How do pet hospitality businesses respond to customer expectations?

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Bachelor's Thesis
2021
Bachelor of Hospitality Management

Abstract

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Degree Bachelor of Hospitality Management	
Report/thesis title How do pet hospitality businesses respond to customer expectations?	
Number of pages and appendix pages 48 + 3	

Services have a long history and throughout the years, there has been an increased need of developing these services to fit the needs and the desired level of what should be in the eyes of the customers´. People´s past experiences are one of the factors that will effect on what is on their mind their service quality standard, perceptions, and expectations.

This research-based thesis focuses on expectations and how do pet hospitality businesses respond to their customers expectations. Furthermore the author will explain about pet care industry and its services, pet hotels, charasteristics of pet boarding facilities and finally factors that influence expectations. Customer satisfaction is strongly linked to services and expectations, therefore it was also discussed about the importance of customer satisfaction in service management.

Everyone have expectations and they are uncounsiously or consiously effecting the perceived level of service. Perceived service level will determine how well the service actually met or did not meet the expectations one had towards a certain service. Expectations are a topic that has been researched under many different fields.

Focusing on expectations, the main research question involves the term pet hospitality business respond to these expectations. This was done by conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews, analyzing the results as well as supporting this by the existing literature. It turned out that not one of the existing literatures focuses directly on how do pet hospitality businesses respond to their customer´s expectations, therefore the author strongly believes how there is a need for further research under the similar topic.

Outcome of this thesis provides enough results for the author about how the pet hotels re-spond to their customer expectations. Furthermore, the outcome gives the justification of why there is need for more research in the field of pet hotel businesses.

Keywords Expectations, pet hotel, customer satisfaction, hospitality.

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1 Introduction

This research-based thesis's focal point is to explore how do pet hospitality businesses respond to customer expectations. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the main research question surrounding the topic with expectations. To understand this, a reader must first grasp an overall picture of expectations.

Everyone uses services whether it is a product or a service that one is using, the perceived service quality of it will affect massive future repurchase decisions as well as the perceived image of the company. Nearly all the companies that exist provide a service, whether it is directly or indirectly. They can provide a great service while delivering a product to their customer, or they can provide poor service. However, the perceived service is what matters, in the terms of word-of-mouth marketing for example. People will talk about bad experiences and great experiences, what they won´t talk about is everything in between great and bad. This way, it can cause remarkable damage to any company´s perceived image.

Some companies promise certain things they will deliver, without the desire to deliver the promised service quality. Services have a long history and throughout the years, there is an increased need of developing these services to fit the needs and desired level of what should be in the eyes of the customers´. People´s past experiences are one of the factors that will affect what is on their mind their service quality standard, perceptions, and their expectations.

In the context of pet hotels and how to find out how they are responding to their customers 'expectations, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with the customers alongside service providers. The main purpose of these interviews was to support the overall literature review, as well as help to draw new topics that would arise through these interviews.

1.1 Background of the topic

Services have a long history and they have progressed and developed massively throughout the years. Some people do not believe unless they are the person who will use the service, that the services are seen very differently, and everyone is the one who chooses to "criticize how good or bad the service is". It does not matter what the company is, every company that delivers a product also provides service. In other words, each company is a service company, and their product is just a part of their company. The product that the company offers is often used to deliver the service. As an example, Starbucks cafés have coffee as a product they are selling, but to deliver this product they add their special service which will help to provide this product (i.e., coffee). In Starbucks 'case, they are more famous for their service which is personalized with small details, such as writing a customer's 'name on the coffee cup instance. Another example would be Disneyland. If Disneyland hadn´t built everything that they have around their theme park and rides, it would provide poor service, due to the long queues and waiting time. Instead, Disneyland is now perhaps more famous for its overall theme park experience, than its rides. The same examples could be used with a lot of companies that deliver some sort of product or service, for example with hotels. With hotels, it can be multiple different factors (i.e., breakfast, restaurant, the quality of beds, pillows, etc.) They are just about the same with each hotel, but what may bring customers back to hotels is often the service (intangible or tangible).

Before deciding between a repurchase and considering a new product instead of a repurchase, there is a decision to be made. This decision, however, is not something that just happens. The author believes that the things which affect this decision might seem more complicated with a service than a product. Since a product can be as expected by the consumer, yet the experience with the service provider who is offering this product might be everything but a pleasant experience. Yet this product is exactly what the consumer believes to receive before buying it, and the consumer is not expecting a great experience with the service provider. However, it makes things a lot more complicated if the service that is being provided is intangible. If a customer is buying a service, that is mostly intangible, a service provider should do everything they can, to either meet the "standard" or so-called basic measurement of this individual buying the service. This might be impossible sometimes, especially if the customer is a new customer for the service provider.

The same goes with the last great experience one may have had (i.e., with a trip abroad with an incredible hotel), this experience may now influence the same individuals´ future hotel decisions consciously or unconsciously. There is a huge amount of these choices, which people will decide either based on their past experiences, their last perceived service quality, or their latest expectations towards a certain service for instance. This,

among the ways people are experiencing these services and products that the service provider is providing, is shaped by these different factors. Factors that existence people might not even realize. The customers 'set their level of service quality standards based on their previous experiences, their perceptions, and their expectations. This will be discussed later in the theoretical framework part of this thesis.

1.2 Research problem and research issues

This thesis's main goal is to study **how do pet hospitality businesses respond to customer expectations**. The author aims to find out exactly how the expectations are met and/or responded to within the pet hotel businesses. To find out how these expectations are met, it is important to find out what exactly are the expectations in the pet care industry, more specifically, expectations towards the pet hotel businesses. In this research-based thesis the focus is on the following research questions, which will support and clarify the objective of this thesis:

- How can expectations be managed?
- Why should pet hotels fall under the category of hospitality?
- How do past experiences shape the expectations in the pet hotel business?
- How does the established service name shape the customer expectations in the pet care industry?
- Why should pet hotels pay attention to customer expectations and how are they formed?

Finally, the author will conclude all the findings based on the research as well as the reflections gathered from the interviews. These findings will be further and more in-depth explained in the later subchapters.

1.3 Justification for the research

There are several different studies made on the topic of pet hotels, ranging from medical studies to emotional and behavioral studies. However, out of these studies author discovered that not one focuses directly on a specific pet hotel and on how does that pet hotel respond to the expectations of its customers. Or, when a pet hotel was mentioned, it was often related to the typical hotel that only offers rooms for people travelling with a pet.

When looking into the topic of pet hotels or the pet care industry, there is not much research made on the topic. Nearly all the research that has been made is regarding hotels with pet policies (e.g., people will take their pet with them to spend the night at the hotel), leaving the area for pet hotels out completely. Often the term pet daycare is mentioned, when searching pet hotels from the internet, however, it is not the same thing. Another quite repeatedly researched area, related to the term pet hotel, is linked to hotels, that

provide rooms for people with pets. However, offering hotel rooms for people travelling with pets, or having a kennel-type facility, or offering daycare for pets is not related to the pet hotel, as it is covered in the following chapters.

It was discussed how do travelling and pets go together, in addition to this, the uncertainty that relates to this phenomenon, have been researched. Rátz and Michalkó (2012) acknowledged certain problems that may influence the owner´s travel behavior or leisure, restricting their participation in tourism. One of the problems was the lack of pet boarding services, and therefore the lack of people to look after the pet while the owner is away. They observed the choices, that people who own a pet(s) have when they have leisure and holiday decisions to consider. These choices were: deciding not to travel because of the pet(s), to travel without the pet(s) and organizing pet sitting or other care, and to take their pet(s) with them. However, they criticized how the choice of destination will vary, if the owners were to choose to take their pets with them on a holiday, due to either lack of services offered for pets for example. (Rátz and Michalkó, 2012.) This and many other researchers confirm the upscaled need for pet boarding services (pet hotels).

Taillon, Yun, and MacLaurin (2013) have done a study called anthrozoology, which explores interactions and bonds between two living things. According to their study findings, there is a strong willingness to pay for a satisfying travel experience with pets. They also add on how there is a need for future research in primary areas of pet policy. (Taillon, Yun, and MacLaurin, 2013.) In addition, Taillon, Yun, and MacLaurin (2013) conducted an exploratory factor analysis for human-animal bond sales - the results are not surprising as they reveal how most owners claim the following: "My pet is a member of the family", or "My pet is my ´fur kid´" as well as "My pet is my best friend". Where pet-related products (e.g., various supplies) might not sell as well, the industry tends to hold up, which would show even more how people see their pets as an extension of their families (Priya and Nandhini, 2018). Another study, related to pets and their behavior while accommodating in a pet hotel was a study conducted by Wojtaś et al. (2020) that shows how a dog´s salivary cortisol levels increased during a dog´s visit to a pet hotel. These results express how a stay in a pet hotel, can be a stressful situation for dogs (Wojtaś et al., 2020). When searching for different definitions of a pet hotel the author discovered the lack of literature on the topic concerning pet hotels. Due to the increased amount of people getting pets and based on the other findings on what has been written about the topic of pet hotels, nonetheless, no specific research has been made regarding how the pet hospitality business responds to customer expectations. The author believes that this among the findings of the research, which can be used to support the topic of this thesis, will provide enough justification for this research.

1.4   Methodology in brief and delimitations

The objective of this thesis is to explore how pet hospitality businesses respond to customer expectations. To find out what these expectations are and how are they met, qualitative semi-structured interviews are conducted with the users of this service and with the service providers. A thematic analysis of these interviews will be done to see what the specific themes are related to the expectations of the customers or what are the things pet hotel businesses hold important or crucial to respond to these expectations. This thematic analysis will help the author to separate specific themes that relate to the customer expectations towards the pet hotels. Finally, the author will use the affinity diagram as a tool to help categorize the themes. To conclude the findings from thematic interview analysis utilizing the affinity diagram, the author summarized all the biggest themes under one figure (see figure 4) and will explain them more in the chapter 4 results and analysis chapter.

When this process started in January, all the minor details had not even crossed the author´s mind yet. The delimitations were needed but they were not quite thought through thoroughly yet. As the process developed further, the author faced another roadblock which was to set up the interviews and get enough participants. The aim was to get at least 5 interviewees who were the customer´s plus then at least 1 owner of a pet hotel. In the end, the author was able to get 6 participants in total and 2 pet hotel owners as the participants of this interview. Interviews were mostly conducted online via teams and zoom, recorded, and transcribed afterward. Only one interview was face to face interview, which was also recorded and transcribed. All the interviews were done in Finnish, and later in the analysis part, they were translated back to English. Reflecting on the aftermath now, the author believes that using a specific tool to help transcribe the interviews, would have saved a lot of time. But instead, the author chose to do it by herself, this process took about 3 hours per interview. The first interview was done on the 7th of June and the last one on the 13th of August. All the interviews lasted on average approximately 45 minutes.

1.5   Definitions

The central topics covered in this thesis are the following: expectations, pet hotel, and customer satisfaction. All the main concepts are further and in-depth explained below.

Expectations are seen as how well the product or service met or did not meet the desired level of what should, would, and could be, in the eyes of a customer. In other words, customer expectations hold a central role in service quality assessments (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991). In other cases, they are referred to as unconscious or conscious forms of expectations. Expectations are heavily affected by humans ´perceptions of

the outcomes of their activities (Dogge et al., 2019). According to research by Almsalam (2014), customer expectation and perceived service quality have a positive impact on customer satisfaction. Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) believe that desired and adequate are the two levels for customer service expectations. Where what customer hopes to receive includes beliefs of "can be" and "should be", and the other one is, what is acceptable in the customer´s eyes. What is acceptable is of course a bit trickier, since the customer measures what the service "will be". (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991.)

