Traveling with pets: Designing hospitality services for pet owners / parents and hotel guests

Purpose – Pet-friendly hotels are growing rapidly. The prevalence of pet adoption has largely resulted from the loneliness due to social distancing that happened during the Coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. Many hotels around the world aim to become pet-friendly to satisfy the growing demand. Hoteliers believe that the popularity of pet-friendly hotels will continue, as pet owners often treat pets as their kids. This study aims to investigate how pet-friendly hotels need to design and manage pet-friendly services and policies.

Design/methodology/approach – Using grounded theory methodology, this research conducts interviews with 25 pet-friendly hotel managers from Hong Kong (HK). The study includes hotels from different hotel categories and classifications. It examines the conceptualization of pet-friendly service design, drawing on a service blueprint.

Findings – Building on the service marketing and service blueprint literature, this research provides a synthesis that reflects how pet-friendly hotels can serve both guests with and without pets. The findings reveal that pet-owner's service expectations are formed on anthropomorphism that is an inclination of attributing human features to non-human entity. Hotel managers, and particular those who have pets personally understand better how pet-friendly service can be adapted to meet the expectations and requirements of pet owners whilst accommodating guests without pets. The market of pet-friendly hospitality is growing with high profit potential from pet-owners who are willing to spend generously.

Research limitations/implications – Data were collected from selected pet-friendly hotels in HK through interviews with pet-friendly service providers. The research is qualitative and exploratory in nature. It aims to explore and examine the multilevel pet-friendly hospitality service design from a managerial perspective. This research enriches the literature on anthropomorphism theory, the design of pet-friendly services and the application of service blueprint.

Practical implications – The research offers explicit suggestions for the design of pet-friendly hospitality services. A pet-friendly hotel service blueprint is developed. This can help managers to develop essential pet-friendly policies and service collaborations between internal departments and with external specialist organizations, maximizing the value for all stakeholders.

Originality/value – The study explores a rapidly emerging market and scrutinizes its specific design requirements. It extends theoretical insights by enriching the anthropomorphism theory and broadening the conceptualizations of service blueprint based on anthropomorphism theory.

Keywords: Pet-friendly; Service blueprint; Pet policy; Pet owners; Pet Parents; Pet travel; Dogs

Article Type: Research paper

1. Introduction:

The demand for pet-friendly services has grown dramatically since the outbreak of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. A survey of American respondents in November 2021 reported that 14% acquired a new pet while 10% planned to adopt a new pet (Statista, 2022). This rising pet adoption resulted from loneliness, due to social distancing restrictions (Tomassini, 2022), leading more people to seek solace from pets (Morgan et al., 2020). Humans feel increasingly reluctant to go on holiday and leave the pets in kennels or with family or friends (Alves and Sousa, 2022, Peng et al, 2014). Hotels realized the market potential and developed suitable product and service propositions to tap into the growing pet-owner segment. Pet-friendly hotels have long been lucrative as they attract affluent guests. Serving pet owners and offering ancillary pet services often increases occupancy rates and revenue per available room (Boroshok, 2006). The average stay of guests with pets is approximately 2.56 nights, longer than the 2.1 nights for guests without pets (Boroshok, 2006). As such, 76% of pet-owners become loyal guests after a successful stay at pet-friendly hotels (Hansen, 2004). Pet owners make up an affluent segment, as Average Daily Rate (ADR) and overall spending significantly exceed the hotel average. With an all-profit potential, lodging brands such as Loews and Kimpton have perennial pet-friendly services. Other hotel brands, such as St. Regis, W Hotels, Disney Hotels, and The Ritz-Carlton, have all reaped the benefits that come with increased loyalty from pet owners (Renrokil, 2019). Prospecting into the future, hoteliers expect the prevalence of pet-friendly hotels to continue, as more guests wish to travel with their pets (Washington Business Journal, 2021; Wu & Chang, 2021).

Serving guests with pets requires exceptional service design and quality. Pets often play a very influential role in their owners' daily routines. This is often the case for the well-being for older adults and senior citizens (Patterson and Balderas-Cejudo, 2023) as well as young females (Su, 2022). In addition, the human–pet association often shapes the perception and behavior of owners as it brings a range of constraints (Borgi & Cirulli, 2016, Chen et al, 2011). These constraints need to be carefully examined and they are applied differently to different animals (Hung et al, 2012, Chen et al, 2013). Pet-owners often need to think and satisfy the needs of their pets before they can satisfy their own (Hansen, 2004). With pets being an influencing factor, the pet-owner's perceived service quality is multifaceted (Ying et al., 2021), involving their personal service quality, pet attachment, and perceived pet benefits (Tang et al., 2022). To satisfy the requirements of pet-owners, who often anthropomorphize their pets, hotels had to re-engineer their processes and to launch various innovative pet-friendly services. For example, the Rosewood Hotel in London offers dog grooming sessions with a renowned dog groomer. They also offer a fashionable leash, dog bed and coat, all designed by a British historical brand. In Japan, the Kai Kinugawa resort provides private hot spring baths for both dog-owners and dogs to enjoy (CNN, 2019).

