on the personality and past experience of the individual dog (*Absolute Dogs*). Since the dog toys purchased by the dog owner are meant to be for the dog, its behavior can influence how the dog owner feels about the consequences of such purchases. There are several ways in which dog behavior can influence how the dog owner feels after a dog toy purchase.

Firstly, there is a positive behavior towards a toy. This can be affirming to the reasons behind a dog toy purchase. The owner could have desired to do something nice for their dog and by seeing a positive consequence, the owner feels as a good caregiver by having provided a good experience for the dog. More so, a positive response from the dog makes the purchase a success and justifies the invested money and time it took to do it. A content over a product makes the person feel good about the product itself and with themselves for having chosen a good product (Foxall, 2005)). Furthermore, a positive reaction from the dog can confirm the decision to prefer convenience over price (Feichtinger et al., 1998) because it was worth investing money and receiving a good result which could have been delayed have the owner decided to make a low-cost alternative to a toy but then waited until they had the time, the desire or will to actually make it. Convenience over cost provides a good result with little effort at the expense of an investment, however a good result may justify this preference as a right decision. More so, the quality of the product might be higher which justifies the price. A higher quality toy can also justify being a better caregiver for providing the best there is for one's dog. Additionally, a positive engagement from the dog with an interactive toy can strengthen the dog-owner relationship, since the relationship mainly consists of the interaction between the dog and the owner. In conclusion, a positive reaction from the dog, the owner's emotional state can be influenced, - they can feel content, satisfaction, fulfillment, etc.; more so, the consumer side of being a dog owner is gratified; and finally, the relationship can be strengthened.

Secondly, the dog might show indifference to the toy. This can affect the owner in different ways. For instance, the owner might feel frustrated that his/her investment is not appreciated but rather is a waste. Individuals tend to feel frustrated when an investment in a product does not meet the expectations the person had when buying it (Olshavsky et al., 1972). Dog owners would expect their dog to play with the toy they purchased and a different result would leave them dissatisfied. More so, the indifferent reaction might hurt the dog-owner relationship. The gesture of buying a toy can be unappreciated by the dog. Consequently, the owner might think the dog is not interested in the care they provide via the toys and might even consider the dog as ungrateful. The owner might be left feeling dissatisfied, bitter, angry, frustrated, etc. This is a probable situation a significant amount of dog owners might find themselves in. The market for toys and the society of dog owners can nudge owners to buy more and more toys (Pae et al., 2002), which can easily result in a household full with different balls, tug toys, or else, whilst the dog interacts with 3 or 4 toys. In this situation, it is possible that the owner does not feel negatively, meaning that the nudging could be a reason for the owner to feel they completed their duty as owners to provide the dog with nice toys and there the situation stops. This can also be an indication for a stop of toy purchasing, since the dog has more than enough toys and does not play with all. Additionally, the

owner might feel negatively due to the fact that they did not know their dog enough to know how they would react. This can also be harmful for the relationship because it can cause misunderstanding between dog and owner which is not being resolved.

Lastly, the dog might have a negative reaction to the purchased toy. What defines a negative reaction is depends on the owner. A few possible examples of negative reactions are that the dog destroys a new toy, annoys the owner with it, loses it in the park, etc. It is possible that even indifference from the dog's side falls under the category of negative responses. Negative responses might lead to a negative emotional state of the owner. Again, the feelings might be of unappreciation, frustration, anger, etc. However, it is probable that in these cases the blame would be placed on the dog, since it's the dog who destroyed, lost, etc., the toy. The purchase of the toy becomes harmful for the owner in a way – they invested money for the dog to destroy the toy within minutes; they tried to show care and/or provide an enriching item, only for the dog to engage it negatively; and they had expectations of a positive reaction which they did not get, resulting in disappointment.

To sum up, the dog behavior can inevitably influence the relationship between dog toy purchasing and the owner's experience. Whether that behavior is reacting to the toy in a positive, indifferent or negative way, the consequences could be apparent in the relationship. Hence, this research is considering dog behavior as a significant variable while examining the relationship.

# Chapter 3: Methods

Before measuring the relationship between dog toy purchasing and the dog owner's experience, taking into consideration the dog behavior as a potential influencer on the relationship, this thesis conducted a thorough research on the variables in question. The theoretical framework shaped the concepts to be studied and clarified the measuring methods. The deep understanding of the dog owners population, the phenomenon of toy purchasing and the dog behavior helped in specifying the type of information this research needs to gather in order to answer the research questions.

