



# How Adoption Intention Changes as a Function of Medical and Close-Relative Advice

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## **Abstract**

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The present research explores how consumers perceive pet adoption in different contexts. Specifically, it aims to assess how pet adoption intentions differ when we are encouraged by medical and close-relative advice, as well as we attribute hedonic and utilitarian values to the pets when facing a mental health framework. In this research, these questions are explored where a new perspective regarding consumer behavior towards the impact of pets on human mental health is proposed.

While past research has suggested that there is a stronger attachment to hedonic possessions, rather than utilitarian ones, in the present study, it was observed that the type of advice - medical or close-relative -, does not significantly impact emotional connections to pets. In fact, pets were perceived more as experiential, rather than material, regardless of the type of advice. Thus, attachment to pets relies more on emotional connections, rather than on the context itself. Regarding the adopter's psychological attributes, it was found that relational attributes are favored over self-improvement ones. Furthermore, although Animal-Assisted Therapy is perceived as safe and credible, there may be a slight skepticism towards it.

The present study adds to the literature on pet adoption, which has an increased relevance for different fields in the marketing area, as understanding how pets may influence consumer behavior beyond the immediate context of pet ownership is crucial for the companies' strategies to thrive. Lastly, it offers a new perspective regarding the impact of pets on human mental health.

**Keywords:** Pet Adoption; Animal-Assisted Therapy; Medical Advice; Close-relative Advice; Utilitarian; Hedonic; Pet Ownership.

## **Resumo**

O presente estudo explora como os consumidores percebem a adoção de animais de estimação em diferentes contextos. Especificamente, pretende avaliar como as intenções de adoção diferem quando recebemos conselhos médicos ou de familiares próximos, bem como quando lhes atribuímos valores hedónicos e utilitários perante um quadro de saúde mental. Estas questões são exploradas, enquanto uma nova perspetiva do comportamento do consumidor face ao impacto dos animais de estimação na saúde mental é proposta.

Enquanto pesquisas anteriores sugeriram uma maior ligação aos bens hedónicos do que aos utilitários, no presente estudo, observou-se que o tipo de aconselhamento - médico ou de parentes próximos - não tem impacto significativo nas ligações emocionais com os animais. De facto, estes foram considerados mais experienciais do que materiais, independentemente do tipo de aconselhamento. Assim, a relação com os mesmos assenta maioritariamente nas ligações emocionais do que no contexto. Relativamente aos atributos psicológicos da pessoa que adota, os relacionais são mais favorecidos do que os de desenvolvimento pessoal. Além disso, embora a Terapia Assistida por Animais seja considerada segura e credível, pode ainda haver um ligeiro ceticismo.

O presente estudo contribui para a literatura sobre a adoção de animais de estimação, que tem uma relevância crescente para diferentes áreas do marketing, uma vez que compreender de que forma os mesmos podem influenciar o comportamento do consumidor para além do contexto imediato da sua posse é crucial para o sucesso das estratégias das empresas. Por fim, oferece uma nova perspetiva sobre o seu impacto na saúde mental.

**Palavras-chave:** Adoção de Animais de Estimação; Terapia Assistida por Animais; Conselho Médico; Conselho de Familiar Próximo; Utilitário; Hedónico; Posse de Animais de Estimação.

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## **Introduction**

### **1.1. Research Topic**

Pets are prevalent and hold important roles in consumers' daily lives (Amiot and Bastian 2015; Cavanaugh, Leonard, and Scammon 2008; Hirschman 1994; Holbrook and Woodside 2008; Serpell and Paul 2011). The natural history of keeping animals as companions has been comprehensively explored by withdrawing representations of various aspects of this phenomenon occurring throughout the history of representational art (Edney, 1995).

Although human health is a difficult concept to define, as it encompasses more than just the presence or absence of illness, one's well-being must be evaluated in terms of quality of life. Therefore, all relevant factors influencing the case should be considered. In recent years, numerous reviews have examined the health benefits of companion animals, as pets share their environment with humans in various ways. Although a wide variety of species are kept in households for this purpose, the majority are dogs and cats which, despite within-species breed differences, had been identified with systematic cross-species differences (Bradshaw 2012, 2013; Jardim-Messeder et al. 2017). Additionally, sharing the same environment with such animals significantly impacts the health of their owners (Amiot & Bastian, 2014; Edney, 1995).

As pets are an integrative part of everyday life, understanding the impact that pets have on human mental health and wellbeing, especially during periods of prolonged social isolation, is vitally important to determine whether animals can be integrated in prevention, recovery and intervention programmes to promote mental health and well-being (Grajfoner et al., 2021).

Although not universally practiced across cultures, pet keeping is common in most societies, and an array of theories have been offered to explain why people integrate animals into their lives (Herzog, 2010). Among these are the misfiring of parental instincts, biophilia, social contagion, the middle class's tendency to mimic the habits of the wealthy, the need to dominate the natural world, social isolation in urban societies, and the desire to teach responsibility and kindness to children. While the precise reasons for pet keeping's widespread cultural adoption remain unclear, it is evident that companion animals play a crucial role in many people's lives (Herzog, 2011). Whereas this perspective contrasts sharply with prior psychological research where animals occupy a more instrumental role, it is needed to account for a large domain of human activity and explore how humans interact with and relate to animals (Amiot & Bastian, 2014).

Despite the significant role pets play in people's lives as well as their presence in mass media, popular culture, and marketing communications, there has been limited research exploring how pets may affect consumers' judgments, decisions, and behaviors (Jia et al., 2022). To date, the discipline of psychology has been remarkably slow to investigate human-animal relations (Knight & Herzog, 2009; Melson, 2002; Plous, 1993a, 2003) and has been somewhat anthropocentric in its orientation (Amiot & Bastian, 2014). This is likely due to the peripheral status that animals have traditionally occupied in ethical frameworks, and the tendency not to recognize their psychological qualities (Bastian, et al., 2012; Epley et al., 2007). More recently, existing research on pet-human relationships has been focused on how pet ownership impacts the owner's pet-related judgments and behaviors (Jia et al., 2022).

However, there is a lack of research exploring how pets may influence consumer behavior beyond the immediate context of pet ownership, as well as how consumers perceive pets as “products” under certain contexts – e.g. healthcare. Such knowledge would provide novel and valuable insights to marketers, and allow them to develop marketing strategies tailored to pet exposure situations (Jia et al., 2022).

## **1.2. Research Problem**

The present dissertation aims to study the differences regarding how consumers perceive the impact of pet ownership on their mental health, given two distinct occasions - close-relative advice and medical advice. To narrow down the scope of this research, this study will be focused on the adoption of a regular dog and a therapy dog. Additionally, it will also be assessed whether previous pet ownership and attendance to Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) sessions moderate consumers' perception regarding hedonic and utilitarian values of pets. Therefore, the main research questions of this study are:

**RQ1:** How does consumers' representation of pets in terms of their objectification change as a function of the context of adoption?"

**RQ2:** How does consumers' representations of pets in terms of their hedonic and utilitarian values change as a function of the context of adoption?

**RQ3:** How do consumers perceive AAT and alternative therapies when exposed to different adoption occasions?

**RQ4:** Can pet ownership background moderate consumers' adoption intention when exposed to different adoption occasions?

**RQ5:** Can AAT attendance background moderate consumers' pet perception when exposed to different adoption occasions?

### **1.3. Dissertation Structure**

This thesis will consist of 7 chapters. Chapter 1 will provide a brief explanation of the research topic and outline the research problem. In chapter 2, a literature review will be presented, as it consists of the theoretical foundation for addressing the research questions and developing the hypotheses of this dissertation. Chapter 3 will address the research methodology, and explain the approach taken to conduct the studies. In chapter 4, the main results will be thoroughly analyzed. In chapter 5, a discussion of the results will be presented, while Chapter 6 will address the managerial implications of these results. Finally, chapter 7 will outline the limitations encountered during the dissertation, while suggesting directions for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Utilitarian and Hedonic Function of Pets**

Consumers' perceptions and preferences both rely on hedonic and utilitarian dimensions. However, there is an asymmetry on how consumers trade off these dimensions in acquisition and forfeiture choices, as it depends on individual context and motivation (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Consumers perceive a dimension to be more hedonic whenever it results from sensations derived from the experience of using products, or more utilitarian when derived from functions performed by products (Voss, Spangenberg & Grohmann, 2003).