Service design must strike a balance when accommodating both guests with and without pets. With the COVID-19 pandemic, guests are more concerned about hotel hygienic measures (Chan et al., 2021). When demonstrating the reframing of service innovations from designing to practicing, extant literature has applied service blueprint as a service design process (Pandey & Kulshrestha, 2021). However, very few hospitality studies have examined service blueprints and often focus on

customer-oriented aspects (Milton & Johnson, 2012; Pandey & Kulshrestha, 2021). Therefore, research must address how hotels design their services to satisfy the needs of pets and the demands of their owners. As such, this study aims to examine the multilevel pet-friendly hospitality service design from a managerial perspective.

2. Literature review

2.1 Service expectations of pet owners

Pet owners increasingly identify themselves as pet parents. In particular, such is the case for childless adults or empty nesters, who can enjoy caring responsibilities when adopting pets (Owens & Grauerholz, 2019). During adoption, pet owners develop attitudes towards pets that resemble their human family members, resulting in their specific service expectations (Owens & Grauerholz, 2019). These service expectations therefore reflect the association between owners and their pets (Carr, 2017). This study primarily focuses on dogs, which is the most common pet type with 33% owners of the global population (PFMA, 2021). Dogs are the pets that are mainly welcomed by pet-friendly hotels (Renrokil, 2019). Habitually, dog owners also anthropomorphize their pets (Serpell, 2003), ascribing humanlike emotions related to their social needs, identity motivations, and societal expectations (Dotson & Hyatt, 2008; McConnell et al., 2016). Pet cute response explicates how pet owners consider themselves as guardians, with innate parental instincts (Serpell, 2003). Literature on animal ownership illustrates a strong positive association between pet ownership and enhancements in owners' physical and mental health (Kirillova et al., 2015). Pet owners who are highly attached to their pets benefit more from pet ownership than those who are less attached (Serpell, 2003).

Anthropomorphism symbolizes how pet ownership affects consumer behavior and consumption patterns (Cavanaugh et al., 2008). Anthropomorphism theory illustrates how people are inclined to anthropomorphize using three psychological determinants, namely, elicited agent knowledge, sociality, and effectance (Epley et al., 2007). The elicited agent knowledge explains how customers make humanlike judgements toward nonhuman entities. Sociality illustrates the human need to develop and sustain social relationships with others, including non-human entities. Effectance explains how humans interpret and control their behaviors easier than non-human agents at times of uncertainty (Epley et al., 2007). Anthropomorphism theory signifies an active cognitive mechanism of anthropomorphism that determines how humans feel like the non-human entity is initiatively. The owner–pet relationship affects consumer experience across different consumption stages, including acquisition, consumption, and disposition (Aylesworth et al., 1999). Pet parents often treat their pets as children and behave accordingly (Chiang, et al, 2022; Hu, 2023). Dogs, as companions, influence traveler's consumption behavior (Huang et al., 2021; Kirillova et al., 2015; Chan and Tung, 2022). Pet owners often prioritize the needs of their pets over their own, and are thus restricted by limitations on the locations they can visit and the services they can consume. Hotels that intend to attract this affluent market segment can, therefore, offer diversified pet-friendly services (Chen et al., 2014). These services must address the needs of all stakeholders, allowing pet owners to indulge in the company of their pets.

Pet-friendly hotels refer to accommodation establishments that offer pet-centric amenities, making owners and their pets feel welcome and energetic (Apartmentguide, 2019). The service extent of

being pet-friendly is more than that of pet-allowed, which only permits owners to have their pets with them (Yu et al., 2020). Hotel managers need to establish various service processes, as well as terms and conditions, to support the needs of pets and their owners. A balance in accommodating guests with and without pets is also necessary to avoid possible complaints (Huang et al., 2021). Processes and services must not compromise health and safety for all stakeholders. Often, restrictions are in place to ensure that everybody understands and appreciates what pets are allowed to do in a hotel property, to ensure the safety and comfort for all. Typical pet restrictions comprise animal characteristics such as weight limitations, pet type, number of pets, and hotel locations, including prohibited hotel public areas (such as restaurants, ball rooms, pools, and spa areas) (Pettravel, 2019). Pet owners are informed in advance about their rights and responsibilities, together with a list of facilities, local veterinarians, and places to go with pets (Chipkin, 2006). Frequently, these restrictions do not apply to guide service dogs as they are professionally trained to operate safely in similar environments (Qiao, et al, 2023).

The stringency of pet policies varies according to the hotel rating, design, and location. Several upper-scale hotel chains loosen pet restrictions to provide greater comfort for pet owners. For examples, the Rosewood HK has no weight limit for pets. The Murray and the Hyatt Centric hotels in HK have alfresco dining areas where owners and their pets can freely enjoy table service meals other than in their rooms (SCMP, 2021). Apart from restrictions, pet-friendly hotels have designed multiple service packages, satisfying the inclination of pet owners the anthropomorphize their pets. All additional services are chargeable and lift the revenue and profitability of hotels (Boroshok, 2006). For example, the Le Bristol in Paris offers customizable accessories with the pet name; the NIZUC Hotel in Mexico provides a "pet ocean adventure" in which pet owners and their pets can try paddle boarding together (CNN, 2019). Hence, pet-friendly hotels formulate various products, services, and policies according to local conditions, customers, and facility design. However, very limited literature has explored the relevant processes in terms of policy- and decision-making from the hospitality supply perspective (Huang et al., 2021). This study therefore answers this call, through the conceptualization of a service blueprint.

