



HUMAN-DOG RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BANGKOK'S DOG CARE INDUSTRY

BY

MISS NETI CHANGBENCHARONG

**AN INDEPENDENT STUDY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE PROGRAM IN MARKETING
(INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM)
FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND ACCOUNTANCY
THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY
ACADEMIC YEAR 2014
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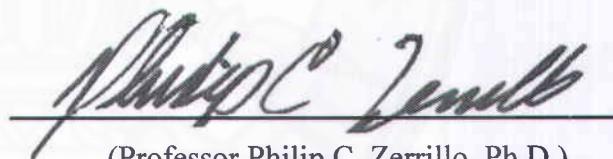
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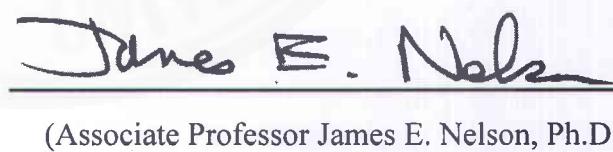
HUMAN-DOG RELATIONSHIPS AND IMPLICATIONS
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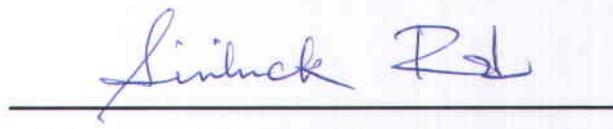
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Author	Miss Neti Changbencharong
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ABSTRACT

Relationships between human beings and canines have changed from just pets and house guards to companions and even fashion accessories. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand consumers' perceptions of their pet dogs and their behaviors in the purchase of selected products for their dogs. Findings of this study will help business managers in the dog care or related industries better understand consumers' needs and expectations, as well as underlying factors that drive consumers to purchase particular products. Results will assist managers in designing responsive marketing strategies — in other words, what kinds of products need to be offered and messages communicated — that will result in a transaction.

Qualitative research was conducted face-to-face numbering 20 in-depth interviews with dog owners. Separately, an interview with Petsville's managing director was conducted. Observations at community malls, namely K Village and The Nine, also were conducted. The semi-structured interviews were conducted entirely by the researcher. Non-probability sampling in the forms of purposive and snowballing methods were employed to obtain targeted informants.

Results of this study show that there are different segments among the dog owners. These segments are described as the Proud Parents, the Accessorizers, and the Practicals. Marketers should be mindful when targeting different groups of

dog owners, as these segments have different perceptions towards their dogs and, therefore, possess different influencing criteria when purchasing products for their dogs.

Keywords: Human-dog relationship, Bangkok's dog care industry, Dog owners' purchasing criteria, Dogs, Dog care

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I would like to express my appreciation to my family and close friends for their support and encouragement throughout.

Lastly, thank you to all the four-legged friends out there for making the world a friendlier, lovelier place to live.

Miss Neti Changbencharong

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement and Research Purpose

In Thailand, dog products and services are a lucrative business. In 2013, the Thai dog care market was valued at 13 billion baht with a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 10% from 2008 to 2013 (Prachachat, 2014). The mid-priced segment continues to have the largest share, while the premium category has gradually gained on its share in consumer consideration (Euromonitor International, 2013). With an attractive market already in place, we see a proliferation of new pet products in the market. Never-existed-before offerings, such as dog supplements and dog insurance, have become a common market offering. Competition in the marketplace has intensified among local brands with premiumized offers and international brands with superior performance claims.

Several factors are believed to have contributed to the overall industry growth. These include the increase in pet ownership, improved economic conditions of the pet owners, and adoption of the pet humanization trend (Euromonitor International, 2014). Currently, more than 5 million Thai households own a dog, representing 25% of total Thai households (Daily News, 2014). The number is expected to grow as a large number of Thais are now raising dogs as family members. Thais are marrying later and having fewer children while career focus has become a priority. Consequently, dogs have become a popular companion for the large majority of single male and female Thais alike (Tepchaval, 2014).

Dog owners in general, are financially better off. Thailand has experienced improved economic conditions, allowing consumers to splurge on themselves and pass on the benefits to their dogs. Dog owners have become more willing to purchase premium pet care products. Owners are said to spend at least 10% of their personal income on pet products, or approximately 3,000 baht per dog per month, based on Thailand's average income of 30,000 baht. The rise in disposable income also serves as a boost to the pet population. The rise in disposable income, coupled with increased

knowledge of pet products thanks to product reviews and personal recommendations, will be the key to sustain the dog care industry (Euromonitor International, 2014).

Further, Thailand has caught onto the global pet humanization trend. Dog owners have shown more concern for their pets' wellbeing. This has resulted in large demand for "pet humanized" products which "treat pets like human beings." Examples of such products include specialized diets for dogs, as well as specialized treats and supplements. Specialized pet services such as dog training, dog cafés, and full-service boarding are also increasing in popularity (Euromonitor International, 2013). These products are a boon to pet-centric businesses that can command premium prices as the pet owners' perception of their pets is positive and affectionate. In Bangkok particularly, it is common to see dogs enjoying 'human' lifestyles – Chihuahuas dressed in furry outfits strolling at community malls and French bulldogs swimming with their personal trainers on weekends. Furthermore, as consumers become increasingly aware of their canines' health, the former has become selective in choosing what to feed their loved ones. Pet owners strongly believe that treating them right and feeding them right will make their dogs happy, which can translate into more canine years. Besides food, consumers are willing to buy higher quality products that ensure nutritional value and option products including dog treats and accessories (Positioning, 2014).