## Participants

The participants of this research consist of dog owners with one or more dogs in their household. English is the first or second language all participants speak. The group of focus is international online users of social platforms, like Facebook. They will be asked to fill in a questionnaire that would take 5 to 10 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will be distributed through Facebook groups for dog owners with the permission of the groups' administrators. The Facebook groups are either training focused or breed-focused. Additionally, individuals who own dogs and do not participate in these Facebook groups were also sent the questionnaire through email and messaging applications (e.g., WhatsApp, Viber). This research wants participants of all age groups and considers 300 participants as a minimum for some level of generalizability.

## Procedure

The questionnaire will be distributed in Facebook groups (with the permission of the administrators) and via other internet channels. All participation will be anonymous and voluntary.

Upon opening the link, the participants will see an introductory text familiarizing them with the topic of this questionnaire and including information about the research itself being part of a Bachelor thesis. The questions are divided into four categories: demographic questions, questions about dog toy purchasing, questions about the owner's experience, and questions about the dog behavior. Each category consists of 5 to 15 questions. There are a total of five pages of questions – two for the dog toy purchasing and one per every other category. Every category, except for the demographic questions, uses the Likert 7-point scale. The questions are formulated in a table-like manner in the survey to make it easier for the participants to answer.

## Measures

The data analysis section of Chen et al. (2012) consists of questions which can be used as an inspiration for the questionnaire of this thesis. The research is on pet stores, hence the wording regarding pet stores were replaced with wording about the topic of this research. The format of the questions was not changed. Chen et al.'s (2012) research uses the 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). This thesis adopts the style of the questions and the measuring scale. Additionally, more questions were created to best measure the variables of the research, again, based on the questions of Chen et al. (2012). Finally, this research added demographic questions for better understanding of the participants.

## Demographics

In order to gain knowledge about the participants, four demographic questions were created. The question about gender has four possible answers (male, female, non-binary/third gender, prefer not to say). The question about age separated the possible answers into ranges of approximately 10 years. The first option is for participants under 18 years old, the second – between 18 and 24 years old, and all of the following up to 85 or older are each with 10 years range. Both the question about gender and about age were taken from the Qualtrics platform. The third question is about the country the participants live in. This question was an open-ended one. The last question refers to the number of dogs the participants currently have. The first three options are respectively 1, 2 or 3 dogs, the second to last was for 4 dogs and more and lastly about participants for whom none of the answers apply which directly led to ending the questionnaire and not recording the entry. Detailed information about the questions is presented in table 1.1.

*Table 1. Detailed information about the questionnaire.*

Category	Questions/Statements	Answers / Scale
<b>Demographic Questions</b>	What is your gender?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Male</li> <li>➤ Female</li> <li>➤ Non-binary / third gender</li> <li>➤ Prefer not to say</li> </ul>
	What is your age?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Under 18</li> <li>➤ 18-24</li> <li>➤ 25-34</li> <li>➤ 35-44</li> <li>➤ 45-54</li> <li>➤ 55-64</li> <li>➤ 65-74</li> <li>➤ 75-84</li> <li>➤ 85 or older</li> </ul>
	Where do you live?	(open ended)
	How many dogs do you own?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ 1 dog</li> <li>➤ 2 dogs</li> <li>➤ 3 dogs</li> <li>➤ 3 dogs or more</li> </ul>



Table 1.2. Detailed information about the questionnaire.