2.2 Pet-friendly hotel service blueprint design

The service blueprint uses a process chart to facilitate service providers in designing, providing, and managing innovative propositions (Shostack, 1984). Service design is visualized by pointing out how customers, employees, and support services can cooperate effectively (Pandey & Kulshrestha, 2021). The service blueprint sets criteria that improves service performance, uniformity, and consistency, as well as identifies potential problems (Shostack, 1984). Thus, the concept of service blueprint has been applied in various industrial operations, including hospital and retailing (Ryu et al., 2020). In addition, the service blueprint is also used in marketing as part of branding, assisting marketers to decipher which operational parts are observable to the consumer and forming the basic service expectations (Tasci, 2020). Hotels aim to identify the individual needs of consumers and their pets at each stage of their journey to offer appropriate service and increase the value perceived by stakeholders.

The standard service blueprint has five main components, as follows: (1) Physical evidence that includes the tangible encounters during customer service experience; (2) Customer actions that

incorporate all of the service delivery processes that customers participate in; (3) Onstage contact employee actions that engage customers to visible operational activities; (4) Backstage contact employee actions that identify operational activities that are invisible to customers, but support the service delivery; and (5) Support processes involving all systems and procedures performed by employees to facilitate service delivery (Zeithaml, 2013). The standard service blueprint is often divided by three horizontal lines, including: (1) the interaction that tells apart service providers and customer activities; (2) the visibility that separates activities between the visible (onstage) and invisible (backstage) to the customer; and (3) the internal interaction that differentiates between front office and back-office activities (Zeithaml, 2013). Milton and Johnson (2012) illustrated that a customer-focused service blueprint and a business process modeling notation are similar when illustrating a hotel stay service process.

Service blueprint hospitality literature is highly limited (Pandey & Kulshrestha, 2021). Chan et al. (2021) illustrated how hotel service design processes had to change to customer-focused service encounter patterns to address the COVID-19 pandemic challenge. A re-framed hotel service blueprint with contactless services had to be introduced due to hygienic and safety concerns. Similarly, pet-friendly hotels need to draw their service blueprints to ensure that they are not only customer-oriented but also pet-oriented, addressing the needs of both humans and pets simultaneously. Such hotels also need to address the needs and requirements of all hospitality stakeholders, including other guests and staff that may not be familiar or appreciative of pets (Pandey & Kulshrestha, 2021). This study therefore addresses two main knowledge gaps: pet-friendly service design processes from a managerial perspective and its multilevel considerations reconciling both guests with and without pets.

3. Methodology

This study aims to establish an in-depth understanding of how pet-friendly services are designed by hotel managers. A qualitative method is used to explore the pet-friendly service design (Maxwell, 2012), and its robustness is verified by using a naturalistic inquiry (Tracy, 2010).

Data collection includes in-depth, on site, personal interviews with hotel managers who are responsible for developing hotel service design processes. Little Steps Asia is a popular digital company among Asian pet owners who seek pet-friendly information (littlestepsasia, 2021). One of their recent reports identified the eight most pet-friendly hotels in HK (littlestepsasia, 2021). The various levels of luxury, comfort, and price range of pet-friendly hotels, six out of eight hotels are selected, as follows: The Ritz Carlton HK; The Rosewood HK; W HK; The Murray HK; Hyatt Centric Victoria Harbor HK; and Alva Hotel by Royal. These hotels are well recognized as market leaders in providing pet-friendly services in HK, and most of them represent well-known international brands. Overall, 25 hotel managers are interviewed for this study, recruited from May to July 2022 period, based on their involvement in the design of pet friendly services. Most of the recruited interviewees are senior managers, including General Managers, Executive Housekeepers, Front Office Managers, and Marketing Executives. On average, each of the interviewees had over 20-year of working experience in the hospitality industry. The vast majority are university graduates, demonstrating their seniority and role in service design. The in-depth interviews are conducted face-to-face either in English or in Cantonese and lasts over an hour on average. With the interviewees' agreement, all interviews are audio-recorded for transcription into English.

Interviewees are given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Table 1 illustrates the interviewees' profiles.

In-depth personal interviews are carried out using the dramatological approach that can keep interviewer predispositions in check by allowing them to play a defined role (Lothane, 2011). This approach is efficient as it reduces interviewers' prejudice and can facilitate more comprehensive and vigorous reasoning than by solely using narratives (Roberts, 2020). The interview protocol is built on the literature review of pet-friendly services. The semi-structured interviews include open-ended questions to enable storytelling by the interviewees and more in-depth exploration by the interviewers (Walker & Myrick, 2006). All responses are collected to the point of theoretical saturation, which refers to the repetition of provided information by the interviewees and no new detail is further obtained (Engward, 2013). Often, interviewees provide evidence of documents and artifacts, such as terms and conditions for pet owners, menus, amenities offered, photographic albums, and marketing collateral. Before each interview, researchers examined the information provided online on the hotel website with regards pet facilities, services, and policies. Once at the hotel, an elaborate site visit is arranged to witness the facilities, service design, and processes on each property. During site visits, ample photographs are taken for documentation of all pet-friendly facilities. Through in-person observation and photos and document collection, authors can triangulate data sources. This authenticated observation and interpretations, supporting further data analysis, and enhancing the credibility of this study (Decrop, 1999). During site inspections, additional comments made by managers are recorded and clarifications on issues are discussed in the interviews. Photographs and artifacts are collected to support the discussion with managers and to document facilities or service design.

