

Lookalike the tutor: Pet keeping characterization in consumption practices context on the relationship between aged and their dogs.

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Abstract:

Men and animals have always been close to each other so that this relationship developed pet keeping practice. Besides, there is an increase of the population longevity with more and more aged people as protagonists in social relationships and in consumption. Considering both aspects, the objective of this work is to typify consumption behavior in the pet keeping practice context between aged tutors and their dogs. Qualitative research was done with daily reports, added to unstructured interviews. Content analysis based on Theories of Practice was used to data treatment. The results indicate that dogs assume a highlighted place in their tutors life as if they were considered members of the family. Other contribution is the observation of new sectors of pet keeping practices, like watching TV, taking a nap and going out by car, which may constitute new practices.

Keywords: consumption behavior, theories of practice, pet keeping

Track: Consumer Behavior

1. Introduction

The animals have always been part of human beings life, either on utility or on emotional relationship, and as a company, assuming a protagonist role nowadays, consisting in pet keeping practice (Serpell, 1986). The utilitarian relationship between human beings and animals began to change when people started to live with animals, because of several reasons, like status, aesthetic appeal and personal fascination (Herzog, 2014). According to Shipman (2010), the connection between the human being and the animal is an universal aspect, also it strongly affects his well-being. This companionship among them puts the human being in a role of a tutor, with responsibilities, including the legal ones, that may promote the best treatment and well-being (Walsh, 2009). The term tutor was adopted in Brazil from the approval of the Law Project 3670/2015 by the Environment and Sustainable Development Commission at the Deputy Chamber, on December 7, 2016, which affirms that animals must not be considered as things.

In this context, the objective of this work is typifying consumption behavior in the pet keeping practice context between aged tutors and their dogs. An understanding which includes the benefits and responsibilities arisen from dogs and tutors coexistence and the development of consumption practices.

The social relevance of this study relates to the fact that the population of aged people and dogs are growing. In Brazil, the number of dogs surpassed the number of people in 52 million and, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), the number of aged people may grow about 50% in the following 20 years, resulting in 30 million people, putting the country on the sixth world place of aged people. Besides, Brazil is the third biggest income market and the second biggest pets population, summing more than 132 million individuals that constitute an attractive field for industry, retail and academic research.

2. Theoretic framework and Literature Review

At the beginning of this work, similar studies were found through a key word search, in both Portuguese and in English. The words used were aged people, elders, pet, dogs, theories of practice, consumption and consumer's behavior. Databases such as EBSCO, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and Portal Capes were the foundation for this research. As it was difficult to gather material that included all of the key words, they were used separately cross-referenced later. The literature review was arranged in three main subjects: the man/pet relationship, consumption and theories of practice and aged people.

2.1 The man/pet relationship

Archeological evidences suggests that, since thousands of years ago, human beings have been establishing affective bonds with animals (Serpell, 2015). The pet isn't just part of the family, it's also part of its owner, through the extended self (Belk, 1988). Dogs have always been a part of the social imagery. Art illustrates their presence throughout history, and how its signification has socially and functionally changed through the years (Monteiro, 2010).

In today's identity fragmentation context, the extended self becomes a relevant influence in consumer's behavior regarding pets (Jyrinki & Leipamaa-Leskien, 2006). The more time and money the owner invests in the pet, the bigger their involvement with it, which changes significantly their lifestyle (Dotson & Hyatt, 2008). The shared consumption shows itself when the owner fulfils their obligations towards the dog as a way to improve their quality of life, as if the pet is their child (Hill, Gaines & Wilson, 2008).

The owners frequently find themselves in a parentage relationship with their pets. Some studies show that owners who spend lots of money on products and other items for the pet feel that they have to, in order to be good "parents" (Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney, Monroe & Chamberlain, 2008). Excessive costs for such items are tangible indicators for pet keeping consumption (Kylkilahti, Syrjälä, Autio & Kuismin, 2016), as well as the choice of shops and budget, which are directly influenced by the owner-pet relationship (Chen, Hen & Peng, 2012).