Pet hotel in general, is like any hotel designed and built for pet(s), only with a little twist that makes them a bit more special than typical hotels. To explain further the concept of a **pet hotel**, it is important to determine the term *hotel* first, which strongly relates to the concept of a pet hotel. Where Cambridge dictionary determines a hotel the following way: *" is a building where you pay to have a room to sleep in, and where you can sometimes eat meals."* (Cambridge University Press, 2021.) Collins's dictionary specifies the same term in more depth, as according: *"a building where people stay, for example on holiday, paying for their rooms and meals."* (Collins, 2021). Pet hotel concludes nearly the same amenities as any other hotel; however, they are specifically designed and built for pets. Besides this, many pet hotels do combine in a way this hotel's way of offering 24/7 service. However, some pet hotels do offer more unique experiences than hotels. Where hotels might offer extra pillows, blankets, and such but there is nothing they can do to modify the room, pet hotels go beyond this up to the next level. Pet hotels plan each stay differently, and by stay, the author means one pet´s night/day at the pet hotel. This way it is ensured that each pet will be as comfortable as it possibly can be. In addition to this, a pet hotel makes a profit from the service/accommodation that they offer, and depending on the pet hotel, most pet hotels do offer flexible check-in time/check-out time.

Customer satisfaction is a way to measure how well the product or service met the expectations of customers. According to Fourie (2015), customer satisfaction is one of the cornerstones of marketing since everyone needs and wants certain things. Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremel (2006, p.110) concluded in their research, "*satisfaction is when the customer evaluates whether a product or service has met their needs and expectations* (Fourie, 2015). Moreover, Mill (2002) claims how satisfied customers tend to be more likely of becoming returning customers, adding that a positive experience is often told to the family and friends for example. In addition, Fourie (2015) adds how a satisfied customer is less eager to tell people about his or her good experience than a dissatisfied customer and this can cause tremendous damage to any kind of organization. One of the factors, that influences the overall customer satisfaction, is all the experiences that customers experience. This in the other words, can be seen as taking the good experiences and

deducting the bad ones, and what is left out of these is customer satisfaction. (Schwagner, 2007.)

1.6   Outline of the thesis

This thesis is constructed the following way. The first part of this thesis is divided under the context of this research-based thesis, the pet care industry. This part will dive into the topic of the pet care industry and its services and define what a pet hotel is, based on the research findings and the interview results. Next, the author will continue with the characteristics of pet boarding facilities, focusing on pet hotels, and finally, conclude with factors that influence the expectations.

After the first part, the author will start the theoretical framework part with section 2.3 the importance of customer satisfaction in service management. Expectations will follow up part 2.4, to explore what are expectations, what different interpretations are made, how are they formed. Finally, this will be all concluded with 2.5 key elements of expectations part, showing the key elements of expectations. And also, to summarize the findings and main elements of expectations.

The third chapter will explain more in-depth about the research methodology and research process. Also, the research methods, as well as the research questions, are covered in this part. Interview analysis results will be covered in chapter 4. onwards, exploring the thematic analysis and affinity diagram which was made. After these are more in-depth explained, the limitations and risks will be covered, and to conclude this part the summary of results.

The last part of this thesis will follow up right after the summary of results, concluding everything under the 5. discussion section, afterwards the author will conclude this thesis and finally evaluate and reflects on her learning process.

2   Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this thesis divides into the topics of expectations and how do pet hospitality businesses such as pet hotels, respond to these expectations. The theoretical framework is structured the following way. First, the author will explain what a pet hotel is, and conclude the first part with factors that influence the expectations. Secondly, the author will highlight the value of customer satisfaction in service management, which is the most common category the expectations have been researched. Finally, the author will connect these previous chapters with the underlying issue of expectations. Going from what are expectations, what are the interpretations of expectations, and well as what happens to the expectations, if they are exceeded. With anything that relates to the service field, the customers or consumers of this service will inevitably have certain expectations towards this service or product they use. Finally, the author will conclude the theoretical framework part with the main frameworks used in this thesis (see Table 3), to support the objective of this thesis.

2.1   Pet care industry and its services

Travelling has shown significant growth over the past years, and due to the latest covid-19 pandemic, there has been a remarkable increase in getting pets. In the United States (US), according to today´s veterinary business (2020), approximately 11.3 million households alone have gotten a new pet during the pandemic. Hendrix (2020) reminds that the number of households with at least one pet in the US alone translates to 67%. Where Grubb (2021) confirms that within the United Kingdom (UK), almost half of the households who owned a pet before, have gotten at least one new pet during the lockdown, while in France one out of two households has a pet (Pires, 2020). In addition, there are approximately 5 million (cats and dogs in total) who live in Hungary, leaving the number of pets so high that each Hungarian family could own at least one pet (Rátz and Michalkó, 2012). As social isolation became more demanding during the pandemic, interest and the adoption rate for dogs showed a significant increase (Morgan, et al., 2020). These findings alone, tell that there will be a need for pet hotel services especially soon once traveling is bouncing back towards normal. Regardless of whether the business travel would decrease in the future, due to the advantages of remote work, the people will desire to get away from their everyday life. This can mean a trip abroad, domestic traveling, or simply just a weekend off at the summerhouse, which will require some kind of care for the pet(s) while the owners are away, especially with cats or other smaller animals. This means that in the future, there will be more pet owners, who are keen to travel as soon as it is allowed again, meaning that there must be a place for their beloved pets. Once the countries travel restrictions will lower and life begins to fold back into somewhat "normal" again, it´s an unavoidable obstacle that people especially what the tourism organization will face, will

have expectations towards this new "normal". It´s therefore predictable that people might or most likely will assume that things and these old routines would work exactly like they did pre-pandemic days.

The Pet industry, in general, is a broad field that includes a variety of different products and services. In recent years it has shown significant growth, especially within the US, bringing nearly anything that is there to offer for us humans, to our pets as well. According to Chen, Hung, and Peng (2012), the pet industry has grown ten times, starting from the late 1990s and it´s an industry that is believed to be beneficial to us humans by offering emotional support, reducing stress levels and sense of loneliness and help us to increase positive emotional development (Priya and Nandhini, 2018; Morgan et al. 2020). The pet industry has been claimed to be one of the most stable industries around, due to people´s tendency to consider their pets on a high priority list and spending a remarkable amount of money on them, even in times of economic troubles (Priya and Nandhini, 2018).

Priya and Nandhini (2018) define the "pet industry" as all the collected businesses globally that make the money by providing things for pets, which could include everything from pet healthcare to food and supplies. Saunders et al. (2017) add on how cost-effective way to promote health pet ownership could be, due to the fact of providing mental, social, and physical health benefits for humans. In other words, pets play a valuable role in people´s lives around the world, and there is a growing body of research concerning the positive relationship between pet ownership and human health (Priya and Nandhini, 2018).

Due to the growth in the number of households owning a pet, what was mentioned already increased amount, but also based on research, there is and will be a need for these pet hotels. Another thing that pointed out is that the name of those pet hotels often does not include the name of "hotel" in them, or if they do it is combined with something more relatable than just the word "pet hotel". It is often referred to some positively related word, such as "home" type or such word which people would relate to more easily.

Looking at the different segments in pet care (veterinary services, grooming, pet-sitting, daycare, spa, pet hotels, accessories, and treats) the industry tends to grow up even in the most surprising ways. Just to mention a few already existing ones such as cat cafés and pet spas, feels just the beginning of a new constantly growing industry, that is open to innovations. Just recently, a real estate company Blok decided to develop private "pet-friendly" open house tours, that they advertise on their web pages, with a paw sign with the houses. The idea behind it lies behind understanding the constant changes in demands or needs of the customers, such as realizing how people feel more and more that the pets are like their children (Brik Kodit Oy, 2021).

The interaction between the consumer and service provider has traditionally been the focal point of service research, adding research on companionships between animals and consumers can be seen to a great extent focusing on pet owners 'relationships to their pets. Even though there is some research made on the interaction between the pet owner and the vet, yet there is a gap with research on how the interaction between the pet and the service provider influences the owner´s consumption experience. (Autio, et al., 2014.)

2.2   Pet Hotels

Hospitality businesses, such as the pet hotel business are becoming more and more important in the future. As hospitality has been determined in the following ways: friendliness towards the guest or satisfying the needs of the customers, and an industry where the guest is the one who defines the pace, pet hotels will without a question fall under this specific category. Besides these, pet hotels offer accommodation and get profit from what they do, which is another reason they should be stated as hospitality businesses.

However, in previous research, there is not such a thing called "pet hotel" as a definition. Therefore, the author chose to define the term "pet hotel". Some of the current terms that introduce the term a little bit are often translated into pet boarding services (usually from Finnish to English, regardless of the original name). Often it is unclearly stated and therefore might confuse people about what is a pet hotel. While exploring different pet hotel types, it was quite shocking how different "pet hotel/pet boarding" facilities there are. Pet hotels are defined by the author later.

The advanced amount of traveling does not only offer increased opportunities for businesses in the travel industry. Since the covid-19 pandemic has shown a significant increase in pet ownership, the author strongly believes that it offers the pet hotel businesses a remarkable opportunity to expand their businesses or allow new pet hotel businesses. Taillon, Yun, and MacLaurin (2013) highlighted one hotel trend, that shows people are willing to pay extra for pet policies. This however side-tracks a little bit the topic of pet hotels, as it will be explained later. As Ioli Macridi, an analyst at Edge by Ascential, said "we are seeing the pet humanization trend proliferate, being increasingly influenced by human trends, such as ethical spending, which means there is a bigger focus on health, wellness, sustainability, and transparency". (Taylor, 2019.) This has already shown its existence, for example in the market of things they sell for the pets. Still, many hotels around the world are not accepting pets to their premises, which shows the increased need for hotels specifically targeted at pets alone.

Walker (2014, p. 17) states that people in the hospitality industry continuously strive for phenomenal guest satisfaction, which leads to guest loyalty and profit. This one is especially important in the pet hotel services since it might be harder to satisfy the needs of the pets, whose voices we cannot understand.

Hospitality is under constant construction, due to the challenging and changing demands set by the customers. The harsh reality is it is an industry that requires hard work, long hours, and resilience. As Crick and Spencer (2011) argue that hospitality as an industry is a dynamic one, in which the guest determines the pace and the type of service. Cambridge University Press (2021) confirms this by stating that hospitality is friendliness towards the guest and all in all the welcoming behavior towards the guests or customers. Walker (2014, p. 15) supports both these statements, by claiming that people who work in the hospitality industry, welcome, inform, comfort, and care for tourists and are collectively a part of a process that can affect human lives and well-being. In addition to this Crick and Spencer (2011) claim that due to the competitiveness of the industry, satisfactory service is now the minimum of the guests. In the context of pet hotels, the author wants to define who exactly is the customer, who determines the pace and type of the service. One factor, in this case, could easily be the fact that the guest is expected to be the one who stays on the premises, which in this case would be the pet of the family. However, in this matter, multiple factors argue against this, in the context of a pet hotel. If the guest is the one who defines, what type of service it must be, how could the pets possibly determine this without vocalizing their thoughts. Perhaps, they might "vocalize" their thoughts by showing certain emotions to their owners. Research provides evidence that animals can experience emotions such as joy, fear, love, despair, and grief (Bekoff, 2021). The author strongly believes that there is a subtle balance between the fact of who is the customer. In this matter, the guest could easily be the owner of the pet as well since they make the final decision whether the pet goes to the pet hotel to spend a night or a weekend there. The author also believes that anyone who would take their pet to a pet hotel, knows their furry best friend well enough, that they would be more than capable of doing the final judgmental decision whether the place fits the needs, wants, and desires of their pet.