Data analysis uses grounded theory, given that the specific pet-friendly service design process is out of any applied theory in hospitality management (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Grounded theory provides a framework for this qualitative study, supporting the generation of mid-range theories and explanations of social actions for exceptional phenomena, such as the uniqueness of pet-friendly services (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Different from the phenomenology that mainly aims to describe a lived experienced, grounded theory focuses on developing an explanatory framework of underlying social processes (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Therefore, the essence of this study is to determine "how" the pet-friendly service must be designed, using best management practices. Instead of "what" is designed, this study collects comprehensive data sources, including observations, photographs, previous literature, and in-depth interviews to explore "how" the design should be (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007).

This study follows the coding procedure for grounded theory data analysis (Walker and Myrick (2006). An audit trail with field notes is retained with the transcriptions. Initial coding notes are saved in the margins of the transcription files with four main steps: 1) Identify the key components in the transcriptions from the interviews; 2) Straighten out the relevance from the common and specific points; 3) Distinguish tracks to streamline data; and 4) Categorize gaps in the data for additional theoretical sampling objectives. Subsequently, the initial codes are evaluated via focused coding. The axial coding method is applied explicitly. The reason is that the formerly theoretical framework illustrates a service blueprint that defines service for customers, employees, and support from the main hotel components (Pandey & Kulshrestha, 2021). This process identifies the core classifications of the emerging theory from the data in the second-order analysis (Kelle, 2007). In accordance with the service blueprint, the core classifications are identified with three distinguished lines (i.e., lines of interaction, visibility, and internal interaction). One core

classification for each concept is formulated into subcategories and storylines. Applying the axial coding procedures enable the view to see how, when, who, why and under what situations and considerations the pet-friendly services are designed. These procedures amalgamate the subcategories into themes. Table 2 exhibits the frequency of the mentioned themes to assist integration and refinement when finalizing theoretical model (Kelle, 2007; Walker & Myrick, 2006). Finally, part of the raw data is presented in findings to illustrate the interviewee statements toward developing hospitality pet friendly designs.

4. Findings

Key findings are presented in the framework of a service blueprint, including the decision making and activities in each stage. Findings broaden the conceptualization of the service blueprint based on anthropomorphism theory.

4.1 Pet-friendly hotel service design

All respondents emphasize that hotels develop their pet-friendly services to address the growing and lucrative market niche during the COVID-19 pandemic. As pet owners do not patronize properties unless they can bring their pets, many interviewees feel that this development is a great opportunity to attract a new market as well as a threat to lose loyal and lucrative customers that want to visit with pets. This market was largely neglected pre-COVID when HK hotels were running over 90% occupancy, mainly with international customers, and were achieving considerable revenue. COVID-19 forced hoteliers to look for new markets. Interviewees generally believe that they comprise a very lucrative, rapidly growing market, with high profit potential because pet-owners are willing to spend money on their "pet kids". This is particularly the case for professionals who have no family obligations and expenses. The pet market is not only considerable in size, but also affluent enough to recover part of the lost hotel revenue. Predictably, interviewees who are themselves pet owners are more familiar with the required services and are naturally more comfortable to design suitable service adaptions. One of the General Managers from an upper midscale hotel explained that:

> "From my observation, most of the guests aged 30–45 with pets are couples without children and are mostly new pet adopters. These guests are generous in any pet related expenditures, similar to first-time parents who are excited for everything about their first baby. Hence, we can charge them premium with the additional pet amenities and services they need." (P6)

Pet-friendly hotels have to design standard pet policies as they accommodate both guests with and without pets. Most of the sample hotels welcome dogs or cats only, while two upper midscale hotels serve dogs only. Interviewees suggest that pet owners feel obliged to travel with dogs, rather than leave them at home. Hence, the majority of guests with pets visiting hotels are dog owners. Hotels in HK pre-assign specific floors, and occasionally lifts, as pet-friendly to reduce potential problems and disruptions for guests without pets. Most of the hotels have a pet weight limitation of 20 to 30 kg to avoid disruption. However, two upper upscale hotels removed size or weight limitations as they were unpopular with guests. These hotels also found that larger dogs tend to be

quieter and more adaptable, as they are less threatened by new surroundings. The common standard is that a maximum of two pets are allowed per room.

Before check-in, pet owners have to inform the hotel. Customers sign a service agreement, outlining all pet-related terms and conditions, and occasionally pay a refundable deposit for possible damages. The terms and conditions define the areas accessible for pets (mainly open-air spaces and private rooms) as well as inaccessible areas, such as food and beverage outlets and common use spaces. The terms and conditions stipulate that pets must be kept on a leash and accompanied by the owner or held in arms in all hotel public areas. This is particularly the case in areas of mixed use, such as the reception (Figure 1). Interviewees also express their concern about providing services simultaneously to a range of different stakeholders, with different interests and preferences. They need to design services to ensure the health, safety and comfort of all guests and pets, as well as to co-create a pleasant experience for all.

> "We must ensure that both pet owners and guests without pets are equally happy and comfortable with each other. We try to identify what services improve their satisfaction even if they need separate access. For example, we have designated lifts for pets so that those who prefer to avoid pets can use different lifts." (P4)

***FIGURE 1 AROUND HERE ***

Apart from private bedrooms, most of the areas inside the hotels are pet-prohibited. Pet owners are recommended to visit hotel outdoor areas and nearby pet-friendly public and private facilities, suggested by the concierge. All interviewees agree that that pet owners are typically collaborative in following pet policies. Interviewees have yet to experience serious complaints about pet-related disturbance from other guests. As such, all interviewees consider their pet-friendly policies are sufficient when accommodating both guests with and without pets.

