
***THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE TARGET GROUP ON THE INTERNATIONAL MARKET
OF VETERINARY MEDICAL SERVICES FOR SMALL ANIMALS***

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Abstract: Veterinary services industry for pets is a growing and diversifying domain through a demand that is constantly changing. The economic factor, namely the economic crisis that hit the world economy, although it had a negative influence on the market, does not necessarily result in lower demand for veterinary care but in a change on consumer behavior in this market. Pet owners' needs remain the same only the demands and perceptions of service quality has changed.

This article will present an exploratory research conducted in order to determine the consumer behavior for pet care, what makes them purchase such a service and a description of the profile of these customers.

Keywords: *consumer behavior, veterinary care, small animals.*

1. Theoretical Aspects

The consumer is an important element in any market activity no matter if we talk about the national or the international economy as it represents the demand. The demand is formed depending on the needs and desires they have daily. Because of this, marketers want to know more about their behavior studied in detail every aspect that can influence.

The Romanian literature can distinguish several definitions of consumer behavior. It can be defined as all acts of decision that can be done individually or by group decisions that are directly related to the collection and use of goods and services to meet consumer needs that is in present and in the future (Cătoiu and Teodorescu, 2004).

Consumer behavior is an interdisciplinary branch of learning because it uses tools from other disciplines such as psychology, sociology or economics. These are borrowed by marketing specialists to be able to learn more about what can influence the behavior.

In the services sector consumer behavior is represented by all actions on how to use the revenues to purchase services or the buyer's all actions and decisions regarding the usage of part of its income to purchase desired services (Cetina, 2001).

The consumer's buying behavior is influenced by cultural, social, psychological, personal and situational factors that can have a positive or negative result in the final decision.

The buying behavior can be explained by the acts that define decision-making process of buying content for services grouped into the following stages (Cătoiu and Teodorescu, 2004): the emergence of unmet needs, searching for information and identifying alternatives, evaluating alternatives mentally, outcome evaluation and post-purchase assessment. These steps can be grouped into three stages which are found both in the purchase of goods but also of services: pre-purchase, purchase, post-purchase (Bateson, 1992, p.84).

From the psychological point of view the consumer will want to give a higher amount of money for a high quality of service and a lower price could mean a low quality of service.

The skilled indicates that consumer expectations have two levels of expression of each one wanted acceptance and which have a tolerance zone. (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991, p. 58).

It is understood by the „accepted level” notion what the customer thinks it can reach, the „desired level” notion is what they want and the „tolerance level” is the minimum limit that can be accepted by the client. What lies beneath the tolerance leads to negative effects because the customer will not be satisfied. Tolerance zone is determined subjectively as it depends on the personality, desire, education of each individual. If the consumer belongs to a certain social status, his decision will be influenced by services provided by some companies, he will be wanting to purchase a service from a firm of international reputation than from a company with a less known brand.

Marketing techniques used by providers influence the consumer's decision, only a supplier who is permanently informed about the consumer needs and demands will be able to have a better quality of service provided.

2. Research methods and data collection

To better know what is the consumer behavior of veterinary medical services in the international market, it was used an exploratory research. Its main source of information were the articles and reports published by various international organizations.

The objective of this research was a better structuring of the important information that can help health care providers of veterinary services for pets to form a better picture about the situation.

After investigating all the found sources, all information were structured, analyzed and concluded certain issues. Limitations of this research were: it was found only an overview of consumer's behavior in some countries and not all countries and there isn't any extensive research on consumer behavior wishing to purchase health care for their pets.

3. Discussions and conclusions

Pet owners want to purchase high quality veterinary medical services and will always want to go to the best specialist in the field. Because services are not tangible, can not be tested, smelled or tasted, the owner is influenced in his decision to purchase by other variables. These *variables* are:

- ✓ *The waiting time.* A customer in urban areas, where everything is happening at a fast pace will not want to wait too long to access his desired veterinary service so it is good to have more specialists with experience on the premises of service desired veterinarian. If the owner wants to access a service provider of a particular service then it is willing to wait until he will finally be able to access the desired service without putting in danger the pets life. That's why emergencies will have priority in front of any other cases.
- ✓ *The cleanliness and appearance of the waiting room.* If there is clean everywhere, the table of consultation is disinfected after each patient, the waiting room has warm colors and welcoming, animal figurines, photographs with customers and their pets patients, a journal where customers can put their pets images to observe their evolution from a medical service to another, all these issues positively influence the

consumer's behavior and the practitioners know this and they daily deal so that the atmosphere is always welcoming. (McKay, 2008)