According to Walker (2014, pp. 17-18), the services in the hospitality industry are mostly intangible. Bebko (2000) defines, that the characteristic of intangibility is one of the biggest differentiators between products and services. In terms of pet hotels, this thesis defines pet hotels as part of the pet hospitality businesses, due to the nature of hospitality. The author reminds that in the context of pet hotels, the names of the facilities may vary but they still need to fit the criteria defined by the author in the next chapter.

As explained in the previous chapters under definitions, pet hotel can be defined the following way: Pet hotel in general, is like any hotel designed and built for pet(s), only with a little twist that makes them a bit more special than typical hotels. Usually, they are all-inclusive, meaning everything is included in the price (i.e., food, water, treats, toys, climbing areas and hiding places within the room, a common area for playtime and attention, litter box, litter sand, and cleaning of the room). In addition to this, the most important thing included in this term pet hotel would be "trust". Trust in this matter concerns all, meaning there must be trust between the customer (the pet and the owner), as well as trust between the owner and the hotel owner. Moreover, the author wants to highlight that in her view there is a strong line that should not be crossed concerning pet hotels and this line is that the pet hotel should only accommodate one breed of animals. Highlighting how cats and dogs should not be accommodated within the same building even. Adding on that most of the pet hotels the author discovered were privately owned pet hotels. Therefore, in the "hotels" category the author believes that depending on the type of the pet hotel, most pet hotels would be "boutique hotels", or "privately owned smaller hotels". With very few cases, the author discovered that some pet hotels were trying to expand their markets, for example within the US.

As reminded by Autio et al. (2014) pets are entitled to a caring service just like us humans would be. Therefore, the owners must use their intuition and consideration when choosing the right place for their beloved pets. As an example of this, if one would own a cat who is highly stressed about dogs, there is no point to take this cat to a pet hotel that has both dogs and cats. Imagine as a human, if you were highly sensitive towards cigarettes and someone booked you a smoking room, you would not like it, would you. To put it in other words, any service which is considered unpleasant in relationships between people is considered the same in pet services (Autio et al., 2014). In addition to trusting your intuition, according to some findings from the interviews conducted, the author noted how trust and reliability was determinant factor.

2.2.1 Characteristics of pet boarding facilities

Where a typical hotel designed for humans tends to offer all kinds and sizes in room types, the hotels which are specifically built and designed for pets (e.g., cats), work a bit differently. One of the perhaps biggest differentiators between the two is that another place does not offer accommodation for humans at all, and where another place offers a certain number of rooms, that they offer for the ones traveling with pets. Depending on the size of this hotel, it may vary a lot how many rooms there are for the furry friends. Some hotels can afford to offer for example a whole floor for the pets and their owners, whereas some might only afford to do this with a fewer number of rooms.

In hotels, the average daily price ranges depending on multiple different factors, nonetheless in typical hotels we can choose between several different room types, and depending on how many would stay in the same room there can be more or fewer options. In the context of pet hotels, the options vary depending on the pet hotel itself. Some of them might offer a variety of different themed rooms as an example. In addition, there might be differences between the pet hotel rooms as well, as an example depending on the room size, one or a maximum of four cats can stay in the same room. This obviously, is determined by the pet hotel and it is never acceptable to accommodate different household cats in the same room, due to their safety. Most pet hotels, especially the ones specifically designed for only cats as an example, can accommodate, depending on their capacity, approximately 12 to 24 cats. This might vary and some places might be able to accommodate over 24 cats if their maximum capacity of occupied and there are multiple "double" rooms booked, which means that one "double room" is accommodating more than one cat (usually two or three). The author has gathered the most relevant information regarding three different types of pet hotels, located in three different countries: Sweden, Finland, and the United States. All of them have a similar number of rooms, that accommodate the pets. The following information is found in table 1.

Table 1. Examples of different pet hotels and their specifications.

Name, location	Katthotellet Villa Minnet, Sweden	Lemmikkihoitola Kissanpäivät, Finland	The Happy Cat Hotel & Spa, United States
Rooms in total	20	24	30
Room types	11 suites with own patio 9 standard rooms without patio	9 standard rooms 3 standard rooms with window 5 double rooms 7 double rooms with window	18 theme rooms, Windsor 12 theme rooms, East Granby
Facilities	Hotel 1: 8 separate rooms (2 suites with patio) Hotel 2: 12 separate rooms (9 suites with patio)	Divided into two larger areas with rooms and a common area to play in, called "Mummola" & "Pappala". *Mummola:* 12 rooms *Pappala:* 12 rooms	*"Individually themed luxury hotel rooms"* In 2 different locations *Windsor:* *18 rooms* *East Granby:* *12 rooms*
Type of Hotel	"Your cat´s second home"	"Homely place for pets"	"Luxury Hotel"
Price €	30-45 / day	25-54 / day	41-65 / night

Autio et al. (2014) bring the importance of the interaction with the service provider concerning the pet's experience, reminding that the consumer's value experience is translated from their interpretation of the pet's experience. They also bring out that the pet owner is the one who defines the value experience, even though this is done with the service provider through the pet. While the pet is the one who will experience the valuable experience, it´s important to keep in mind that the owners may hold certain expectations towards the service that is the one providing this valuable experience to their beloved

pets. To conclude this, the author wants to highlight one of the phrases from the interviews. (P4) summarized this with the following: *To know that they are enjoying themselves and then you may yourself enjoy your vacation with a clear conscience that in the end, it is your well-being that what it is about when cats have a good feeling, and they are enjoying themselves."*

Some of the expected characteristics of pet-friendly accommodation, the pet owners hoped from the place where they ought to leave their pet(s) were pet-friendly attitude, pampering, and essential minimum. One of the most important characteristics, pet-friendly attitude, was explained behavior with pets (e.g., playing with them, showing love to them), and evidence of the company´s understanding of pets 'general and individual needs (e.g., safety, hygiene, special pet food and room to play). (Rátz and Michalkó, 2012.)

It was surprising to explore how much in common pet hotels have compared to the non-pet hotels (which do offer accommodation for people travelling with a pet). For instance, room cleaning is one of them, which do not differ in any way in general. There is a surprisingly mutual amount of these common features in both these hotels. For example, when people are looking for some entertainment, they might go and enjoy the hotel´s entertainment (e.g., live music), whereas when pets want to experience something similar in pet hotels, they are let loose in this common area to play and run around and receive attention. Most hotels have a restaurant and a bar, which seems to be a popular place to go to while staying in a hotel. Pet hotels respond to this feature, offering different types of toys, that include catnip or valerian in them, giving the "same" effect as consuming one alcohol portion, as an example. In addition to toys that pet hotels offer, most of them have an opportunity to either go outside in a separate area or at least peek through a window and watch the "live TV" with deer or birds, etc. The author explored another differentiator that most pet hotels have compared to hotels, which is that some pet hotels have food included in the price, whereas other pet hotels offer it at a certain price per day. According to the observations done by the author, especially in the US, pet hotels are taken to a completely new, upscaled level.

As shown in Table 2 below, most pet hotels are not that strict with their check-in and check-out times, whereas when traveling with a pet and checking in at the hotel there are, in most cases, a certain timeline when you are expected to check-in.

Table 2. Comparison between a hotel and a pet hotel.

HOTELS (accommodating humans & our beloved pets)	PET HOTELS (specifically designed & built for pets)
Check-in & Check-out times (usually within certain hours)	Check-in & Check-out times (**mostly flexible** within the opening times)
In some places breakfast is included in the price (**not** for pets)	In most places, food (incl. treats) are included in the price
Room cleaning 1x day	Room cleaning 1x day
Limited areas, where one can take their pet within the hotel premises In rare places, pet food is offered, sold or included in the price	Common room to play and run around in most places (one households' pets only at the same time)
Restaurant & Bar	Catnip and valerian toys play with
Late check-out upon request Room service Sauna or spa area	Pick-up and drop-off service Room service Cat spa or barber
PET HOTEL CHARASTERISTICS EXPLAINED	
• Check-in and check-out times are usually more flexible • All-inclusive • Different room sizes (comparable to human hotels (double room, suite etc.) • Activities and program daily Pet hotels offer more personalized service, their main differentiator is to know the customer which is in this context the pet. Hospitality is the key for a successful pet hotel.	

This brings us to the next thing, of what the owners of the pet(s) might expect of the hotel, which is specifically designed and built for pets only. One thing pet owners might wrongly assume when taking their pet to the pet hotel is that this place would work as their second home, as advertised in most places. The assumption that the pets would behave or even feel just like at home, is one of the most misleading interpretations the pet owners might have towards the pet hotel. Yet, there are too many things that will be intimidating for the pet such as new territory, new pet(s) among them, new smells and new sounds, new surroundings. Regardless of how well the pet hotel advertises their premises and lure the pet owners to think (or assume) that this place would feel just like at home for their pets, it can often mislead the owner to think it feels just like home for their pets and once they find out it is not. This then leaves them disappointed, because the service did not meet their expected outcome, and therefore their expectations are not met.

When looking into the topic of pet hotels, there are multiple different interpretations people assume or think of the service, even if they have not used this service before. Some of these interpretations might influence the level of the expectation, (e.g., previous experiences with pet hotels). Therefore, the author will further explain the concept of expectations and explore how do pet hospitality businesses (pet hotels) respond to the expectations of their customers, this will be explained further in the interview results part. Pet own-

ers, just as their pets are all individually different from one another and can easily be mis-
led with certain expectations or ideas, that especially the owners might have towards a
certain place such as pet hotels as an example.

2.2.2   Factors that influence the expectations

According to Taylor (2019), there is a very slight line between human child and animal, in
other words, Taylor believes that the pet care industry is booming. Frias (2012) supports
this by stating that it is common for pet owners to change their lifestyles to accommodate
the comfort and wellbeing of their pets. Hendrix (2020) concludes what was mentioned
earlier, the slight or no line between animal and a human child, by claiming that Ameri-
can´s are not seeing their pets as household pets, rather as part of their families. Autio et
al., (2014) believe that some of the descriptions by the pet owner´s close relationship to
their pet communicate the consumer´s value experience. This value experience is built-in
looking after the wellbeing of the animal and the affection toward the pet. (Autio et al.,
2014). One of the things the author argues against is that many pet hotels, claim on their
webpage, that they offer a homelike environment, which can often mislead to the interpre-
tation that it would be an environment where your pet behaves exactly like at home.

As people are counting their beloved pets more as family members than pets, people tend
to do all they can to offer the best for their pets. Frias (2012) states pet owners built their
travel plans around their pets, yet Rátz and Michalkó (2012) found out that nearly non to
very few (4,2%) of the pet owner´s admitted to never or rarely taking holidays because of
their pets, which just confirms that owning a pet does not prevent owners from travelling.
This was also supported by the interview results gathered by the author, where nearly all
participants (P2, P3, P4, P6) said that their pet does not restrict their travel plans.