4.2 Physical evidence and customer action

The hotel's pet-friendly amenities and facilities are key concerns for pet owners. All sample hotels have their standard in-room amenities, which include a minimum pet bed, food, and water bowls, potty pads, pet wipes, and pet snacks (Figure 2). To capture this growing and high-spending segment of pet owners, hotel owners invest capital expenditure and add special features in their services. Several hotels have replaced their carpets with wooden vinyl floors that are more durable, eliminate wear and tear, and improve cleaning processes. This type of floor is more hygienic and avoids smell from pet urine, allowing for easier removal of pet hair easier and reduces cleaning time. When providing pet amenities, the hotel category (which also determines room rates) and the quantity and quality of amenities are positively related. A resident manager from a luxury hotel indicated:

> "We conducted the market research for our offered pet amenities. We have to make sure all pet amenities are from well-known and reliable brands. Even the water we offer is branded bottled water and for snacks we offer 'Wagu Beef' treats. Our guests care much about where the amenities are from and their quality, so we strive for the best." (P9)

***FIGURE 2 AROUND HERE ***

As a comparison, an operations director from an upper midscale hotel mentioned:

> "The pet amenities we provide are mainly from sponsors. Most of them are new products and we help suppliers to launch them in the market by allowing to show-case their products. We do not require sponsors to provide well-known brands, but we ensure that they are professional in producing excellent pet-related food or items, so we can work together." (P12)

The pet amenities play a particularly important role in the quality of pet experience. Experienced pet-friendly managers have gradually learned to consider the pet's perspective. One general manager from an upper midscale hotel is a sophisticated pet adopter and explained:

> "Different from other pet-friendly hotels, we provide a brand-new pet bed, which pet owners can take away when they check out. I had this idea because I have been adopting dogs for ages. I understand that dogs are sensitive to smell, so they don't like it if their bed was used by someone else before. Our guests highly appreciate this offer and this gives us a competitiveness over other pet-friendly hotels." (P6)

Pet facilities and services help create memorable experiences for both owners and pets. Interviews show that pet-friendly hotels concentrate on B2C (business to consumer) and a C2C (consumer to consumer) approaches when accommodating owners and their pets. A B2C strategy is typically adopted when hotels have limited spaces, where owners and their pets can meet with others. In this case, all services are primarily focused on such relations. For example, rooms are often pet-friendly themed and decorated (Figure 3). Most of the sample hotels focus on their B2C approach due to spatial layout limitations. Hence, they provide services for owners and their pets only. A Senior Sales and Marketing Manager from a luxury hotel described:

> "Due to the hotel having a mainly indoor configuration, guests and their pets are basically only allowed in their rooms. However, we provide numerous in-room services that pets, and their owners can enjoy. For example, we decorate pet rooms to be very 'instagrammable', with many photo props, including themed backdrops, pet costumes, and pet embroidery name tags. Our guests can also pay a supplement for professional pet photography service." (P10)

***FIGURE 3AROUND HERE ***

Many hotels also create comprehensive dine-in experiences for pets to enjoy meals in the room (Figure 4). In-room services blend both owner and pet dining experiences, as emphasized by the operation director of an upper midscale hotel:

> "All the public areas in our hotel are pet-restricted. We provide room service for both humans and pets. Owners can order their own meals, but they can also order breakfast, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner for their pet, specifically designed and cooked by our chefs. Owners and their pets can enjoy their private dining time in the room." (P18)

***FIGURE 4 AROUND HERE ***

A C2C approach is adopted primarily when hotels have external spaces, where pet owners can meet and socialize, while their pets can play together. The C2C strategy relates to how hotels facilitate pet owners interacting and co-creating experiences with other pet-owners. This C2C co-creation also involves a D2D (dog-to-dog) interaction, as owners anthropomorphize their dogs

with the desire to make friends with other dogs. The interviewees explain that when spatial layout allows, they encourage C2C and D2D experience co-creation. This is especially the case when they have open air spaces, such as cafes/restaurants with external sitting or pet gardens. Many pet-friendly hotels tend to create physical spaces where interactions between pet owners and pets are encouraged (Figure 5). At times, they try to monetize such spaces by selling coffee, drinks, refreshments, or street food to encourage the interaction and also to add revenue opportunities. They also provide spaces for parties and other social activities, to supports guests that like to include their "pet-kids" in social gatherings, such as parties or even weddings. One hotel is hosting "dog wedding" parties, to accommodate 50 human guests and up to 30 dogs, although the uptake for this package is usually from couples that are getting married and prefer to have their pets present at the ceremony. One front office manager from an upper upscale hotel mentioned:

> "We have a very privileged location among other hotels in the business district. Dogs are not just limited to the rooms at our hotel! Given that our hotel is near the green oasis of HK Park, we signpost the route for our guests. We have outdoor pet gymnasium and restaurants inside our hotel area. Pet parents are welcome to enjoy their time with their furry kids and have more interactions with other pet owners. We also have various pet activities, like dog's yoga class, dogs' weddings, and Christmas's dog party. Pet owners can enjoy more interaction or expand their friendships with other pet owners, same as their pets." (P1)

