



Dog-friendliness in Finnish accommodation business

Mikko Laine

Bachelor's thesis

02/2024

Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management

Mikko Laine

Utilization of dog-friendliness in Finnish Hospitality Business: Researching the perks and perils of dog-owners as a targeted customer group

Jyväskylä: Jamk University of Applied Sciences, February 2024, 47 pages.

Degree Programme in Tourism and Hospitality Management. Bachelor's thesis.

Permission for open access publication: Yes

Language of publication: English

Abstract

This thesis aims to identify and analyze dog owners as a potential target group for Finnish accommodation businesses. The contents of this research investigate dog owners as a demographic by finding out their habits and preferences while traveling and accommodating. The goal is to allow Finnish accommodation businesses to utilize the information provided by this research in order to consider business and marketing models that focus on dog owners as a specific target group.

Dogs and accommodation are seen as a problematic area, and the presence of dog friendly accommodation is rather scarce in Finland. Dogs are often allowed on the premises, but services rarely take dogs into account as a targeted demographic. Dog owners are struggling with finding accommodation services that focus on dog owners as their desired customers. Dog owners make up for an outstanding percent of population and they can be utilized as a quality target group with a substantial amount of purchase power.

This thesis was done by finding relevant data and statistics about Finnish dog owners that help in identifying them as a demographic. To further research the target group, a survey was conducted that provided data about dog owners and their habits as travelers. The results of previous data found, and the results of the survey were then compared to identify dog owners' habits and preferences as a constant phenomenon.

All the data this research provided was then analyzed and brought alive by designing a customer profile and different tools and service paths that businesses can utilize while developing services and products for dog owners as a targeted customer group.

In summary, this research identifies dog owners as a neglected target group in Finnish accommodation business and aims to bring Finnish accommodation businesses and dog owners together.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

Tourism, accommodation, dog-friendliness, dog-owners, traveling with pets, target customer group

Miscellaneous (Confidential information)

Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Traveling with pets	5
3	Business environment.....	12
4	Customer journey as a tool to develop accommodation services for dog owners	13
4.1	Awareness	13
4.2	Consideration	14
4.3	Decision	15
4.4	Service	16
4.5	Retention.....	16
4.6	Advocacy	17
5	Methodology.....	17
5.1	Research process.....	17
5.2	Survey.....	17
5.3	Analyzing the results	19
6	Results.....	19
6.1.1	Demographic data	19
6.1.2	Traveling data	23
7	Discussion.....	31
7.1	Constructing a customer profile based on the results.....	31
7.2	Comparing the results with the theoretical framework	32
8	Strengths and Limitations	33
9	Conclusion	34
9.1	Reliability, validity and ethicality	34
9.1.1	Reliability	34
9.1.2	Validity	34
9.1.3	Ethicality	35
10	Discussion.....	35
10.1	Problematics of dogs and accommodation services.....	36
10.2	Designing services for dog owners.....	37
10.3	Potential for international customers.....	37

References	39
Appendices	41
Appendix 1. Survey part one: Demographic data	41
Appendix 2. Survey part two: Traveling habits and preferences of dog owners.....	44
Appendix 3. Survey part three: Open answers regarding the topic	47

Figures

Tables

1 Introduction

As of 2016, almost every third household in Finland owned a pet (Tilastokeskus, 2020). In total, there were 700000 dogs. In 2023, the Kennel Association of Finland (Suomen Kennelliitto) estimated that there are a total of 803000 dogs in Finland, out of which 580000 (72%) are registered. In 2022, 52743 dogs were registered to Finnish Kennel Association. (STT, 2023).

There are many benefits for owning a dog, varying from practical and useful purposes to having a lovable family member to share your adventures with. Finland has always trusted dogs as their companion, and it is highly improbable to walk down a street without seeing at least a few people walking their dogs. While dogs served a more practical purpose in the past for their owners as guard dogs, sheep dogs or hunting dogs, modern dogs can be seen as just a family member and someone who follows you everywhere you go.

It is commonly agreed upon that traveling with dogs require certain conditions and careful planning, as the majority of accommodation businesses are hesitant to allow pets to accommodate. Dog-owners know that every step of a trip needs to be done on the dog's terms and this factor limits their possibilities to access a variety of possibilities while traveling. According to a survey made by Rover, an American dog-sitting and walking service, 37 percent of 500 respondents have chosen not to travel so could stay home with their dog. (Newsdesk, 2018). However, according to Suomen Kennelliitto, there is a dog in approximately every fifth household in Finland which makes dog-owners a major customer group to target in hospitality business. Besides the large quantity of pet ownership, pet-owners are also increasingly spending more money on their pets' food, medi-

cal services, accessories and the costs accumulated from buying the pet. There has been an increase of over 800€ of annual spending between 1985 and 2016. In 2016, Finnish households spent a total of 925 million euros. (Tilastokeskus, 2020). The increase in these numbers support the argument that dogs and pets overall have evolved to a more important and valued role in a typical Finnish household, which means that families are more likely to commit to costs accumulated from traveling with their dogs. This makes dog-owners a large and easily reachable customer group.

This research aims to provide a thorough study on the perks and perils of dog friendliness for a hospitality business by collecting data from the target group itself and seek solutions to problems that companies might have with the concept. Data is also collected about dog owners as a demographic to further understand their ways of consuming, decision making and thought processing during their holidays. The ultimate goal is to prove a hospitality business that indulging in dog friendliness can result in a positive impact within the company's image, direction and financial gain. This is done by calculating the cost efficiency and dedication required for certain procedures and enhancements that appeal to dog owners. The very question this thesis aims to answer is: "Can a Finnish accommodation business benefit from dog-friendliness as a part of their strategy?".

2 Traveling with pets

A dog can be a trusted companion for everyone regardless of age, relationship status or family structure. By analyzing the data available about the demographic distribution of dog ownership, a hospitality business can find and pinpoint certain factors that can help in building a service for the targeted group. When conducting research about a certain group, it is vital to understand where these customers come from, what they are like and what they are looking for. After a thorough analysis of statistics, it is easier to build a customer profile and a customer journey with the available framework and understanding of dog owners and their lifestyle.

The following statistics include percentages of population who do not currently own a dog, but have owned a dog in the past. This data is worth pointing out, because if a person has previously owned a dog, they are more likely to be tolerant, understanding and easy going towards other customers accommodating in the same location that have dogs accompany them. The statistics were referenced from Kennelliitto's (Kennel Association of Finland) survey conducted in 2014 with a

goal of learning more about dog owners as a demographic. Majority of participants were between the ages of 30 and 44, married and educated on the 2nd degree (high school or vocational school). (Kennelliitto, 2014, p.31.) It should also be noted that the survey did not take into account anyone under the age of 30, which in itself is a limiting factor for a thorough study. However, the fact that the participants were 30 at youngest adds to the reliability of the study, as their situation in life is more likely to be at a more stable setting, compared to younger population.

The most popular dog breeds in Finland

When studying dog owners as a potential target group, it is beneficial to know what dog breeds are popular in Finland. In 2022, the most popular dog breed was Labrador retriever with a total of 2580 registrations. Labrador retrievers have double the amount of registrations compared to the second most popular dog breed. (Kennelliitto, 2023). When observing the top 10, it is clear to analyze that Finnish dog owners prefer dogs that are friendly and social by nature. There are no high rankings of dog breeds that are commonly regarded as aggressive or protective by nature, but dog behavior depends heavily on the way it has been raised.

Rank	Breed	Amount registered
1	Labrador retriever	2580
2	Shetland sheepdog	1279
3	Lappshund	1251
4	Golden retriever	1250
5	German Shepherd	1226
6	Jämthund	1199
7	Jack Russell terrier	961
8	Finnish hound	932
9	Miniature schnautzer	888
10	Wire-haired dachshund	845