The price is commonly used to decide whether a service or an experience meets or does
not meet the expectations of the perceived value. The problem with this can easily turn
into a price comparison between some companies, and most often the customers will lean
towards the service that is better, no matter how much they pay for it. In some cases, the
customers will wrongly assume that when they pay more, they will receive more. This
however leads easily to a problem of a high price and the downfall of expectations after
the absurd expectations are not met. Money has been found as one of the main influenc-
ers of expectations, as it appears in research done by (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml,
1991).

Word-of-mouth is commonly known as a standard-setter, where one hears of a great ser-
vice or experience by someone they know well and makes their experience heard by other

people and the word keeps spreading. It is also said how people are more likely to talk about their great experience and their poor experience and nothing in between. Therefore, the service which is at a level of good service stays often unmentioned (see picture 1). The next step is that this "great" service is at a completely different level between the two people. How do people set their expectations or how do they experience something different from everyone? Therefore, the author believes how intriguingly complicated expectations can be. As Bebko (2000) states that after one establishes reliability, the next step of becoming known for reliability can be achieved from either word-of-mouth communication or strategic marketing efforts.

Picture 1. How the experience will make people talk about your service.

As it was discovered from the semi-structured interview done by the author, also another factor does affect people´s expectations. It was related to a negative experience, which then might have lowered or raised their expectations towards the next pet hotel. To sum it up, if the customers had experienced a negative service experience at a pet hotel, they were more likely to raise their expectations higher, due to the poor service and experience they received and, they were ok to talk about it. None of the participants said that they had a good experience, but they would expect more of the service, which just highlights the importance of customer satisfaction with word-of-mouth and its impact on the company´s perceived service level and its image.

2.3   The Importance of Customer Satisfaction in Service Management

One of the most critical issues facing companies nowadays is ensuring and retaining customer loyalty. In other words, providing and maintaining customer satisfaction is still something every company should consider and yet use their time to develop. (Mill, 2002.) Especially within the service industry, the level of service is often calculated with the measurement of customer satisfaction. Where James (2009) defines that *"satisfaction is generally taken to mean an evaluative attitude towards some object or experience"*, Grönroos (1984) claims how the models and theories of consumer behavior are often used to answer the question how service quality is perceived, yet he criticizes how theories and models in this field do not consider services. Fourie (2015) believes that a remarkable competitive advantage can be achieved by organizations if they meet their customers 'expectations. This, however, can be only done by knowing precisely what their customers need. (Fourie, 2015.) In the terms of pet hotels, this could for example mean that the owners of the pet hotel, could try to find out this information before the pets visit the hotel. In addition to these, the service level includes intangible and tangible services, and it has been often stated how intangible services can be difficult to determine as good services in the eyes of a customer.

Where Lywood, Stone, and Ekinci (2009) claim that to get repeat purchases and loyal customers, it is essential to create a superior customer experience, Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) build on that and claim that to provide superior service one must understand and respond to customer expectations. Ranaweera (2007) argues how companies, who establish long-term customers, will be more profitable than others, due to the likelihood of gaining loyal customers via long-term customers. Mill (2002) mentions how J.C. Penney has been credited saying *"If you satisfy the customer, but fail to get the profit, you´ll soon be out of customers; but if you get the profit, but fail to satisfy the customers, you´ll soon be out of customers."* This leaves one question: which comes first, profits or customers? The author´s view on what J.C Penney was credited from, is that a company can either have satisfied customers and that way a company may gain more customers, even loyal customers - but if they decide to focus first on the profit, without making customers pleased with the entire experience at the company, they may end up with no customers. To put it short Lywood, Stone, and Ekinci (2009) confirm this by claiming that *"customer experience is the next competitive battleground".* Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) conclude that recognizing the dynamic nature of customer expectations, and understanding what effects on them, should help managers to close the gap between perceptions and expectations, or perhaps even exceed expectations.

One of the models that have been used to measure customer satisfaction, is called the Kano Model. According to Baymard Institute (2021), it was designed by Noriaki Kano in the 80s and it is a helpful tool that is used to measure and analyze the customer experience of the product (or service) that is provided. It is built around three basic attributes; *basic*, *performance,* and *delight* attributes. These attributes are mapped with the "Customer Satisfaction" and "Degree of Achievement" axes (y- and x-axises). These two axes are vertically (y-axis) and horizontally (x-axis), as shown in figure 1 below. "Customer Satisfaction" level is defined along the y-axis that describes the level of how satisfied the customers were for the service level of the company. "Degree of Achievement" level is defined along the x-axis and describes the level of how well a given factor is executed in a company´s product. (Baymard Institute, 2021.)
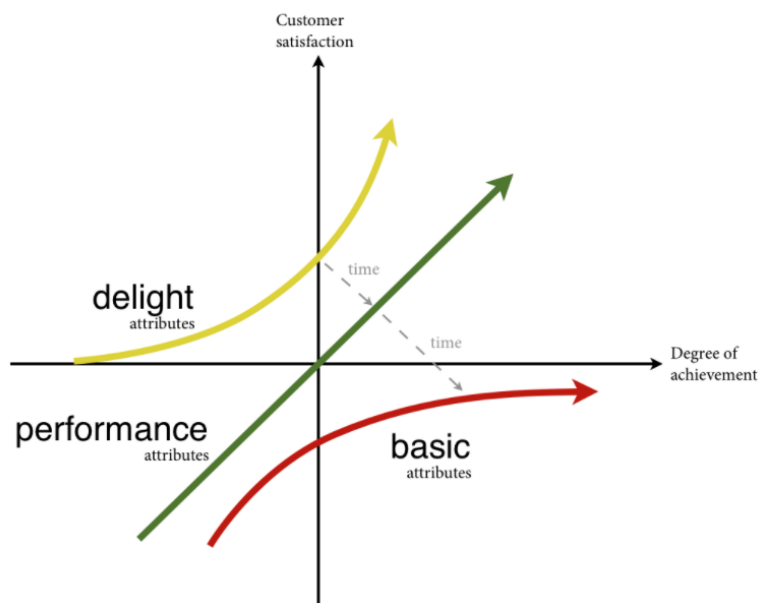

Figure 1. The Kano Model.

Starting from the bottom right, with the basic attributes. Often these are the so-called taken-for-granted attributes. They are not something the customers are consciously looking for. These *basic attributes* are the ones that are basic to the product or service that customers just expect them to work. Basic attributes are needed, to keep the entire customer experience complete. If basic attributes would be left out, it does not matter how well everything else within the overall performance and delighted is, because if basic attributes are not there, then the customer experience is broken. Usually, basic attributes are not used as a competitive advantage, but when left out, it will put the company at a remarkable disadvantage. (Baymard Institute, 2021.)

Going towards the center of the model, and the line that nearly goes from bottom left to top right corner. *Performance attributes* are to define and measure how well the service or

product is performed. There is a direct dependency between the degree of achievement and customer satisfaction. Certain companies try to compete on these attributes, by differentiating their product or service by spending more or less than the competitors did on specific performance attributes. These attributes are naturally the best choices for competition. (Baymard Institution, 2021.)

Finally, go to the last attribute, which is on the top left corner. *Delight attributes* are in question when someone delights the customer, by doing something out of the ordinary, or when something is over delivered to the customer. These attributes are usually unexpected and therefore they are difficult to achieve. Then again, once delight attributes are achieved, the returns can be brilliant. The main difference between the delight attribute and the basic attribute is that when the delight attribute is not there, it does not harm customer satisfaction. Quite the opposite since delight attributes can see a way for an effective engine for word-of-mouth. (Baymard Institution, 2021.)

When taking a pet hotel as an example of what the basic attributes would be in the terms of reflecting it to the Kano model, the author listed the following as an example of each attribute in table 3 (see table 3.)

Table 3. Examples of basic, performance, and delight attribute in a pet hotel

Basic Attributes	For a service like a pet hotel, it might be that when you pay for this service, you know that your pet will be fed and not left without care. Or, that once you book a week´s stay at a pet hotel this stay won´t be canceled since you booked it and will pay for it.
Performance Attributes	For a pet hotel, it might be how much you pay for your pet´s room at the hotel. For example, when you pay more your pet will get a more spacious room and if you pay even more from that they could get a spacious room with a window.
Delight Attributes	For a pet hotel, it might be if you must book the hotel for a longer period and your pet´s needs are taken into consideration, and they get some extra attention (i.e., access to the employees break room).

2.4   Expectations

Anyone who has used a service, or a product of any kind has faced expectations at some level, whether they are conscious or unconscious forms of expectations. Expectations can vary from what one expects from a family or their employer - to what is their desired standard of what the service level should be. To put it in a perspective, Dogge et al. (2019) claim that expectations are strongly guiding the way humans perceive the outcomes of their actions. Expectations will follow us everywhere, whether it is the day off, summer holiday, a meeting at work, or simply coming home from work. It is a widely researched field, especially in psychology and service-related situations. In this chapter, the author's focus is aimed at the expectations in the service field, how are they formed and how can they be managed.

When exploring the existing literature, it was discovered that most of the research that focuses on expectations, also covers customer satisfaction, due to the nature of a strong bond between the two. Mill (2002) believes that two theories explain customer satisfaction well: the disconfirmation paradigm and the expectancy-value concept. In disconfirmation theory, the main idea lies behind comparing a new service experience with a standard which each individual has developed. And it is up to customers 'belief about the service is determined by how well it matches this standard of theirs. (Ojasalo, 2001; Mill, 2002.) Meyer and Schwagner (2007) disagree by claiming that people's expectations are seen as part of their previous experiences with a company's offerings. In other words, Meyer and Schwagner (2007) determine customer satisfaction as the series of customer experiences, which can also be defined as "the net result of the good ones minus the bad ones". Generally, satisfaction is seen in how the performance is perceived by the users, minus the expectations. This enables that those who are disappointed, tend to be less satisfied. (James, 2009.) Bebko (2000) builds on saying that "understanding consumers 'service quality expectations is the key to delivering service quality." Quality of the service and satisfaction are in other words, the product of how well the services process and outcomes will match the expectations of customers (Ojasalo, 2001.)

Customers often make somewhat judgments towards a product and its benefits, and what are the outcomes and attributes of using the product (Mill, 2002; Andereck et al., 2012) this is linked to the expectancy-value theory. People will learn to achieve behavior that they expect will result in positive outcomes (Mill, 2002). The problem with creating superior experiences to customers is not only the intangibility of customer experience, but the inherently personal nature of it - each of us has a dissimilar view of customer experience and therefore it only exists in the mind of an individual (Lywood, Stone, and Ekinci 2009). When translating it to the context of pet hotels, it might be difficult to satisfy each customer

according to their preferences, due to the inherent nature of everyone knowing their way of whatever it is that they prefer.

As explored by Licata et al., (2008) there is an indirect effect on repurchase intentions behind expectations. However, Mill (2002) argues against this statement, by claiming that neither of the two theories (*disconfirmation* or *expectancy-value*) speaks to the relationship between purchase behavior and customer satisfaction. To deliver service quality, it is essential to understand consumers' service quality expectations first (Bebko, 2000).

Mill (2002) argues that service quality standards should be set based on what is discovered by the research which should be conducted to discover what is important to the guest. Adding that satisfied customers are more likely to become returning customers tell their family and friends about their positive experience. To gain satisfied customers, the service provided (as perceived by the customer) is more than expected by the customers. However, if the service provided is less than expected, there are multiple or at least one of the following reasons behind it – management does not know what is important to the customer; management recognizes what is important but fails to set quality standards in the important areas; standards are set but employees fail to deliver on them; empty promises are made to the customers. In the last one, empty promises are made refers to the promises which are made to the customers, but they are not delivered. (Mill, 2002.)

Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) explored that customers expect fundamentals, instead of fanciness. This means basically that what customers expect from the service companies, is to do what they are supposed to do, specifying that they expect performance over empty promises. An example of this would be that hotel customers want a clean and secure room and a smile from the staff. (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991.) Meyer and Schwagner (2007) claim that certain companies don´t understand why customer experience is important to them, adding that often companies collect data and quantify data on it but do not circulate the findings, while others do measure and distributing but they are unsuccessful of making anyone responsible or putting the information to use.

Ojasalo (2001) finds the professional service expectations being much more complex than consumer-level expectations. There have been several different interpretations about what customer expectations are, should they be called expectations, and if so, why. Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) claim that to deliver superior service, it´s essential to primarily understand customer expectations, since the customers compare perceptions with expectations when deciding the company´s service. The author agrees with Richardson (2010) who argues that one must first create a solid foundation and understanding of

what customer experience is, how to structure it, and improve it, before focusing on any-thing else. Moreover, Mayer and Schwagner (2007) claim how dangerous and farfetched customer dissatisfaction can be, due to the customers' empowerment. How does cus-tomer experience shape the expectations of the customer then? It has been claimed by Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1993) that the customer satisfaction theories are known also by the names *"comparison standard"* or *"expectation standard"*, instead of customer expectations. Ojasalo (2001) claims that there are different levels of expecta-tions, which can be divided into *fuzzy*, *implicit*, and *unrealistic* expectations. These levels of expectations will be explained in more depth in the following chapter.

2.4.1   Interpretations of Expectations

When talking about expectations, there are multiple interpretations and research made on the topic. Customer expectations come into the picture when their expectations are either met or exceeded, they may occur also if the expectations are not met at any level. Natu-rally, the fewer expectations are met, the more likely they will feed dissatisfied customers. Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) claim that customer expectations hold a central role in service quality assessments. According to them, there is limited knowledge in re-gards to the structure of expectations and their formation (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991). According to James (2009), there is a difference between how expecta-tions are defined in the literature (e.g., social science) versus how they are seen. Some have argued that expectations should not be mentioned, instead people should talk about perceptions. However, the overall literature and research on the topic talk about expecta-tions more than perceptions. Dogge et al. (2019) explored how humans 'perceptions of the outcomes of their activities are heavily influenced by their expectations. There are sensory expectations, which are formed across the lifetime, moreover, that perception is affected by the temporary action-outcome expectations that are adjustable through con-textual demands. (Dogge et al., 2019.)

According to research (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991), there are two levels of customer service expectations: *desired* and *adequate*. The desired level is the service that the customer hopes to receive, combining the beliefs of "can be" and "should be" by the customer. The adequate service level is what is acceptable in the customers' eyes, mean-ing that the customers assess what the service "will be". This can be also seen as the cus-tomer´s "predicted service". Compared to the desired service expectations, adequate ser-vice expectations seem to be more changeable since they are often influenced more by specific circumstances. (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991.)

Where Ojasalo (2001) claims that expectations of professional services are somewhat different from other types of services, Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) have criticized the lack of knowledge about customer expectations in service quality assessments and their structure and formation. They argued that end-customers (consumers) and business customers' expectations could vary from one another. However, what appeared by their research, is that the differences between these two are minimal. (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991.)

By *fuzzy* expectations, Ojasalo (2001) refers to the fact that customers don´t always have a complete understanding of what they want from the provider of the service. Sometimes they might sense that something is not right or that something is incomplete, but they don´t know what it is. It can be a wish for improvement in their situation without knowing what type of improvement it should be. Although fuzzy expectations can be mentioned, when customers expect change but don´t have an idea what the change should be. This often leads to the situation where customers may have some sort of idea about the change, but there is uncertainty about it. If the service meets the materialized needs of the customer, yet there is something wrong with the service, leaving an unsatisfactory customer thinking why it can be claimed as *precise expectations.* This form of expectation can be also called reversals of fuzzy expectations. (Ojasalo, 2001.)

Implicit expectations relate to situations, where some characteristics or elements of the service are self-evident that customers are not actively nor consciously thinking about them, or the possibility of how they will not materialize. One major differentiator with implicit and fuzzy expectations is that implicit expectations become obvious when they are not met. (Ojasalo, 2001.) Explicit expectations strongly refer to conscious assumptions or wishes concerning the service in the customer´s mind. In this case, the customer knows precisely what went wrong, if some of the expectations are not met.

Unrealistic expectations relate to the word unreal, where the customer often has impossible or highly unlikely expectations for any service provider, or themselves, to meet. Realistic expectations, in comparison, are somewhat quite the reversals of unrealistic expectations. Realistic expectations are related to the expectations that are likely to be accomplished by the service provider, or by the customers themselves. (Ojasalo, 2001.)

Ojasalo (2001) claims that the set of expectations a customer can have may include all the five expectations mentioned at the same time. Also, he adds that their existence may vary, as an example they can be less or more fuzzy. In other words, customer expectations may include (*fuzzy, precise, explicit, realistic, unrealistic*) elements altogether. An implicit expectation comes with a negative impact on service quality when it is not met and

vice versa. To put it differently, implicit expectations can cause only negative surprises, because when the implicit expectation is met, it does not have a corresponding positive impact. (Ojasalo, 2001.)

2.4.2 Formation of Expectations

According to Ojasalo (2001), disconfirmation theory (used to explain the formation of customer perceived service quality and satisfaction), service quality and satisfaction is a result of how well the service performance is. In other words, does the service process and outcome match the customer´s expectations? Surprisingly what Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) found out in their research, is that one of the main influencers on the expectations of customers is money. Customers believe that when you pay more, then the service needs to meet these criteria of being better. However, they did not think that a low price would work as an excuse for poor service. To put it in perspective of the customers, when companies are not playing fair (e.g., responding to the money they ask for with the service quality), it creates mistrust as a result. In other words, what the customers expect from the service basics, is translated to their beliefs commensurate with the price paid by the customer. (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991.)

Customer experience is one factor that influences the desired service level. Meaning that the more experienced the customers are, the more likely they ought to have higher expectations towards the service. And these customers are often more likely to express when these expectations are not met leaving them unsatisfied. (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991.) There is evidence how the association of the intangibility of services, uncertainty, and risk among expectations is one gap in the literature, which needs further research in the service literature. (Bebko, 2000.) Adding how expectations are a key element in defining consumers´ post-consumption service quality judgments, Bebko (2000) reminds us how it is central for marketers to understand these expectations across the intangibility continuum.

Service processes are either experienced by the user of the service (i.e., tangible) or not experienced by the user of the service (i.e., intangible). From the service providers 'point of view, it means that they must determine the level of quality expectations which consumers have for their service industry, with the ideal situation that they try to meet them as well. One example of giving the consumer evidence from reliability is to for example provide a detailed brochure (i.e., describing how each step in the service process guarantees excellent results). This can be done for example, when grooming a dog if the owner is given a detailed list of all the steps that will be taken. The main reason behind this is that when the service process is not experienced by the user, reliability is still one of the things

that should be noted from the service provider to the user of the service. On the other hand, where the service is experienced by the user (i.e., tangible), it is a chance for the provider to demonstrate the reliability of the service. (Bebko, 2000.) To manage the service quality expectations, understanding that both service outcome and service process are the tangibility levels.

To conclude this, all of us will experience service differently. If one perceives a service completely differently than what they expected, it can either increase or decrease their image of the company and lead them to either reusing the service provided by the company or never using the same service by the same company again. It was also explored how less satisfied customers tend to speak up more than those, who were satisfied with the service or a product they used. It is up to a company to choose if they decide to use a certain tool to measure the quality of their service, but this is, however, the option they have if they would like to find out how do they meet the expectations of their customers.

How to measure service quality is complex and some might even wonder how it is even possible. Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) developed an answer to this by creating the ´zone of tolerance ‘as a measure that may vary constantly and depending on the individual internal or external factors. Every customer perceives a certain service or except a certain service, and what is left in between them are that is called the *“zone or tolerance”.* Since each customer is different and we all have an inherent nature of perceiving and perceiving things, the author believes that this SERVQUAL-model can be very useful, due to its capability to change what a customer expected to be poor service, to good service for instance. An example of this would be how a customer has expected what the service level would be in a pet hotel, and once using this service, they perceive the service at a completely different level. This can easily be the other way around as well, meaning that the customer expects a higher service, but they receive a service that would be more towards the basic service. (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991.)

One of the perhaps biggest gaps the author noted was the gap between the company´s perceptions of customer perceptions. When planning a product or a service it is extremely important to ask and find out from your customer what is it that they expect from you. In other words, a company should not try to wrongly assume the expectations the customers might have towards their company, meaning how do the customers perceive their company. Some of the insights gathered from the interviews quite well summed up the statement of a company should not try to assume the expectations of their customers. It appeared that certain past negative experiences by the participants were reflected as “unpleasant”, or “I felt awful leaving my cat there for the weekend”, which just proofs that it is

even more important that the companies would not lie about what type or service they are providing to their customers.

How to measure service quality is complex and some might even wonder how it is even possible. Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991) referred to the ´zone of tolerance ‘as a measure that may vary constantly and depending on the individual internal or external factors. Every customer perceives a certain service or except a certain service, and what is left in between them is an area that is called the *"zone or tolerance".* Grönroos (1984) adds on how certain ideologies (religion, political involvement) or traditions ("we have always done so") may also affect customers´ expectations. Since the previous experience influences the customer´s expectations. The service customers perceive, is resulting from the customer´s perception of the service. (Grönroos, 1984.)

2.5   Key Elements of Expectations

In the previous subchapters, the author has concluded and provided the most crucial information concerning expectations and customer satisfaction. Moreover, the models and frameworks presented in the table (see table 4), are used to support the overall aim of this thesis of examining how the pet hotel businesses are responding to their customers' expectations.

Table 4. The main frameworks used in this thesis.

Author / Source	Framework	Main focus/Purpose
Mill, 2002 Andereck et al., 2012	Expectancy value concept	Customers´judgements towards a product or service and its benefits including what are the outcomes and attributes of using the product. A learned behavior that is expected to produce positive results.
Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml,1991	SERVQUAL model	To measure service quality. Quality is measured by deducting the expectation from the perception. It is used to find out the service level expectations.
Oliver, 1980 Ojasalo, 2001 Mill, 2002	Expectation Disconfirmation Theory Model	Comparing a new service experience with a standard that matches each individual's own. The customer defines how well it fits their standard.
Kano, Seraku et al. 1996	The Kano Model	Scale to measure customer satisfaction.
Grönroos, 1984	A Service Quality Model and its Marketing Implications	Develop a service model concept, that can be used as a service marketing model in service management.

SERVQUAL-model, developed by Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml (1991), proposed the following formula that explains the quality of the service (see figure 2). They explored how expectations are affected by the perception and together, this will define the service quality. (Parasuraman, Berry, and Zeithaml, 1991.)

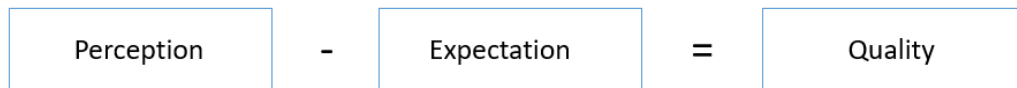| Perception | | − | | Expectation | | = | | Quality |

Figure 2. Service Quality Model formula adapted from Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml, 1991.