***FIGURE 5 AROUND HERE ***

4.3 Onstage contact employee actions

The front office and food and beverage are the two departments providing face-to-face services for guests with pets. All sample hotels adopt Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to facilitate the stay of pet owners. When pet-owners check in, the front desk staff observe the pet and decide if it is eligible to stay. The observation includes pet's weight, breed, and behavior. Front desk staff then go through the pet-related terms and conditions and request the pet owner's signature. Other staff working at the lobby help monitor if pets are all kept on a leash or carried by their owners. Concierge staff provide recommendations for pet activities and suppliers outside the hotel. Predictably, concierge who are pet owners themselves specialize in finding solutions for guest pet owners, as they appreciate their needs better. Most of the sample hotels do not have separate reception areas for pet owners (P1, P3, P5, P9, P16, P21, and P23). Two hotels of upper upscale and upper midscale (P4 and P6) have their designated pet reception areas, located on a separate floor to ensure the comfort and safety of guests with pets and those without. When different reception areas are used, pets and their needs can be easily accommodated and pets can feel more welcome, often by specialized pet friendly staff. In one occasion, the reception area was sponsored and cohosted with a pet-care brand, offering a co-branding opportunity. One of the interviewees from an upper upscale hotel disclosed a plan to have a dog ambassador in the lobby. When the dog ambassador is in the hotel lobby, the service blueprint can further be developed to include greater interactions. Hotel management can empower this ambassador to take charge of all pet-related issues.

Only two of the sample hotels accept guests with pets in their restaurants, as they are privileged with open air dining spaces. These two hotels have developed their particular operations and

procedures for pet friendly outdoor dining. This service creates issues when the weather is not suitable for outdoor dining, as guests have limited alternatives. This is a challenge that is being addressed by developing external spaces that can accommodate guests in most weather conditions. The front office manager from the upper upscale hotel stated:

> "We have an outdoor restaurant where we welcome pets. Our staff recommend various pet menus and the latest pet promotions. Staff have prepared the pet's utensils and observe if any pet owners are not using those and instead use the regular restaurant utensils in feeding their pets. If so, our staff politely reminds them to use the appropriate utensils due to hygiene concerns." (P1).

Most hotels with in-door dining restrict service to private bedrooms through room-service or take-away (Figure 6). An assistant general manager from the upper midscale hotel replied:

> "We do not allow pets dining in any restaurant at our hotel. However, we have a coffee shop where pet-owners and their pets can buy take away food, drinks, or pet pastries. Staff there are familiar with various pet pastries offered and promote them to pet-owners to take away." (P24)

***FIGURE 6 AROUND HERE ***

To provide pet owners more activities with their pets, most of the sample hotels collaborate with external specialists and outsource activities to trusted partners (P3, P5, P7, P11, P16, and P18). The collaborations include pet booths, set up by pet amenities or pet food companies; promotions of products and services; and a range of professionals who attend rooms for specific services such as pet grooming, photography, or yoga. A guest relations supervisor of an upper upscale hotel stated:

> "Every month, we have different pet-related booths at our hotels. They are here not just promoting their pet-related services or products but also to provide pet-related consultation or advice to guests. We do not receive any commission from them, but we believe our collaboration is reciprocal to guests, those external companies, and our hotel." (P3).

Overall, the onstage contact employee actions are mostly intended to support pet owners. Hotel staff offer assistance for pet-owner needs. Initial services, such as active interaction with pets or in-depth conversation with pet owners, are less apparent in pet-friendly hotels.

4.4 Backstage contact employee actions

Housekeeping (HSK) and Human Resources (HR) are the two main backstage departments accountable for supporting frontline pet-friendly services. Interviewees from HSK confirm that cleaning pet's room requires more efforts than regular rooms. An additional 25%–40% time is needed, and extra effort is required to remove dog odor, poop, urine stains, hair, and pet dander. The COVID-19 pandemic has made housekeeping work more challenging, as more antibacterial surface cleaning is required (P2, P4, P8, P12, P15, P17, P20, and P25). To facilitate, pet-friendly hotels have pre-assigned pet floors and also offer additional training to housekeeping attendants for cleaning rooms used by pets. Several upper upscale hotels keep a room vacant for one day after checkout, to ensure that is properly cleaned and fresh for new guests. Given the greater workload for cleaning pet rooms, assigned housekeepers can have a higher credit for each pet room they

clean. The typical credit ratio is that one pet-used room equals to 1.5 normal rooms, reflecting the 30% extra workload required. Therefore, when a housekeeping attendant is expected to clean 15 normal rooms daily, this is reduced to 10 pet-used rooms. This reduction allows them greater meticulous cleaning to address pet fur, odor, or waste issues (P2, P7, P8, P15, P17, P20, and P24). A director of housekeeping from an international luxury hotel chain explained:

> "We understood that cleaning pet rooms is more procedural than regular rooms. Hence, we lower the cleaning credit for designated pet room housekeepers. If any case is reported where the pet room requires more time, we further extend that credit accordingly." (P22)

The majority of the sample hotels use their internal housekeeping staff for cleaning pet-used rooms. However, one upper upscale hotel employs both internal and external specialized housekeeping staff. Their executive housekeeper explained:

> "Both internal and external staff are needed for cleaning pet rooms. Our internal attendant carries out the general cleaning first and then the external staff hired from the professional pet cleaning company follows with deep cleaning. We hired the external staff after the COVID-19 pandemic as we believed that higher precautionary procedures are essential." (P2).