The study of 'Human-dog relationships and implications for Bangkok's dog care industry' has been chosen to be a part of a contemporary topic in applied marketing. The purpose of the study is to raise business managers' attention to consumers' increased concerns over their pet dogs. The study will be of great contribution to business managers operating in the dog care or related industry. The findings will allow managers to have a better understanding of pet owners' perceptions and their key influencing factors leading to product adoption. This is especially important at this time as the market experiences a mushrooming of imported dog products. Findings of the study will assist the audience in designing effective marketing strategies to aid consumers in the decision making process by focusing on factors that drive them to buy particular products.

1.2 Research Objectives

Objectives of the study are:

- 1) To study the market overview and trends of Thailand's dog care industry
(market value, market growth, market trends, and competitive landscape)
- 2) To increase understanding of dog owners' perception towards their dogs
- 3) To identify and define different segments of dog owners
- 4) To identify factors influencing dog owners when purchasing products for
their dogs

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of ‘Human-dog relationships and implications for Bangkok’s dog care industry’ has been chosen to be a part of a contemporary topic in applied marketing, with societal opportunities in the market being explored. Today, the relationship between owners and their dogs has shifted towards a positive note. Pet owners are showing more affection towards their dogs, which has a positive correlation to the level of care given their dogs and increased spending for their dogs. Pet owners appreciate the new products and services, especially those that cater to their own- and their pet-needs. This shift in relationships suggests business opportunities that marketers can tap into.

As part of secondary research, a literature review has been conducted to better understand the current overview of the dog care industry. The literature review was largely extracted from online published sources and articles, in the context of countries including Thailand, the United States, and Australia. Relevant and insightful information are summarized in this report as follows.

The human-animal bond has been defined by the American Veterinary Medical Association as “a mutually beneficial, dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well-being of both” (Byrd, 2012).

The American Pet Product Association (APP) defined “dog care” as dog products and services that cater to the needs, comfort, and/or benefits of dogs. These include consumption products (food and supplements), supplies, grooming, day care, boarding service, and health and wellness facilities (Sena, 2014). The Thai Pet Product Industries Association (TPIA) provided a similar definition and clearly segmented the dog care industry into dog care products and dog care services pertaining to the Thai market. Dog care products include food, snacks, clothing, toys, and other supplies. Dog care services include hospital/clinic, spa and grooming,

training, hoteling, and funeral service (College of Management, Mahidol University 2012).

General owner perception towards dogs

A recent Mahidol University study surveyed 400 Thai dog owners' perceptions and found that 51% of dog owners perceived their dogs as a child, 24% as a sibling, and 3% as a close relative (College of Management, Mahidol University, 2012). According to Thailand's high-end pet accessories company, Doodletons & Friends Co., "people are marrying later and having fewer children, so they treat pooches like children." The company has seen many of their customers buying expensive products as they would spend on their children (Tephaval, 2014).

The majority of the respondents (73%) allowed their dogs to spend most of their time indoors. Close to half (47%) allowed their pets to sleep in the bedroom, while 26% allowed them to live anywhere indoors (College of Management, Mahidol University, 2012). A recent BNResearch studied the emotional extent to which owners felt for their dogs. The research showed that 48% of owners often bought gifts for their dogs and 58% really missed their dogs when away from home (Lue, Pantenburg, and Crawford, 2007).

Benefits of owning a dog

Numerous studies have concluded several physiological and psychological advantages of dog ownership. Many researchers have listed benefits such as lower heart rates, blood pressure, and reduced stress. Dog companionship has been linked with the "alleviation of depression and greater self esteem." Meanwhile, dog owners are more engaged in physical activity, resulting in a lower chance of obesity compared to non-dog owners (Byrd, 2012).

Besides providing health benefits, dog companionship also fulfills social and safety needs. Dogs are said to be "social lubricants," boosting owners' self-esteem and social interaction with other people. Moreover, dogs can provide their owners a

sense of safety by watching over the house or accompanying their owners on a night walk (Byrd, 2012).

Factors influencing willingness to buy dog products

A BNResearch study (2007) suggested a positive correlation between the strength of owner-dog bond and the willingness to buy and pay for products. Fundamentally, the strength of the bond is determined by a number of indicators, including human perceptions towards the dog, the amount of time spent with the pet, and the type of pet acquisition. This research has shown that owners with the strongest bonds take their dogs to the veterinarian more often and feed their dogs premium diet. Interestingly, owners who have paid for theirs dogs developed closer ties to their pets and were likely to spend more on their dogs, compared to those acquiring pets from family or friends who paid little or nothing (Lue, Pantenburg, and Crawford, 2007).

Among the marketing mix (product, price, place, promotion), product recommendations or referrals play the most important roles in influencing owners' purchasing decisions, according to a 2013 survey conducted by German market research company The GfK Group. Verbal recommendations from veterinary clinics and acquaintances were the most powerful (Phillips-Donaldson, 2014).

On the other hand, price plays the least important role in influencing consumers' purchase, especially for consumers with strong relationships with their pets. Dog owners are said to be price insensitive and are willing to cut back spending on themselves and spend small indulgences such as snacks and toys for their dogs (Phillips-Donaldson, 2014). According to a Mahidol University research (2012), Thai owners spent approximately 3,000 baht per dog per month, equivalent to 10% of their personal income (based on Thailand's average income of 30,000 baht). Spending fell heavily on food, health-related products (vet charges and supplements), and supplies (clothing and accessories included) (College of Management, Mahidol University, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Methodology

The study of ‘Human-dog relationship and implications for Bangkok’s dog care industry’ focuses on dog owners’ personal experiences, behaviors, and emotions. These psychological dimensions are most effectively obtained from dog owners through a qualitative study in the form of exploratory research. Secondary research and primary research in the form of in-depth interviews were designed for this study.