Hedonic and utilitarian dimensions can both be presented within the same product. When this is the case, the consumer's experience regarding these dimensions is tied to an attribute-specific level – i.e., the classification of a product as hedonic or utilitarian is, in effect, a function of the relative salience of its hedonic and utilitarian attributes (Chernev, 2004; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Moreover, depending on who is evaluating them, each dimension will have distinct weights (Batra & Ahtola, 1991).

Consumers consider that hedonic consumption is not as essential as utilitarian consumption (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000), since hedonic consumption is often associated with luxuries,

whereas utilitarian consumption mostly regards to necessities (Kivetz & Simonson, 2002a, 2002b). Nevertheless, hedonic consumption also encompasses facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of product use (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Therefore, consumers are often more attached to the hedonic dimension, and more reluctant to part with it than with the utilitarian dimension, as they develop symbolic relationships with their possessions. If these relationships are more unique and stronger for hedonic than for utilitarian possessions, consumers might reasonably value such options more over time (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Belk, 1988).

According to Holbrook et al. (2001), high levels of pet-related deep involvement challenge the view that focuses on possessions as extensions of the self. This view suggests that the materialistic ownership of meaningful objects is crucial to the formation of personal identity and to the communication of the identity, both to oneself and to others. Furthermore, pets are frequently perceived as a part of the owners' self and often regarded as representatives of the pet owners, as the inference of their personal characteristics from their pets is frequent (Belk, 1988).

The perspective of pets as possessions tends to assign animal companions to the role of a utilitarian function in a self-enhancing or identity-building means-ends relationship, as an important source of social influence on consumers' judgments and behaviors (Holbrook et al., 2001; Jia et al., 2022). Despite pets being perceived as instruments to self-identity that are often useful as transition objects, they often transcend the concept of material possessions, as owners bond with their pets in ways that resemble human relationships, attributing them the special status of family members (Holbrook et al., 2001; Amiot & Bastian, 2014; Belk, 1988). Some consumers prefer animal companionship to that of humans, since sharing in common a deep awareness that their relationship with an animal companion is an end in itself and not a means to other end – such as an ego-enhancing self-identity, the admiration of others, or a creature to protect the house against intruders (Holbrook et al., 2001; Toure-Tillery & McGill, 2015; Belk, 1988).

As Holbrook et al. (2001) suggested the concept of pets-as-sacred rather than pets-as-possession, they represent not self-extending possessions but rather a series of opportunities for deeply involved consumption experiences. As these experiences transcend the domain usually explored by marketing and consumer research, pets occupy hallowed ground, since they belong to the realm of sacred consumption.

As assessed by Amiot & Bastian (2014), there is a dichotomy between the visions of pets as cohabitants animals that have no obvious function, and animals that can be used as emblems by children to define their own personal strengths. In this way, pets are so instrumental to self-identity that they are often useful as transition objects for children, and as surrogate children for adults (Belk, 1988).

According to the previous statements, human mind may be wired to think differently about animals than inanimate objects, suggesting that part of the brain evolved to specialize in processing information about animals (Amiot & Bastian, 2014).

## **2.2. Benefits of Pets on Human Psychological Health and Well-Being**

Animal companions bring to consumers far more than temporary pleasure or amusement, since they may contribute significantly to humans' mental and physical well-being, helping to promote their happiness and to prolong their lives (Holbrook et al., 2001; Amiot & Bastian, 2014). Moreover, relationships with pets not only have repercussions for human health (Fine, 2006; Herzog, 2011), but also impact on associations with fellow humans, and even consequences for animals (Plous, 1993a), as both humans and dogs show increases in oxytocin, dopamine, and endorphins when interacting positively with one another (Amiot & Bastian, 2014).

The extent to which one's pet is included in the self has been linked to human well-being. As suggested by Cavanaugh, Leonard, & Scammon (2008), the more owners felt proximity to their dog and had owned their dog for longer, the higher their well-being. Therefore, it is attachment to animals that predicts human well-being, while possessing a pet or not is not associated with well-being (Garrity, Stallones, Marx, & Johnson, 1989; Ory & Goldberg, 1983).

According to El-Alayli et al. (2006), the less pet owners perceive discrepancies between their own personality and their pet's personality, the more likely they are to report higher life satisfaction and lower negative affect. Additionally, the more pet owners report a high degree of behavioral compatibility between their pets and themselves, the higher their attachment to their pet, and the more likely they are to report positive overall mental health (Budge et al., 1998). This enhances the importance of considering the subjective rather than the objective nature of the relationships with animals to predict when animals are associated with more positive human health and well-being (Amiot & Bastian, 2014).

Paul & Serpell (1996) suggested that children that present higher levels of attachment to a new dog have an increase in self-confidence at the 6-month follow-up and decreases in tearfulness and weepiness at the 12-month follow-up. Furthermore, anxious attachment to one's pet is associated with more psychological distress among adult pet owners (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011a), whereas those low in avoidant attachment experienced reduced blood pressure during a stressful event when their pet was either present or recalled to memory (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012; Amiot & Bastian, 2014). Moreover, when evaluating stress, animal companions have been argued to play a particularly relevant role in attenuating performance-related stress compared to humans (Siegel, 1993; Wells, 2009; Amiot & Bastian, 2014).

The fact that animal companions enhance consumers' well-being might be supported by medical, psychological, and psychotherapeutic benefits of pet-related consumption experiences (Holbrook et al., 2001).

For over two decades, medical research has been supporting that animal companions help to reduce stress, to improve cardiovascular performance, and thereby to reduce the risk of heart disease while increasing the survival rates of individuals who suffer from heart ailments (Holbrook et al., 2001). The simple act of petting or stroking an animal causes transient decreases in blood pressure and heart rate which is supported by the fact that new pet owners report a significant reduction in minor health problems during the first month following pet acquisition (Amiot & Bastian, 2014).

Living with an animal companion is associated not only with reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and with decreased physiological stress responses, but also with improved mental health. Sharing one's life with a pet contributes to greater self-reported psychological well-being, lower chances of clinical depression, reduced feelings of loneliness and isolation, and an enhanced sense of comfort, security, and entertainment (Holbrook et al., 2001).

Pet owners usually express higher aspirations and improved self-esteem, and report greater feelings of capability, and self-efficacy when attaining personal goals, compared to when not in the presence or not thinking about the pet (Amiot & Bastian, 2014). Furthermore, people who share their lives with pets tend to forge stronger relations with friends and family (Holbrook et al., 2001), as reinforced by Amiot & Bastian (2014), that suggested that children who owned a dog were visited more often by their friends, and their families, engaging in more leisure activities.

### **2.3. Animal-Assisted Therapy**

As suggested by Amiot & Bastian (2014), AAT is defined as an intervention with specific goals and objectives delivered by health professionals with specialized expertise in using an animal as an integral part of the treatment of humans with a variety of illnesses (Holbrook et al., 2001). In AAT, animals play the role of transitional objects (Belk, 1988), and secure attachment figures (Zilcha-Mano, et al., 2011b) that may then serve as a springboard to more permanent and positive human relationships (McNicholas & Collis, 2006; Parish-Plass, 2008).

Based on a study conducted by Nimer and Lundahl (2007), dogs are the most common animal therapists, and the use of dogs in AAT is consistently associated with moderately high effect sizes. Additionally, AAT shows highly beneficial effects on autistic spectrum behaviors, moderate beneficial effects on well-being outcomes - such as anxiety and depression - and moderate beneficial effects on behavioral and medical outcomes (Amiot & Bastian, 2014).

Many psychotherapists who focus on children and adult orientation, have used animals as co-therapists in treating their outpatients, as well as institutionalized ones. Moreover, the psychotherapists have recommended that patients acquire a pet as a complement to therapy. Individuals struggling with depression associated with chronic illness or disability, low self-esteem, loneliness, and feelings of helplessness report that their animal makes them feel needed and secure, distracts them from their worries, and makes them laugh (Holbrook et al., 2001).

Siegel et al. (1999) reinforced these findings by stating that AIDS patients who owned pets and had few close human confidants reported lower levels of depression compared to those without pets. Consequently, pets can be therapeutic in expanding the self of children, hospital patients, and the elderly (Belk, 1988).