Chart 1: Amount of dog breeds registered

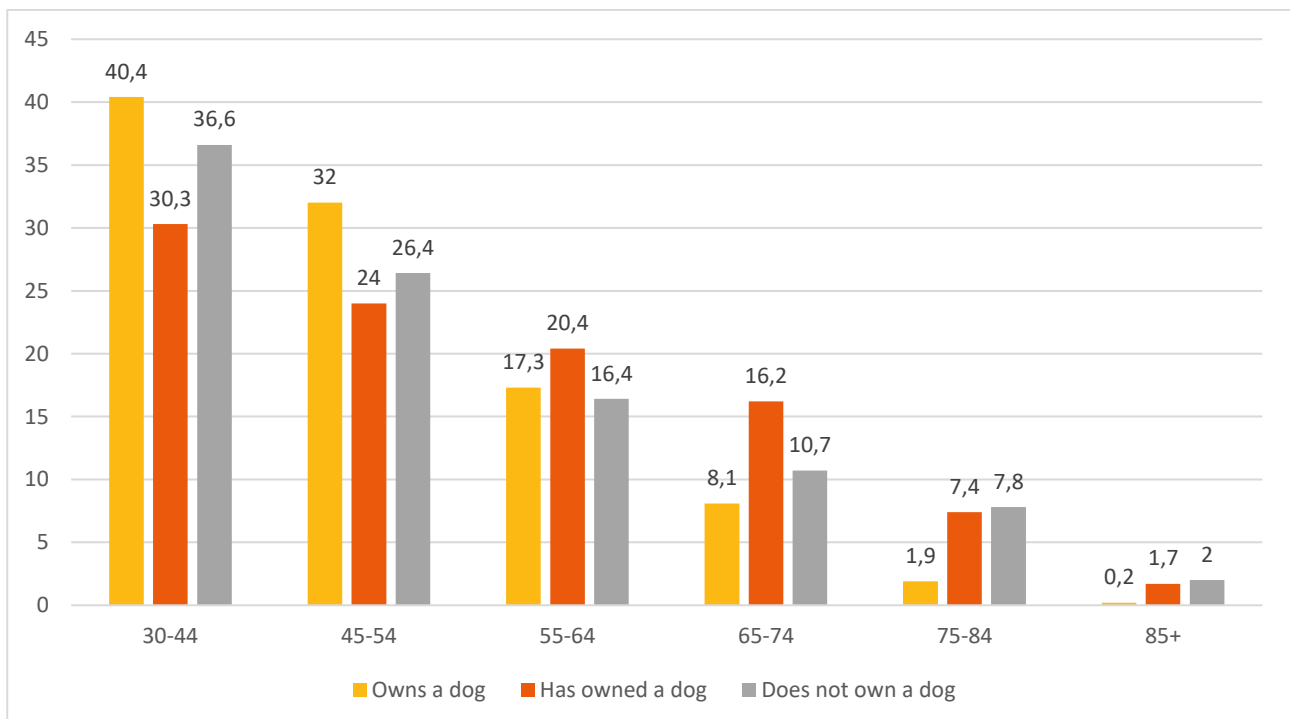
Dog owner households

According to a consumption research done in 2016 by Tilastokeskus, around 37 percent of single parent households owned a dog while 35 percent of two parent households owned a dog. 26 percent of childless couples owned a dog, and 12 percent of single person households owned a dog. Households aged over 64 years, around 7 percent owned a dog (Tilastokeskus, 2020). According to the study, families with children are most likely to own a dog which means dog owners have to take children into consideration as well while planning a vacation.

From the hospitality field's point of view, a business should examine these numbers to further develop their service to become more suitable for this specific target group. For example, if a customer has a dog the chances are they also have children. Therefore, a hospitality company's business model should include children friendly elements as well. Children have a major part in determining the course of a holiday and parents often favor solutions that make the holiday as stress free as possible even though children are coming along. Taking dogs along for the trip bring up similar kinds of challenges as children, as they are unable to take care of themselves and require constant care. Therefore a hospitality business should plan the customer journey for this demographic as easy and inviting as possible.

Age distribution among dog owners in Finland

According to a survey conducted by Suomen Kennelliitto in 2014, most dog owners were between the ages of 30 to 44. In this age group, a total of 40,4 percent owned a dog. The percentage of dog ownership can be seen to gradually decrease in relation to the age of the survey participants (Kennelliitto, 2014, p. 11.).



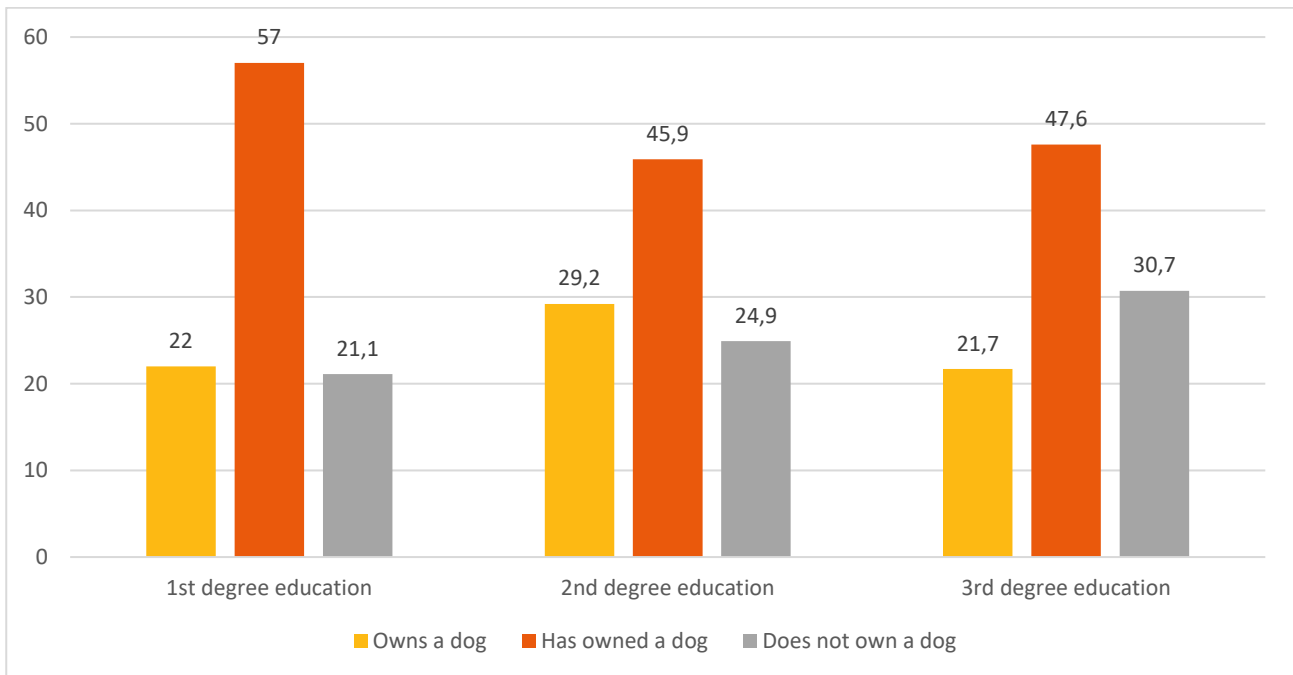
Graph 1: Age distribution among dog owners in Finland (%)

A hospitality business should take into account the age distribution of dog owners, as many of possible activities and services that benefit this demographic can be dependent on the age of the customer. For example, by examining the graph it can be seen that most dog owners can be found among 30-54 years of age, so if a hospitality business wishes to offer a service like a hiking trail, they can confidently measure the length of the trail to respond to a typical amount of kilometers that a typical dog owner would appreciate.

United Nations has listed population ageing as a demographic megatrend. (United Nations, 2020, p. 8.) It is apparent that as the population ages, hospitality businesses should take into consideration the phenomenon when designing their products and services. Although no data could be found about elderly people registering more dogs than before, it is sensible to take this megatrend into account.

Degree of education among dog owners in Finland

The study by Suomen Kennelliitto also included statistics about the degree of education of dog owners in 2014. Individuals who hold the largest number of dog ownerships are educated on the second degree, referring to high school or vocational school graduation. Therefore dog owners are most likely referred to as middle class citizens, although the differences between these groups are rather marginal. Nevertheless, it is important to take into account every aspect of a customer group when researching the potential within.



Graph 2: Degree of education among dog owners in Finland (%)

Among 1st degree education, there is a slight difference between genders of dog owners. 26,1 percent of 1st degree education males owned a dog, while 18,4 percent of female dog owners with 1st degree education. (Kennelliitto, 2014, p. 17-18.)

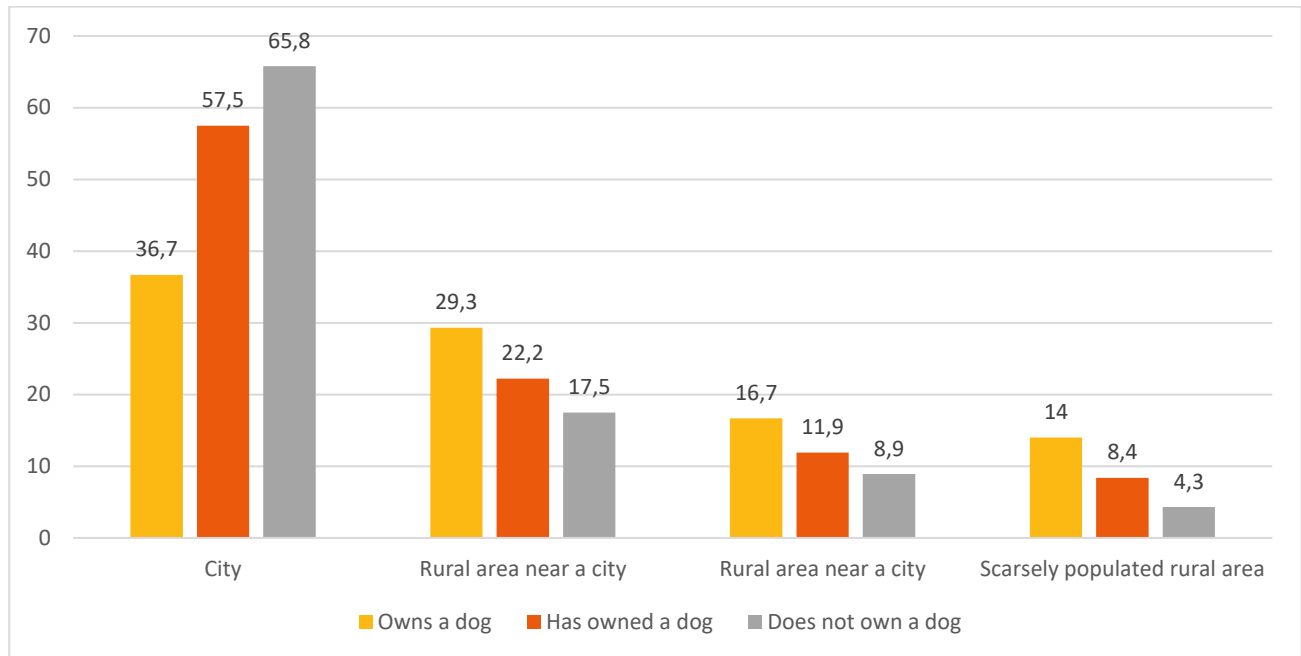
Employment status among dog owners in Finland

In 2014, 78,7 percent of dog owners were employed, 9,7 percent were agricultural entrepreneurs and 8,9 percent were overall entrepreneurs. (Kennelliitto, 2014, p. 18.) By studying these numbers, it is apparent that dog owners are mostly working full-time, therefore adding to the value of a targetable customer group for hospitality businesses as they have standard wages and are probable to spend money on free time and holidays.