3.1.1 Secondary Research

Secondary research was conducted to seek more understanding on the topic under study. It included studies that had already been done and explained by existing theories. Secondary research sources included:

- Published online reports and literature related to dog owners’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors.
- Statistical data on dog owners, such as dog ownership in Bangkok, spending on dog products, and others deemed relevant.
- Shared stories and opinions on Thailand’s renowned online discussion web board, Pantip.

3.1.2 Primary Research

In-depth Interviews

Key questions for in-depth interviews were developed based on findings from secondary research. The objective of the interviews was to understand the important psychological motives and needs of dog owners. Consequently, their perceptions towards their dogs were studied. A variety of other information such as product appeals also were explored as they are crucial in determining influential purchase decision factors. Knowledge of these factors will help to design marketing strategies that will meet dog owners’ expectations. General information such as the owners’ demographics and lifestyle were also studied.

Interviews were conducted with 20 dog owners. The sampling plan is explained in the following part. An interview was held separately with Petsville dog facility managing director, Tananchai Chunsangchantra, to explore his opinions on Bangkok's dog care industry and his interactions with dog owners, including his knowledge of owners' expectations.

3.2 Sampling Plan

Purposive sampling was used in the study in order to select targeted informants. The specific method of sampling for selecting interviewees was a mix of purposive and snowballing sampling. Firstly, a purposive sampling method was used to obtain early interviewees. Then a snowballing sampling method was used by asking interviewees to recommend people likely to match the researcher's criteria. Followings are the criteria in selecting in-depth interview respondents.

- Dog owners
- Male or female aged between 20 and 50 years old
- Bangkok residents
- Socioeconomic status (SES) of A to C (Monthly personal income of at least 30,000 baht)

3.3 Data Collection

A total of 20 in-depth interviews were conducted face to face with the respondents in Bangkok during the period from August 2014 to March 2015. The interview duration was approximately 40 minutes per respondent. Results were voice recorded and handwritten as results were used for further analysis.

A list of semi-structured questions was used to guide the interview. The questions pertained to dog owners' general information and behavior, perceptions towards their dogs, and purchasing behavior of dog products (focusing on product appeals). For some respondents, probing was required for further inquiry and clarification. Refer to Appendix A for the list of interview questions used.

Separately, an interview with Petsville's managing director was held in November 2014. The interview was intended to seek an expert's opinion on the dog care industry and his encounters with dog owners. Moreover, observations at community malls, namely K Village and The Nine, were conducted in January 2015 to study real-time behavior of the different types of dog owners.