- ✓ *The location of the veterinary medical service provider.* The consumer wants to save time and money by opting for the nearest practitioner to the place where he lives. In cases where there is no practitioner in the desired time zone for veterinary services will move but, it is possible to reduce the demand for veterinary services remained within the budget because the economic factor has a big influence on consumer behavior.
- ✓ *Education* also plays an important role in consumer behavior. In developed countries like USA, UK, France, Germany, Austria, Australia, China, etc. pet owners see their pets as family members, a child or a best friend and they are willing to make sacrifices for their pets so they would not suffer. For them the word „owner” or "animal" does not exist in their vocabulary. In countries with high poverty like Egypt, a pet's life is not so happy. They will be taken to the veterinarian only in extreme cases when their additional income it is threatened and the owner's funds can be reduced. This pet is increased by 2 goals, mating and security and in case of death will be replaced immediately by another animal because they do not want to lose their source of income or safety, notwithstanding that it may prevent the animal's death by the most basic and inexpensive medical service veterinary, namely consultation.
- ✓ *The degree of stringency.* It is higher among young people who use social networks to get informations in advance about their veterinary medical service provider wishing to access and the features of the medical service desired. Young people are better informed than other age groups and it gets easier to choose the right option.
- ✓ Pet owners *love to be listen and to observe* that a veterinarian cares about what happens to the pet's health. A veterinarian who puts himself in the customer's place, who sees the big picture in the customer's eyes, wins over the trust of the pet's owner and gains over the competition.
- ✓ *The manner of speech is also important.* When describing a service it is useful to use a common language, it should be avoided using medical terms or a specific medicine language because over 50% of owners complain that they don't understand what they are communicating. When the customer has to take an important decisions on a complex veterinary services it is useful to use a language that is easy to understand, there is a shortcircuit in the communication between what pet owners say and what the veterinarians do. (Verdan, 2011)
- ✓ Another aspect to consider is *the access to the medical information of their pets.* The access to the past informations and the present medical services provided should be very simple. The owners want to have online access to the data even more to have the option of online programming or online consultations. (Verdan, 2011)
- ✓ The *perception* may also influence the final decision because no two customers will think the same way or will see just the same even if they were in the same room when the veterinary services is presented, so there is no difference in exposure to external factors. The perception is related to the psychological part of the man as well as the different reaction of the two people to the same stimulus.

All these factors can help to assess alternatives in a market where the competition is fierce and making the right choice when it comes to purchasing a veterinary medical service.

For the practitioners to stay on the market is not only the necessary decision to purchase but more important is the effect of the decision consisting of post-purchase evaluation and satisfaction / dissatisfaction. A happy customer will return and become a faithful customer of that practitioner, even more he will do a free advertising in his entourage which will attract more customers, which is beneficial for the economic activity of the practitioner. The veterinarian must think that when he practices his skills, he will do it not only to a customer but to more customers who observe and assesses.

In the veterinary market is necessary to distinguish between the buyer that pays and the consumer. In this case the consumer is neither the buyer nor the payer and has no decision-making power when he is acquiring a veterinary service, the same case with an infant whose brand of powder milk is sought in the market by the responsible purchasing (buyer) who is the payer also but not a beneficiary.

On the veterinary medical services market the buyer is also the payer who makes the final decision in purchasing veterinary service and he is the owner of the pet. The consumer and medical service beneficiary is the pet and the happiness of the pet translates into post-purchase evaluation, namely the satisfaction / dissatisfaction of the buyer.

When using the generic term "client" it may generate some confusing because the term refers to both the one who buys and the one who pays for the service or, where appropriate, who will ultimately consume the goods / services offered. We can say that in the veterinary services market the customer is the owner of the pet but also the pet.

In developed countries and countries in developing, the term "client" is used for the beneficiary of the service, namely the pet but in some countries such as Romania this is not accepted yet. In Romania the client is not the patient but the owner of the pet.