Residency distribution among dog owners in Finland

Finland is a prime example of different ways of living, ranging from crowded cities to distant rural areas. A hospitality business should be aware of the changes in macro environment, such as urbanization and the slow decay of small towns and distant municipalities. United Nations lists urbanization as one of the five megatrends that are deemed to shape the trends of our time. (United Nations, 2020, p. 9)

According to Suomen Kennelliitto, in 2014 most dog owners in Finland could be found living in central areas of cities. A close second are rural areas located near bigger cities. (Kennelliitto, 2014, p. 20)



Graph 3: Residency distribution among dog owners in Finland

Based on these statistics, one could argue that if a hospitality service takes upon the challenge of including dog owners as a part of their targeted customer groups, they should design the customer journey in a way that resonates with people who live in cities or close to a city. As urbanization accelerates and the population slowly disconnects from its roots of agriculture and forestry, added value can be found by offering these once obvious ways of life as an exotic product. For example, a dog who has lived in a city for its whole life while taking walks on a leash and not straying far from the usual jogging routes can experience nature at a more rural setting of accommodation. This brings value not only for the dog, but the owner of the dog as well.

70 percent of the participants who own a dog lived in a detached house, while 12,6 percent of the participants lived in a semi-detached house or a row house and 16,6 percent lived in a compartment building. A dog living in a compartment building would by its nature love a more open setting to spend a holiday at, and as dog owners are more likely to see their pets as more of a family member than a tool or an asset, they probably want to give their dogs a chance to experience running free every now and then.

Preferred ways of spending time among dog owners in Finland

Getting a dog brings major changes in a person's lifestyle. Dogs provide company and when well trained, offer unconditional loyalty to their owner. It is common knowledge that a dog needs physical exercise to remain in shape and healthy. This often reflects to the owner in a positive way, helping them to get more steps per day by turning a walk with the dog into a habit. Kennelliitto found out in their survey that those who own a dog practice light exercise approximately 11 percent more than those who do not own a dog. However, those who do not own a dog practice more intense exercise compared to those who own a dog. Therefore it is apparent that dog owners would rather take their dogs on a walk than to the gym, which then can be taken into account when developing a hospitality businesses services for dog owners. Possibilities for exercising are vital to attract dog owners, as it is a constant requirement to be able to walk with the dog.

Those who own a dog spent approximately 320 minutes sitting down during the weekend, while those who do not own a dog spend approximately 346 minutes sitting down. Dogs work as a great motivator to get up and going. (Kennelliitto, 2014, p. 27)

Conclusions about the statistics

Even though the statistics from the surveys are almost ten years old by the writing of this research, they can be used as a solid framework in understanding dog owners as a demographic. By analyzing these results and the megatrends and changes in macro environment of the current year, it is possible to forecast certain changes in the target group. For example, the fact that urbanization is on the rise and birth rates have been showing a steady decline globally, it is highly possible that more childless households with dogs are on the rise while families with children and dogs show no signs of change in volume.

As tourists wander more into the nature, the amount of services that allow them to take dogs along could see an increase in demand. Ecotourism is predicted to grow 12,90 percent annually from 2023 to 2032. (Precedence Research, 2023)

3 Business environment

Competitors

Finland has a variety of accommodation options for dog owners. However, if compared to the total amount of accommodation services in Finland, the selection is rather narrow and does not necessarily shine with its presence. Koirasuomi.fi has provided a list of dog-friendly accommodation services on their website (as of 2023), and although there is no guarantee this is the complete list of selection, it gives a crude framework on how dog-friendly accommodation services are present in the major cities of Finland:

City	Amount of dog-friendly accommodation
Helsinki	9
Espoo	3
Tampere	6
Turku	8
Oulu	3
Raasepori	9
Jyväskylä	4
Other	68
Total	110

Chart 2: Amount of dog-friendly accommodation, including hotels, motels, hostels, rental cottages and other forms of accommodation

According to Tilastokeskus, on 2017 there were 1383 accommodation services: 672 hotels, 115 inns, 320 resort villages, 226 camping grounds and 50 hostels. Total amount of rooms was 68834. (Tilastokeskus, 2018). By observing the chart, it can be identified that only 8 percent of accommodation businesses in Finland offer dog-friendly services. So if almost a third of Finnish households own a dog, a third of the market must settle with only 8 percent of accommodation services that are available to them.

Lomarengas is the largest distribution service of rental cottage accommodation. On their website, it is possible to limit the search to cottages that allow pets. According to their website, there is a total of 2077 cottages that allow pets. Altogether their service features 4194 cottages, which means that 49,5 percent of their selection for accommodation allow pets. Let it be noted that the majority of rental cottages are located in middle- to northern Finland. (Lomarengas, 2023).

Camping grounds for motor homes and other forms of camping offer a more versatile and comprehensive variety of selection for dog owners. According to Camping.fi, a website dedicated to

campers, lists a total of 119 options with 104 of them allowing dogs. (Camping.fi, 2023). Of course, campsites do not fall into the traditional category of accommodation as every customer brings their own accommodation premises, but not every dog owner wants to spend their vacation in a tent or a motor home.

Additionally, even if an accommodation business allows pets, it does not mean they are dedicated to offer the best possible service for the dog owners. Dogs have been allowed just to be seen as another paying customer, rather than as the desired target customer. Services designated purely for dog owners shine with their absence on the market.

Industry life cycle

Industry life cycle model can be used to identify the current state that a particular industry is in. The steps of an industry life cycle model are: introduction, growth, shakeout, maturity and decline. (Peterdy, K. n.d.) To reach maturity, the industry would need services that offer distribution and dedication for dog owners as a target group in order to form a solid foundation of community and accessibility for this particular set of customers. If one would forecast the future of dog friendliness in hospitality business, it is difficult to imagine a sudden decline in dog ownership that would render dog friendly hospitality businesses redundant.

4 Customer journey as a tool to develop accommodation services for dog owners

“Customer journeys are the complete set of interactions that a consumer has with a brand for any given task or decision.” (McKinsey, n.d.) In other words, every time your customer is in direct or indirect contact with your company, whether it be through social media or using your service on the spot, they are contributing to their customer journey. Customer journey can be divided into five steps:

4.1 Awareness

According to Cambridge Dictionary, awareness can be defined as: “knowledge that something exists.” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). “The awareness stage of the customer journey is when prospects discover your brand and product.” (Kaliyur, R. 2023).

Even the best companies with the best business ideas fail inevitably if they fail in making themselves seen and heard. Awareness can be obtained through marketing and advertising your company through channels that are prone to reach your target audience. If the targeted market is niche, it is easy to utilize modern marketing tools that are designed for directed marketing. A good business dedicated to a certain target group is also prone to spread its brand through word of mouth.

Dog owners are no exception in having their own communities and practitioners. There are different associations for specific dog breeds, dog training and dog sports. Dogs are such an important part of a dog owner's life that it is not misspoken to talk about a lifestyle, and more often than not a lifestyle includes studying the topic and involving oneself to take part on the communities' activities.

The importance of connectivity within the community can offer a wide range of opportunities to do marketing for hospitality businesses. By putting the emphasis on the fact that your company welcomes dogs and dog owners can result in a widespread word of mouth-effect as the dog owner promotes your business to their friends.

A common way for a dog owner to find accommodation is to use a distribution service, like Lomarengas. Their website allows you to search for a rental cottage where dogs are allowed to stay. (Lomarengas, 2023) However, their website only offers the cottage and a scarce list of close by services and activities. This results in a loss of in-depth information that could steer the customer to make their purchase decision. The website also does not provide a direct link to the cottage renter's website if they have one. The outcome is a potential customer who does not get to hear about the great opportunities your accommodation service offers to dog owners. Therefore, a marketing strategy that bypasses the use of distribution services can lead to a more clarified picture of your company's branding towards the target group.

4.2 Consideration

According to the 5 stages of the customer journey, an article written by Ranga Kaliyur in 2023, the consideration stage is where competition comes into play. Potential customers are comparing your product or service to other available options.