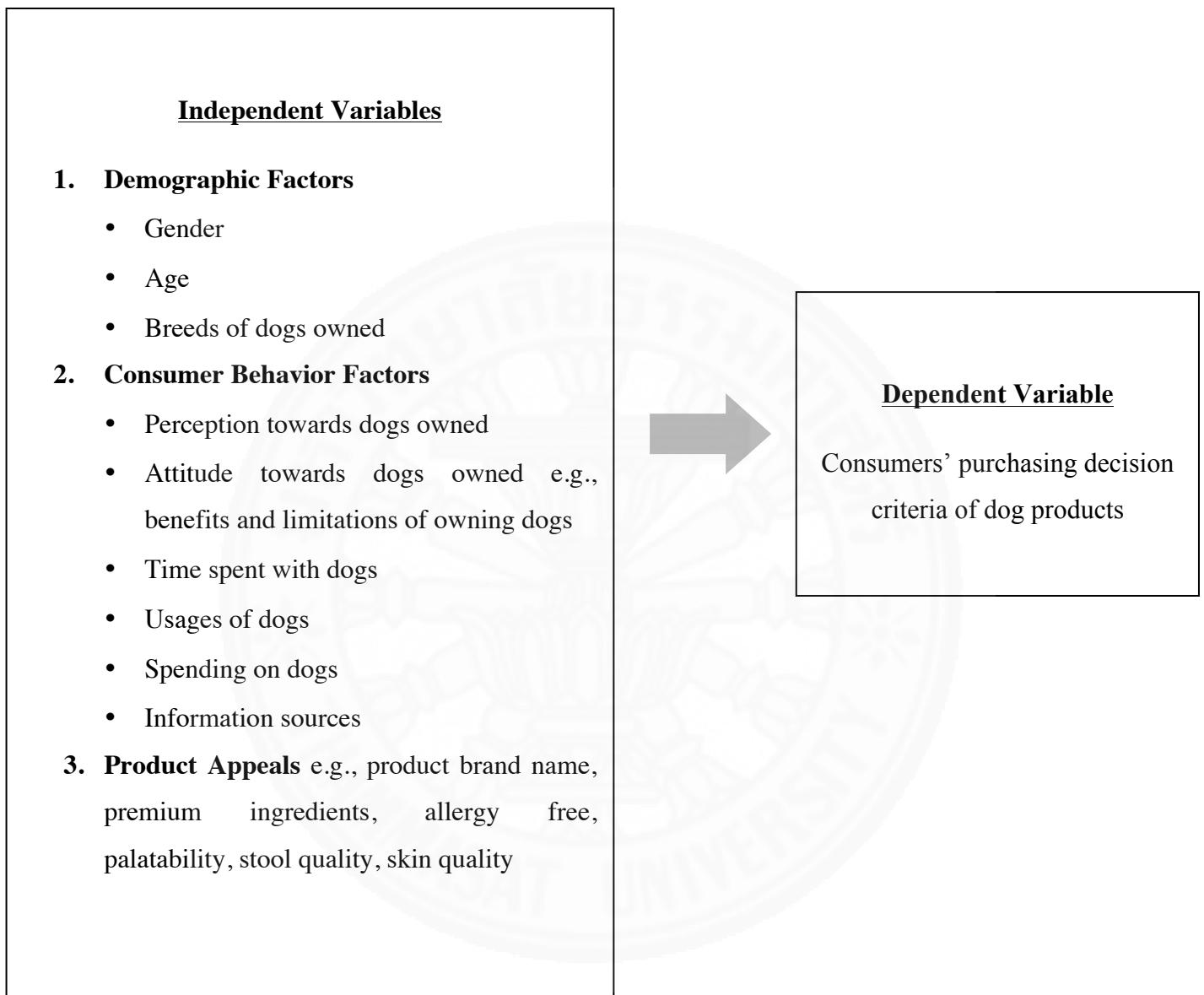
3.4 Data Analysis

Data obtained from the interviews were first transcribed and selected to make respondent comments manageable and understandable. The patterns among the responses were organized and observed in order to identify possible segments of dog owners. The theoretical framework presented next outlines the defined research variables employed in this study. Further, verbatim statements are used to summarize and provide evidence for assertions.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework presented on the following page was employed for the study. The independent variables consisted of dog owners' demographic information such as their gender and age, dog owners' behavioral factors such as their perceptions and attitudes towards their dogs, and product appeals that were important to dog owners. The dependent variable was dog owners' decision criteria in purchasing particular products for their dogs.

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework



3.6 Limitations of the Study

- Sample selection did not represent an equal number of respondents in terms of gender and age groups.
- Sample selection did not represent an equal share of the different types of dog owners selected for the interviews which may affect the segmentation process.
- Findings from the in-depth interviews may not generalize to the entire Bangkok population of dog owners due to non-probability sampling method and small sample size.

Overall, the effect of these limitations on the study's recommendations for Bangkok's dog care industry is minimal.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Secondary Research – Key Findings

According to World Animal Protection International, Thailand is one of the top 10 countries with the highest dog population – over 7 million dogs in total. Popular breeds are Thai dogs and mixed-breed dogs that are easy to care for and are less vulnerable to sickness. However, foreign breeds, particularly small breeds such as the Pomeranian and Chihuahua, have become more popular because they are practical in size. Moreover, new families are gravitating towards small-sized residences, such as townhouses and condominiums (Daily News, 2015). The increasing popularity of foreign dogs is also believed to be the result of continuous promotions of brand owners who depict these breeds in their advertisements (Keomahakarl, 2007).

Having pets is very common in Thailand. In fact, it is estimated that almost every Thai household has at least one dog (Keomahakarl, 2007). Dog population grew 20% over a 5-year period from 2000 to 2005. The most obvious benefactors of the sharp increase in the dog population are dog product and service providers. The dog food segment alone is expected to grow at least 8% over the next five years (China Daily, 2015). The food sector performs well for two primary reasons. First, as previously mentioned, dogs have become a popular companion – a remedy for loneliness. Second, dog owners have become more sophisticated as they develop greater understanding of feeding their dogs nutritious food and, as a result, they are more willing to spend money on premium products (Euromonitor International, 2013).

The dog care market is dominated by three market players, which are Mars Thailand (Pedigree), Perfect Companion Co, and Nestlé Purina PetCare, all of which focus on mid-priced and economy dog food. The competition is expected to intensify as premium imported brands, such as Royal Canin (acquired by Mars in 2001) and Hill's Science Diet are increasing their presence in the market shelf space due to product variety available to dog owners. They also boast higher nutrition in the form

of human-grade ingredients and breed-specific formulations. Though priced several times higher, these brands have a limited impact on the purchasing decisions of owners who already value quality over price. Moreover, these imported brands are distributed at selected pet specialty shops and veterinary clinics, ultimately adding value to the brands (Euromonitor International, 2015).

When it comes to selecting food for their dogs, owners cited product brand and the safety of ingredients (no allergy) as key. Owners rarely switch brands unless encountering problems, such as the dogs experiencing food allergy or refusing to eat. Nutritional balance, palatability, and packaging also play a role in enticing purchase. Information search can take place prior to purchase. This ranges from asking a friend or a vet, reading information online, and checking on media such as TV and magazines (Keomahakarl, 2007).

In terms of distribution channel, hypermarkets and supermarkets remain the major channels where dog owners shop. In fact, close to 50% of retail sales of dog products are shared between these two channels. This is in alignment with the fast-paced lifestyle of consumers who seek one-stop convenience. At the same time, pet specialty shops have become more prominent as they carry more brands and optional products such as treats and accessories, allowing owners to pamper their pets. E-commerce is expected to surpass specialty stores as pet owners increasingly prefer this channel for the ability to shop anytime and to avoid carrying heavy bags of dog food (Euromonitor International, 2015).

Besides food being the key driver, the proliferation of other pet products will sustain the dog care market, as dog owners will continue humanizing their pets. Never before have we heard of dog insurance or thought of taking our dogs to swim. Based on Thailand's online discussion web board Pantip, it is evident that the human-dog bond has grown on a positive note. Thai dog lovers have formed an online community where they frequently share stories and confess their unconditional love for their "friend" and "child." Dogs serve as a "plug of a familial gap for small households" and a "friend who never stops loving you." Dog owners take their dogs to the beach

and invest heavily on health bills to ensure their dogs have the best possible quality of life (Pantip, 2014).