<b>Dog Toy Purchasing</b>	<p>I buy toys...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ that my dog really needs</li> <li>➤ that my dog likes</li> <li>➤ that are beneficial to my dog</li> <li>➤ that keep my dog occupied</li> <li>➤ that improve my dog's daily life/well-being</li> <li>➤ that have consistent quality</li> <li>➤ that have an interesting design</li> <li>➤ that are reasonably priced</li> <li>➤ that offer value for money</li> <li>➤ of different variety</li> </ul> <p>I like buying toys for my dog.          Buying toys for my dog makes me feel good.          I buy toys that are to MY liking.          I buy toys so I can interact with my dog.          I rather buy toys than make them.</p>	<p>7-point Likert scale          (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)</p>
<b>The Dog Owner's Experience</b>	<p>(<i>caregiver</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ I consider my dog to be a companion.</li> <li>➤ I consider my dog to be human-like.</li> <li>➤ I consider my dog to be part of the family/child-like.</li> <li>➤ I understand my dog's needs.</li> </ul> <p>(<i>relationship</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ My dog and I have a very close relationship.</li> <li>➤ I play with my dog quite often.</li> <li>➤ I often go to places with my dog (e.g., parks, events, meet-ups, etc.).</li> </ul> <p>(<i>emotional state</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Playing with my dog helps my health/well-being.</li> <li>➤ Playing with my dog adds to my happiness.</li> <li>➤ My dog sometimes annoys me with wanting to play.</li> <li>➤ I feel satisfied when my dog plays with the toy I bought.</li> <li>➤ I like that I can interact with my dog via a toy I purchased.</li> <li>➤ I like seeing my dog play with the toys I bought.</li> <li>➤ I feel disappointed, frustrated, angry, etc. when my dog/dogs ignores the toys I bought.</li> <li>➤ I feel disappointed, frustrated, angry, etc. when my dog/dogs destroy the toys I bought.</li> </ul>	<p>7-point Likert scale          (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)</p>
<b>Dog Behavior</b>	<p>My dog plays with toys.          My dog ignores/shows no interest in toys.          My dog destroys toys.          My dog uses toys to interact with me.          My dog has ignored/destroyed toys I have bought.</p>	<p>7-point Likert scale          (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)</p>

## Dog Toy Purchasing

The questions in this category were made in the form of a matrix table – on the left the participants are presented with statements and on the top are the possible answers corresponding with the 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The statements were separated into two blocks (Table 1.2).

The first block has “I buy toys...” as a heading of the matrix and the statements complete the sentence. This is used in order to simplify the matrix by not having repetitive text. The first five statements address the dog orientation with regard to the toy purchases, namely whether the participants buy toys which the dog needs, likes, are beneficial to the dog, keep the dog occupied and improve the dog’s daily life/well-being. The second half of the questions are more oriented towards the consumer reasoning behind buying toys. The participants are asked whether they buy dog toys with consistent quality, interesting design, that are reasonably priced, that offer value for money, of different variety. Most questions are an adapt version of the questions from Chen et al. (2012). The only change was replacing the word “pet” with “dog” and the future tense into present tense. This research selected only statements which can be in relation to this research. For example, the statement “I will (...) buy toys that my pet really needs.” became “I buy toys (...) which my *dog* really needs”. Only three statements were created by the student and they follow the structure of those of Chen et al. (2012), namely about the dog toys bought to keep the dog occupied, improve its daily live/well-being and toys of different variety. Those three were addressed in the theoretical framework as possible significant factors, consequently they were included in the questionnaire.

The second block consists of five independent statements which are focused on the experience of buying toys. The statement “[I] buy services that make me feel good” from Chen et al. (2012) was transformed into “Buying toys for my dog makes me feel good” and inspired the statement “I like buying toys for my dog”. The statement “[I] buy services that I like”, again from Chen et al. (2012) was transformed into “I buy toys that are to MY liking” in order to stress the preference of the owner. Additionally, two more statements were written by the student: “I buy toys so I can interact with my dog” and “I rather buy toys than make them” which are topics the theoretical framework considers to be significant in dog toy purchasing.

## The Owner’s Experience

This category has the biggest number of statements, fifteen, presented in table 1.2. They were shown in a matrix style in the questionnaire and used the Likert 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The first four statements correspond with the caregiver part of being a dog owner and were taken from Chen et al. (2012), the only word changed in them is “pet” becoming “dog”. They intend to measure to what extent the participant considers their dog a companion, human-like, family member/child-like and to what extent the participant believes they understand the dog’s needs. The following three statements are focused on the dog-owner relationship aspect. The statements are “My dog and I have a very close relationship”, “I play with my dog quite often” and “I often go to places with my dog (e.g., parks, events, meet-ups, etc.)” All three are again taken from Chen et al (2012) and the word “pet” has been replaced with “dog”, additionally, a few examples were added to the last statement so that it is clear the meaning is not about essential places (e.g., the veterinarian office).

The remaining questions relate mostly to the emotional aspect of being a dog owner. Only the first two statements, “Playing with my dog helps my health/well-being” and “Playing with my dog adds to my happiness”, were taken from Chen et al. (2012) and had only a few words changed. The following statements were created by the student and address areas the theoretical framework suggest might be significant.

## Dog Behavior

The final category consists of five statements again in a matrix form and using the 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) as an answer type. The statements are completely created by the student. They address the dog behaviors, discussed in the theoretical framework, with potential influence on the relationship between dog toy purchasing and the dog owner's experience. The three statements address whether the dog plays with, ignores and destroys toys in general. The fourth statement addresses whether the dog uses toys to interact with its owner. Lastly, the participants are specifically asked whether the dog has shown no interest or negative interest in a toy they have bought, not in toys in general. The questions are summarized in table 1.2.