### **2.4. Hypothesis**

The dichotomy between utilitarian and hedonic dimensions' impact on consumer behavior has been studied, specially in the context of product acquisition and forfeiture decisions. Since pets are not only valued for their functional roles but also for their ability to enhance emotional well-being and serve as extensions of personal identity (Chernev, 2004; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982), this duality of pets as both utilitarian and hedonic reinforces the need to

examine how different contexts and perceptions influence consumer attitudes towards pet adoption and the effectiveness of related therapies.

Prior research has shown that individuals value advice received from unfamiliar others, who have more resources available, more than advice from peers with fewer resources at their disposal (Constant et al., 1996; Gómez-Solórzano et al., 2019). In fact, Constant et al. (1996) suggested that advisers without a direct personal connection to the advice-seekers were prone to provide more useful advice and were more likely to solve the problems disclosed by the advisee. Additionally, as patients acquire previous knowledge from peers about their condition and treatment options, they may feel more prepared for consultations with a medical professional (Bartlett and Coulson, 2011), as well as less lonely (van Uden-Kraan et al., 2008; Colineau and Paris, 2010). Furthermore, Rueger et al. (2021) suggested that the use of medical terms affects the extent to which the individuals appreciate the peer advice.

Thus, the present study aims to explore the effects of advice context on various aspects of pet-related behaviors and perceptions. Specifically, it will investigate how different contexts influence pet perceptions, emotional connections, adoption intentions, and perceptions of AAT. Additionally, the study will examine the role of pet ownership and AAT attendance as moderating factors in these relationships.

Hence, it is hypothesized that:

**H1:** The effect of advice context on the intention to adopt a pet will vary, as close-relative advice occasions lead to higher adoption intention, compared to medical advice occasions.

**H2:** When perceiving the pet as more hedonic, individuals' intention of adopting a pet increases.

**H3:** The effect of advice context on the pet perception will vary, as close-relative advice occasions lead to a perception of the pet as more experiential, compared to medical advice occasions.

**H4:** The advice context will affect the level of emotional connection between individuals and the pet, as close-relative advice occasions lead to a higher emotional connection, compared to medical advice occasions.

**H5:** The advice context will significantly impact individuals' perception of psychological characteristics related to the person adopting the pet.

**H6:** The advice context will significantly impact individuals' perception of AAT.

**H7:** The advice context will significantly impact individuals' perception of alternative therapies.

**H8:** Pet ownership will moderate the effect of advice context on the adoption intention, enhancing the positive effects of experiential contexts.

**H9:** AAT attendance will moderate the effect of advice context on the pet perception.

### **3. Methodology and Data Collection**

During this study, collecting primary data was crucial to deepen the previously gathered knowledge from the literature review. Therefore, one experimental study was conducted in order to understand consumers' decision-making process regarding adopting a pet as a mechanism for mental health improvement, under two different scenarios - medical advice and close relative advice - whose effects were moderated by pet ownership and attendance to therapy sessions. According to Cohen et al. (2017), quantitative research can be described as a social research that employs empirical methods and statements. As suggested by Creswell (2009), the purpose of this type of research relies on explaining phenomena, by examining the relationship among variables through numerical data that can be further analyzed with the application of statistical procedures. Therefore, one online survey was conducted as a quantitative research of this study. A more detailed explanation of the research method can be found in the Appendices section (see Appendix 1).

#### **3.1. Participants**

A total of 122 people voluntarily completed the questionnaire. The selection of participants was randomized as the survey was shared across different social media channels, including Facebook and Instagram, as well as through word-of-mouth. Respondents were aged, on average, 35 years old, and 84.4% were Portuguese. Among the respondents, 83.6% were female and 16.4% were male.

## 3.2. Material

### 1. Independent Variable

This study relies on one **independent variable** - the **Advice Context** - which includes two levels: Medical Advice versus Close-relative Advice. Therefore, this study followed a 2 (Advice Context) between-subjects design. In order to manipulate the variable “Context”, participants were randomly assigned to either the “Medical Advice” condition, where a professional advice was given by a therapist, or the “Close-relative Advice” condition, where an advice was given by a close family member. Moreover, participants were also randomly assigned to either an utilitarian condition, where a therapy dog was adopted, or to an hedonic condition, where an ordinary dog was adopted.

In the “Medical Advice” condition, participants were exposed to a situation where a therapist suggested AAT as an alternative approach to improve the high stress levels of their patient, who had been diagnosed with a psychological disorder due to anxiety. This way, participants were also exposed to a utilitarian condition, since the therapist suggested their patient to adopt a purpose-driven therapy dog.

Regarding the “Close-relative Advice” condition, participants were exposed to a situation where a person, who had been diagnosed with a psychological disorder due to anxiety, received advice from their mother, who suggests adopting an ordinary dog as a solution to cope with the high stress levels, exposing participant to an hedonic condition.

Moreover, participants were asked to imagine they were in the same position as this person.

### 2. Dependent Variables

To evaluate the extent to which participants were willing to adopt a dog, given the respective context they were assigned to, the **adoption intention** was measured through a 7-point Likert scale (1 – Would not adopt at all; 7 – Definitely would adopt).

To assess the **pet perception**, participants were also required to state their thoughts on Material versus Experiential, as well as on Utilitarian versus Hedonic through 7-point scales (1 – Completely Material; 7 – Completely Experiential), in order to measure the level of possession and objetification towards the dog.

Next, **emotional connection** between the person and the dog was measured through a 7-point likert scale, in order to assess participants' closeness to the dog, given the respective context.

To further evaluate the concept of **adopting a dog** as a strategy for coping with anxiety-related issues, as well as the psychological characteristics of the individual choosing to adopt, 7-point Likert scales (1 – Not at all; 7 – Extremely) were employed, following different parameters. The concept of adopting a dog was assessed based on credibility, effectiveness, reasonableness, safety, scientific basis, ease of implementation, and enjoyment. Meanwhile, psychological characteristics were evaluated in terms of competency, empathy, intelligence, influence, reliability, and responsibility.

Adding on, to assess the **perception of AAT**, 7-point Likert scales (1 – Not at all; 7 – Extremely) were implemented following different indicators, as the perception of ATT was measured based on credibility, effectiveness, evidence basis, ease of implementation, reliability and safety. Further on, **effectiveness of other methods of treatment** compared to AAT, such as psychology, therapy, coaching, traditional medicine, chinese medicine and holistic therapy, was also measured through a 7-point Likert scale (1 – Not effective at all; 7 – Extremely effective) was implemented.

### **3. Moderators**

As moderating variables are constructed by taking one variable and multiplying it by another to determine the joint impact of both (Creswell, 2009), pet ownership and AAT sessions attendance were defined as moderators of this study and measured through a set of 11 multiple choice and open questions.

By assessing these moderators, the collected data can be more efficiently analyzed, and, thus, conclusions can be drawn more appropriately.

### **4. Manipulation Checks**

During the survey, one question was employed in order to evaluate if the manipulation of the independent variable had the desired outcome on participants' answers, as well as on their reasoning regarding the manipulation of the specific context.

First, participants were exposed to a brief explanation of what utilitarian and hedonic values refer to. Therefore, they were asked to state the level of agreement regarding the pet perception and to choose between utilitarian or hedonic values, depending on what the dog represented to them in this specific context, through a 7-point Likert scale (1 – Completely Utilitarian; 7 – Completely Hedonic).

### **3.3. Procedure**

The survey consisted of 4 sections: (1) Introduction, (2) Manipulation, (3) Moderators, and (4) Demographics.

In the introduction, respondents were informed through a consent statement that the collected data was strictly destined for the purpose of the study, supporting a Master's Thesis in Management with Specialization in Strategy, Entrepreneurship & Impact, by Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics. Moreover, the participants became aware that all the data would be treated confidential and anonymously.

Next, participants were randomly assigned to the “Advice Context” condition, either to the “Medical Advice” or to the “Close-relative Advice”.

Based on the previous explanation, participants would be exposed to only one of both scenarios, either to the “Medical Advice” and “Utilitarian” conditions or to the “Close-relative Advice” and “Hedonic” conditions. Adding on, regardless the condition respondents were presented with, the questions that measured the dependent variables, the moderators, and the manipulation checks were all the same.