4.2 In-Depth Interviews with Dog Owners – Key Findings

A total of 20 dog owners were interviewed – 14 were female, 6 were male. Most respondents had at least a Bachelor's degree. Most were office employees, falling in the 30,000 to 50,000 baht per month income range. The majority of owners owned more than one dog. Thai dogs and small breeds such as Shih Tzu, Pomeranian, and Chihuahua stood out. Most pets were either self purchased by the owners or acquired from someone else. Descriptions of the findings can be summarized as follows:

Table 1. Key Findings of In-Depth Interview with Dog Owners

<p><i>Reasons for raising a dog</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main reasons that the respondents decided to raise a dog in the first place were they were seeking companionship, they were used to having dogs around since childhood, and they wanted personal security. <p>“I always remember growing up with dogs. We’re used to having dogs around.” – Som, 25</p> <p>“We have a huge home. Our dog deters intruders.” – Book, 28</p> <p>“We have a small household. Our dogs keep the house lively.” – Mint, 30</p>
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Table 1. Key Findings of In-Depth Interview with Dog Owners (Continued)

<p><i>General dog owner behavior</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Owners spent an average of 2 hours with their dogs on weekdays. Time increased during weekends, rising to an average of 5 hours to a whole day. (There were owners who played with their dogs from time to time only.) • The scope of activities done with their dogs varied among the respondents. Activities included walking the dog, training, taking the dog to the mall, taking the dog for a swim, and visiting dog salons. • Many respondents raised their dogs indoors. However, this was also dependent on the dog breeds. Foreign and small breeds were normally raised indoors and allowed to roam freely inside the home, including sharing the sofa. On the other hand, large breeds, particular Thai breeds, were raised outdoors. <p>“We sleep together every night.” – Earn, 27</p> <p>“My parent don’t allow our dogs inside the home. They’re afraid of bugs and fleas.” – Bas, 32</p>
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<p><i>Perception towards dogs</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responses of the owners indicated the level of attachment to their dogs. Nevertheless, human perception towards dogs revolved around three angles: dogs are dogs/guard dogs, dogs are humans, and dogs are accessories. Some regarded their dogs as a symbol of success. <p>“He’s a son to me, just that I didn’t give birth to him.” – Earn, 27</p> <p>“My dog makes me feel proud. I see her development from baby.” – Au, 28</p> <p>“She’s like my purse – with me all the time.” – Mint, 30</p>
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Table 1. Key Findings of In-Depth Interview with Dog Owners (Continued)

<p><i>Benefits of owning a dog</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog owners stated physical and emotional benefits of owning a dog. These benefits included staying physically active, companionship, a ‘social lubricant,’ psychological support, and stress alleviation, safety. It can be noted that psychological benefits were more discussed among the female owners than male owners. <p>“I’m tired and stressed from work. I come home and see him and I’m happy.” – Pinn, 26</p> <p>“My dog has made communication in our family much better. My mum has become softer spoken. I myself have become more gentle.” – Earn, 27</p> <p>“My dog is a perfect conversation starter – makes it easy for me to talk to strangers.” – Hieng, 33</p> <p>“My dog helps me get through my father’s death.” – Molly, 50</p> <p>“I feel very safe having a large dog protecting the house” – Book, 28</p>
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Table 1. Key Findings of In-Depth Interview with Dog Owners (Continued)

<p><i>Disadvantages of owning a dog</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Despite the benefits that dogs provided to their owners, the respondents cited persistent barking and whining, begging for food at the table, and aggression as negative experiences of owning a dog. Dogs' over-attachment to their owners can also limit the owners' freedom. Health problems especially in ageing dogs also serve as a limitation. <p>“I have to put my dog in a cage or on leash when my friends visit our home.” – Bas, 32</p> <p>“My sister and I have to switch turns going out. We can't leave our dog alone at home.” – Mick, 27</p> <p>“My dog is old. The bill can go up to 100,000 baht. But that's the least we can do.” – Wing, 44</p>
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<p><i>Consumer purchasing decision behavior</i></p>	<p><u>Information search</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of respondents asked a friend and searched information online before making a purchase. <p>“I often get advices from online dog communities. Whenever my dog has a skin problem, I resort to online sources for remedies and food recommendations.” – Au, 28</p> <p>“I always ask my dog expert friends on what's good (food and treats) for my dogs.” – Nan, 26</p> <p><u>Product alternative selection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respondents fed their dogs different kinds of food, ranging from human leftovers to prepared food (including pellet and wet food), depending on their willingness to pay. Many owners opted for international brands such as Royal Canin and ANF, which were believed to contain higher nutritional value.
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Table 1. Key Findings of In-Depth Interview with Dog Owners (Continued)

<p><i>Consumer purchasing decision behavior (Continued)</i></p>	<p>“I’ve tasted all of my dog food to make sure that they are tasty.” – Earn, 27</p> <p>“I buy vet-recommended brands like Royal Canin and Science Diet.” – Mint, 30</p> <p>“I cook for my dogs. Prepared foods in the market are too salty.” – Hieng, 32</p> <p>“I normally feed my dog leftovers from human food.” – Bank, 30</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Spending behavior</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The owners spent approximately 2,000 baht per dog per month. Spending increased if the owner purchased snacks, accessories, and toys, which could represent an additional 1,000 baht per dog per month. One respondent spent over 10,000 baht per dog per month as she only purchased premium products for her dogs. <p>“I’ll pay any amount to keep my dog healthy.” – Molly, 50</p> <p>“I just bought a 300-baht plaque protection toothpaste for my dog. My toothpaste costs only 80 baht.” – Hieng, 32</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Purchase channel selection</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pet specialty shops were the predominant channels where owners shop for products for their dogs due to product variety and lower prices. Supermarkets and hypermarkets also play an important role as they provide convenience as owners can also shop for their own products.
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Table 1. Key Findings of In-Depth Interview with Dog Owners (Continued)