As all the world is on the internet, it is important to upkeep an online presence for your company. Once a potential customer finds their way to your website, it is vital that their attention is drawn with visual aid that supports your marketing for dog owners. This could include photography of dogs with their owners enjoying a walk in the forest, laying in the sun on the terrace or playing fetch by the lakeside. If the customer is reached in a way that makes them feel like you really want them and their dogs to connect with the destination, they are one step closer to choosing you over the next choice.

To grab the attention of a dog owner, the marketing should highlight factors that resonate with them. If your company has invested in activities and services that dog owners can use, such as fenced areas, agility courses or hiking trails, they can be assured that the destination guarantees activities for their dogs and themselves. Collaborating with other companies in the dog world, such as dog food companies or associations can help boosting the company image as a dog friendly environment. As traveling with dogs can be a hassle, your mission is to offer certainty that your premises offer a safe and exciting environment.

Promoting other businesses and services in the area for the desired target group helps in adding depth to your product. For example, as a customer is scrolling through your website and learning more about the location and its surroundings, you can help the customer out by telling them about different hiking trails, dog friendly companies such as restaurants and other services, distance and directions to the closest vet, local pet food stores and related associations.

It is also wise to mention if your service, for example a rental cottage, has features that help dog owners during their stay. For example, does your accommodation have an entrance that allows easy clean up of dogs' paws as they come inside? Are the surfaces of furniture easy to clean and do they collect dog hair? Are the floors scratch resistant and easy clean? Are there stairs or other obstacles that restrict the area for the dogs to move in? By advertising features like these it gives more credibility to your image as a company.

4.3 Decision

Decision stage begins when the prospect has narrowed down their search into few options. At this stage, it is up to the provider to seal the deal by helping the decision making of the prospect with

different tools. These tools can be personalized features, first timer discounts or other means that help the prospect to choose your business over another. (Kaliyur, R. 2023)

As the customer confirms the purchase, they want to be assured that there will be no extra costs or steps to take into consideration regarding their pets. If you advertise your company as dog friendly, it should be heavily implied that the dogs travel free and have a pleasant time waiting for them.

4.4 Service

There is a variety of extra services that can be developed to answer to the target group. Finland has a strong community of people whose hobby is to train their dogs in agility, obedience testing, scenting, dog shows and more. This opens the door of opportunity for expanding your company brand to further serve the customers by building supporting services and products that give the customers access to training with their dogs. For example, fenced areas that allow dogs to run free could be implemented on the premises. Possibilities of collaboration with local dog trainers and practitioners could help in creating an environment purely dedicated to dog owners.

There are many domestic dog food- and accessory companies that could be utilized in marketing and services. Dog owners care not only about their dogs' fitness, but also about their diet and as organic and locally made nutrition is arising as a trend, this feature could help to bring in some additional gains. As an example by a real life implementation, Rantalan Lomamökit offers a free bag of dog treats produced by a Finnish dog food company. As the customers enter their rental cottage, they find the bag on the table along with a greeting card. First impression is important, and this little gesture is likely to make the customers feel welcome not only as guests, but as dog owners.

4.5 Retention

Retention consists of the effects of your service towards the customer's life after they have experienced your business. Different tools, like email lists, can help in making a first time customer a returning customer. "A returning customer works out to be 5-10 times less expensive than acquiring new ones." (Kaliyur, 2023).

As the market for accommodation services designed for dogs is rather scarce in Finland, dog owners must value the options they have seen to be pleasant. Dogs also can benefit from returning to the same location while traveling.

4.6 Advocacy

Dog owners are prone to socializing with other dog owners, and owning a dog opens the door to a world of different hobbies that can be practiced with dogs. These social circles can offer a good way for advocacy. Advocacy means the customers that are willing to vouch for your business and recommend it forward to other people who they see fit (Kaliyur, R. 2023).

5 Methodology

5.1 Research process

“Quantitative methods emphasize objective measurements and the statistical, mathematical, or numerical analysis of data collected through polls, questionnaires and surveys, or by manipulating pre-existing statistical data using computational techniques.” (USC, 2024). The reason this method was chosen was to access a large amount of data and participants, as there was no prior studies made on this specific matter. Quantitative research offered the possibility of building a more sturdy framework compared to qualitative methods through volume and less complex analysis process of the answers provided by the participants. In addition, quantitative approach proved to be a more efficient choice timewise and the survey was able to collect a satisfying amount of answers within a short time period.

5.2 Survey

A survey was conducted to gather relevant information about dog owners as a demographic. A survey is “an activity in which many people are asked a question or a series of questions in order to gather information about what most people do or think about something.” (Britannica, 2024) The survey was designed as quantitative research and the main goal was to learn about traveling as a phenomena among dog owners. The survey was created in Webropol program, a survey tool provided for degree students by Jamk University of Applied Sciences.

In order to gain attraction and momentum, an incentive in a form of a 50€ gift card to Musti&Mirri was promised to one respondent in form of a raffle. The gift card was not sponsored and there was no collaboration with the company, the gift card was paid in full by the researcher. The company was chosen, as it is a Finnish business that sells pet products and accessories. As the survey was related to dog owning, this prize could be utilized by every respondent if they happened to win. Taking part in the raffle was completely voluntary. If the respondent wished to participate, they were able to leave their email address at the end of the survey.

It was decided to distribute the survey in Facebook, as Facebook had a prominent amount of active dog owner communities within its social network. The survey was posted on a total of five different groups related to dogs and traveling with dogs: Koirat (61500 members), Koiraystävällinen Suomi (22300 members), Länsimaalaisen koiran ahdinko (27100 members), Matkailu ja majoittuminen koiran kanssa (12000 members), and Agility Suomi (6700 members). The survey was published on 13th of December 2023 and closed on 17th of December 2023. Total amount of answers gathered from the survey was 1746 and all respondents are assumed to be Finnish people who have traveled in Finland.

A collection of 22 questions was split into three segments. First segment (Appendix 1) included a total of seven questions about the participant as an individual, like age, gender, employment status, family structure and the amount of dogs in the household. This information was vital, because the goal of this research was to find out about dog owners not only as travelers, but also as a demographic group as a whole. Therefore, it was important to know certain facts, like the age distribution among the participants. Basic demographic statistics can help in recognizing the target group and its specific ways of living.

Second segment of questions (Appendix 2) aimed to learn about the participants' relationship with their dogs and different activities and the experiences they value. The questions emphasized on subjects related to traveling and how dogs affect their habits and processes. Some of these questions were multiple choice-questions and most of them were questions that used the Likert scale method. "Likert scale is a rating system used in questionnaires and its used to measure people's attitudes, opinions, or perceptions." (Jamieson, n.d). The Likert scale used in the survey had five

options, ranging from strongly disagreeing to strongly approving. The questions were designed allow the respondents to more accurately express their feelings towards different topics, for example the importance of including time in nature for their dogs.

Third segment (Appendix 3) allowed the respondents to freely express themselves by writing a free formed answer to two questions: “What would be the destination of your dreams while traveling with your dog? What kind of services would you appreciate?” and “Has there been a particular destination or accommodation service that has proven itself to be especially practical and good for you as a dog owner?” These questions were added by the researcher as an extra source of data, but will not be analyzed thoroughly for the sake of this research, as there were over a thousand replies. The most prominent themes within the answers, like the importance of fences around the accommodation location, were taken into consideration during the conclusion process or the research.

5.3 Analyzing the results

Quantitative research methods made it possible to analyze the results easily. The analyzation process included comparing the results with prior data that had already been researched about dog owners as a demographic and pinpointing differences and similarities. The results were also analyzed in a manner that it is easy to find out the stereotypical demographic data and behavior of a typical dog owner.

The results were also analyzed utilizing the customer journey segment of this thesis. By looking at the results of the study, it is easier to connect a customer journey (awareness, consideration, decision, service, retention, advocacy) to the data that shows what kind of customer a dog owner would be.

6 Results

6.1.1 Demographic data

The survey began with part one that aimed to identify the demographic statistics within dog owners (Appendix 1).

Age

Out of 1746 respondents, 19,1% were between the ages of 18 to 30. 25,6% were between the ages of 31 and 40. 25,8% were between the ages of 41 and 50, just barely making them the most common group. 21,8% were between the ages of 51 and 60. 6,8% were between the ages of 61 and 70 and 0,9% were above the age of 70. By looking at the chart, the majority of the respondents can be assumed to be around forty years-old.

Age	Total	Percentage
18-30	334	19,1%
31-40	446	25,6%
41-50	451	25,8%
51-60	380	21,8%
61-70	119	6,8%
70+	16	0,9%

Chart 3: Age distribution

A business should take into account the age median of a typical dog owner in order to help with awareness. By focusing your marketing to people aged from 30 to 50, it is possible to draw as much attention to your company as possible by this particular demographic. The target group's expected age can also help further in developing a service in other parts of the customer journey, like consideration and service phases.

Gender

Out of 1736 respondents, total of 1674 (96,4%) were female. 48 (2,8%) were male and 14 (0,8%) identified as other. The results can be speculated to be affected by different behaviors between genders in social media, but they can also be analyzed to point out how women seem to have a more personal bond with their dogs and answering the survey offered them a pleasant pastime activity that had the potential to further strengthen the bond they have with their dogs.

Employment status

The majority of respondents were employed (80%). Eight percent were students, five percent were retired, three percent were unemployed and 4 percent identified as 'other'. These statistics sit well with a stereotypical dog owner, as dogs require financial fees just like any other living subject. According to an article written in 2023 by Tiina Katariina Tikkanen, owning a dog racks up a total cost of 1500-3000€ annually. That means an expense of 125-250€ per month.