When the scenario was presented, participants were immediately asked to imagine themselves in the same situation as the person concerned, and to state their willingness to adopt the dog, given the context they were assigned to. After answering this question, a manipulation check was introduced in order to assess respondents' understanding of the manipulation, and the level of agreement regarding the “Advice Context” condition, as they were asked to state their perception of the utilitarian and hedonic values of the dog. Next, participants were presented with 6 questions that aimed to assess the dependent variables by filling 7-point scales. Further on, two moderators were assessed, where respondents stated their pet ownership journey, as well as their attendance to AAT sessions. Finally, demographics were gathered and, after

completing the survey, respondents were informed about their answers' recording and were thanked for their participation.

### 3.4. Design

The experiment followed a 2 (Advice Context: Medical Advice versus Close-relative Advice) between subjects' design. Therefore, either "Medical Advice" or "Close-relative Advice" were randomly assigned to each participant.

## 4. Data Analysis and Results

### 4.1. Prior Analysis

As previously mentioned in the Methodology and Data Collection section, the present study followed a between-subjects design. Furthermore, in order to properly analyze the collected data, the answers regarding each scenario were merged into one, by calculating their averages. Moreover, a recoding of the necessary variables was executed (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1**

*Variables Recoded*

Variables	Values
<b>Context</b>	1 = "Close-relative Advice"; 2 = "Medical Advice";
<b>Gender</b>	1 = "Male"; 2 = "Female"; 3 = "Prefer not to disclose"; 4 = "Other"
<b>Occupation</b>	1 = "Student"; 2 = "Working Student"; 3 = "Part-time Employed"; 4 = "Full-time Employed"; 5 = "Unemployed"; 6 = "Retired"

Respondents who failed to answer the entirety of the questionnaire were eliminated. Therefore, out of 226 responses, 104 were not valid. Thus, the further analysis of the results will consider 122 valid responses.

The present study included questions that had more than one item that measured a specific variable. Thus, it is relevant to assess their reliability in order to ensure trustworthy results. Therefore, a Cronbach's Alpha analysis was further developed since the number of items of each specific variable were above 3. According to Cortina (1993), the Cronbach's Alpha value should be over .700 in order to ensure a valid reliability of the items. After conducting this analysis, it is possible to assess that all items were reliable, as shown from Table 4.2 to 4.5.

**Table 4.2**

*Reliability Analysis on "Dog Adoption Perception"*

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
.917 > .700	8

**Table 4.3**

*Reliability Analysis on "Psychologic Characteristics"*

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
.868 > .700	6

**Table 4.4**

*Reliability Analysis on “AAT Perception”*

---

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
.941 > .700	5

---

**Table 4.5**

*Reliability Analysis on “Alternative Therapies Perception”*

---

<b>Reliability Statistics</b>	
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
.714 > .700	5

---

## **4.2. Sampling Characterization**

By the end of the survey, respondents were presented with demographic questions regarding their gender, nationality, age and occupation (see Appendix 2).

Out of 122 participants, 83.6% were female and 16.4% were male. Regarding the nationality, the majority of participants were Portuguese (84.4%), followed by Brazilian and German, both accounted for the same percentage (2.5% each), and French (2.5%). British, Cape Verdean, Cypriot, Guatemalan, Hungarian, Romanian, Swedish, and American were the remaining nationalities, which accounted for the same percentage (0.8% each). However, 1.7% of the respondents preferred not to disclose their nationality.

In terms of age, respondents were aged 35 years old, on average, as the youngest participant was 20 years old, and the oldest participant was 65 years old. However, 1.6% of the respondents preferred not to share their age.

As for their occupation, most of the respondents were full-time employed (47.6%), followed by working students (22.1%), students (18%), and part-time employed (7.4%). Only a few were unemployed (3.3%), and retired (1.6%).

Regarding pet ownership, the majority of respondents currently own a pet (65.6%), while 66,7% of the remaining respondents who currently do not own a pet, have owned a pet in the past. Within the respondents who currently own a pet, 75% of respondents own a dog, whilst 40% own a cat, and 6.25% own other types of animals. Additionally, 5.7% of participants have attended AAT sessions, all performed by a therapy dog.

### 4.3. Main Results

#### 4.3.1. Effect of Advice Context on Adoption Intention

In order to draw conclusions for H1, an ANOVA was performed (Table 4.6 and Figure 4.1).

**Table 4.6**

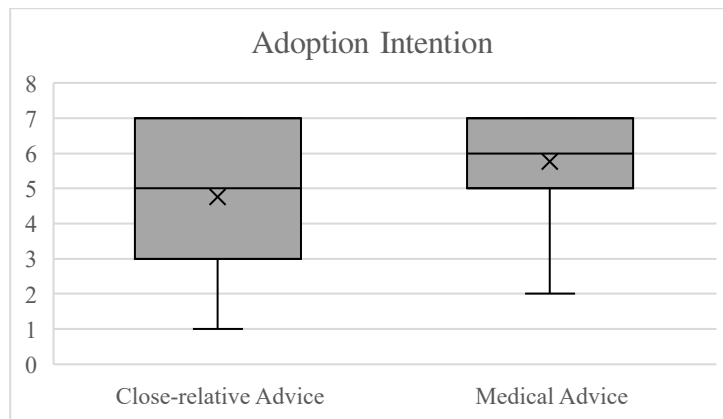
*ANOVA (Adoption Intention)*

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>		
<b>Advice Context</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	
<b>Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)</b>	4.75 (2.06)	
<b>Medical Advice (Utilitarian)</b>	5.77 (1.27)	
<b>Total</b>	5.23 (1.80)	
<b>Test of Between-Subjects Effects</b>		
<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>F</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
<b>Adoption Intention</b>	10.47	.002

According to the tests of between-subjects effects, it is possible to observe a significant main effect of Advice Context on Adoption Intention ( $F(1,119) = 10.47, p = .002$ ). In fact, there is an overall preference for adoption on medical advice occasions, rather than on close-relative advice occasions ( $M_{\text{Medical Advice}} = 5.77$  and  $M_{\text{Close-relative Advice}} = 4.75$ ), as it can also be observed in Figure 4.1. Therefore, H1 cannot be supported.

**Figure 4.1**

*ANOVA (Adoption Intention)*



Since the Advice Context has a significant impact on Adoption Intention, a Pearson Correlation test was performed in order to verify the correlation between Adoption Intention and Advice Context (Table 4.7).

**Table 4.7**

*Pearson Correlation (Adoption Intention vs. Pet Perception – Utilitarian vs. Hedonic)*

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
<b>Adoption Intention</b>	5.23 (1.80)
<b>Pet Perception (Utilitarian vs. Hedonic)</b>	4.89 (1.66)

<b>Correlations</b>		
	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Pet Perception (Utilitarian vs. Hedonic)</b>	
<b>Adoption Intention</b>	.217	.017

According to the previous table, it is possible to observe that the willingness to adopt is moderately high ( $M_{\text{Adoption Intention}} = 5.23$ ). Additionally, respondents tend to perceive the pet slightly more as hedonic, rather than utilitarian ( $M_{\text{Pet Perception}} = 4.89$ ). Regardless being moderately weak, the correlation between Adoption Intention and Pet Perception is statistically significant positive ( $p = .017$ ,  $r = .217$ ), meaning that as the perception of the pet as more hedonic increases, so does the intention to adopt. Therefore, H2 can be supported.

#### **4.3.2. Effect of Advice Context on Pet Perception**

An ANOVA was conducted in order to verify H3 (Table 4.8 and Figure 4.2).