<p><i>Criteria in selecting dog products</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The findings are separated into three product categories: food and snack treats, toys and accessories, and services including doggy pool, hotel, and training. • The influencing factors on dog food products included product brand, palatability, and product packaging (size and eco-friendliness). Convenience was also crucial as many respondents opted for prepared food. In terms of treats, product variety (flavors and forms) played a critical role. At present, many respondents purchased international brands, particularly American and Japanese, as they perceived local offers to be limited. • Product benefits that owners sought in food products included nutritional balance, scented, human grade ingredients, age-specific formulations, improving digestion (stool quality and smell), and improving skin and fur condition. • Pedigree and Royal Canin were perceived as the most trusted brands. For the most part, Pedigree had a strong association with dog food, while Royal Canin was perceived as a premium brand, guaranteeing nutritional quality. • Dog accessories such as collar, harness, and clothing were evaluated primarily on style and practicality. • In selecting dog services like hotels and doggy pools, credibility of the service provider and hygiene were most influential. Moreover, attentiveness and dog friendliness of the service provider were important. The owners needed to feel that the providers, for instance, the trainer, are dog lovers themselves.
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Based on the findings presented, Bangkok dog owners that were encountered during the research period can be categorized into three distinguished segments, namely Proud Parents, Accessorizers, and Practicals. It is important to note that individual pet owners may share diverse and sometimes similar qualities. However, for the most part, these descriptions best describe each type of dog owner.

Segment 1: The Proud Parents (n= 11)

The Proud Parents are the closest to their dogs. They perceive their dogs as another human being – clearly no association with being a pet or an animal. “Child” is the term most commonly used by the Proud Parents when referring to their dogs. Dogs are raised indoors and allowed to roam freely, including sharing the sofa. The owners spend at least an hour with their dogs on weekdays and an entire day on weekends. They are often engaged in outdoor activities, such as going to the mall and swimming.



“I care about my dog’s health than my own.” – Earn, 27

Proud Parents are attached to their dogs and often miss them when away. Despite their kindness to their dogs, Proud Parents are strict when it comes to their dogs’ disciplinary behavior. The owners display more verbal and physical dominance over their dogs to ensure discipline.

Proud Parents are very selective when it comes to food products. They search for information from online sources and acquaintances including their dogs’ vets before deciding on products to buy. They read labels thoroughly. Factors influencing purchase of dog products are brand and past experience. What clearly distinguishes this segment from the other two groups is that this group spends more on dog treats than the Accessorizers and the Practicals. Proud Parents spend approximately 500 baht per month on dog snacks and treats while Accessorizers and Practicals spend 200 baht per month and less than 100 baht per month, respectively. Factors influencing product purchase include product brand, product packaging, and nutritional value. Product features and benefits that they seek include human-grade ingredients and digestion ease (and stool quality) as their dogs remain indoors. Often times, this

segment buys imported products. In terms of distribution channel, the Proud Parents like to shop at specialty stores due to wider product variety.

Segment 2: The Accessorizers (n= 6)

This particular group of owners shares similar perception and attitude to those of the Proud Parents segment, i.e. dogs equate to family members. However, Accessorizers perceive their dogs as more like their ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ and tend to “equip” their dogs with more accessories, whether they are dresses, shoes, trolleys, collars, and harnesses. They sometimes refer to their dogs as an ‘accessory.’



“My dog likes to dress up.
It signals that we are going out.”
– Mint, 30

Like the Practicals, Accessorizers like to engage in outdoor activities with their dogs, such as taking them to the mall. However, Accessorizers are more active in taking their dogs to professional grooming. Moreover, unlike the Practicals, Accessorizers are spoilers as they fail to display dominance over their dogs, allowing the dogs to get away with errant behavior. For Accessorizers, the factors influencing product purchase include product brand, product packaging, and palatability.

Segment 3: The Practicals (n= 3)

Practicals have the most distant relationship with their dogs. They often regard their dogs as guard dogs watching over the house and protecting owners from dangerous animals, such as snakes and monitor lizards. Practicals raise their dogs outdoors and spend the least time with their dogs. In fact, they often have someone else to look after the dogs. Nevertheless, Practicals may at the same time own more than one breed. In the event that the Practicals own a Thai breed and a foreign breed, the latter tends to live indoor and is more likely to receive better treatment.

The Practicals are not selective when it comes to feeding their dogs. They feed their dogs a combination of local-brand pellet food and human leftover-foods. Pellet

food is preferred over wet food due to greater convenience and longer shelf life, with product, price, and packaging size acting as key decision factors. The Practicals tend to shop at supermarkets and hypermarkets due to accessibility. It should be noted that though the Practicals may not be as attached to their dogs as the other two segments, they do not neglect their pets' veterinary requirements.

4.3 In-depth Interview with Petsville Owner – Key Findings

Dog owners seek a one-stop service

Starting off as a dog park with a small-scale pet mall, Petsville quickly expanded its services to include dog training, dog daycare and hotel (with surveillance cameras for real-time updates on owners' phones), doggy pool, and soon, an integrated healthcare facility. This is in response to Petsville's visitors who value one-stop convenience. "Pet owners want everything in one place. If you cannot offer a complete service, they will go elsewhere, particularly at this time when dog facilities are mushrooming all over Bangkok," said Petsville managing director Tananchai 'Jay' Chunsangchantra.



"Dog owners want a one-stop service."