As suggested by Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml (see figure 2), the service quality is measured by taking the remains of perceptions and expectations combined. In the context of pet hotels, the author believes that the interview results show how this is more or less still used in the minds of customers. Most of the interviewees mentioned how what was expected was a much lower level compared to their actual perceived service quality and the experience, which led to higher service quality in the eyes of the customer. The same happens when a customer has already used a pet hotel and had a bad experience with the hotel, which leads to the decrease of their expectations towards this hotel and their perceived service quality is low. This can be turned into an advantage when for instance, this same customer is using a different pet hotel and has low expectations, due to the low perceived service quality. Once the perceived quality increases, the expectations are often exceeded since they were already low in the first place. Now to repeat the exceeding of this customer´s expectations will be more difficult the next time because now the expectations are high and the perceived service quality as well.
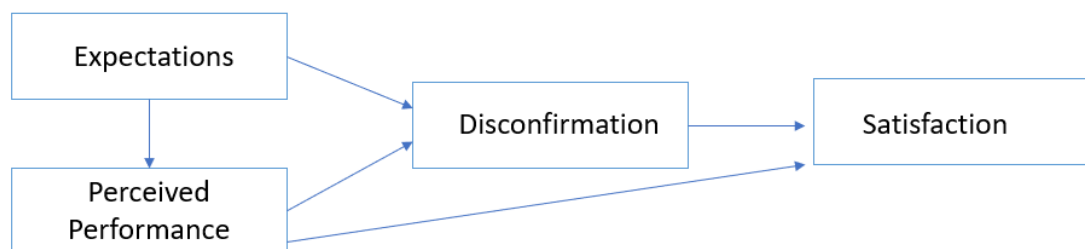
Figure 3. Expectation disconfirmation theory.

The expectation disconfirmation theory model highlights the uniqueness of everyone. The focus is built around letting the customer define how well the service, product, or experience compared with their standard. With anything that relates to customers´ expectations, many different scenarios will affect the overall experience in the end. Customer expectations will keep increasing, due to the nature of ever-increasing development. The Kano model demonstrates well how time will in the end reshape the attributes companies will offer to their customers.

Basic attributes are often unspoken ones and they do not have a direct relationship between customer satisfaction and the degree of achievement. When basic attributes are achieved, it does not mean that the customer would be satisfied, since these attributes are assumed to work without saying. The logic behind *performance attributes* goes, the more you offer, the more satisfied the customers will be. In other words, the cost is directly tied to the degree of achievement which is why performance attributes are the ones that companies can compete with. Delight attributes are also known as taking the customer by surprise, which can often lead to over-excitement due to the unexpected attribute. Over-excitement can be also seen as a positive way to increase word-of-mouth. Delight attributes are never expected by the customers and therefore they do not have a straightforward relationship with customer satisfaction and the degree of achievement. (Baymard Institute, 2021.)

As Baymard Institution (2021) states, time is a factor that will deteriorate these features related to customer satisfaction. As companies start to compete on the feature and customers get accustomed to it (Baymard Institution, 2021). The quicker people get accustomed to new features that the companies offer, the quicker the level of their expectations will increase. Therefore, the service companies need to find new ways to perform and delight. In a way, there is a constant circular movement with these features that companies keep inventing. Eventually when a certain feature reaches a point where any further improvement would be so inconsequential that it would only matter when it is not being delivered, or one fails to deliver them – then it becomes a basic attribute again. (Baymard Institution, 2021.)

In the context of a pet hotel, the author strongly believes that based on the research made and the results from the qualitative semi-structured interviews, having to measure the expectations of the customers might not show effective results for a pet hotel business. However, the author found out that based on the interview results, pet hotel businesses have accomplished to fulfill most of the expectations of their customers. To conclude, everyone must recognize how difficult and multi-layered people´s expectations are. Especially with pet hotels, when the owners are the actual decision-makers who will set their standards and choose if the service fit or did not match with their expectations and perceived service quality. As a follow-up from this chapter, the author will conclude these frameworks with the author´s view of how pet hotel businesses are responding to customer expectations (see figure 4).
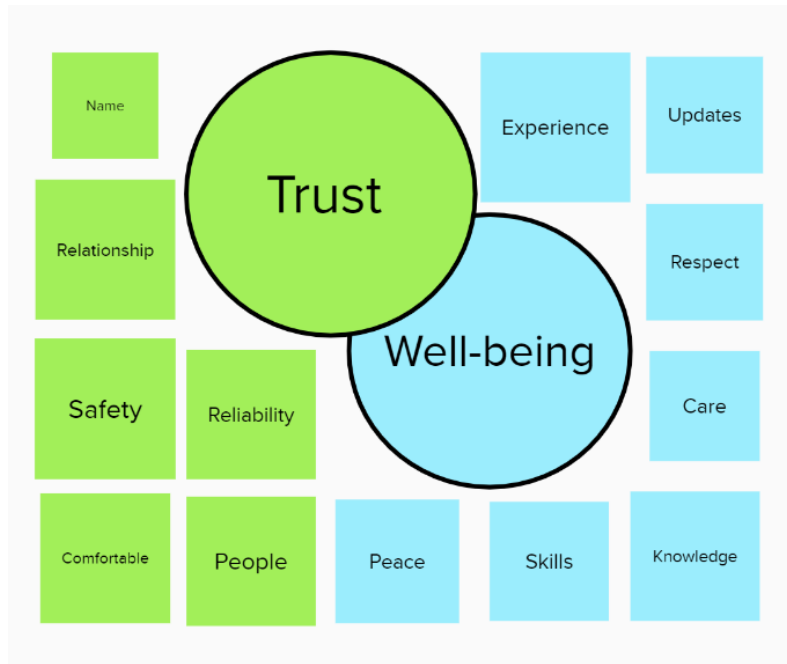
Figure 4. The author´s key findings from the thematic interview analysis part.

3 Research Methodology

This chapter covers the research process and the research methods. Justification for the chosen methodology is included as well. Furthermore, this chapter will also cover why the author used thematic analysis and explain the process behind the thematic analysis. Finally, the process behind the interviews, transcribing, and the data collection process will be further explained. The interview results will follow in chapter 4 results and analysis. The purpose and desired outcome of these interviews are to give insights and possibly new topics on further research, which will help when finalizing the thesis.

Qualitative research aims to answer the questions why and how (Curedale, 2016, p. 71), therefore qualitative interviews are a perfect example, among the main research question of "how do pet hospitality businesses respond to customer expectations?", to justify why the author chose to conduct qualitative semi-structured interviews. One of the reasons why in this thesis, the qualitative method is used, is behind the main research question. In addition to these, the author thought before these interviews, that some of the questions might give better insight, but as it turned out this did not happen. A qualitative method as a research methodology will be discussed in a more detailed manner in the next subchapter as well as the process of collecting data.

3.1 Research Methods

The research method chosen for this thesis will provide qualitative information, which can be used to answer the main research question of how do pet hotel businesses respond to customer expectations. Another reason behind choosing this method is that it leaves space for more open discussions rather than a strict interview structure, which can help the interviews to feel that they can express themselves better and leave space for communication as well. According to Curedale (2016, p. 153) interviews, where questions can be modified as needed during the interview are called unstructured interviews, whereas an interview with multiple questions or a script of an interview that they will follow during the interview, is called a structured interview (Curedale, 2016, p.149). In addition, Silverman (2011, p.25) claims that if the purpose of the research is to answer "how" or "what" questions, then qualitative methods are the best suited for the research. Curedale (2016, p.71) defines the 7 steps of how to use qualitative research method: define research questions, select research subjects and context to study, collect data, interpret data, study data for insights, collect more data, analyze data.

Affinity diagrams are great tools to use, especially when a large amount of information needs to be categorized or grouped. Their history reaches back to the 1950s when it was

created by Japanese anthropologist Jiro Kawakita. The method was named to K-J method around 1967 and later in 1986 Kawakita published a comprehensive description of the KJ method. (Curedale, 2016, pp. 196-197.) However, this method is now called an affinity diagram, and due to its low resources, it is very simple to use, especially in today´s world where nearly every item mentioned in the resources, can be used digitally and mostly for free. Resources Curedale (2016, p. 201) mentioned are whiteboard, large wall spaces or tables, dry-erase markers, sharpies, and post-it notes. Nowadays there are numerous ways to use digital post-it for free mainly, basically, this means that one could only need a piece of knowledge or a bit of time to search for a good way to use an online post-its platform. These platforms most often include all the necessary resources Curedale mentioned. In this thesis, the author used a digital platform called Mural. The affinity diagrams are shown below in picture 2 (see picture 2.)

Picture 2. Affinity diagrams.
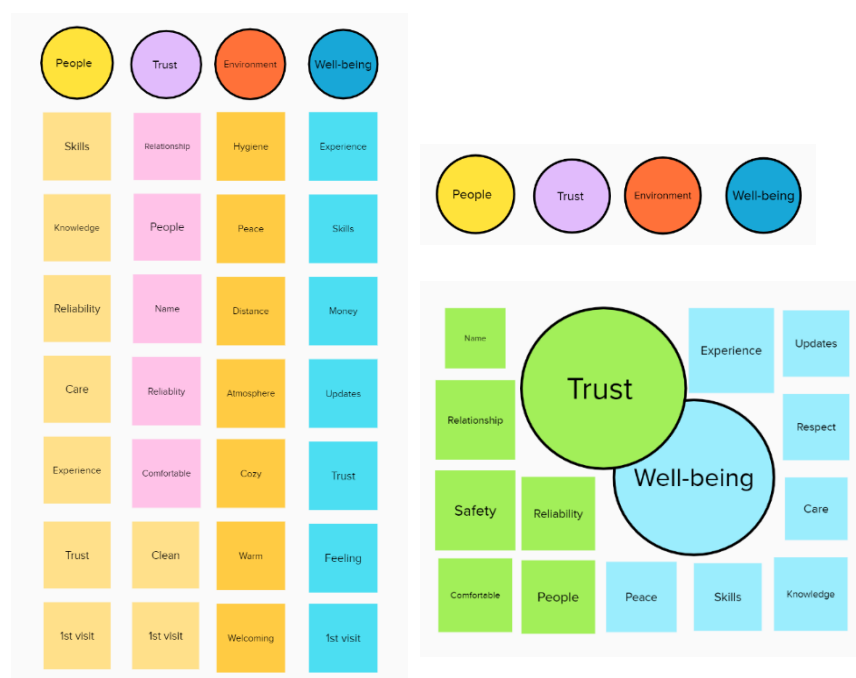
In this thesis, the author chose to analyze her data from the interviews and use thematic analysis as a tool to make sense of the results. For example, the author´s main idea is to establish similarities between many pieces of information (Curedale, 2016, p.197) to help to answer the main research question. An affinity diagram is a way to assemble multiple ideas into groups with common themes or relationships. They can also be used to brainstorm ideas (Curedale, 2016, p. 196-197.) These results will be further discussed and explained more in the following sub-chapters.

To support the main research question of *how do pet hospitality businesses respond to customer expectations,* the author used these research questions to support the aim of this thesis (see table 5). When looking into the research questions, listed in table 4, they were all ought to help the author to form an overall picture of expectations, how they are formed and how can they be managed. First question was used to support the theoretical framework part as well and the last one. The two questions in the middle of the table were used to back up the interview questions and to justify the importance of hospitality.