Pet keeping and domestic human relationships show similar patterns, with profound feelings of a spiritual and sacred essence (Brockman, Taylor & Brockman, 2008). The experience acquires such meaning that it elevates the pet to a sacred place (Holbrook, Stephens, Day, Holbrook & Strazar, 2001).

2.2 Consumption and Theories of Practice

In order to understand the consumption, we must look at Bourdieu's perspective of Theories of Practice (1983), studied by authors such as Warde (2005), that suggests the comprehension of consumption through everyday activities. Consumption's behavior takes place when the products and items are acquired during practices, which include understanding, proceedings and engagement. Understanding stands for knowledge and shared how-to interpretations, proceedings imply rules and principles, and engagement is associated with affection and emotion.

Shove & Pantzar (2005) complement Warde's (2005) point of view when defining the practices as composed by harmonized elements which connect objects, consumption and market in a process of abilities structuring with practice performance, what allows that it may

be shared with other individuals, innovating or generating new practices from learning processes, including new products and their consumption.

Magaudda (2011) contributes when observes how the practices' contexts enable the understanding of the changing process and influence habits and consumption behavior. This author suggests a tool for the empirical analysis of consumption based on the perspective of Theories of Practice by adopting a "practice circuit". Three main dimensions are proposed by the author, which are linked to each other and contribute to construct the practices as a pattern of shared social activities: (1) meanings and representations; (2) objects, technologies and material culture in general; and (3) competences and activities included in "doing" (Magaudda, 2011, p. 20). We will consider these dimensions to investigate pet keeping in the aged person universe. When we use the "practice circuit" to analyze some practice we represent, in a visual way, how the (re)arrangement of a consumption behavior occurs, considering the heterogeneity and complexity of practice, from its main dimensions: objects, meanings and actions (Magaudda, 2011), that are interconnected and allow the construction of socially shared activities patterns (Shove & Pantzar, 2005).

2.3 Aged and longevity

According to United Nations' Elderly Statute, a Brazilian document, a person is considered elder if they are 60 year or older. However, "the definitions of aging, as well as the social roles of each group, change drastically over time and amongst different cultures" (Hareven, 1986, p.17). Therefore, the definitions of "elder" or "senior" have been changing.

In order to align with this paper's objective, it was crucial to observe the elder pet relationship and its similarities to human relationships (Holbrook et al. 2001), promoting significant improvement in quality of life, physical and mental health and stress reduction as a result of pet interaction (Serpell, 2015). The humanized pet care causes the aged people to go beyond pet's limits, illustrated by reports such as: "pet owners claim that their pets match their personality, lifestyle and family" (Belk, 1996, p.,127).

3. Methodological Procedures

This exploratory research from a qualitative approach was developed with the intention to understand the phenomenon as an integrated and contextual way (Godoy, 1995). We chose the usage of personal diary as the main technique of data collection, filled by the own tutor (Zaccarelli & Godoy, 2010). Brief interviews complemented the diary reports, characterized as interviews with free answers (Morin, 2007) in which the interviewer allows or stimulates an

improvising freedom when answering. The research corpus was selected from the clients basis of a food industry for pets. We also recruited tutors aged from 60 years old or older, married or widowed, from both sexes. We chose adult dogs tutors with more than one year living together, emphasizing an established relationship between the tutor and the pet, after the adaptation period of living with each other.