For accommodation businesses this is good news. When considering dog owners as a potential target group, it is important that the target group has purchasing power. As the majority of dog owners appear to be employed, there is a level of guarantee that they are financially more able to afford accommodation services compared to for example the unemployed demographic. In addition, the five percent of retired dog owners are worth mentioning as they have time for leisure activities.

From customer journey's perspective, employment status can affect phases like consideration, decision and service. Working class is likely to plan their travels to start on a Friday or Saturday after work. 24,2 percent also answered that they have children, which means those families are likely to plan their holidays around the holidays of their children.

Traveling companions

A multiple choice question related to who the respondent travels with was included to find out what kind of a group can be expected when a dog owner makes a reservation. 81,8 percent of respondents traveled with their dog, 64,3% percent traveled with their partner, 18,2 percent traveled with their children and 9,4 percent traveled alone.

The question had a follow up question about children. 75,8 percent answered that they do not have children. This points out an interesting factor about Finnish dog owners as a demographic, as childless couples who have dogs are apparently very common in Finland. It should be noted that the communication channel of social media used for inquiring the respondents might have had a limiting factor to the diversity of respondents, as those who spend time in Facebook's social groups related to dogs are probably more enthusiastic about dog ownership as a way of life, rather than as a family companion. This has an effect on the results.

The structure of the customers' family affects heavily the consideration and decision phases of the customer journey. If your accommodation business markets itself as a dog friendly place, but does not take children into account, it can lead to the prospect to choosing a different accommodation service. Also, since 81,8 percent of the participants claimed to travel with their dogs, it is vital for a business to emphasize their dog friendliness in the awareness-, consideration-, and decision making-phases.

Amount of dogs within the household

Majority of respondents, 47,2 percent, owned one dog. 29,8 percent owned two dogs, 11,4 percent owned three dogs, 5,2 percent owned 4 dogs and 6,4% owned more than five dogs. This data can be used in realizing the size requirements of an accommodation service, and based on these statistics most visitors would probably have one or two dogs.

Number of dogs	Total	Percentage
1	819	47,2%
2	516	29,8%
3	198	11,4%
4	90	5,2%
5+	111	6,4%

Chart 4: Amount of dogs within household

By knowing the typical amount of dogs within a household, customer journey can be developed further in terms of service. Are your accommodation premises big enough for multiple dogs? Are the outdoor spaces like yards suitable for multiple dogs? A total of 11,6 percent of dog owners that participated in this survey claimed to have four or more dogs. A dog friendly accommodation business should be ready to accommodate multiple dogs, as it can lead to customer satisfaction and further develop the retention and advocacy phases of the customer journey.

Residency

Finland is the land of vast forests and natural destinations. Its history in forestry and agriculture has left behind charismatic rural areas and municipalities, each with their own culture created by their societies. As modern world continues to change towards urbanization, rural areas are expected to wither. Finnish accommodation businesses should take this trend into consideration, for example, if their business is located in a more remote area, it could gain unique value through exotism in future as the upcoming generation slowly loses touch with its roots.

These claims apply to dog owners as well. The survey revealed that 47,1 percent of respondents lived in the city, while 28,1 percent lived in suburban or other areas near a city. 18 percent lived in core rural areas and 5,4 percent lived in distant rural areas.

Area	Total	Percentage
City	816	47,1%
Near a city	486	28,1%
Central rural area	311	18,0%
Distant rural area	94	5,4%
Abroad	6	0,4%
Other	18	1,0%

Chart 5: Residency

Historically, dogs have been used in wide variety of practical purposes, especially in rural history. Originally, a family would get a dog

to aid in everyday life, whether it was hunting, shepherding, guarding or foraging. In the modern day, however, most dogs in Finland are living in the cities and no actual practical tasks are assigned to them.

Accommodation services can benefit greatly from identifying this phenomenon by providing an environment where dogs get to experience something that is built into their DNA, as it is common knowledge that dogs do not belong in closed spaces and the hectic surroundings of city life. A dog owner who loves their dog is likely to choose a service or a destination that can offer a natural and exciting setting for their pet.

An accommodation business can utilize this information in developing the customer journey. For example, if an accommodation service is located in a rural setting, the company should strive to develop means of travel and enough information regarding traveling on their website. If a customer is doubtful about their possibilities to travel to your location, they might hesitate and you lose a potential customer in the decision phase of the customer journey.

6.1.2 Traveling data

Second segment (Appendix 2) of the survey dove deeper into the satisfaction and demand for dog friendly accommodation services. The purpose of these questions was to identify the overall situation of dog friendliness in Finnish accommodation business and if the customer and the service provider are enabling each other's potential to the maximum.

Involvement in a group/hobby/activity with a dog

Out of all the respondents, 50,5 percent answered that they belong to a group that actively practices dog ownership through agility or other hobbies. In return, 49,5 percent did not. It should be noted that the result is heavily impacted by the social media channels that were used to distribute the survey, as most members of those groups can be classified as more serious and enthusiastic dog owners than a casual dog owner.

As the results reveal, dog owners are bound to practice a hobby with their dog. This should be taken into account when developing the service of your customer journey. In addition, if a customer sees that you have activities to offer in their consideration and decision phases, they are more likely to seal the deal and choose you over a competitor who does not provide ways of passing time on their accommodation service.

Importance of bringing a dog along the holiday

According to the statistics revealed in the survey, bringing a dog along is important for the owner. 11,5 percent of respondents answered that they do not go anywhere where their dog cannot come. 55 percent answered that they take their along everywhere where it is possible. 29,9 percent take their dogs along if the process does not prove to be too much of an effort. 3,5 percent tend to leave their dogs home or at someone else's care for the duration of the trip. Mere 0,1 percent answered that their dogs are always left home or at someone else's care when going away.

The following question and its results supported the prior question, as 71 percent of respondents revealed that they had skipped a trip because it was not possible to take the dog with them. This data proves that dog owners are enthusiastic about taking their dogs with them when traveling, and the importance of dog friendliness is a big affecting factor in the planning stage.

Accommodation business' marketing should make it clear in the awareness phase of a customer journey that they do indeed practice dog friendliness. If the customer does not know about the emphasis on dog owners as a target group, they portray your company as just another accommodation company.

"I am satisfied with the amount of dog friendly accommodation services in Finland"

	1	2	3	4	5		Total	Average	Median
Fully disagree	62	358	748	497	75	Fully agree	1740	3,1	3,0
	3,6%	20,6%	43,0%	28,5%	4,3%				

This graph shows the results for the respondents' satisfaction related to the amount of dog friendly accommodation services in Finland. As the median of 3,0 shows, the satisfaction level is rather neutral.

I am satisfied with the quality of dog friendly accommodation services in Finland"

	1	2	3	4	5		Total	Average	Median
Fully disagree	34	247	662	687	113	Fully agree	1743	3,3	3,0
	1,9%	14,2%	38,0%	39,4%	6,5%				

This graph shows the results for the respondents' satisfaction related to the quality of dog friendly accommodation services in Finland. The results proved that Finnish dog owners are slightly more satisfied than dissatisfied with the quality of the services.

"Traveling with dogs requires careful planning and researching in order to find suitable options for accommodation."

	1	2	3	4	5		Total	Average	Median
Fully disagree	14	117	222	672	717	Fully agree	1742	4,1	4,0
	0,8%	6,7%	12,7%	38,6%	41,2%				

Most of the respondents agreed that extra steps in the research and planning process are needed when dogs are joining for the journey. Even though the responses about the amount and quality of dog friendly accommodation services were neutral, dog owners still think they need to plan more carefully for trips with dogs. It can be identified that Finnish accommodation businesses could improve their processes and marketing in order to help dog owners find and plan their journeys more effortlessly.

An accommodation business can tackle the need for careful planning and researching by providing clear and thorough instructions and information on how their company aims to help the dog owner as a customer as best as they can. Advertising slogans like: "You just need to come with your dog, we have arranged the rest" can help the customer in the decision-making process.

“Traveling with dogs generates extra costs.”

	1	2	3	4	5		Total	Average	Median
Fully disagree	16	56	161	502	1006	Fully agree	1741	4,4	5,0
	0,9%	3,2%	9,3%	28,8%	57,8%				

Most of the respondents agreed that dogs generate extra costs while traveling. Among other things, these costs can be related to fees within the accommodation services. Many of these services in Finland require extra payments for allowing dogs on the premises. Finnish accommodation businesses could find alternative ways to handle transactions with their dog owner customers. One way the negative stigma of extra pet costs could be avoided is an insurance payment that the dog owner pays to the service provider. If the pet causes no problems regarding the tidiness or loudness levels of the room/cottage/other, the payment would then be returned to the customer. This kind of approach could be more inviting to a dog owner, as they get a feeling that the accommodation service still wants your dog to come as well, while upholding a mutual respect between the customer and the service provider.

Having a text on your booking system that mentions extra costs can lead to a negative impact on the customer and their decision-making. It would not be tacky to mention in the booking process that dogs do not in fact generate any extra costs while staying at your accommodation service.

“I prefer dog products and dog food that are made in Finland.”