**Table 4.8**

*ANOVA (Pet Perception – Material vs. Experiential)*

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>	
<b>Advice Context</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
<b>Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)</b>	5.72 (1.30)
<b>Medical Advice (Utilitarian)</b>	5.45 (1.56)
<b>Total</b>	5.59 (1.43)

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### Test of Between-Subjects Effects

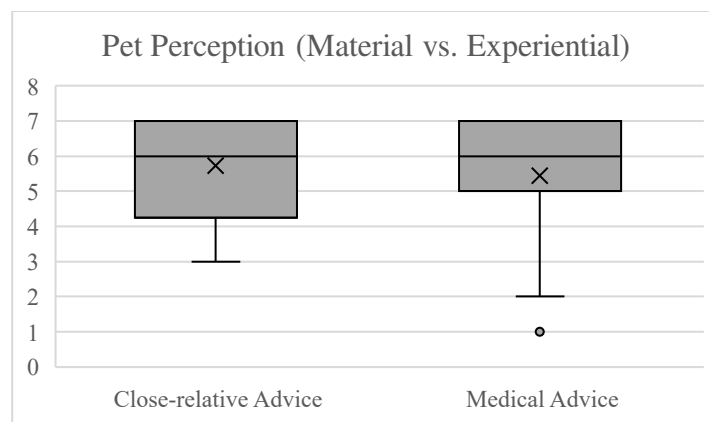
Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Pet Perception (Material vs. Experiential)</b>	1.089	.299

---

By observing the between-subjects effects table, it is possible to verify that the effect of Advice Context on Pet Perception is not significant ( $F(1,120) = 1.089, p = .299$ ). In fact, respondents tend to perceive the pet more as experiential, rather than material, regardless of the type of advice ( $M_{\text{Medical Advice}} = 5.45$  and  $M_{\text{Close-relative Advice}} = 5.72$ ), as can also be observed in Figure 4.2. Therefore, H3 cannot be supported.

**Figure 4.2**

*ANOVA (Pet Perception – Material vs. Experiential)*



Interestingly, by observing the figure, it is possible to verify the existence of an outlier. On these cases, participants might not have understood the context, or might have strong opinions regarding this topic.

### 4.3.3. Effect of Advice Context and on Emotional Connection

To draw conclusions for H4, an ANOVA was performed (Table 4.9 and Figure 4.3).

**Table 4.9**

*ANOVA (Emotional Connection)*

Descriptive Statistics		
Advice Context	Mean (SD)	
Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.25 (1.55)	
Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.71 (1.27)	
Total	5.47 (1.43)	

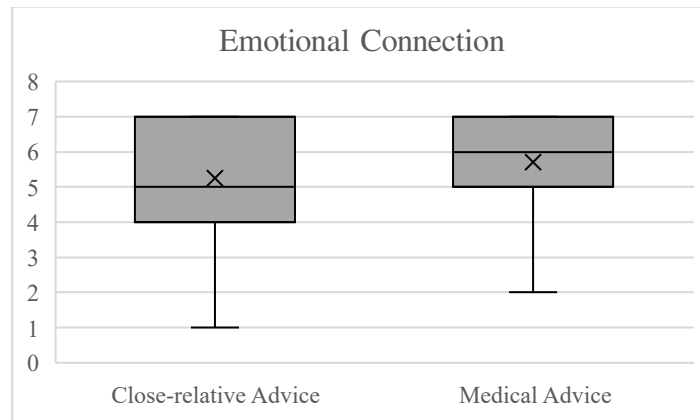
  

Test of Between-Subjects Effects		
Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Emotional Connection	3.072	.082

By observing the tests of between-subjects effects, it is possible to verify that the effect of Advice Context on Emotional Connection is not significant ( $F(1,120) = 3.072, p = .082$ ). In fact, respondents who received medical advice reported a slightly higher emotional connection, compared to those who received advice from close-relatives ( $M_{\text{Medical Advice}} = 5.71$  and  $M_{\text{Close-relative Advice}} = 5.25$ ), as it can also be observed in Figure 4.3. Therefore, H4 cannot be supported.

**Figure 4.3**

*ANOVA (Emotional Connection)*



**4.3.4. Effect of Advice Context on Adopting Perception**

In order to further explore H1, an ANOVA was performed (Table 4.10).

**Table 4.10**

*ANOVA (Adoption Perception)*

Descriptive Statistics		
Variable	Advice Context	Mean (SD)
<b>Credible</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.98 (1.66)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.78 (1.29)
<b>Effective</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.87 (1.75)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.66 (1.15)
<b>Reasonable</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.82 (1.70)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.67 (1.09)

<b>Safe</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.07 (1.62)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.58 (1.25)
<b>Science-Based</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.66 (1.60)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.45 (1.52)
<b>Easy to Implement</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.70 (1.62)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	4.89 (1.31)
<b>Enjoyable</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.75 (1.27)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	6.11 (1.00)

<b>Test of Between-Subjects Effects</b>		
<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>F</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
<b>Credible</b>	8.564	.004
<b>Effective</b>	8.307	.005
<b>Reasonable</b>	10.118	.002
<b>Safe</b>	3.667	.058
<b>Science-Based</b>	9.334	.003
<b>Easy to Implement</b>	.462	.498
<b>Enjoyable</b>	2.739	.101

According to the tests of between-subjects effects, it is possible to observe a significant main effect of Advice Context on how respondents perceive the pet adoption as Credible, Effective, Reasonable, and Science-Based ( $F_{Credible}(1,121) = 8.564, p_{Credible} = .004$ ;  $F_{Effective}(1,117) = 8.307, p_{Effective} = .005$ ;  $F_{Reasonable}(1,115) = 10.118, p_{Reasonable} = .002$ ;  $F_{Science-Based}(1,115) = 9.334, p_{Science-Based} = .003$ ). In contrast, it is possible to verify that the effect of Advice Context on how respondents perceive the pet adoption as Safe, Easy to Implement, and Enjoyable is not significant ( $F_{Safe}(1,117) = 3.667, p_{Safe} = .058$ ;  $F_{Easy\ to\ Implement}(1,113) = .462, p_{Easy\ to\ Implement} = .498$ ;  $F_{Enjoyable}(1,114) = 2.739, p_{Enjoyable} = .101$ )

On the other hand, respondents tend to perceive pet adoption as more credible, effective, reasonable, safe, science-based, easy to implement, and enjoyable on medical advice occasions, rather than on close-relative advice occasions. Additionally, there is an overall tendency to perceive pet adoption as more enjoyable, rather than as easy to implement ( $M_{Credible\_Total} = 5.36, M_{Effective\_Total} = 5.25, M_{Reasonable\_Total} = 5.22, M_{Safe\_Total} = 5.31, M_{Science-Based\_Total} = 5.03, M_{Easy\ to\ Implement\_Total} = 4.79, \text{ and } M_{Enjoyable\_Total} = 5.92$ ).

#### 4.3.5. Effect of Advice Context on Psychologic Characteristics

An ANOVA was performed in order to measure H5 (Table 4.11).

**Table 4.11**

*ANOVA (Psychologic Characteristics)*

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>		
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Advice Context</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
<b>Competent</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.84 (1.24)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	4.84 (1.07)
<b>Empathic</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.97 (1.29)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.19 (1.07)

<b>Intelligent</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.03 (1.26)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.04 (1.07)
<b>Influenced</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.02 (1.27)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	4.95 (1.34)
<b>Reliable</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.76 (1.56)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.07 (1.04)
<b>Responsible</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.79 (1.30)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.07 (1.23)

**Test of Between-Subjects Effects**

<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>F</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
<b>Competent</b>	.001	.972
<b>Empathic</b>	.962	.329
<b>Intelligent</b>	.000	.986
<b>Influenced</b>	.085	.772
<b>Reliable</b>	2.376	.126
<b>Responsible</b>	1.478	.227

By observing the tests of between-subjects effects, it is possible to verify that the effect of Advice Context on how respondents perceive the person's psychologic attributes as Competent, Empathic, Intelligent, Influenced, Reliable, and Responsible is not significant ( $F_{Competent}(1,118) = .001, p_{Competent} = .972$ ;  $F_{Empathic}(1,112) = .962, p_{Empathic} = .329$ ;  $F_{Intelligent}(1,115) = .000, p_{Intelligent} = .986$ ;  $F_{Influenced}(1,117) = .085, p_{Influenced} = .772$ ;  $F_{Reliable}(1,117) = 2.376, p_{Reliable} = .126$ ;  $F_{Responsible}(1,116) = 1.478, p_{Responsible} = .227$ ).

However the differences within both contexts are low, respondents tend to perceive the person who adopts the pet as more empathic, intelligent, reliable, and responsible on medical advice occasions, rather than on close-relative advice occasions. On the other hand, the person who adopts the pet is perceived as competent in the same way despite the occasion, and as more influenced on close-relative advice occasions, rather than on medical advice occasions.