# Chapter 4: Results

The data was analyzed using SPSS. The reliability and validity of the measures were analyzed in accordance with the guidelines of Andrew Hayes (2017). Prior to conducting the analysis, the data was prepared. All uncompleted responses to the questionnaire were deleted, resulting in 1683 valid responses. All missing values were renamed to be treated accordingly by SPSS.

## Demographics

The demographic values measure four concepts: age, dogs owned, gender and country of current living. The age of the participants has a mean of 41.29 years old and a standard deviation of 13.56. The mean of dogs owned was calculated to be 1.59 (1 = one dog, 2 = two dogs) with a standard deviation of 0.29. The gender of the participants showed groups of 1615 females, resulting in 96% of the whole sample, and 40 males, being 2.4% of the participants. Participants who did not want to share their gender or did not identify as female or male, were grouped into a category named "other" which represents 28 of the participants or 1.7%. The country question received a great amount of variation in its responses, resulting in participants currently living in 38 countries. Most participants live in USA (n = 818, 48.6%), The United Kingdom (n = 361, 21.4%), Canada (n = 266, 15.8%), Australia (n = 108, 6.4%), Bulgaria (n = 45, 2.7%) and New Zealand (n = 18, 1.1%). All other countries scored under 1%. The full data results of the demographics are summarized in table 2.1 (age, dogs owned and gender) and table 2.2 (country).

*Table2.1: Demographics: Age, dogs owned and gender.*

Age			Dogs Owned		
mean	41.29		mean	1.59	
st. deviation	13.56		st. deviation	0.92	
Frequency	under 18	0.2%	Frequency	1 dog	61.3%
	18-24	7.4%		2 dogs	25.4%
	25-34	34.0%		3 dogs	7.2%
	35-44	20.7%		more than 3	5.1%
	45-54	19.0%			
	55-64	13.8%			
	65-74	4.2%			
	75-84	0.6%			
Gender		Frequency	Percentage		
male		40	2.4%		
female		1615	96.0%		
other		28	1.7%		

Table 2.3: Demographics: country of residence. Note: all values higher than 1% have been highlighted.

Country	Frequency	Percentage	Country	Frequency	Percentage
Argentina	2	0.1%	India	1	0.1%
Austria	2	0.1%	Italy	2	0.1%
Australia	108	6.4%	Latvia	1	0.1%
Belgium	1	0.1%	Lithuania	3	0.2%
Bulgaria	45	2.7%	Macedonia	1	0.1%
Canada	266	15.8%	New Zealand	18	1.1%
Chile	1	0.1%	Norway	3	0.2%
Colombia	1	0.1%	Portugal	1	0.1%
Croatia	2	0.1%	Qatar	1	0.1%
Cyprus	1	0.1%	Romania	1	0.1%
Czechia	1	0.1%	Slovenia	1	0.1%
Denmark	2	0.1%	South Africa	9	0.5%
Finland	2	0.1%	Spain	4	0.2%
France	4	0.2%	Sweden	2	0.1%
Georgia	1	0.1%	Switzerland	2	0.1%
Germany	6	0.4%	The Netherlands	4	0.2%
Gibraltar	1	0.1%	United Arab Emirates	2	0.1%
Haiti	1	0.1%	United Kingdom	361	21.4%
Hungary	1	0.1%	USA	818	48.6%

## Variables

Prior to the variables' analysis, all variables measuring negative values were reversed in SPSS so that they measure the same as all the rest, meaning that the value of 1, which was previously the most negative, was changed to measure the most positive, and the same reversion was done for the values from 2 to 7. The questions for which this was done were "I feel disappointed, frustrated, angry, etc. when my dog(s) ignores the toys I bought" and "I feel disappointed, frustrated, angry, etc. when my dog(s) destroy the toys I bought" for the dog owner's experience and "My dog ignores/shows no interest in toys", "My dog destroys toys" and "My dog has ignored/destroyed toys I have bought" for dog behavior. Next, the variables were analyzed for consistency and validity, using the Cronbach's Alpha, and the means and standard deviations were calculated.