– Jay, 32

Most of Petsville patrons are repeat customers who are concerned about their dogs' health. The doggy pool is the highlight, with Petsville's frequent customers using the service at least three times a week. The fee for a one-hour swim is 300 baht at a minimum, depending on the dog's weight. Even customers who have a pool at home prefer going to Petsville as it is equipped with attentive personal trainers who individually take care of the dog. In rewarding customer loyalty, Petsville offers a membership card with discounts and attractive promotions, such as students' price on certain days. This is because many of Petsville customers are university students, for whom taking their dogs out to socialize is an integral part of their lifestyle.

Dog owners seek sense of community

Dog parks are a great place for socialization, for dogs and their owners alike. “Petsville is a great place for socializing. Customers have their own weekend clubs: Huskies, Corgis, and many others,” according to Tananchai. In fact, Petsville serves as a ground for dog owners to share common interests and advices, and more importantly, to show off their dogs. Meanwhile, owners themselves also make new friends, with their dogs acting as icebreakers. “Our park is open to both dog owners and non-dog owners, free of charge. That way, we can build a community of dog owners.” However, to create a friendly and decent community, Tananchai clearly instructs his customers to clean up after their dogs. Dogs also should be put on leash and supervised at all times.

Small breeds receive better treatment than large ones

From his observations, Tananchai notes that more small dogs than large dogs visit his facility. His assumption is that small dogs are less costly to maintain. At Petsville, a swim can cost up to 800 baht and a night stay at the dog hotel can cost at least 1,000 baht. Moreover, small dogs are more mobile and easier to control when encountering other dogs, based on Tananchai’s experience.

Dog lovers regardless of social class

“We have all kinds of dog owners – the rich who are all dressed up, to construction workers with paint all over their shirts. They equally love their dogs,” Tananchai said. This suggests that there is no correlation between one’s affordability and devotion for one’s dogs.

4.4 Observations – Key Findings

The findings on observations are based on two data collection approaches: in-depth interviews and community mall visits at K Village and The Nine. Data collected include dog owner demographics, behavioral expressions when talking about their dogs or when with their dogs, and interaction with other dog owners or passersby.

Data were recorded during the interviews and visits and corresponding behaviors were coded to determine emergent patterns.

Dog owners are outgoing and friendly in general

Dog owners have a likeable personality. They are friendly and extroverted. This is possibly because of the psychological impact that dog ownership is believed to bring to dog owners. The owners are approachable and receptive.

Dog owners are all smiles when talking about their dogs

Dog owners are generally fond of their dogs. This particularly applies to the Proud Parents and Accessorizers segments. During the interviews, dog owners belonging to these segments smiled and praised their dogs. They were enthusiastic to tell stories about their dogs and to show their dog pictures on their phones. On the other hand, Practicals were less passionate when talking about their dogs and clearly less devoted to their dogs. They had a hard time recalling how much time or money they spent on their dogs.

Likewise, dog owners spotted at K Village and The Nine displayed a positive nature when other dog owners or passersby took notice of their dogs. The owners were particularly happy when people greeted their dogs, stopped to play with their dogs, and asked them questions regarding their dogs' name, breed, age, place of acquisition, and so on. Dog walkers at these community malls are mostly females aged 30 and above. They either came alone or with their family or suitor.

Like owners, like dogs

It is interesting to see how owners and their dogs shared personalities or even dressed alike. In fact, dog owners passed down human traits onto their dogs. Owners who owned toy dogs were mostly females. This group of owners was more dressed up and flamboyant than those owning masculine dogs like French bulldogs, beagles, and Jack Russells. For instance, one of the respondents dressed her Pomeranian in fluffy dresses. The owner herself was a big fan of pink colored clothes and accessories. On the other hand, the owner of a Siberian Husky had a more masculine manner. Owners

of small dogs also tended to be softer spoken when conversing with other dog owners or passersby. Owners of big dogs appeared more fun loving yet composed.

Dog owners display responsibility

This finding specifically applies to dog owners visiting community malls. The majority of dog owners displayed responsibility in supervising and cleaning up after their dogs. Most dog owners put their dogs on leash, small dogs sometimes in trolleys, and they had plastics bags ready for clean up. Some tucked plastic bags into their dogs' harness for handiness. Moreover, most owners ensured that their dogs do not cause nuisance to the mall patrons, especially at restaurants, by sitting in a separate dog-friendly zone prepared by the restaurants.

The facility itself has an important role in encouraging dog owners' responsibility – putting up instructions, such as sign boards to remind owners to keep their dogs on leash and clean up after their dogs. In terms of facility readiness, K Village has a dog friendlier facility compared to that of The Nine. The former has multiple toilet spots designed for dogs while also proving plastic bags for clean up. Additionally, several eateries are designed with a separate dining area for customers with dogs to ensure quality time and hygiene at the same time.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Dog owners are price insensitive

As dog owners have become increasingly devoted to their dogs, their willingness to pay for dog products also has increased. Dog owners are inclined to try new products even when they are more expensive. Besides food, owners indulge their pets with snacks, toys, and accessories. This ongoing trend suggests that marketers can improve or introduce features to existing products or introduce complementary products, which can allow them to command premium prices. Price insensitivity is most apparent when it comes to ageing dogs, as owners invest in their veterinary requirements and diet to ensure their wellbeing.

Product packaging (including labels) and ingredients are essential in influencing owners' purchase intentions. Dog owners are looking for an eco-friendly package, which is perceived as safe and organic. Labels that clearly indicate nutritional contents provided by the brands and human-grade consumption ingredients appeal greatly to a large audience, an audience that is willing to pay more for those product features.