As this research is performed in a domestic setting, a question of this nature was added to the survey as a way to find out about the importance of domestic products. As domestic tourism is especially important for dog owners, a vague dive into their preferences in this matter can offer some insight into their values that drive their decision making.

	1	2	3	4	5		Total	Average	Median
Fully disagree	51	232	462	542	458	Fully agree	1745	3,6	4,0
	2,9%	13,3%	26,5%	31,1%	26,2%				

The results show that Finnish dog owners do prefer products made in Finland. This information sits well with Finnish accommodation businesses, as it allows collaborating with Finnish brands that offer products and food for dogs. A simple, affordable gesture of including a dog treat besides the welcome card of a hotel room or a rental cottage can make a great difference in how the visitor perceives the company and its friendliness towards dogs.

Finland can be seen as being proud of its domestic products and services. Finnish travelers probably feel more secure if they know the company, they are about to spend their money on has values of similar nature, promoting home grown values. It gives them a sense of safety and can further aid them in the decision-making process of the customer journey.

“I would like to offer a more diverse variety of experiences for my dog.”

	1	2	3	4	5		Total	Average	Median
Fully disagree	49	126	444	541	579	Fully agree	1739	3,8	4,0
	2,8%	7,3%	25,5%	31,1%	33,3%				

Majority of the respondents felt like they wanted to offer more life experiences for their dog. This heartwarming result speaks for the evolution of dogs and their importance in the modern family structure, as they are no longer seen for their practicality with certain tasks, but rather as an important family member that deserves to live a fulfilling and active life.

This means that the dog owner is ready to invest and work through extra steps required to take their dogs with them. As the field of dog friendly accommodation in Finland is relatively scarce, dog owners are behaviorally predictable customer group to target.

Related to this question, the next question revealed that 90,4 percent of respondents felt that it is important for dogs to experience time in nature. While a customer group like a family with children requires different attractions near the accommodation service, a dog owner can appreciate simpler ways to spend their time, for example hiking in a forest. This enables rural destinations to compete for dog owners as a customer group, as dogs are easy companions with no interest in

man-made attractions. Previous data stated in this research also speaks for the effort that dog owners are ready to invest in for the sake of their dogs.

Related to the importance hobbies within the dog owner community, the service phase of the customer journey should be able to offer the customers reliable accommodation, but also the possibility of trying different things with their dogs. These things can be something like agility courses, outdoor trails or simple fetch games with a ball by a lake. Whatever the customer cannot experience in their normal setting in life adds to the value of the experience, creating emotional connections with the service and therefore advancing the retention and advocacy phases of the customer journey.

Preferred season for traveling with dogs

Summer was arguably the most popular season to travel with dogs. However, spring and autumn were also favored by over half of the respondents. These results shed a glimpse of positive outcome regarding the current seasonality in Finnish tourism business. As summer and winter are arguably the most popular seasons for international tourists, every meas-

Season	Amount	Percentage
Spring	984	56,9%
Summer	1449	83,8%
Autumn	1081	62,5%
Winter	756	43,7%

Chart 6: Preferred Season for traveling

ure need to be taken to turn Finnish tourism into a more appealing destination on spring and autumn as well. Dog owners can be utilized as a targeted customer group during these low seasons. For example, a skiing resort that is packed during winter, could come up with a concept for the dog owner demographic in an attempt to fill out the quieter time in their yearly cycle. Skiing resorts are often located in remote locations with forests and interesting environments that could be utilized by dog owners. For example, cross country skiing tracks are there even if there is no snow. A holiday village could transform their surroundings into something that dog owners as a customer group could value.

All this should be done with the customer journey in mind. If a typical working class dog owning person gets four days free from work during winter, they probably are not looking for a skiing resort as a potential getaway destination. Instead, if an accommodation business manages to bring awareness on getaway-type of holidays, they have a shot at scoring the customer to book a stay at their service. Finland also has drastic seasonal changes in weather and the environment, so there

is a chance your accommodation service has completely different experiences to offer depending on the season. This can help with retention phase of the customer journey, if you are able to convince your customers that another season has different things to offer at the same destination.

Preferred form of accommodation service

Rental cottages proved to be the most popular choice for accommodation among dog owners, with 73,6 percent. 59,6 percent of respondents claimed to prefer hotels, 18,5 percent preferred camping grounds and 18,4 percent spent their nights in nature, for example by camping. Rental cottages are arguably the easiest choice for dog owners, as they outshine other forms of accommodation in privacy, accessibility and practicality.

Preferred means of transportation when traveling

96,4 percent of respondents preferred to use their own car while traveling. As Finland is known for its long distances between destinations and attractions, having your own car while traveling eases the process by a lot. In addition, dogs are easier to manage on the journey while traveling with a car, because they have needs that require stopping at certain times. Also, dogs can get stressed or out of control while traveling with public transportation. Typically a dog is familiar with its family's car and recognizes the trunk or the back seat as its own spot.

21,1 percent also chose trains as a viable transportation possibility for them. Only 5,6 percent liked traveling with a bus. While trains have carriages that allow dogs and other pets to tag along, busses are a bit more cautious of letting dogs in.

Transparency and willingness to help the customer with their transportation can help in sealing the deal between the company and the customer. By having the relevant information on nearby attractions, convenience stores and other points of interest can narrow the gap of unknowledge and help the customer to choose your business over another. By familiarizing the customer about the surrounding area and its services, a company can aid in creating retention between the customer and the business. It is easier to return to a familiar place.

Honorable mentions from the open answer segment of the survey

A total of 1458 expressed themselves in the third segment (Appendix 3) of the survey about the most important opportunities and possibilities in Finnish accommodation services. A total of 198 respondents expressed their appreciation and need for fenced areas, either around the yard of a rental cottage or an area dedicated for dogs. Partakers in this survey expressed a great demand for knowing that their dog is safe in and around the accommodation.

Themes like solitude and remoteness were prominent. Many of the respondents shared stories about how special a certain destination had made them feel as they noticed how dogs and dog owners were taken into consideration on site. Dog owners wish to have their own privacy and if possible, no direct view to the next unit or cottage is seen as an important factor.

Especially those respondents who preferred rental cottages mentioned how it would be nice to have a couple food bowls for dogs, as well as some bags for their remains. Also, multiple respondents mentioned how a little bag of treats for the dog as a welcoming gift has been a pleasant surprise.

Extra fees and worrying about the quality of dog friendly services were also mentioned in multiple responses. Many respondents seemed to be concerned about the extra costs and how they do not think it is appropriate for accommodation services to ask for sometimes a large amount of money for the dogs visiting. Also, often times the services like breakfast or restaurants within the accommodation service neglect the dog friendliness completely and even though dogs are allowed to stay at the room, they are not allowed to partake in other, often times fundamental processes that a visitor might go through and experience.

The respondents were also asked about pleasant experiences in different accommodation services in Finland. Many replies mentioned the importance of nature, bodies of water close to the destination, hiking trails, allowing pets to the breakfast/restaurant/terrace, no extra fees and rooms as good as those that are dog-free. Still, a lot of dissatisfaction could be seen within the replies.

These open responses further developed the understanding of the importance of retention within accommodation business. Many of the answers spoke for advocacy towards certain companies and destinations they had experienced and were satisfied with.

7 Discussion

Discussion is based on summarizing the findings of the survey and mirroring the results with the theoretical framework and data found before conducting the survey.

7.1 Constructing a customer profile based on the results

A customer profile is “a description or analysis of a typical or ideal customer for one’s business.” (Collins English Dictionary, 2023). It is used to create the most typical frame for a potential customer when developing a business for a targeted customer group.

Based on these results of the survey, it is possible to construct a customer profile that represents the most relevant characteristics of a Finnish dog owner. This profile can then be reflected into Finnish accommodation business while developing targeted marketing, products and services. It should be noted that as the channels used to distribute the survey seemed to attract a rather niche group of dog owners, ones who are very invested in their dogs’ life, these results do not reflect the whole spectrum of dog owners in Finland. Instead, these results should be analyzed as proof of habits and way of living for the specific group of dog owners whose dog ownership is more like a lifestyle.

According to the survey’s findings, an average dog owner in Finland is 40 years old. They are most likely employed, and they travel with their spouse and their dogs. If they have children traveling with them, chances are the number of children is between one to two. The amount of dogs within the household is in all likelihood one and its breed is Labrador retriever. They live in a city, or by a close proximity to a city.

There is a 50 percent chance they practice a certain sport or a hobby with their dog, making them connected in the dog owners’ world. They are eager to take their dogs along for their trips, but if it is not possible or causes too much stress and hassle, they are willing to leave them home. They are

satisfied with the amount and quality of dog friendly accommodation services in Finland, but still they feel like bringing a dog along causes extra research, planning, work and costs.

They see their dogs as family members and wish to offer them a wider variety of life experiences. They also want their dogs to experience time in nature. When traveling, they are more likely to choose summer, autumn, or spring over winter. During their travels, they have identified rental cottages to be the most functioning form of accommodation for dog owners. They have their own car and are willing to travel long distances to remote destinations that offer solitude and safety.

The main problems they have experienced in Finnish accommodation services are lack of space, lack of fenced areas, lack of dog inclusiveness in restaurants/terraces/other service premises, quality of dog-allowing rooms, rooms with dogs placed next to each other and extra fees generated by bringing a dog along. Supporting services, like dog sitting are also a rare sight in Finnish accommodation and tourism services as a whole. Also, washing of the dogs should be taken into consideration more often by the service provider in forms of mud vestibules and towels for the dogs' paws.