## Cronbach's Alphas

Taking into consideration that some of the questions of the questionnaire were generated by the student and the remaining ones were altered from the research of Chen et al (2012), it was deemed necessary to test their consistency and reliability using Cronbach's Alpha. The analysis was conducted for the three variables of the research model: dog toy purchasing, the dog owner's experience, and dog behavior. The results showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .99 for all 15 questions measuring dog toy purchasing. The 15 questions about the dog owner's experience also showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .99. For both variables Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted showed that there will not be any change to the alpha values if certain items are deleted, hence all questions were kept. Finally, the 5 questions about dog behavior showed a Cronbach's Alpha of .98 and that deleting items would decrease this value with no more than .006, hence no item was deleted. All values are summarized in table 3.

*Table 3. Summary of variables values.*

	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>St. deviation</b>
<b>Dog Toy Purchasing</b>	.99	5.85	4.58
<b>Owner's Experience</b>	.99	5.82	4.57
<b>Dog Behavior</b>	.98	5.05	4.64

## Means and Standard Deviations

All questions measuring the same variable were combined into one presenting the means of those questions per participant. This was done in order to calculate the means and standard deviations of each of the three variables. The results are summarized in table 3.

The mean of **dog toy purchasing** for all participants is 5.85 with a standard deviation of 4.58. The mean of the questions measuring the **dog owner's experience** is 5.82 and the standard deviation is 4.57. The mean of the **dog behavior** measuring questions is 5.05 and the standard deviation is 4.64.

## Relationship Analysis

In order to analyze whether dog toy purchasing influences the dog owner's experience, a regression analysis was conducted. The dependent variable of the regression analysis was "dog owner's experience" and the independent variable was "dog toy purchasing". This analysis showed that indeed dog toy purchasing has a positive effect on the dog owner's experience ( $\beta = 0.99$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). In order to analyze whether dog behavior has a moderating influence on the relationship, a moderation interaction analysis was conducted. This analysis examined the relationship between the dependent variable "dog owner's experience" and the independent variable "dog toy purchasing" while also examining whether "dog behavior" has a significant effect on the relationship between the variables. The analysis showed that indeed dog toy purchasing has a positive moderating effect on the relationship ( $\beta = 0.30$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), whilst the effect of the independent variable on the dependent remains. The results are summarized in table 4.

In order to control for effect of the demographic variables gender, age and dogs owned, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. The control variables in the hierarchical regression analysis were “gender”, “age” and “dogs owned”, the dependent variable was “dog toy purchasing”, the independent variable was the “dog owner’s experience” and the moderating variable was “dog behavior”. This analysis showed that gender does not have a significant effect on the dog owner’s experience ( $\beta = -0.002$ ,  $p = 0.558$ ); age ( $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) has a significant but weak negative effect on the dog owner’s experience; and dogs owned ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) have a significant moderate positive effect on the dog owner’s experience. All results from the regression analysis are shown in table 4.

*Table 4. Regression and Interaction analysis.*

	beta	p value
<b>Independent:</b> Dog toy purchasing		
<b>Dependent:</b> Dog owner's experience	0.99	< .001
<b>Interactor:</b> Dog behavior	0.30	< .001
<b>Control variables:</b>		
• Gender	-0.002	0.558
• Age	-.01	< .001
• Dogs owned	.15	< .001

# Chapter 5: Results

## Summary of results

The results indicate that the participants are from all age groups with most between 25 and 54 years old. Most participants own 1 or 2 dogs, however there are some who own more. This can be seen as an accurate representation of the general population, since it's harder for people to have dogs before 25 years of age, when they assumingly do not have a stable income and after 54 when physical difficulties might apply; moreover, 1 or 2 dogs is the most commonly encountered amount of dogs per household. The participants are predominantly women with only a small fraction being male. The biggest part of the participants come from Western English-speaking countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, United Kingdom, USA) but there are representatives from worldwide. The participants scored high on the variables, meaning that overall, they agree with the statements about dog toy purchasing, the owner's experience and dog behavior. The results showed that dog toy purchasing has a strong positive effect on the dog owner's experience. This indicates that the more dog toy purchasing an owner does, the more positive their experience as a dog owner will be. Dog behavior as a moderator has a highly significant moderate effect, meaning that the behavior of the dog influences how the owner experiences being such after a toy purchase, however only to an extent, in other words, there is a part of the effect of dog toy purchasing that is uninfluenced, hence the behavior of the dog might not determine how positive the owner will feel. When assessing gender, age and dogs owned as control variables, it was shown that gender and age have extremely small negative and yet significant effect on the dependent variable (the dog owner's experience); dogs owned did not have a significant effect. This rules out the control variables as a potential influencer on the relationship between "dog toy purchasing" and the "dog owner's experience".