Additionally, there is an overall tendency to perceive the person who adopts the pet under this psychologic context as more empathic, rather than competent ( $M_{Competent\_Total} = 4.84, M_{Empathic\_Total} = 5.07, M_{Intelligent\_Total} = 5.03, M_{Influenced\_Total} = 4.98, M_{Reliable\_Total} = 4.91, M_{Responsible\_Total} = 4.92$ ). Therefore, H5 cannot be supported.

#### 4.3.6. Effect of Advice Context on AAT Perception

To assess if Context and Perception impacts AAT Perception, an ANOVA was performed (Table 4.12).

**Table 4.12**

*ANOVA (AAT Perception)*

Descriptive Statistics		
Variable	Advice Context	Mean (SD)
Credible	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.80 (1.12)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.98 (1.01)

<b>Effective</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.58 (1.81)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.70 (1.08)
<b>Evidence-Based</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.63 (1.19)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.64 (1.21)
<b>Reliable</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.67 (1.03)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.73 (1.16)
<b>Safe</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.90 (.90)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	6.02 (.94)

**Test of Between-Subjects Effects**

<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>F</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
<b>Credible</b>	.913	.341
<b>Effective</b>	.307	.580
<b>Evidence-Based</b>	.004	.950
<b>Reliable</b>	.074	.787
<b>Safe</b>	.456	.501

The tests of between-subjects effects indicate that the effect of Advice Context on how respondents perceive AAT as Credible, Effective, Evidence-Based, Reliable, and Safe is not significant ( $F_{Credible}(1,120) = .913$ ,  $p_{Credible} = .341$ ;  $F_{Effective}(1,117) = .307$ ,  $p_{Effective} = .580$ ;  $F_{Evidence-Based}(1,117) = .004$ ,  $p_{Evidence-Based} = .950$ ;  $F_{Reliable}(1,115) = .074$ ,  $p_{Reliable} = .787$ ;  $F_{Safe}(1,117) = .456$ ,  $p_{Safe} = .501$ ).

Despite the differences between both contexts are not significant, respondents tend to perceive AAT as more credible, effective, evidence-based, reliable, and safe on medical advice occasions, rather than on close-relative advice occasions. Moreover, there is an overall tendency to perceive AAT as more safe, rather than effective and evidence-based ( $M_{Credible\_Total} = 5.88$ ,  $M_{Effective\_Total} = 5.64$ ,  $M_{Evidence-Based\_Total} = 5.64$ ,  $M_{Reliable\_Total} = 5.70$ , and  $M_{Safe\_Total} = 6.02$ ). Therefore, H6 cannot be supported.

#### 4.3.7. Effect of Advice Context on Alternative Therapies Perception

To assess if Advice Context impacts Alternative Therapies Perception, an ANOVA was performed (Table 4.13).

**Table 4.13**

*ANOVA (Alternative Therapies Perception)*

Variable	Descriptive Statistics	
	Advice Context	Mean (SD)
Psychology Effectiveness	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.76 (1.07)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	6.09 (.97)
Therapy Effectiveness	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.80 (1.12)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	6.02 (1.0)
Coaching Effectiveness	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.50 (1.74)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	4.09 (1.53)

<b>Traditional Medicine Effectiveness</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.33 (1.33)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	4.09 (1.53)
<b>Chinese Medicine Effectiveness</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.08 (1.53)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	4.00 (1.43)
<b>Holistic Therapy Effectiveness</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	4.11 (1.54)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	4.04 (1.52)
<b>AAT Effectiveness</b>	Close-relative Advice (Hedonic)	5.48 (1.24)
	Medical Advice (Utilitarian)	5.77 (1.01)

<b>Test of Between-Subjects Effects</b>		
<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>F</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
<b>Psychology Effectiveness</b>	3.023	.085
<b>Therapy Effectiveness</b>	1.219	.272
<b>Coaching Effectiveness</b>	1.990	.161
<b>Traditional Medicine Effectiveness</b>	.779	.379
<b>Chinese Medicine Effectiveness</b>	.086	.769
<b>Holistic Therapy Effectiveness</b>	.071	.790
<b>AAT Effectiveness</b>	1.945	.166

According to the tests of between-subjects effects, the effect of Advice Context on Alternative Therapies Perception of effectiveness is not significant ( $F_{Psychology}(1,119) = 3.023$ ,  $p_{Psychology} = .085$ ;  $F_{Therapy}(1,115) = 1.219$ ,  $p_{Therapy} = .272$ ;  $F_{Coaching}(1,115) = 1.990$ ,  $p_{Coaching} = .161$ ;  $F_{Traditional Medicine}(1,114) = .779$ ,  $p_{Traditional Medicine} = .379$ ;  $F_{Chinese Medicine}(1,116) = .086$ ,  $p_{Chinese Medicine} = .769$ ;  $F_{Holistic Therapy}(1,115) = .071$ ,  $p_{Holistic Therapy} = .709$ ;  $F_{AAT}(1,118) = 1.945$ ,  $p_{AAT} = .166$ ).

Once more, the differences between both contexts are not significant. However, respondents tend to perceive psychology, therapy, and AAT as more effective on medical advice occasions, rather than on close-relative advice occasions. On the other hand, coaching, traditional medicine, chinese medicine, and holistic therapy are perceived as more effective on close-relative occasions, rather than on medical advice occasions. Furthermore, there is an overall tendency to perceive psychology as more effective, followed by therapy and AAT ( $M_{Psychology\_Total} = 5.92$ ,  $M_{Therapy\_Total} = 5.91$ ,  $M_{Coaching\_Total} = 4.71$ ,  $M_{Traditional Medicine\_Total} = 4.22$ ,  $M_{Chinese Medicine\_Total} = 4.08$ ,  $M_{Holistic Therapy\_Total} = 4.08$ , and  $M_{AAT\_Total} = 5.61$ ). Therefore, H7 cannot be supported.

#### 4.3.8. Effect of Advice Context, with moderation of Pet Ownership

To assess if current Pet Ownership arises as a moderator of Adoption Intention, a Factorial ANOVA was performed (Table 4.14).

**Table 4.14**

*ANOVA (Adoption Intention)*

Test of Between-Subjects Effects		
Variable	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Advice Context</b>	7.303	.008
<b>Pet Ownership</b>	3.320	.071
<b>Advice Context*Pet Ownership</b>	.047	.829

According to the previous table, the effect of Advice Context on Adoption Intention is significant ( $p = .008$ ,  $F = 7.303$ ), since participants' intentions to adopt the pet differ depending on the type of advice they receive. On the other hand, the effect of Pet Ownership on Adoption Intention is marginally not significant ( $p = .071$ ,  $F = 3.320$ ), as this effect is borderline and may require further exploration for more robust results. Pet Ownership does not significantly moderate the relationship between Advice Context and Adoption Intention, since there is not a significant interaction effect between Advice Context and Pet Ownership on Adoption Intention ( $p = .829$ ,  $F = .047$ ). Therefore, H8 cannot be supported.

#### 4.3.9. Effect of Advice Context, with moderation of AAT attendance

As previously mentioned (Table 4.8), the effect of Advice Context on Pet Perception is not significant ( $F(1,120) = 1.089$ ,  $p = .299$ ). Thus, two Factorial ANOVAs were performed in order to assess if the inclusion of AAT Attendance as moderator impacts the effect of Advice Context on Pet Perception (Table 4.15 and Table 4.16).

**Table 4.15**

*ANOVA (Pet Perception – Utilitarian vs. Hedonic)*

<b>Test of Between-Subjects Effects</b>		
<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>F</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
<b>Advice Context</b>	.013	.909
<b>AAT Attendance</b>	.000	.987
<b>Advice Context*AAT Attendance</b>	.026	.871

According to the test of between-subjects effects, the effect of Advice Context on Pet Perception is not significant ( $p = .909$ ,  $F = .013$ ), since there is not a difference on how participants perceive the pet's utilitarian and hedonic values depending on the type of advice they receive. Furthermore, the effect of AAT Attendance on Pet Perception is also not significant ( $p = .987$ ,  $F = .000$ ), since whether participants have attended AAT sessions or not does not impact their perception of pets. AAT Attendance does not significantly moderate the

relationship between Advice Context and Pet Perception, since there is not a significant interaction effect between Advice Context and AAT Attendance on Pet Perception ( $p = .871$ ,  $F = .026$ ).