Regardless of the different alternatives, the author believes that she was able to follow her original plan quite well. The most challenging obstacle for the author was to continue with the thesis upon starting at the new job position during the beginning of September. This slowed down the thesis process for about two weeks, but after that time the author continued with the thesis and was able to complete the remaining part of the thesis.

Table 5. Research questions and the main aim with the question.

Research questions which will support and clarify the objective of this thesis:	Aim:
How can expectations be managed?	Find enough research on this topic
Why should pet hotels fall under the category of hospitality?	Highlight the diversity of hospitality
How does the established service name shape the customer expectations in the pet care industry?	Find out if the name has an effect on people´s expectations
Why should pet hotels pay attention to customer expectations and how are they formed?	Find enough research on this topic and support this with the research results from the interviews.

3.2   Data Collection Process

The overall research process was challenging including a lot of ups and downs, due to multiple different factors. As the author mentioned in the written thesis plan, due to different possibilities for fall 2021, this thesis will either follow plan a, b or c, depending on what will happen. This will be determined later during the fall, and just as mentioned, the plan might rapidly change during this time. This happened in this case and therefore, the overall thesis plan structure did change a little bit. During the research process, the author learned more in-depth how to manage multiple moving parts at the same time. Yet, the overall time management could have been a bit better handled since the author learned in a later stage that having a more detailed time management plan, may have been helpful when things got tough.

To get enough interview participants did not just happen overnight and the author was thinking to get more people to participate, because who would not love to talk about their

beloved pets. The author got two pet hotel owners to ask their customers to participate in this interview. One post was also posted on Facebook, but this did not get enough brave participants to contact the author. Finally, the participants and the author agreed on an interview time via email, and they got scheduled soon after the email. The estimated duration for these interviews was set to a maximum of one hour, which was done successfully from the author´s part. Nearly all the interviews were approximately 45 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, the author made sure to ask permission to record these interviews, to help the author when transcribing these interviews. All interviews were conducted anonymously and promised to be deleted afterward. In the next chapter, the author will conclude the research process.

The qualitative semi-structured interviews were transcribed by the author after each interview. It took about three to four hours to transcribe one interview, which was approximately 35-45 mins long. The interviews were all recorded for the analysis part and the author refers to the interviewees by participants (i.e., P1 stands for participant 1). In addition to the customers who had or had not used the pet hotel services, the author wanted to hear from the owners' views on how they believe these expectations are being dealt with. In the end, the author interviewed two different pet hotel owners, whose interview analysis will be discussed as well, referring to owner 1 and owner 2.

One of the things which needed to be done was to choose which tool to use to make sense of all the results from the interviews. Also, to give an overview of how the pet hotels are responding to the expectations of their customers. An affinity diagram is often used when analyzing large amounts of data for example. In this thesis, the affinity diagram was done using the online platform called Mural – see appendix 3. To conduct thematic analysis, there are things to consider but the most important note is that thematic analysis is flexible and can be adjusted to multiple different research (Caulfield, 2019.) Using an affinity diagram might help and benefit since it is cheap and flexible, as well as visual and quick arriving themes, but it comes with setbacks as well. One of the downsides of affinity diagrams is that is hard when data varies a lot or that there is a lot of it. (Rosala, 2019.) The author chose to use an affinity diagram due to the visual part of it and because it seemed to fit into categorizing the themes more easily than any other method.

4   Results and Analysis

This chapter concludes all the findings gathered from the semi-structured interview's part. In the next chapter, the author will conclude the findings from the interviews with thematic analysis. The interview results are discussed in the order of the research questions, which were mentioned in chapter 1.2. The author's focus during the interviews was to get as much information as possible from the participants, without further leading the discussion between the author and the participants. Some of the research questions, such as questions "How does the established service name shape the customer expectations in the pet care industry?" and "How do past experiences shape the expectations in the pet hotel business?", brought a lot of great insights that the author will bring out in the following chapters. Moreover, the author found out analyzing the results, how it could have been useful to conduct a questionnaire in addition to the interviews. By conducting a questionnaire with anonymous answers, could have revealed more insights into the topic and perhaps leveled the imbalance between the demographics between the participants.
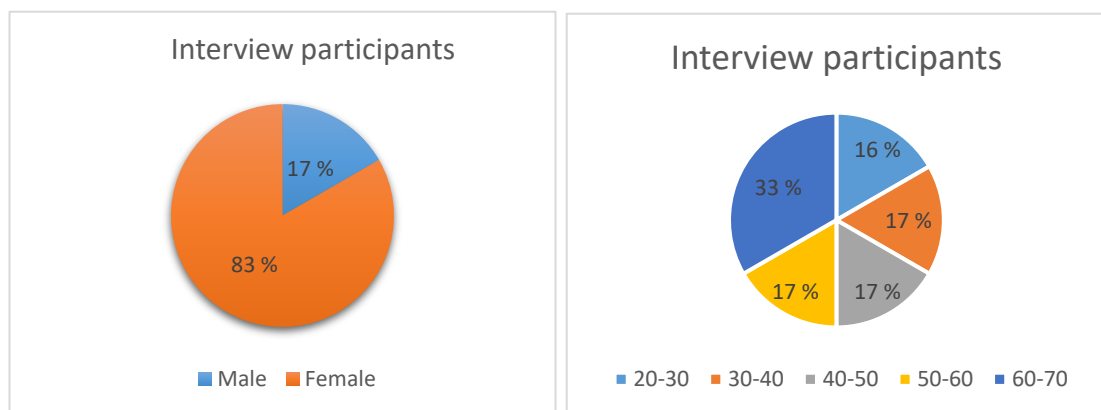

Figure 5. Gender division & age division between the participants.

This could have given more detailed insights for the analyzing part as well as the overall research results. As a conclusion of the term "pet hotel", the author wants to reflect on some insights gathered from the qualitative semi-structured interviews. Some of the results revealed additional points, for example, the fact that some interviewees (participant 6) felt it is more than just a place where you take your cat for instance when going on a holiday. (P6) expressed the following:

"It creates a feeling that the pet goes there on a vacation as well, basically it is like a hotel, so the pet is vacationing, everything there should be nice and cozy. And preferably this type of all-inclusive, where everything is included. You just take a cat there and you have the feeling that you may leave him/her there with peace of mind."

This comment itself was quite an interesting one because the author noted that one of the "expectations" within this comment was that this pet hotel should include this "all-inclusive" type of service. On the other hand, this is not too much of an unrealistic expectation, due to the ideology the owners have of the term pet hotel. Owner 1 concluded the term as follows:

"To me, a pet hotel means that it is this type of all-inclusive place. It means that there are all the accommodation facilities, the food, cat litter sand, all the sort of basics. But in addition to these, there should be some programs, so entertainment. Kind of like in the hotels for humans, but yeah we do not have any type of band to perform like a cat band to perform, but the fact that we play with them and it is the same as they would go out so to speak, or that there are catnip toys / Valeriana toys that the cats can sort of use the bar and you know in a way that the overall experience would be a relaxing for the pets as well."

From the other pet hotel owner (owner 2), the following comments were made during the interview:

"A cat hotel in my own opinion I would like to think that we are precisely the hotel. For cats, this is also a resting place and cats own an activity park. That here they are allowed to frolic, and many customers say that their cat might sleep for 3 straight days knocked out when they come home since here, they have played and ran out all their energy. Safety and quietness. And I would also think that since it is so peaceful environment around here because there is no traffic around and it saves the cats from listening to this noise pollution. And I would consider that we are more of a complete experience for the cat rather than a place where we would just give them food and care for them. We aim to be a home-like environment that there would be a human present most of the time."

When interviewees were confronted with a question related to the term pet hotel / or a pet boarding facility/pet boarding place, they all had more or less similar answers. Here the author noted that it is depending on the person, their relationship with their pet, and also the factor if they have had a pet before, or have they only become "pet parents" at a bit older age, that often determined what do the participants refer when talking about their pets for instance. While (P5) made a remark on: *"But you don´t leave a child, a small child home alone for a long period. And well, I would describe it more of a hotel, rather than a pet boarding place",* another participant had a quite opposite idea of this were (P1) said, *"I never say her/him when I talk about a cat, I always say it".* This demonstrates that there are more and more pet owners, who say that their pet is their kid or a fur baby, rather than a pet. Yet, these results showed that everyone is an individual and therefore, no matter

how much all of us love our pets, it is undisputed that they all still care for their pets. It was reflected also as far as; your wellbeing is at stake if your cat is not feeling well/good and enjoying the accommodation. *(P4) "To know that they are enjoying themselves and then you may yourself enjoy your vacation with a clear conscience that in the end, it is your wellbeing that what it is about when cats have a good feeling, and they are enjoying themselves."*

When confronted about expectations that the participants feel that they would or have had towards a pet hotel, the following comments were said by participant 2:

"Everything is very well in the place if nothing bad happens. So basically, I would not expect anything that they will wash my dog and do incredible tricks and provide with multiple activity things and so on, but rather means that the dog would act just as normally at home after visiting the pet hotel, as it would on a normal night at home." (P2)

The comments on expectations by (P2) are showing how for example, if there is nothing to compare service to, it is the individual expectation level, that defines the level of what is their perceived service level or experience. When the expectation level is at a somewhat "normal" level, it is easier for the service provider to meet these expectations and easier to exceed these expectations, when they will turn into delight attributes.

Some of the most important qualities that were seen important in the people looking after the pets at the pet hotel were related more for the safety and the feeling that the people looking after their pets can be trusted, as mentioned by P2;

P2 *"Probably just **reliability**, someone who loves animals and so the willingness of wanting to look after them and care for them."*

P1 *"I take it or granted that it needs to be a cat person, that is obvious. And then it is the **customer service**. The ability and the people skills, whether it is fake or real, that is very important".*

Some of the participants hold it more important that the owner of this pet hotel would know their pet on a more detailed level. In this context, the author would say that their expectations were already at in much higher level than for example other participants' expectations. Some of the remarks the participants (P3, P5) gave on this example were the following:

P3 *"The fact that they understand and an read the animal and understands specifically this breed´s needs. That the person has enough skills and knowledge with the animals, that for instance they understand and recognize when the animal is stressed and can in that way accomplish the trust of this pet and organize activities that are comfortable for this individual. That they won´t just have to be miserable in there while visiting the pet hotel."*

P5 *"You have to know that even if this little cute cat would approach you and go on his back and beg for tummy rubs, it might mean that if you now rub my belly, I will catch you (play with you)."*

Some of the participants (P3, P4) did mention that their pets do not limit their traveling but rather acquire more travel arrangements from them. Most of the participants also felt that if they pay more it is not an issue because it is their pet, and they all wanted good care for their pets. It was surprisingly delightful to find out that distance is the minimum factor that impacts the final decision if everything else in that pet hotel is good. As P4 concluded it the following way:

*"The factors would be the **trust** and perhaps this warmth and the cat´s **well-being.** But then of course the price and location are in a way one factor, but in our case, we noticed that these two will fall to the bottom ones and that the trust and warm/welcoming atmosphere goes to number one."*

Limitations regarding this research process were that there were nearly enough participants for the interviews, whereas another limitation was that the author got one participant who have not used this type of service before. Also, the lack of male participants shows another limitation regarding this research. Some of the results were lacking negative experiences, which might have given the results a bit different twist, but since most of the expectations were answered, this led to the reliability of this research and the validity.

5 Discussion

This thesis 'main aim was to explore how pet hospitality businesses, such as pet hotels respond to customer expectations. This last part will reflect on the overall thesis process, conclude the findings of this thesis. Moreover, in the sub-chapters, the author will reflect on the learning process and will evaluate this thesis 'overall outcome and the author's input.