## Limitations and future research

The limitations with this research with regard to demographics are four. First, the results apply mostly for households with one or two dogs. However, households with one or two dogs are the most common and with three or more are less, meaning that the participants most likely are representative for the population of dog owners. In future research, it could be interesting to look into this small group of dog owners, as well as foster homes, since it was not mentioned in the research. Second, the overwhelming majority of the participants are female. This makes the generalizability of the results very high for women. However, the male participants are still enough to draw conclusions for them. Third, a big amount of the participants are from Western English-speaking countries. This could have been expected since questionnaire was in English and it was spread in English Facebook and platforms. Nonetheless, the participants from other countries bring a significant variety in the sample, meaning that although the results cannot be generalized on country-specific level for those non-English-speaking countries, the sample still represents a worldwide population. In perspective, it would have been contributing to create the questionnaire in several languages so that it is easier to approach more people and as a result more countries to be represented. And lastly, country of residence was not chosen for a control variable because it was not categorical and the open-ended style of the questions resulted in the participants writing the same country in a different way (e.g., USA, the USA, United States, America, etc.) which made it impossible to correct in order to include as a control variable. It would be wise in future research to create the country of residence questions as a categorical variable, so that it can easily be included in the analysis.

The limitations about the questions measuring the variables are mainly about phrasing and measuring. Most of the questions were altered from a questions of already existing peer reviewed research, however those who were not, although proven reliable and consistent by the analysis, might not measure correctly the intended



items. Specifically, the questions measuring dog behavior were created by the researcher of this thesis and some feedback about them from participants show the possibility of non-exact measurement. For instance, the question about the dog destroying toys was meant to measure a negative experience, however it was pointed out that some individuals buy toys for the sole purpose of their dog destroying them. However, it can be said that for the majority of the population would see a dog destroying a toy as a negative thing, which indicates some validity of the questions, still, the possible mismeasurement cannot be ignored. Speaking about a future research, it would be beneficial to do a more in-depth research on how dog behavior is perceived in relation with toys as it seems there is more to it than discovered by this thesis' literature review; and whether there is existing research with questions that are proven to measure dog behavior correctly.

The last limitation was pointed out by several participants, namely that participants with two or more dogs with different interest in toys were conflicted in how they should answer the questions since their dogs would score differently. Some did not complete the questionnaire due to that, and some had to find a way to answer for both dogs, hence going for an approximate average score. In future research, a beneficial change would be to present more than one answering forms for participants with more than one dog in their household, so that the gathered information is more individual dog specific and not measuring the overall experience with all dogs which can be confusing.

## Implications

Understanding the influence dog toy purchasing has on the individual can have numerous implications. It can show a deeper understanding of this part of the consumer society. This can have potential use of pet stores and pet toys producers which could understand better their clients' experience *after* a purchase, hence aiming for creating products aimed at this aspect. For instance, they can create a marketing campaign with the topic of creating a better dog owning experience as a consequence of buying a certain toy. Another example is the usefulness for in-store sales. If an employee sees that an owner's intention is to feel better about being an owner, than the employee might encourage them to buy a toy instead of, perhaps, a chewing bone.

Understanding the consequences of dog toy purchasing can have potential contributions to different academic spheres. The social sciences can gain deeper understanding of the processes an individual goes through when owning a pet, except from the popular topics of pets improving mental and general health and contributing to happiness. Dog toy purchasing could have an external but direct influence on these already explored areas of dog owning. Business studies can gain deeper understanding of consumers, similar to the knowledge of producers and pet stores. Dog training academies can find new ways to teach concepts, such as proximity, owner focus, owner engagement, etc., via encouraging buying toys as a way for the owner to invest in the learning.

Furthermore, these findings can raise new questions, for instance what consequences there could be if the owners purchase toys with the intention of improving their dog owning experience? The dog-owner relationship has bigger and bigger importance nowadays and this research could be one of the starting points of in-depth understanding of it and the social and consumer processes that influence it. People who aim for a closer relationship might consider the option of buying toys as a way to enhance said relationship; and dog trainers could offer purchasing toys with the hope of the same result.

Research towards pet owning experiences is still quite new and there are many more aspects to be analyzed, such as the consumer and dog-owner relationship aspects of owning a dog. With the increasing dog owners population, conducting such research becomes more and more relevant. This is of interest of academia, business spheres but also the individual, because the goal is not simply to provide good homes for dogs but to create homes where both owner and dog live happily together.

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