**Table 4.16**

*ANOVA (Pet Perception – Material vs. Experiential)*

<b>Test of Between-Subjects Effects</b>		
<b>Variable</b>	<b><i>F</i></b>	<b><i>p</i></b>
<b>Advice Context</b>	.234	.629
<b>AAT Attendance</b>	1.139	.288
<b>Advice Context*AAT Attendance</b>	.963	.328

According to the previous table, the effect of Advice Context on Pet Perception is not significant ( $p = .629$ ,  $F = .234$ ), since there is not an impact on how participants perceive the pet's objectification depending on the type of advice they receive. Moreover, the effect of AAT Attendance on Pet Perception is also not statistically significant ( $p = .288$ ,  $F = 1.139$ ), when evaluating the pet as material or experiential. AAT Attendance does not significantly moderate the relationship between Advice Context and Pet Perception, since there is not a significant interaction effect between Advice Context and AAT Attendance on Pet Perception ( $p = .328$ ,  $F = .963$ ). Therefore, H8 cannot be supported.

## **5. Conclusions and General Discussion**

According to the variable that controlled for participants' intention of adopting a pet, it is known that the sample of this study did not reveal all the expected results. Contrarily to what was expected, participants responding in the medical advice and utilitarian condition presented the highest adoption intention. The fact that participants tend to perceive the pet slightly more as hedonic, rather than utilitarian ( $M_{\text{Pet Perception}} = 4.89$ ) might explain this result. In fact, respondents tend to perceive the pet more as experiential, rather than material, regardless of the type of advice ( $M_{\text{Medical Advice}} = 5.45$  and  $M_{\text{Close-relative Advice}} = 5.72$ ).

Furthermore, the results found in this study serve as proof that dichotomy between the utilitarian and hedonic values of pets are complex and highly individualized by emotional and psychological factors (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). This perspective contrasts sharply with prior psychological research where pets occupy a more instrumental role to self-identity and are often useful as transition objects. In fact, pets often transcend the concept of material possessions, as owners bond with their pets in ways that resemble human relationships, attributing them the special status of family members (Holbrook et al., 2001; Amiot & Bastian, 2014; Belk, 1988).

Past research suggested that consumers are often more attached to the hedonic dimension, and more reluctant to part with it than with the utilitarian dimension, as they develop symbolic relationships with their possessions. If these relationships are more unique and stronger for hedonic than for utilitarian possessions, consumers might reasonably value such options more over time (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000; Belk, 1988). However, this study revealed that both conditions (close-relative advice, hedonic and medical advice, utilitarian) are not relevant for the perceived depth of emotional connection between individuals and the pet. Hence, this might support the fact that the attachment to animals is the predictor of human well-being, rather than the context itself (Garrity, Stallones, Marx, & Johnson, 1989; Ory & Goldberg, 1983).

Regarding the perception of pet adoption, the results showed similar patterns when controlled by the occasion. It was observed that participants tend to perceive pet adoption as more credible, effective, reasonable, safe, science-based, easy to implement, and enjoyable on medical advice occasions, rather than on close-relative advice occasions, although the safety, ease of implementation, and enjoyability were not statistically significant. Nonetheless, pet adoption was perceived as more enjoyable, rather than as easy to implement ( $M_{\text{Enjoyable\_Total}} = 5.92$ ,  $M_{\text{Credible\_Total}} = 5.36$ ,  $M_{\text{Safe\_Total}} = 5.31$ ,  $M_{\text{Effective\_Total}} = 5.25$ ,  $M_{\text{Reasonable\_Total}} = 5.22$ ,  $M_{\text{Science-Based\_Total}} = 5.03$ , and  $M_{\text{Easy to Implement\_Total}} = 4.79$ ). This effect can be explained by the fact that all statistically significant attributes are directly related to the professional reliability individuals assign to medical advice.

Although pet owners usually express greater feelings of capability, and self-efficacy, compared to when not in the presence or not thinking about the pet (Amiot & Bastian, 2014), as well as an enhanced sense of comfort, security, and entertainment (Holbrook et al., 2001), this study revealed an overall preference for enhancing relational rather than self-improvement characteristics, as individuals perceive the person who adopts the pet under this psycholog

context as more empathic, rather than competent ( $M_{\text{Empathic\_Total}} = 5.07$ ,  $M_{\text{Intelligent\_Total}} = 5.03$ ,  $M_{\text{Influenced\_Total}} = 4.98$ ,  $M_{\text{Responsible\_Total}} = 4.92$ ,  $M_{\text{Reliable\_Total}} = 4.91$ , and  $M_{\text{Competent\_Total}} = 4.84$ ).

Interestingly, the way individuals perceive AAT as credible, effective, evidence-based, reliable, and safe, when controlled by the occasion is not statistically significant. Although existing studies suggest that dogs are the most common animal therapists, and the use of dogs in AAT is consistently associated with moderately high effect sizes (Nimer & Lundahl, 2007), the results are similar for both occasions. Additionally, there is an overall tendency to perceive AAT as more safe, rather than effective and evidence-based ( $M_{\text{Safe\_Total}} = 6.02$ ,  $M_{\text{Credible\_Total}} = 5.88$ ,  $M_{\text{Reliable\_Total}} = 5.70$ ,  $M_{\text{Effective\_Total}} = 5.64$ , and  $M_{\text{Evidence-Based\_Total}} = 5.64$ ). Thus, participants might not attribute due importance to medical advice as they are still skeptical towards this type of therapy. In fact, it was observed that there is an overall preference for psychology as more effective, followed by therapy and AAT.

Regarding current pet ownership, the results were not according to the previous literature. Some consumers prefer animal companionship to that of humans, since sharing in common a deep awareness that their relationship with an animal companion is an end in itself and not a means to other end (Holbrook et al., 2001; Toure-Tillery & McGill, 2015; Belk, 1988). Hence, it was expected that current pet ownership would positively moderate participants' willingness to adopt other pet, which was not supported by this study. Lastly, previous AAT sessions attendance was also not considered a moderator regarding pet perception, since its effect is not statistically significant.

## **6. Theoretical and Managerial Implications**

Theoretically, the present dissertation adds on to the existing literature on consumer behavior and pet adoption, by assessing how psychological and emotional bonds are formed between humans and their pets, under different occasions.

The results found in this study bring an understanding of how utilitarian and hedonic values of pets are perceived by consumers. Contrary to prior assumptions that individuals usually favor the hedonic aspects of pets, this research shows that under certain conditions - such as medical advice - the utilitarian value can also impact adoption intention. This challenges the traditional dichotomy and suggests that these dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but rather influence each other dynamically depending on the context.

The study highlights the critical role that emotional attachment to pets plays in predicting human well-being, suggesting that this attachment may be more relevant than the context itself. This finding supports and extends previous research that has emphasized the emotional relationships consumers have with their possessions (Belk, 1988).

From a managerial perspective, the present research reveals implications for organizations and marketers, particularly those involved in pet adoption, AAT, and well-being. Since medical advice enhances the perceived credibility and safety of pet adoption, organizations could tailor their message according to the source of advice, in order to tackle different individuals' necessities. Furthermore, marketers should consider segmenting their target audience based on their proneness towards utilitarian or hedonic values, as personalized marketing strategies that align with an individual's motivators - e.g., companionship or functional benefits - could be more effective.

Despite the existing benefits of AAT, skepticism remains among consumers. To enhance acceptance, providers of AAT should base their message on safety and professional reliability, which were perceived positively in the study. Additionally, it is relevant to develop more comprehensive educational campaigns that go beyond promoting its benefits, by integrating testimonials from medical professionals and showcasing scientific studies, in order to build trust and overcome skepticism.

## **7. Limitations and Future Research**

As it occurs with all academic research, this study also presents limitations, which are addressed in this chapter. To begin with, by implementing an online survey, there was no opportunity to clarify participants' potential doubts regarding the questions that were asked throughout the questionnaire. Despite that, and even if participants did not have any concerns, it was still not possible to control for their genuine motivation, honesty, and their surroundings, all of which could have potentially influenced their responses.