Main findings based on the research showed how there is a gap with connecting pet services under the category of hospitality. In addition to this, not one research has focused directly on how hospitality businesses, more specifically pet hotels respond to their customer expectations. There should be more research made considering expectations and how they affect the perceived service quality, adding on how managers should learn how to utilize these within their business to improve their business image. Concerning pet hotels and how they respond to customer expectations should be researched more because there was only a certain number of participants and only one of these participants had never used pet hotel services but is curious to experience that one day. In addition, to back up these expectations and how the pet hotel owners respond to them, all the customer expectations were responded to in this context.

5.1 Conclusion

The pet care industry has already grown remarkably over the decades. And once traveling will bounce back to normal, the need for pet hotels will grow, and hopefully, the number of pet hotels will grow as well. Some of the research findings show how some companies do not do what they promise to their customers, which leads to a situation where the customer has high expectations towards this place, and once the customer experiences this service which is not what was promised, their perceived service quality drops down. This has happened with certain pet hotels as well, for example, as it appeared to one of the interviews, where the participant said that the place had a "separate" building for cats and dogs, but the noise was not considered at all, which lead to the decision of not wanting to go back there again.

One final addition which would have been useful to support the different views on pets and their importance would have been to interview non-pet owners and ask their views on certain pet hotel-related questions. This can be also added to the part of why the author believes how large the chosen research area is and how it was realized a bit too late. In addition to this, conducting a survey might have brought more detailed answers or at least

a more general idea about people´s expectations that they might have towards a pet hotel. In the end, there is no guarantee that even with the survey the author would have gotten more detailed answers. The only thing which perhaps prevented the participants to state their feelings more was that nearly all the participants had been using a specific pet hotel for quite some time now. Which lead to the situation where even when trying to reform questions and trying to get more detailed answers it did not provide more insights.

As explained in a table (see table 4), many different frameworks and models were used to support the aim of this thesis. There are a lot of similarities between these frameworks, but the author believes that unless the expectations and perceived service quality will not match, the expectations cannot be met completely, in that case, they are exceeded or not met at all which leads to many unhappy customers. In addition to this, the author believes how some of the pet hotels wrongly advertise on their webpages about what the service will be, because as it was discovered with the results from the interviews, more people want their pet to be treated as an individual and wants to make sure that the place knows exactly when they will eat and for example what is the worst thing you can do that their pet will not appreciate.

Overall, a great customer experience is not the same as most companies think it is. Most companies think that a great customer experience equals happy customers, well it does not. When the customer expects a certain timeframe for their package, for instance, their expectations are exceeded by delivering the package a day sooner than promised, they received more than they expected in the first place. Then the customer had a perception of having the package delivered a certain way, but the service exceeded the customer´s expectations. The same goes the other way around as well. If a customer has had a great experience with package delivery, the expectations will be on a much higher level and they expect similar service. But if this time the service does not match the expectations of the customer, then it will affect negatively that perceived service level, in the eyes of the customer.

(P6) ”In a common level, I believe that these types of pet hotels can be used, even if they claim that home is the best place for a cat, but sometimes for the cat it is better to go to a cat hotel for instance, where it is looked after pretty much 24/7 instead of someone going home to feed the cat once a day, so I believe it is a great alternative for this scenario too.”

5.2   Evaluation and Learning Process

This thesis process has been one of the toughest obstacles the author has faced by far. The overall process began in January when the author still had a few courses left that just had begun in January. Yet, it was necessary to get this process started as early as possible. From the very beginning, the author had part of the topic figured out, but since the topic was so wide, there was a lot of narrowing down to be done. The pet care industry in general reaches from anything that relates to the well-being of the pet, to their nutrition and reaches to pets' health services, such as veterinary services, grooming, nutrition guidance, and to the most extreme newest things for pets, just name it. There are multiple pet cafés around the world. In addition to this, certain countries have gone one step ahead with this and in Denmark, they have arranged a bus ride for the dogs, that spend their day at a dog daycare.

Coming back to the topic of this thesis, during the first 2 months, the name of this thesis reshaped its form about three times. Finally, around March- beginning of April, the author had all of the research questions ready, and the research process began with searching and exploring material. At the beginning of June, the author finally began to write the theoretical framework part and that took a brief pause for July, due to a mandatory summer language course. One of the interviews was done on June 7th, but most of the interviews continued at the end of July, reaching the 13th of August.

Some of the most challenging issues related to this thesis process were to find a suitable topic, that is not too wide. Secondly, to choose whether it is research-based or project-based, this was confirmed at the beginning but took some time to choose. One of the perhaps easiest choices was to decide that the interest is within the pet care industry, but as noted earlier it was such a wide area that it needed a lot of narrowing down the topic. Third, expectations came into the picture, since the author wanted a topic that challenges and a topic that has a lot of research made. The advantage of choosing expectations as a topic is also to help to pursue the author´s interest in the work-life after graduation.

The learning process could have been more in-depth and detailed but starting a full-time job in the middle of this thesis process, slowed down certain things related to this learning process. Time management has been the key term in the eyes of the author and with this thesis, there were a lot of sacrifices that needed to be made regarding balancing between physical and psychological well-being. Therefore, time management is one of the areas, where the author feels strongly that if she would have written the days down when to write a thesis, the overall time management would have been massively better and more controlled.

To conclude the evaluation and learning process, considering the amount of work the author used while writing a thesis, completing final courses, and searching and applying for a work placement and a job all simultaneously, the author is overall happy with the result. It could have been far more improved and much more detailed, but taking everything into account, the author chose to focus on staying sane throughout the process, instead of aiming for the impossible.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview structure for pet hotel owner(s)

Haastattelun runko lemmikkihotellin omistajille.

- Kerrotko itsestäsi vielä lyhyesti, kuka olet?
- Omat lemmikit?
- Omat ajatukset lemmikkihotellista ennen kuin tulit omistajaksi nykyisessä yrityksessä?
- Olitko käyttänyt lemmikkihotellipalveluita aiemmin ja minkälaisia odotuksia sinulla itselläsi oli niitä kohtaan?

- Minkälaiseksi kuvailisit toimintaa yritykselläsi?
- Jos sinun pitäisi kategorisoida tämä yritys, mihin laittaisit sen? (esim hotelli / kissan hoplop yms?)

- Mikä sai sinut perustamaan kyseisen yrityksen? Tai miten päädyit nykyiseksi omistajaksi?
- Mitkä asiat piti ottaa huomioon heti alusta lähtien?
- Koetko, että kilpailu on kovaa kyseisellä alalla? Ja mitä asioita teet jotta varmistat pysyväsi alalla?

- Nimi, mitkä asiat vaikuttivat siihen ?
- Miten itse arvioisit nimen vaikuttavan asiakaskuntaan ja siihen, millaisia ennakko-odotuksia se luo mahdollisille asiakkaille?

- Mitkä asiat vaikuttavat yrityksesi toimintaan?
- Isoin asiakaskunta sinulla?
- Osaatko mainita, mitkä mielestäsi ovat yleisimmät asiakasodotukset ja miten itse koet että juuri Hyrinä vastaa niihin?

- Palaten lemmikkeihin, kuinka varmistat, että lemmikit parhaiten sopeutuisivat tiloihin tänne tullessaan? Mitä asioita voisit kertoa esimerkkinä? Asiat jotka mahdollistavat lemmikin pikaisen sopeutumisen?
- Returning customers? Eli takaisin palaavat asiakkaat. Erotatko asiakkaiden odotuksissa hoitolaa kohtaan eroja? Mitä ne voisivat olla?

- Määrittele termi kissahotelli tai kissahoitola. Entä mitä tai minkälaisia asioita yhdistät siihen?

Appendix 2. Interview structure for customers

<u>Perusasiat | Basics</u>

- henkilön suostumus haastatteluun + ikä (N/M)
- Lemmikin nimi ja rotu ja ikä?
- matkusteleeko paljon?
- Koetko, että lemmikkisi ei rajoita matkustamista? kyllä→ Miksi?

<u>Lemmikin hyvinvointi | Well-being of the pet</u>

- Pystyisitkö kuvailemaan lemmikkisi persoonaa / luonnetta ? Esim. onko ujo vai ulospäinsuuntautunut jne

- mitkä asiat ovat sinulle tärkeitä lemmikin hyvinvoinnissa?

- mitä lemminkin tai lemmikkiisi liittyviä hyvinvointopalveluita olet käyttänyt? Jos et ole, miksi et ole käytänyt niitä palveluita?

<u>Hoitopaikka lemmikille | Place for the pet (while travelling)</u>

- Milloin koet tarvitsevasi hoitopaikan / hoitajan lemmikillesi?

- oletko ikinä antanut lemmikkiäsi muiden hoitoon esim reissun tai työmatkan takia?

- Ei → miksi? Kyllä → Minkälaisen hoitopaikan järjestät tai olet järjestänyt lemmikillesi?
- *Jos kaverille, miksi juuri se kaveri ?*

- Mitkä asiat koet vaikuttaneen tähän päätöseen?
- Mitä asioita pidät tärkeinä henkilöllä, joka huolehtii lemmikistäsi poissaollessasi?
- Millä tavalla esimerkiksi tuttujen suositukset vaikuttavat sinun päätökseesi hoitolan suhteen?

- Oletko käyttänyt lemmikkihoitola / lemmikkihotellipalveluita viimeaikoina ja jos olet kuinka usein? JOS OLET → mistä kuulit paikoista ja mikä sai sinut avaaamaan nettisivut?

- 2 tuntematonta paikkaa, molemmat tarjoavat hotellin kaltaista majoitusta lemmikillesi, mitkä asiat vaikuttavat lopulliseen päätökseen?

- Oletko etsinyt viimeaikoina tietoa lemmikkihoitolapalveluista esimerkiksi sosiaalisen median välityksellä? Ja jos olet, mikä asia sai sinut avaamaan hoitolan nettisivut mm.? (nimi, sijainti jne.?)

- Onko sinulle oleellista, että hoitopaikalla on SoMe (esimerkiksi facebook tili, instagram tms)? Ja miksi?

- Muita asioita, jotka mahdollisesti ovat vaikuttaneet hoitopaikan valintaan?

- Mitkä asiat ovat tärkeimpiä sinulle lemmikkisi hoitoa koskevissa asioissa? (erikoisruoka, tilaa leikkiä, eläinrakas ihminen)
- Ja olisiko tärkeää, että saat lemmikistäsi päivitystä hoitojakson aikana ? ja miksi`?
- Olisiko sinulle tärkeää päästä katsomaan lemmikkihotelli / hoitopaikka ennen sen paikan valintaa? / Lemmikin viemistä sinne hoitoon? Miksi?

- Mitä ajatuksia sinulle tulee mieleen sanasta "lemmikkihotelli" ? Pystytkö itse määrittelemään kyseisen termin?

- Mitkä ovat tai olivat omat odotuksesi, kun veit lemmikin hoitoon/ mitkä olisi sinun odotuksesi kyseistä paikkaa kohtaan?

Appendix 3. Affinity diagram for thematic analysis

People	Trust	Environment	Well-being
Skills	Relationship	Hygiene	Experience
Knowledge	People	Peace	Skills
Reliability	Name	Distance	Money
Care	Reliablity	Atmosphere	Updates
Experience	Comfortable	Cozy	Trust
Trust	Clean	Warm	Feeling
1st visit	1st visit	Welcoming	1st visit