From the veterinarian's points of view that are working in the international market, the pet is the client which is also the motivation of buying the medical service. Firms providing the veterinary services, when talking about the demographic factor and initiator service request relate to the client- pet's profile and focuses on that when they are developing and diversifying services.

In the U.S. and not only, the buyer of veterinary services considers the pet as a family member and are therefore treated as such. Couples without child or single people use the syntax "my child / our". (Birkner, 2012)

In the U.S. over 81% of dog owners consider them a family member, 77% of them are considering themselves more parents than masters (unsupported word in their vocabulary). Over 80% of owners know the birthday of your pet and have celebrated it at least once and 77% have bought presents for their birthday. This is the main reason that explains why there were increases in revenues practitioners of veterinary services at 14 billion dollars in 2011 compared with \$ 13 billion in 2010. The time when dogs slept in the cage is on the past, now they sleep in the bed. (Birkner, 2012)

The paying buyer of veterinary medical services knows no boundaries of age or social class. A pet owner can be a minor or an older person, regardless of gender, wealth, color, religion, it does not discriminate when it comes to companions. The only discrimination is at

the level of affection that people show to their pets, for some of them to have a pet is more important than having a person next to them.

The love for their pets is greater the more of their budget is spending on the veterinary services, thus resulting to the development of luxurious veterinary services.

The effects of pets in human life (human-pet bond) are positive in terms of psychological, mental, clinical, etc. According to the latest American Heart Association's research it is proved that:

- ✓ The possession of an animal, especially dogs, reduces the risk of heart-related diseases and thus increases life expectancy.
- ✓ Pet owners are less likely to suffer from depression than those without pets.
- ✓ Pet owners have a lower blood pressure under stress conditions compared with those without animals.
- ✓ Playing with the pet raises the level of serotonin (the secret of happiness) and dopamine, hormones secreted by the brain that calms and relaxes the body.
- ✓ The patients that have animals who suffered a heart attack are more likely to survive than those without.
- ✓ Pet owners over 65 years will have 30% fewer visits to their doctor than those without pets.
- ✓ Holding a pet for a short-term in prison, will have a surprising effect among the convicts by changing the behavior of the most dangerous criminals in the long term from interacting with animals, many of them showing signs of affection for the first time in their life.
- ✓ Pets have a positive effect with traumatized children by the terrifying events of their lives and choose to close in their virtual world. The animal is a "connecting bridge" with the real life, with the help of them it is easier to face reality.

The research done by the University of California at Davis School of Veterinary Medicine has shown that Alzheimer's patients suffer fewer bouts of anxiety if they have a pet in the house. A docile and playful animal may reassure a patient with Alzheimer's disease thereby decreasing the likelihood of aggressive behavior. They were used for this experiment cats and poultry because they are easier to maintain. (Robinson and Segal, 2015)

Animal assisted therapy it uses animals like: horses, dogs, cats, rabbits, birds or even fish. They interact with patients suffering from schizophrenia, depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, attention deficit, autism and series of developmental disability because it turned out that animals have a beneficial effect on the mood and reduces anxiety.

Pets are also used in various assisted activities and they are sightseeing in pediatric hospitals, elderly care homes, schools. During these visits, patients are invited to pet a dog, take clutching a rabbit or a cat. Some dogs use the movements learned from dressage to distract patients from their problems and have better features.

The dogs are trained also to become utilitarian, to help blind, mute or deaf people, to be able to carry on with their normal daily activities, they learn to find people under rubble after disasters or even human corpses. They are also used for the national security of a country (screening drugs and bombs).

From all points mentioned above it can be clearly distinguished that pets are important in the daily life of man and how life would not be the same without them. Depending on the type of pet there are specific veterinary medical services. Each species and breed of animal needs veterinary services specifically designed for it. Dogs and cats have special veterinary services for them (vaccines) that are not found in other species.

Depending on the market segmentation the consumers can be grouped into several subgroups, each by applying to be a certain mix of marketing and representing a potential market niche for each veterinary medical service. (Lee, 2006)

In conclusion, it is important to know the wishes of customers who purchase veterinary medical services and what are they willing to sacrifice for "their family member". They want to have as much information as to prevent and improve the life of your pet. Knowing well the customer behavior, veterinary care providers will be able to make offers in accordance with market demands.

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