We provided the diaries for the registration of the dogs routine so they should describe individual and shared activities with the pet for seven days. There were instructions to fill the diaries based on the nexus of the practices and the main consumption behaviors mentioned in the literature review. The interviews that complemented the reports had about 15 and 45 minutes duration, performed with the tutors after filling the diary. In total, eight diaries were filled, in which one from a masculine tutor and seven from feminine tutors, with the ages between 60 and 75 years old. We interviewed three of these tutors, two women and one man, and three more interviews with one man, one woman and a couple that decided to be interviewed together, all of them between 63 and 75 years old, what totalizes a corpus of 12 participants. The participants live in São Paulo state, they are white, heterosexual and middle class people. All of them signed a Free and Informed Agreement Term. The interviews were developed in Skype platform between November 2019 and February 2020, and were also recorded and transcribed. We used Content Analysis as data organization and treatment, establishing categories from the collected data and analyzing the existent relationship among them (Bardin, 2016). Theories of Practice were used for the data codification and interpretation, especially the practice circuit proposed by Magaudda (2011).

4. Results and discussion

The data were organized in categories and subcategories which were constructed along the analysis process (Bardin, 2016). The identified meanings linked to the theoretical reference and the literature review were explored in the interpretation process, structured in the practice circuit nexus (Magaudda, 2011).

OBJECTS	MEANINGS	ACTIONS
TELEVISION AUTOMOBILES MEDICATION ACCESSORIES TOYS DOG FOOD FRUIT AND VEGETABLES SNACKS	HUMANIZATION INDULGENCES OBJECTS REFRAME COMPANY	AUTONOMY NAPS MEALS WALKING BATH <i>PET SHOP</i>

Figure 1. Categories and subcategories observed in Content Analysis

The categorization allowed the description of pet keeping practice and pointed to four elements not explored yet: one is related to a humanized feeding because in the past the tutor feed the dog and now, both of them have breakfast, have lunch and have dinner; the television as a promoter for a being together moment; the automobile as an space for compensation and enjoyment besides its function of transportation; the aged daily nap is now shared with the pet, strengthening their emotional relationship. We name these four new elements as sections of pet keeping practices, which may even modify the whole practice or construct possible proto-practice (Shove & Pantzar, 2005), that might derive for specific practices. Anyway, we consider that this practice categorization presents promising elements to be considered from a consumption perspective.

4.1 Practice Sector Circuit (Breakfast)

The dog’s feeding schedule synchronizes with the owner’s meals, bringing them even closer. Expressions such as “Belinha [the dog] had already had dinner”, “ every morning there is a treat ritual, with fruits and vegetables”, or even “We had breakfast, he [the dog] had some cheese (and he loves it!)” show that the pet and its owner share meal hours and food. Many activities and objects get different meanings in this pet-human interaction (Magaudda, 2011), and can create new products and innovations through new learning and adaptation processes (Shove & Pantzar, 2005). Since the dog has a symbolic and functional role in the owner’s life (Jyrinki et al., 2006), the changes of meal hours imply different behavior, in which new food is brought in to functionally satisfy the dog’s feeding and symbolically attend the new consumption design. Instead of feeding once a day, the dog now gets to choose its own food, have breakfast, lunch and dinner. The structure suggested by this process allows the identification of new objects and actions, as the following diagram illustrates.

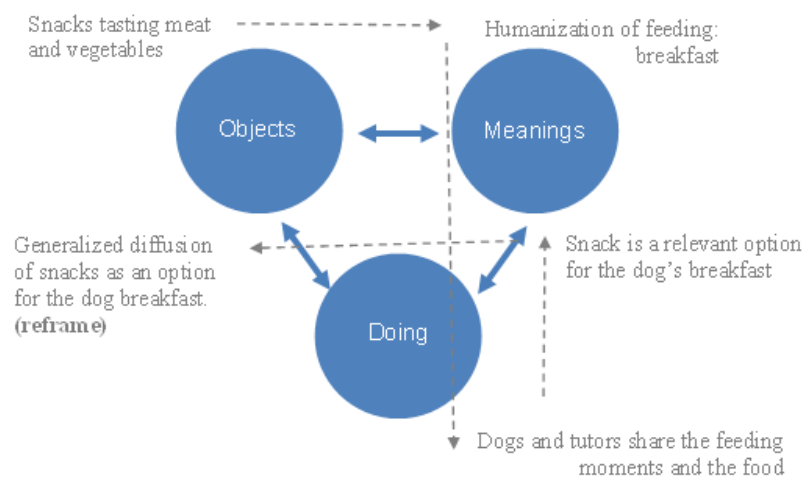


Figure 2. Pet keeping sector of practice circuit (breakfast) adapted from Magaudda (2011)