To ensure that all operational staff are equipped with the skills to offer pet-friendly services, the HR department needs to adjust recruitment, job allocation, and training. All interviewees responded that when hiring staff, being a pet-lover is not necessary, as hotels respect each employee's preference when allocating pet-related assignments. For staff assigned to work on pet-related duties, additional training on handling pets is provided (P2, P4, P8, P12, P17, P21 and P24).

4.5 Support processes

Sales and marketing departments (S&M) work closely with revenue and reservations departments to support pet-friendly services. The S&M departments are responsible for promoting pet-friendly accommodation and suitable packages. The internal systems of reservations and housekeeping support the entire experience co-creation, that is in compliance with S&M promotions. As a typical practice, the sample hotels have greater verifications dealing with pet owners as soon as they receive their reservations. The reservation department needs to clarify a series of questions, including the number of pets, breeds, weight, diet, and their special needs. All of these records directly link to HSK to prepare for guest arrivals. These services provide adequate equipment, amenities, and facilities as well as plan daily housekeeping roster, accordingly (P2, P5, P8, P9, P11, P17, P18, P22, and P25). A senior S&M Manager from a luxury international chain hotel suggested:

> "We have standard question lists for guests reserving pet's room. Those questions are not just for screening if the pet is suitable for staying at our hotel. They also help us to see if any specific amenities are needed so we can inform our housekeeping for inventory in advance. We also use them as upselling opportunities for birthdays or other special events. For example, we can promote suites and celebration packages." (P19)

Most interviewees present their hotels as photo-opportunity venues, where pet-owners can take glamorous photos of/with their pets (P1, P5, P10, P14, and P16). To showcase examples on their websites and social media, hotels hire professional photographers to take inviting photos,

presenting how pets enjoy their stay. A director of communications from an international luxury hotel chain indicated:

> "Our guests are looking for luxury. To show this is a luxury hotel that pets love, we purposively hire photographers who are experienced in taking pet photos. We also develop several campaigns to generate engagement. One of those campaigns is to form a promotional clip from a pet point of view. We placed a GoPro camera on a dog's head and let the dog enjoy the property. We created a sensation from how our hotel is experienced from the pet point of view, communicating staying here in a very lively way." (P16)

Promoting hotels as photography venues drive memorable co-creation experiences. Designing pet-friendly rooms to be photogenic is also the duty of S&M departments. They engage Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and influencers for marketing purposes. They also invite influencer pets, those with a strong following on social media, to stay and generate promotional User Generated Content (UGC). Several of the most famous influencer dogs maintain Instagram accounts with half a million followers. Those dogs are effectively working as marketing brands, with a team of professionals managing their affairs. By developing their online reputation as good supplier to the pet market, hotels can monetize their success and enhance profitability. A manager from an upper midscale independent chain hotel explained:

> "We have promotional photos showing how pets stay in the room. All these photos are displayed on our websites and social media. We do not strive to present how pets experience the accommodation. We just want to show pet-owners how pets enjoy our rooms." (P13)

A Senior S&M Manager from an International chain luxury hotel revealed:

> "More than promotion, we work on co-creating the guests' experience. We take reference from the latest Instagram trends and gain advice from the photographers on how to decorate pet-friendly rooms. For example, recently, we provide a huge cup noodle in pet-rooms, which in fact is a pet-bed. Pet-parents love putting their pets in it and taking "yummy" photos. Once they share this UGC on Instagram, they also promote our hotel. Many of the dogs have huge following on their own Instagram listings, and some exceed half million followers! Occasionally, we ask guests if we can use their photographs on our social media and they are usually very honored to showcase their pets." (P10)

5. Discussion and implication

While the pet-owner market is growing globally, limited research attention has been paid to this segment. Previous literature has discussed the motivations of traveling with pets from the demand perspective (Kirillova et al., 2015; Tang et al., 2022). This study adopts a managerial perspective and explores how hotels can satisfy pet owners through pet-friendly hospitality services and design. Figure 7 summarizes all findings, proposing the service blueprint for pet-friendly hotels. The presented service blueprint sheds lights on both theoretical and practical contributions to hospitality industries.

***FIGURE 7 AROUND HERE ***

5.1 Theoretical implications

This study extends theoretical insights in three main ways. First, this study enriches the literature on anthropomorphism theory by arguing that humans anthropomorphize their pets, with the support of hospitality agents and facilities. Anthropomorphism theory indicates the inclination to imbue the authentic or envisioned action of non-human agents with humanoid intentions, attributes, motivations, or sentiments (Epley et al., 2007). The theory presents how humans initiatively feel like the non-human entity. Dissimilar to the active proposition of anthropomorphism theory, this study argues human are not always actively to anthropomorphize the non-human entity, but they anthropomorphize their pets triggered by the third-party. This argument is justified by the findings as shown in the service blueprint (Figure 7). The pet-friendly hotels are the premiers creating how the accommodation experience with pet would be and then designing all the following operations in multi-interface dimensions. The pet-friendly requests raised from owners firstly while the hotels accommodate accordingly are not commonly found. Hence, extending the anthropomorphism theory, this study espouses the mechanism of anthropomorphism would be from the influence of their third party instead of human (the owners) firstly.