Furthermore, the sample size could have been larger in order to reach more meaningful conclusions, and to verify a greater accuracy of the results. Additionally, the sample was mainly composed by Portuguese participants, aged between 21 and 24 years old. Therefore, for future research, it is relevant to 1) gather data from a broader sample, 2) specially from individuals

who have experienced AAT sessions, 3) including participants from more countries, 4) and from more generations, in order to have a more robust sample.

For future research, it is also relevant to include other variables in the study. The same study could be conducted while including questions regarding personal relationships, habits and consumption intention. Hence, it would be interesting to evaluate how adopting a pet impacts individuals' proneness to forge human relationships, encourages healthier and fitness habits, and influences consumption decisions – e.g. choosing a pet friendly café instead of a traditional one. This way, it would be possible to assess interesting areas of the impact of pets on humans' well-being.

Lastly, as the present study encompassed psychological and medical concepts, the author's limited expertise of the subject may have subsequently influenced the outcome of the results. For instance, the way scenarios were presented, or how questions were asked and phrased, might not have been presented in the most accurate form, in order to capture all the desired outcomes.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Research Method**

As previously mentioned, an experimental study was implemented in order to test the hypotheses. Thus, the variables were manipulated through this study design, which aimed to achieve a measurable effect on the dependent variables by influencing the independent variable. Adding on, the experimental research relied on an online survey, as by choosing this data collection method, respondents can seamlessly access the questionnaire as it is easy to complete, guarantees reliability and ensures participants' anonymity, as well as it improves the response rate. By gathering online data, the chances of losing information are reduced as it is more simple to transfer it into a database (Carbonaro & Bainbridge, 2000; Granello & Wheaton, 2004; Lefever et al., 2006). Moreover, researchers can potentially reach unique populations who would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach through other channels, in a cost-effective way and in a short period of time (Wright, 2006; Nayak & Narayan, 2019).

This online survey was conducted under the Qualtrics Survey Software, which is an online tool that allows one to easily build and distribute surveys, collect responses, and analyze response data, all from within the same platform. Moreover, it is possible to download response data in various formats, including SPSS, which is the statistical software program where the collected data was further transferred and analyzed.

The survey was available in two languages, English and Portuguese, in order to reach a greater amount of respondents. Besides, it was distributed across different social media channels, such as Facebook and Instagram, and spread through word-of-mouth, aiming to target a more diverse population. Ultimately, it was possible to collect x responses to the survey.

### **Appendix 2: Survey**

#### ***Introduction***

*To see the Portuguese version, please click on the right corner at the top of the page*

*(Para ver a versão em português, por favor clique no canto superior direito)*

Welcome and thank you for taking part in this study!

This survey is an integral part of my Master's Thesis in Management with Specialization in Strategy, Entrepreneurship & Impact, by Católica Lisbon School of Business & Economics.

Your participation in the study is completely anonymous and voluntary. Your responses will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this study. Your participation in this study should take approximately 5 minutes.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me: s-bfcmartins@ucp.pt

By moving forward on this survey you are agreeing to voluntarily taking part in the study.

Thank you for your attention!

-----*Break*-----

You will now be exposed to one scenario. Therefore, I kindly ask you to carefully read the instructions, in order to better project yourself in that specific context.

We are aware that this is subjective and therefore there are no right or wrong answers.

You will now answer questions about the study.

-----*Break*-----

### **1. Condition Close-relative Advice/Hedonic**

Please consider the following scenario.

Alex has been diagnosed with a psychological disorder since struggling with high levels of stress due to an imbalance between work and personal life, leading to significant anxiety issues.

In an effort to prevent the further escalation of stress levels, Alex decides to ask their closest family members for advice. Alex's mother suggests adopting a dog as a solution to their anxiety-related challenges since she has a friend who recently adopted a dog and has been feeling healthier overall.

Therefore, Alex decides to take their mother's advice and adopts a dog.

Please consider this scenario and answer the following questions.

## **2. Condition Medical Advice/Utilitarian**

Please consider the following scenario.

Alex has been diagnosed with a psychological disorder since struggling with high levels of stress due to an imbalance between work and personal life, leading to significant anxiety issues.

During a session, Alex's therapist suggests Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) as a complementary and alternative approach to improve their high levels of stress. Based on Alex's personality, the therapist suggests adopting a dog as a solution to their anxiety-related challenges.

Therefore, Alex decides to take their therapist's advice and adopts a therapy dog.

Please consider this scenario and answer the following questions.

-----Break-----

### ***Questions***

#### **Scenarios | Close-relative Advice/Hedonic vs. Medical Advice/Utilitarian**

1. Please consider Alex's situation. If you were in Alex's position, to what extent would you be willing to adopt the dog? (1 = Would not adopt at all; 7 = Definitely would adopt)

- 1 (Would not adopt at all)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 (Definitely would adopt)

#### ***2. Manipulation Check***

Relationships and experiences can be pursued for its utilitarian and hedonic value.

Utilitarian value refers to the functional and practical dimensions, i.e. to necessities.

Hedonic value refers to the pleasure, joy and fun, i.e. to indulgences.

Taking this into consideration, how do you classify the dog in this context? (1 = Completely Utilitarian; 7 = Completely Hedonic)

- 1 (Completely Utilitarian)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 (Completely Hedonic)

3. Taking into consideration the contrast between experiences and material possessions, how do you classify the dog in this context? (1 = Completely Material; 7 = Completely Experiential)

- 1 (Completely Material)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7 (Completely Experiential)

4. How emotionally close from their dog do you think Alex feels? (1 = Not close at all; 7 = Extremely close)

- 1 (Not close at all)
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- 6
- 7 (Extremely close)

5. Taking Alex's decision into consideration, how do you classify the idea of adopting a dog to help coping with anxiety challenges? (1 = Not at all; 7 = Extremely)

	Not at all						Extremely
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Credible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reasonable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safe	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Science-Based	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Easy to Implement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Enjoyable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Please think about what you have learned about Alex. How would you rate this person on the following psychological attributes or characteristics? (1 = Not at all; 7 = Extremely)

	Not at all						Extremely
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Competent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empathic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Intelligent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Influenced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Responsible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

-----Break-----

### **AAT & Alternative Therapies**

7. Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) is a therapeutic intervention that incorporates animals into the treatment plan. During sessions, the client, therapist, and animal work together toward the same goals, which can be physical, mental, emotional, and social.

Taking this description into consideration, how would you rate AAT on the following indicators? (1 = Not at all; 7 = Extremely)

	Not at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely 7
Credible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Evidence-Based	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Safe	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Taking into consideration Alex's disorder, how would you rate the following methods of treatment in terms of effectiveness? (1 = Not effective at all; 7 = Extremely effective)

	Not effective at all 1	2	3	4	5	6	Extremely effective 7
Psychology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Therapy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Traditional Medicine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Chinese Medicine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Holistic Therapy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Animal-Assisted Therapy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

-----Break-----

### ***Moderators***

#### **Pet Ownership**

9. Do you currently own a pet?

- Yes (*Skip to 13*)
- No (*Continue to 10*)

10. Have you ever owned a pet?

- Yes (*Continue to 11*)
- No (*End of the block*)

11. How old were you when you adopted your first pet?

(Text)

12. Which kind of pet did you own? (*End of the block*)

- Dog
- Cat
- Other (Text)

13. How old were you when you adopted your current pet?

(Text)

14. Which kind of pet do you currently own?

- Dog
- Cat
- Other (Text)

15. Is this your first pet?

- Yes (*End of the block*)
- No (*Continue to 16*)

16. How old were you when you adopted your first pet?

(Text)

17. Which kind of pet did you own?

- Dog
- Cat
- Other (Text)

-----Break-----

## **AAT Sessions Attendance**

18. Have you ever attended Animal-Assisted Therapy sessions?

- Yes (*Continue to 19*)
- No (*End of the block*)

19. Which kind of animal was used during those Animal-Assisted Therapy sessions?

- Dog
- Cat
- Horse
- Other (Text)

-----*Break*-----

## ***Demographics***

This section will be used to cover your sociodemographic data. Please provide your information.

20. Please indicate your gender:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to disclose
- Other (Text)

21. Please indicate your nationality:

(Text)

22. Please indicate your age:

(Text)

23. Please indicate your current occupation:

- Student
- Working Student
- Part-time employed
- Full-time employed
- Unemployed
- Retired

-----*Break*-----

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey. Your response has been recorded.