4.2 Practice Sector Circuit (Automobiles)

The automobiles, as identified in the diaries and interviews, also have acquired a different meaning, as it is now part of the dog's life, both in transportation and recreation spheres. New products come from this use, for example, as quoted from one of the interviewees, the dog adapted seat belt. This practice creates new ways of production and consumption, as well as different consumer industry interactions (SHOVE; PANTZAR, 2005).

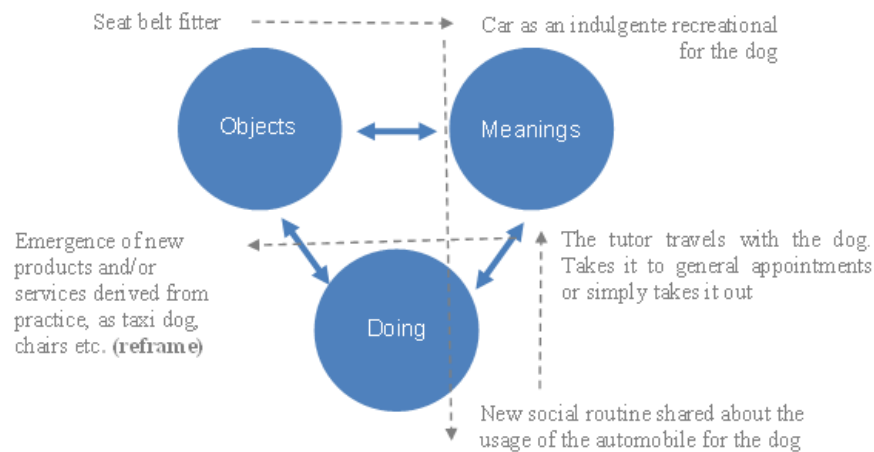


Figure 3. Pet keeping sector of practice circuit (automobile) adapted from Magaudda (2011)

The usage of medication for car sickness, transportation chairs, accessories to be used inside the automobile also emerged in this section of practice and possible new proto-practice. Like some services such as Uber and Taxi Dog. However, what seems the most innovative is the conversion of the car on a recreational place, just used to take the dog out, innovating the usage and the meaning of the tutor and dog relationship.

4.3 Practice Sector Circuit (Television)

According to a few owner's reports, the television can be a consumption object for dogs (to keep them company when the owner is not at home, for instance), as well as an interaction place for them. The TV hours are distributed between owner and pet, and they keep each other company, besides, there's also physical affection involved.

Therefore, two main meanings were identified related to TV consumption. The first is related to dog entertainment and the second is related to an emotional interaction between the tutor and the dog. TV channels for dogs already exist and they were developed based on the dogs physical and behavior features, such as illumination and sound adaptation. In the future, many other products may emerge to answer this practice section.