Second, the theoretical implications of this study broaden the conceptualizations of service blueprint based on anthropomorphism theory. Developed by Shostack (1984), service blueprints design processes that address the market needs and diminish the risk of service failures, by visualizing a service delivery journey flow. This approach has been applied in various tourism and hospitality services. Hummel and Murphy (2011) compared the actual performance to service inefficiencies of a full-service casual chain. Go and Kim (2018) discovered the constituents of negative C2C interaction for in-flight services. Pandey and Kulshrestha (2021) re-framed the service blueprint by identifying the potential service failures of regular hotel operations in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has led to changes in consumer behavior and guest priorities (Hao et al., 2021). Therefore, hospitality and tourism organizations need to address the new challenges (Liu et al., 2022). Extant studies share the common premise that all service failures are derived from customers. If service providers design appropriate service propositions and promptly address consumer needs and requirements, then customers can be highly satisfied (Gupta et al., 2022; Pandey & Kulshrestha, 2021).

Third, with the anthropomorphism theory underlining the pet-friendly design, this study illustrates that accurate conceptualization of pet-friendly service blueprints can lead to successful co-creation of value for all stakeholders. Interviewees suggest that when-pet friendly services are offered, the focus actually moves to the well-being and satisfaction of the pets. Unless services are design to address their needs, pets can suffer discomfort, which then leads to pet owners' dissatisfaction (Owens & Grauerholz, 2019). Each pet has unique needs, habits, and behaviors. Pets cannot easily communicate their needs and requirements to their owners or service providers. When pets are taken to hospitality organizations, they experience unfamiliar environments. This often increases their anxiety or excitement, altering their behavior (Sheppard & Mills, 2002). Hotel managers explain that cohabiting in a hotel space or a restaurant with other guests and servers, who may be unfamiliar or even allergic to animals, also affects the co-creation of experiences. This makes designing and delivering services rather complex for hospitality organizations.

   5.2 Industry implications

Industry implications include three key managerial propositions for pet-friendly hotels. First, the pet-friendly hotel service blueprint can help managers to develop all essential pet-friendly policies. Pet-friendly hotels must establish effective policies that pet owners need to adhere to. As hotels provide multidimensional services to multiple stakeholders, key policies need to address pet-friendly processes, services, amenities, food, and experiences provided by external companies. The service blueprint needs to involve all hospitality stakeholders and external parties. Managers must therefore be inspired and establish comprehensive pet-friendly policies that ensure the value co-creation for all stakeholders. Marketing strategies and social media can help promote hotels to this market through UGC and KOLs.

Second, through the proposed service blueprint, service managers must understand their roles in depth. Communication channels must incorporate all relevant departments, as the service blueprint presents the entire accommodation ecosystem. Managers can review the overall process, prioritize services, and allocate resources to maximize guests' satisfaction. Findings reveal that most of the pet owners dine in their rooms with their pet, as room service is generally more comfortable for pets than waiting in restaurants. F&B managers need to redesign service processes and quality for both human and pet guests and address their needs holistically. When dining in restaurants, pet-friendly zones need to be established to address the needs of pets and pet owners. Regular guests must also be considered as they may dislike dining in the same environment with pets due to allergies or preferences. The service blueprint can offer flexibility to managers when accommodating guests with and without pets.

Third, the service blueprint, can inspire managers to devise new, innovative, and competitive pet-friendly services. Given that the service blueprint includes physical evidence, customers, and onstage front staff action, managers must link all processes to offer seamless services. From the physical evidence point, managers must think thoroughly the backstage contact employee functions and support processes to ensure that service is delivered smoothly while meeting commercial targets. Communicating across various social media how they satisfy both pets and pet parents can increase recognition as an expert, boost reputation and desirability towards enhancing profitability and competitiveness (Anagnostopoulou, et al, 2020; Williams, et al, 2015).Big data analysis and attribution (Stylos, et al, 2021, Buhalis and Volchek, 2021) can help both to establish personalized needs for both pets and pet-owners and also establish the most appropriate distribution channels for reaching specific markets. The service blueprint must therefore inspire managers but also facilitate the reengineering and redesigning of the service process throughout.

6. Conclusion and future research

Pet-ownership and parenthood are expected to grow significantly across households, inevitably leading in an increase of demand for pet-friendly tourism and hospitality services. This study is exploratory in nature and sets the scene for further research in greater detail across all pet-related tourism and hospitality functions. Although HK has a well-developed hospitality market, future studies can reach a larger sample and investigate pet-friendly hospitality and tourism services and operations across multiple countries and cultures. Future studies must explore the demand side and particularly the needs and expectations of both pets and pet owners. Research on pricing must

focus on how much more pet owners are prepared to pay for their room and ancillary services and what may be the threshold. Price-personalization for pet owners can support the willingness for paying these services (Tomassini, 2022), while the online reputation of pet-friendly hotels to relevant markets can establish the effect on profitability, and competitiveness. Research must also expand in other sectors of the travel industry, including transportation, such as airlines, trains, ferries and cruise liners (Sang, and Huang, 2023; Fu, 2023; Deng, et al, 2023). Perceived pet-friendly service quality from pet owners' perspectives must be evaluated and linked with behavioral intentions of re-purchase and positive word-of-mouth. Sociality is one of the determining factors of anthropomorphism theory. Therefore, how sociality can be strengthened for the pet-friendly market segment must be established in the tourism and hospitality context. Finally, future research must investigate how technology and smart networks (Buhalis, 2020) can address this rapidly expanding market towards value cocreation for all involved.

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