Dog owners like everything in one place

One-stop convenience is highly valued among dog owners increasing engaged in hurried lifestyles. This is evident in their shopping behavior at supermarkets where they can get shopping done for both themselves and their dogs. This also applies to selecting a service facility, as the vast majority of dog owners opt for all-in-one facilities, provided by major dog parks. As a facility provider, this fact should be noted. For instance, a community mall may consider introducing additional services such as daycare, grooming, and training to better cater to the needs of the dog owners and to stay ahead of the competition.

Marketers should position dog products differently

Provided that there are three different segments of dog owners seeking different values, marketers need to be mindful of how they position their products and how to get their messages across. To the Proud Parents and Accessorizers, stressing brand credibility and market dominance are crucial, particularly if the product is a local brand (as these groups prefer imported products). Marketers can craft a premium image through promotional campaigns or introduce a niche snack product line, given that there are few local brands competing in the marketplace. Product features that appeal to the Proud Parents and Accessorizers are quality of ingredients and improvement of stool quality (reduction of stool odor), as most of their dogs stay indoors. In terms of communication, psychological dimensions such as ‘love,’ ‘belonging,’ and ‘family’ should be stressed, as these groups of consumers are emotionally motivated.

For the Practicals, who are the most price sensitive, advertising should be limited. Rather, on-site promotions should be utilized. To avoid head-to-head price competition, brands may consider promotions like additional volume offered at the same price.

Marketers should utilize online marketing

As dog owners are migrating to the online world, marketers need to follow suit. Online channels not only serve as a shopping destination but also as a gateway to information. Owners have become more detailed prior to purchase and have found the Internet a quick yet thorough assistant. One emerging trend that marketers can leverage is product reviews. Today, product reviews are considered one of the most influential tactics for aiding consumer decision and driving sales of products of all kinds, whether they are restaurants, cosmetics, or accommodation. The same fashion can quickly be applied to dog food, dog hotels, etc. Encouraging dog owners, experts, and likeable personalities to share their opinions on products will accelerate brands’ credibility and acceptance in the marketplace. Meanwhile, as e-commerce is expected

to grow, distributing products online should be considered to extend reach and convenience while keeping operating costs at a minimum.

With these implications, managers can design effective marketing strategies to which their target consumers are most responsive. Though it is extremely difficult for brands to compete, thanks to the large and growing dog care market, there is still a large room where managers can profit in view of consumers' healthy perception towards their dogs and demand for premium products. Bangkok is a huge and growing market, and this should apply to other parts of Thailand, which also represent promising markets. The most crucial thing to keep in mind is: to excel in the dog care industry, one needs to have the ability to understand dog owners' mindsets and to develop the ability to offer products that best cater to their customers' four-legged companions.

Future Research Suggestions

This initial study of “Human-dog relationship and implications for Bangkok’s dog care industry” can be further conducted to enhance the result outcomes for better contribution of the study. The following initiatives are suggested if the study were to be further researched:

- A quantitative study for better extrapolation of the research findings, particularly the relative sizes of important segments
- A possibility of segmenting the market with alternative key segmenting variables, for instance, segmentation by age of dog owners or age of dogs
- An additional market study, i.e. geographical area (provincial) besides Bangkok
- A qualitative study, particularly in-depth interviews with industry experts, specifically veterinarians and pet shop owners, for better understanding of market trends and dog owner behavior

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (DOG OWNERS)

General consumer information

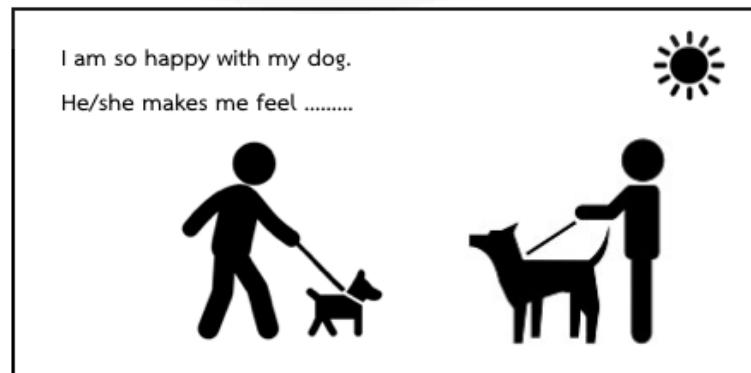
1. Introduce yourself — name, age, education background, occupation, personal income
2. How many dog(s) do you own? What breed(s) do you raise?
3. Type of dog acquisition — get from someone/self-buy/adopt
4. Price paid for dog acquisition
5. How many years have you been raising your dog(s)?

General consumer behavior and decision making process

6. Where do you raise your dog(s) — indoor/outdoor?
7. On average, how much time do you spend with your dog(s) per week?
8. What activities do you do with your dog(s)?
9. Do you search for information before purchasing particular products for your dog(s)? If yes, from what channels?
10. What do you feed your dog(s) with? (Product and brand choices)
11. What product benefits do you seek for?
12. Where do you buy those products for your dog(s)?
13. On average, how much do you spend on your dog(s) per month?
14. What promotions would entice you to purchase particular products?
15. What are the criteria in selecting products for your dog(s)?
16. What products currently not available locally that you would like to see being offered?

Consumer attitude and perception

17. What motivates you to own a dog in the first place?
18. What does your dog mean to you?
19. What are the perceived benefits of raising your dog(s)?
20. What are things that you like/dislike about your dog(s)?
21. What are the different uses of your dog(s)?
22. Refer to the illustration below and fill in the blank .



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