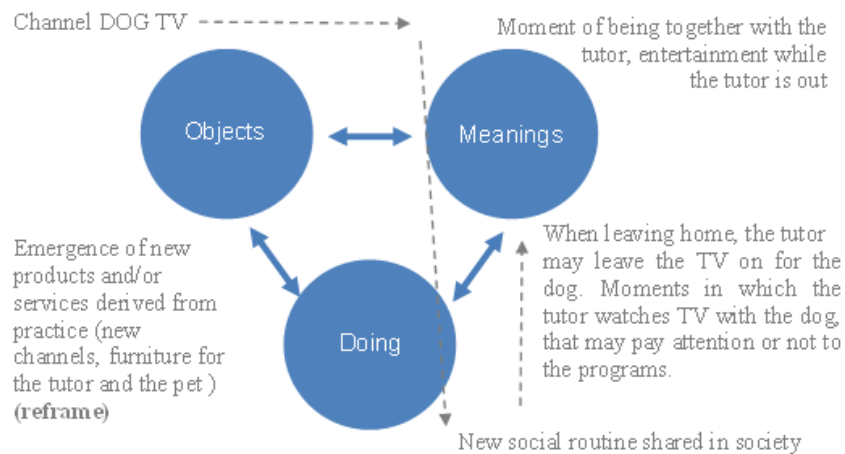


Figure 4. Pet keeping sector of practice circuit (television) adapted from Magaudda (2011)

4.3 Practice Sector Circuit (Naps)

According to the reports, a common practice among elders is to sleep during the day, with from now on we'll call napping. "When I'm not too busy, I'll turn on the TV and end up napping, and he [dog] naps with me. When I get up, he wakes up, he follows my pace". The dog follows the owner through most of their day activities, and in these moments of rest, they interact with each other by occupying the same bedroom or bed during the nap.

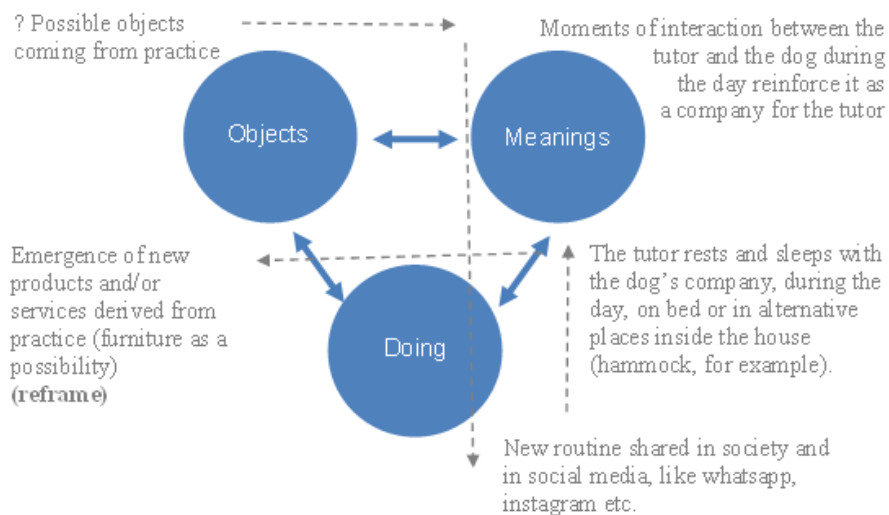


Figure 5. Pet keeping sector of practice circuit (naps) adapted from Magaudda (2011)

5. Conclusion

The pet keeping components and its possible new proto-practices enabled us to organize a detailed description of some practice sections, which deserve more attention, in our opinion, and that are next summarized, also may be considered original contributions: (a) The meals acquire a new status on the pet's agenda. The dog doesn't just feed, he has lunch, dinner and

breakfast along with their owner. This leads to the conclusion that the industrial food business can develop new products to fill this gap; (b) The automobile as an entertainment place for pets. There can be created accessories to ensure the dog's safety and comfort during the ride, or even medication as a solution to car sickness; (c) The television as a space for content consumption. When watching TV, the owner and the dog keep each other company, and when the owner is absent, the television becomes the pet's "babysitter"; (d) Nap time with the owner. Both the pet and the owner share this moment, strengthening their affective bond. This seems to be a promising sector, but the data collected suggests that it's yet incipient compared to other sectors.

Some limitations that the research presents may be its accomplishment with aged people only from São Paulo State, which can bring possible specific local points of view. Another aspect to be highlighted is that all participants are white, heterosexual and middle class people. Therefore, new researches that involve this absent diversity would be welcome. Finally, we consider these four sectors of pet keeping mapped in this study to be promising possible topics for further research, with important contributions to the consumption and consumer's behavior studies, as well as to the development of new products and practices related to these topics.

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