In addition, lack of clarity in information regarding dog-related instructions and guidelines is typical in Finnish accommodation businesses. Dog owners struggle to find clear stating if their dog is allowed and if they are allowed, where the dogs are allowed to be and in what activities can they be part of. Also the reservation process done online should include options to choose from when a dog is involved.

7.2 Comparing the results with the theoretical framework

Research made by Suomen Kennelliitto in 2014, which was used as a part of the theoretical framework in this paper, about dog owners as a demographic supports the results of the survey conducted for this thesis. It had similar findings about dog owners' age, employment status, residency and preferred ways of spending time. Although these two studies are almost ten years apart time-wise, they only prove that dog owners show signs of being a static group with no major changes in their demographic.

8 Strengths and Limitations

Even though the survey gained a lot of traffic within a short time period, totaling 1746 respondents, the distribution process of the survey should have been more diverse. The gender gap within respondents takes away from the potential of the results, as male audience was clearly not reached. It should still be noted that 64,3 percent traveled with a partner, which means that even though the respondent claimed to be female, they travel with a male companion in most cases and therefore are speaking for both. It can also be speculated that female audience is more eager to take part in surveys online compared to male audience.

As only social media was used to distribute the survey, the voice of certain age groups were not reached. Elderly people are not as active in the using of social media, which most likely resulted in lack of input from potential respondents above the age of 60. As elderly and retired individuals are also an important target group, dog owners or not, their age group should have been reached in an alternative way.

The survey lacked input from more 'normal' dog owners. Most dog owners do not actively practice hobbies with their dogs or indulge in the dog owning culture. Because the survey was distributed in Facebook social groups, a lot of active and enthusiastic dog owners were reached. However, this is not necessarily a negative impact, because dog practitioners are more likely to spend more money on their travels if they can ensure a good time for their dogs as well. As the main purpose of this research is to identify dog owners as a potential target group, dog enthusiasts are in a key role while developing the concept of dog friendliness in Finnish accommodation business.

Overall, the survey proved to be an interesting topic for the respondents' as well. Dozens of comments were given by respondents to the Facebook posts mentioning how interesting the topic was and a lot of inquiries for the results were also given. Some conversations started in the comments section about the respondents' experiences regarding the matter as well. On average, the distribution posts made garnered over 150 likes per post. There is a clear demand for dog friendliness not only in tourism business, but other business fields as well and utilization for this market can prove to be fruitful for those who decide to develop it.

9 Conclusion

The intent for the conclusion is to provide suggestions for further research possibilities regarding the matter at hand. It analyzes what has been found out so far and dives into the utilization of the information in Finnish accommodation business environment.

9.1 Reliability, validity and ethicality

9.1.1 Reliability

Reliability refers to the repeatability of a research. If the survey was to be repeated, the reliability of the research would be measured by how similar the answers were (Business Research Methodology, 2023).

When comparing the survey results with the theoretical framework about dog owners as a demographic, it is safe to assume that the survey can be identified as reliable. No statistics came as a surprise, as the relatively big amount of answers aid with the reliability of the study.

As an incentive was included within the survey, it raises questions about the reliability of the survey. There was a possibility to spam out several answers using different email addresses, therefore resulting in extra answers that might not have reflected the reality. By projecting the results of the survey to the prior study made by Suomen Kennelliitto in 2014, there was no significant differences in the results. This provides a sense of trust in the answers, and it can be assumed that the results are trustworthy. Based on the open answers at the third segment of the survey that over 85,3 percent decided to answer to, the topic was interesting enough for the respondents to share their own thoughts and the answers were full of quality reflection. This proves that the majority of respondents were invested in the process and provided hopefully truthful answers.

9.1.2 Validity

Validity of a study refers to: "how well the results among the study participants represent true findings among similar individuals outside the study." (National Library of Medicine, 2018). As mentioned within the chapter about reliability, the comparison of pre-existing data found within

this research and the results of the survey could be seen as parallel. The open answers of the survey also support the validity, as the participants got to tell with their own words about their experiences regarding the topic (Appendix 3)

The survey results can be validated for use in further studies regarding the topic. It offers a solid package of information and it proved itself as a quantitative study. The amount of respondents add to the validity of the research and it could be further distributed to alternative channels to gather more information.

9.1.3 Ethicality

Research ethics can be defined as: “norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.” (Resnik, D. 2020). There could have been ethical issues regarding this study, which were mitigated through anonymity and respectful approach towards all groups. There were some negative mentions about certain companies within the field in the open answers section, which is why these answers are not published in the study. These answers, just like all other answers, were completely anonymous and the conductor of the survey was not capable of identifying any personal information about respondents and their answers.

The option to participate in the raffle (Appendix 3) was also done in as anonymous manner as possible. The partakers were only required to leave their email address along with a nickname of their choice. This way, even if the survey was ever reached by an outside party, they would not get any personal information apart from the email and the nickname. The email addresses and nicknames were not tied to the participants’ answer, which means there was no way for the conductor to know who had answered what. Anonymity played an emphasized role in the process, as there was no need for any personal information.

10 Discussion

Discussion includes thoughts and ideas for further development over the matter at hand. It acts as a tool to inspire alternative ways of thinking towards dog-friendly accommodation business and provides answers that were achieved by using the research results.

10.1 Problematics of dogs and accommodation services

The most frequently heard argument from an accommodation service when it comes to allowing dogs is related to cleaning and allergies. Dogs can be unpredictable and undertrained, resulting in damages, noise, or unpleasant interactions with other visitors. It is clear that all accommodation services simply can not offer vacancy for dogs. For example, if a hotel is located in a historical building, it is ethical to preserve the building. If a dog causes a potential hazard for the building, it should not be allowed to stay there.

Allergies are often brought up in the conversation regarding dog friendly accommodation. According to allergia.fi, a Finnish info bank on allergies, approximately 15 percent of Finnish individuals suffer from allergies caused by pets (Allergia.fi, 2023). But when this number is compared to the amount of dog owning households in Finland, which is almost every third household, it can be evaluated if the accommodation benefits more from allowing dogs by risking the popularity of allergic population. It should also be noted that the level of allergy varies greatly within population and most individuals do not risk their lives by occupying a space where a dog has previously been.

Damage to furniture and structures can also be seen as a potential harm. Just like with humans, if a customer causes damage to the property, they are obligated to pay for the damage done. The human is responsible for their pets and the damage they might cause. This problem can be tackled beforehand in the design process of the accommodation. For example, choosing materials and fabrics that are scratch and rip resistant can aid. In addition, furniture and their fabrics could be chosen based on their ability to be cleaned from dirt and shedding fur. Selection for the floor material can provide options that do not wear out from the nails.

Dogs can cause noise especially when left alone or nearby other dogs. Dog owners know this is normal behavior for dogs, but other residents who do not live the dog owning lifestyle may find the presence of a dog as a negative. In apartment solutions, like hotels, this can be solved by locating dog owners in their own region of the premises. Rooms with dogs should be apart enough from each other so the dogs do not get aggravated by other dogs' barking. As the survey results revealed, dog owners do acknowledge this issue and prefer accommodation options that offer enough distance from other residents in hopes of not causing noise- or other type of discomfort to other residents.

One reason why an accommodation company might reconsider targeting dog owners is the fact that dogs do not generate extra income for the company directly, as they do not pay to go skiing or to go on amusement park rides. This can be tackled by including alternative ways of how the dogs could actually bring money for the service provider in forms of different services designed for dog owners.

10.2 Designing services for dog owners

Dog friendliness can be adapted into conventional practices of accommodation business with minor adjustments to systems and processes. Many businesses allow dogs, but dog owners are almost never treated as the main customer group of a company. As dogs are seen as more of a liability than an asset in the customer targeting process, not many companies dare to investigate this rather underperforming market and decide to go with safer, more researched route.

Dogs can be able to tag along for the trip, but most of the dogs' time is spent inside the apartment as they are not approved in other public spaces. A walk around the neighborhood is the only activity they presumably can enjoy. Dog owners feel bad for leaving their dogs behind, because in their everyday lives they take their companion everywhere and have structured their living in a dog inclusive way. They already are invested in their dogs' life and are willing to pay for solutions that benefit them, why not utilize this market in accommodation business as well?

Competition for conventional hotels is fierce, as every hotel tries to serve every major customer group. By focusing on a more niche target group, the potential to become something unique, something that the other accommodation businesses can not offer, grows. As the research within this thesis shows, there is enough dog owners in Finland to easily fill the desired customer amount for a company. Dog owners are highly social inside their own groups and these social structures can create high amounts of word-of-mouth marketing.

10.3 Potential for international customers

This research was conducted to specifically research the possibilities between domestic accommodation companies and domestic consumers that fit into the demographic. However, approaching

the problem from international tourism's point of view can also bring valuable concepts and potential customer groups for accommodation businesses in Finland.

There are 448,4 million inhabitants in the EU (European Union, 2024). According to Health for Animals, there are approximately 92 million dogs held as pets within the European Union (Health for Animals, 2022). By looking at the numbers, there is approximately one dog per four humans. This makes up for a huge market in pet tourism.

Common issues are faced when traveling overseas with dogs, mainly with transportation. Planes do not resonate as an optimal solution for pet owners, trains are time consuming and limit the options, and traveling with a personal car can be costly and sometimes stressful while visiting other countries. Dogs also require vaccinations issued by the country of visitation.

Dog owners can get worked up on these obstacles while developing their holiday plans. A skilled company can lower the bar with certain actions, like advertising their business as a dog welcoming destination. Their website could offer a solid package of information that the international traveler needs to know about visiting the country with a dog, and offer accessible customer service that is happy to help the traveler with all their questions. Once the target customer has been reached and convinced that everything will be going smoothly as they arrive, they are most likely more willing to go through the effort of taking the extra steps. Making the process as simple as possible for the customer provides comfort and trust, therefore international dog owners can be lured to your accommodation business.

Attracting international dog owners could also provide solutions for the dramatic seasonality of Finnish tourism. Northern regions struggle with summer season, Southern regions suffer with winter season. Accommodation businesses and hospitality businesses overall could introduce international dog owners as a potential target group for these quieter seasons, as they do not require as many attractions and ways of spending time as normal tourists. Finland is the land of vast and unique nature after all, and it can be considered as our greatest attraction. As the survey showed, dog owners want to be alone anyways.

References

Tilastokeskus. (2020). *Kotitalouksien kulutus 2016*.

https://www.stat.fi/til/ktutk/2016/ktutk_2016_2020-04-20_fi.pdf

STT. (2023). *Koiranpentujen rekisteröintien kasvu tasaantui: Kennelliitto rekisteröi yli 48600 koiraa vuonna 2022*. <https://www.sttinfo.fi/tiedote/koiranpentujen-rekisterointien-kasvu-tasaantui-kennelliitto-rekisteroi-yli-48-600-koiraa-vuonna-2022?publisherId=1744&releasId=69961617>

Newsdesk. (2018). *Stats: 37% of Dog Owners Have Skipped Vacation to Stay With Dog*.

<https://www.travelagentcentral.com/running-your-business/stats-37-dog-owners-have-skipped-vacation-to-stay-dog>

Vantaan Sanomat. (2023). *803 000! – Nyt tuli tuore arvio siitä, paljonko koiria Suomessa tällä hetkellä on*. <https://www.vantaansanomat.fi/paikalliset/5791800>

Kennelliitto. (2023). *Suosituimmat koirarodut*. <https://www.kennelliitto.fi/koirat/suosituimmat-koirarodut>

United Nations. (2020). *Report of the UN Economist Network for the UN 75th Anniversary: Shaping the Trends of Our Time*. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/10/20-124-UNEN-75Report-ExecSumm-EN-REVISED.pdf>

Kennelliitto. (2014). *Koiranomistajuus Suomessa*. <https://www.kennelliitto.fi/files/koiranomistajuus-suomessa-2014>

Precedence Research. (2023). *Ecotourism Market*. <https://www.precedenceresearch.com/ecotourism-market>

Lomarengas. (2023). <https://www.lomarengas.fi/mokkihaku>

Koirasuomi.fi (2023). *Koiraystävällisiä hotelleja, majataloja ja muuta majoitusta*. http://www.koirasuomi.fi/koiraystavalliset_hotellit.php

Camping.fi (2023). *Leirintäalueet ja lomakylät*. <https://camping.fi/leirintaalueet-ja-lomakylat/>

Tilastokeskus. (2018). *Majoituspalveluiden kysyntä nousi ennätyslukemiin vuonna 2017*. https://www.stat.fi/til/matk/2017/matk_2017_2018-04-19_tie_001_fi.html

Tilastokeskus. (2020). *Suomalaisten matkailu keskittyi kotimaahan kesällä 2020*. https://www.stat.fi/til/smat/2020/14/smat_2020_14_2020-11-05_tie_001_fi.html

Cambridge Dictionary. (2023). *Awareness*. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/awareness>

Kaliyur, R. (2023). *5 Stages of The Customer Journey*. <https://www.factors.ai/blog/stages-of-the-customer-journey>

USC. (2024). *Quantitative Research*. <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/quantitative>

Britannica. (2024). *Survey*. <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/survey>

Jamieson, S. (2024). *Likert Scale*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Likert-Scale>

Tikkanen, T. (2023). *Selvitimme: näin paljon koira maksaa vuodessa*. <https://www.op-media.fi/omat-rahast/nain-paljon-koira-maksaa/>

Peterdy, K.. (n.d.). *Industry Life Cycle*. <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/management/industry-life-cycle/>

Collins English Dictionary. (2023). *Customer Profile*. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/customer-profile>

Business Research Methodology. (2023). *Research Reliability*. <https://research-methodology.net/research-methodology/reliability-validity-and-repeatability/research-reliability/>

National Library of Medicine. (2018). *Study Validity*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6188693/>

Resnik, D. (2020). *What is Ethics in Research & Why Is It Important?* <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis>

Allergia.fi (2023). *Lemmikkieläinallergiat*. <https://www.allergia.fi/allergia/mita-allergia-on/allergioiden-yleisimmat-aiheuttajat/lemmikkielainallergiat/>

European Union (2024). *Facts and figures on life in the European Union*. https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/key-facts-and-figures/life-eu_en

Health for Animals (2022). *Global State of Pet Care*. <https://www.healthforanimals.org/reports/pet-care-report/global-trends-in-the-pet-population/>

Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey part one: Demographic data

Traveling habits and preferences among dog owners

Hello, and thank you for opening this survey! My name is Mikko Laine, a Tourism & Hospitality Management student in JAMK University of Applied Sciences. This anonymous survey has been created to be a part of my thesis that aims to identify the state of dog friendly accommodation in Finland.

It does not matter, if you and your dog are not active travelers. There are multiple problematic areas regarding traveling with dogs and the main goal of this research is to identify dog owners as a targeted demographic within accommodation business field.

I would like to thank you and your dogs for participating! There is a 50€ gift card raffle to Musti&Mirri (not a sponsored collaboration). In case you want to participate in the raffle, feel free to leave a nickname of your choosing and your email address on the final page of the survey. All information will be handled safely and anonymously and they will not be forwarded to third parties.

1. Age

1. 18-30
2. 31-40
3. 41-50
4. 51-60
5. 61-70
6. 70+

2. Gender

1. Female
2. Male
3. Other

3. Employment status

1. Employed
2. Student

3. Unemployed
4. Retired
5. Other

4. Who do you most commonly travel with?

1. Partner
2. Children
3. Dogs
4. Alone

5. Do you have children who travel with you?

1. No
2. Yes, 1
3. Yes, 2
4. Yes, 3
5. Yes, 4
6. Yes, 5+

6. How many dogs are there within your household?

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3
4. 4
5. 5+

7. Residency

1. City
2. Close proximity to a city
3. Central rural area
4. Distant rural area
5. Abroad
6. Other

Appendix 2. Survey part two: Traveling habits and preferences of dog owners

8. I am part of a group that practices hobbies with dogs (agility, hunting etc.)

1. Yes
2. No

9. How important is it to you that dogs can come along when traveling?

1. I do not go anywhere without my dogs
2. I take my dog with me wherever it is possible
3. I take my dog with me if it does not cause too much hassle
4. My dogs are left home or to a carer most of the time
5. My dogs are always left home or to a carer

10. "I have skipped a trip because my dog(s) were not able to join."

1. Yes
2. No

11. "I am satisfied with the amount of dog-friendly accommodation services in Finland"

1. Fully disagree
2. Somewhat disagree
3. Do not agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat agree

5. Fully agree

12. "I am satisfied with the quality of dog-friendly accommodation services in Finland"

1. Fully disagree
2. Somewhat disagree
3. Do not agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat agree
5. Fully agree

13. Traveling with dogs requires careful planning and researching."

1. Fully disagree
2. Somewhat disagree
3. Do not agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat agree
5. Fully agree

14. "Traveling with dogs generates extra costs."

1. Fully disagree
2. Somewhat disagree
3. Do not agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat agree
5. Fully agree

15. "I favor domestic dog food and products."

1. Fully disagree
2. Somewhat disagree

3. Do not agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat agree
5. Fully agree

16. "I want to offer my dog a wider variety of life experiences."

1. Fully disagree
2. Somewhat disagree
3. Do not agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat agree
5. Fully agree

17. "It is important for dogs to experience time in nature and outdoors."

1. Fully disagree
2. Somewhat disagree
3. Do not agree nor disagree
4. Somewhat agree
5. Fully agree

18. "I prefer to travel during ____ with my dogs."

1. Spring
2. Summer
3. Autumn
4. Winter

19. "I prefer ____ while traveling with my dogs."

1. Hotels

2. Rental cottages
3. Camping grounds
4. Nature, like tent camping

20. "When traveling with a dog I use..."

1. My own car
2. Train
3. Bus

Appendix 3. Survey part three: Open answers regarding the topic

21. What would be a dream destination while traveling with a dog? What sort of services would it include?

22. Has there been a destination/accommodation service that has proven to be very functional or enjoyable? You can write about your pleasant experiences below.

23. In case you wish to participate in the gift card raffle, please leave a nickname and your email address. This information will not be forwarded to third parties and it will be handled securely.