Pets As Extended Self in the Context of Pet Food Consumption

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the construct of extended self is connected to pets and especially to pet food consumption. Literature review showed that the construct of extended self relating to pets consists of three opposing aspect pairs: personal and social, symbolic and functional as well as attachment and control. Our empirical data was quantitative by its nature. As a result, our data suggests that those consumers who regarded their pets as their self extensions differ from other respondents and consume pet food differently than the others. Furthermore, most of the theoretically found aspects could be connected to pet food consumption patterns.

For long, one of the basic assumptions of consumer behaviour has been that consumers’ possessions have meanings beyond their utilitarian benefit (e.g. Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Wallendorf, Belk and Heisley 1988). Accordingly, it has been claimed that we define, learn and remind ourselves through consumption objects. In this way, consumption objects become consumers’ extended self. (Belk 1988.)

Belk in his seminal work (1988) provides evidence from several disciplines for the existence of the construct of extended self, its functions, processes related to it and different categories of possessions it could be applied to. One of the possessions categories in which the construct of extended self has been applied to is pets. When seeing pets as extended self, consumers adopt pets’ traits, behaviours, and appearance and project their own personality onto the pet (Beck and Katcher 1983, 253; Savishinsky 1986, 120-121). There is also plenty of evidence in the research of human-animal bond stemming from various disciplines concerning pets as self extensions or parts of consumers’ self (e.g. Beck and Katcher 1983; Savishinsky 1986). In spite of the large attention and discussion for and against (Cohen 1989) the construct of extended self has gained, it still seems to remain ambiguous.

Moreover, the construct of extended self has not been connected to consumption and buying behaviour. It is noticed that consumers’ possessions reflect consumers’ self, but how does this show in consumers’ consumption behaviour? Especially, the connections between seeing the pet as extended self and buying products to it, is yet to be studied (cf. Aylesworth, Chapman and Dobscha 1999).

In this paper, we aim to grasp the ambiguous construct of extended self as it is seen related to pets. More specifically we are to study pet food consumption of those consumers who see their pets as their extended self. Food consumption is chosen to our study context because it is something that both pets and humans have in common. In this study pet food consumption refers to both buying pet food and feeding the pet.

We set following objectives to our study. First, we offer a literature review concerning pets as extended self in order to clarify different aspects of the extended self construct. Literature review is based on both consumer behaviour research as well as on studies related to human-animal bond from other disciplines. Second, we set three empirical objectives: characterising the extended self group, comparing pet food consumption between the extended self group and the others, and connecting empirical results with the theoretical aspects of the construct of extended self. The study is exploratory in a sense that it approaches the phenomenon quantitatively, while it previously has mainly been studied qualitatively. On the whole, we wish to contribute to the much discussed construct of extended self in order to provide building blocks for both theory-building and further empirical testing of the construct.

CLARIFYING THE CONSTRUCT OF EXTENDED SELF RELATED TO PETS

During the literature analysis we found out that the construct of extended self seemed to be an ambiguous one. Belk (1988; 1989; 1996) makes a significant contribution in his works in recognizing the construct, but however, it still seems to remain complicated. In order to make it clearer, we reorganized and made visible some of the central, earlier often implicitly recognized aspects of it. These aspects seem to be even opposing, but still simultaneously present.

Even though it might be possible to recognize more aspects, we chose three aspect pairs under examination, because they seemed important especially when related to pets. Besides they came up in consumer behaviour literature, they were also found in studies concerning human-animal interaction in other disciplines. First, even though the construct of extended self refers to a consumer’s self-concept and personality, it is also highly social by nature. Second, consumers have both symbolic and functional roles for their possessions that are regarded as extended self. Third, consumers seem to form close emotional attachment to possessions, especially to pets, and it also seems to be so that control over and by those possessions is an important element when a pet is viewed as extended self. Next, we look at these aspects more closely from the standpoint of pets as self extensions.

Extended Self as Personal and Social Construct

The construct of extended self includes both personal and social aspects. Supporting this view Belk (1996, 127) found out that pet owners claimed their pets to fit to their personalities, lifestyles and families, which as such reflects personal and social aspects.

It is reasonable to assume that pets can mirror owners’ personalities and traits, both positive and negative (Belk 1996, 128). It is even stated that human’s choice of an animal is itself a definition of a self. A pet could be compared to a hair style or clothing. (Savishinsky 1983, 120.)

To explain this, it is claimed that pets are seen as us, because a pet is a representation of ourselves as infants. The pet is the self as an infant, who is no longer part of nature and not yet trained to live in adult society. (Beck and Katcher 1983, 88.) In this role, the pet represents the id of its owner (Hirschman 1994, 618). Consumers, as adult human beings must control his/her doings and beings very closely, but pets can freely express emotions that might be forbidden for human beings (Beck and Katcher 1983, 89; Savishinsky 1983, 120). This could explain that when consumers are mourning for the lost pet they are mourning besides the pet, also because of their lost childish nature. So, when we are mothering our pets we would be mothering ourselves. (Beck and Katcher 1983, 90; cf. also Belk 1988, 144.)

Moreover, pets have been seen as vehicles for narcissistic love, and thus they are used to express love to oneself. It is seen that animals have so little personality of their own that pet owner projects attributes he chooses to the pet without feelings of contradiction. Indeed, when we are talking about the love the pets offer,
we are talking about our feelings, not pets’ feelings. All pets may be used narcissistic ways, but interesting examples are exotic animals, like snakes or wildcats. (Beck and Katcher 1983, 92-95.)

Self extension is seen especially evident for men, who own large, aggressive male dogs. In these cases, pet owner can see himself in the sexual potency and virility of his dog. He may even react negatively to suggestions of the dog to be castrated or might resist dog leash laws. (Beck and Katcher 1983, 253; Hirschman 1994, 620; Savishinsky 1983, 120).

A phenomenon labelled persona perception is closely connected to personal aspect of the construct of extended self. This phenomenon means that consumers attach companion animals’ personalities to those of the animals’ human owners. Usually, this is directed to somebody else and often pet is a projective target for negative feelings that consumers might have towards for example family members. (Hirschman 1994, 621.)

Like this latter example shows, self is expressed in different levels; we don’t exist only as individuals but also as groups (Belk 1988, 152). Even though, Belk (1998, 145) claims that he focuses on individual; he still cannot leave the social nature of this phenomenon without attention. As he says, person-thing – relationship is never two-way, but always three-way, person-thing-person (Belk 1988, 147). This view was even more emphasized from the perspective of symbolic interactionism in which it is claimed that there are different ways of expressing and defining social group memberships through consumption possessions. It is seen that self derives from actor’s social interactions in the ongoing process of self-definition (Sanders 1990, 662). As Solomon (1990, 68) says, this discussion “helps us to move toward the embrace of phenomenological individual who actively uses goods to construct and maintain his/her social reality”. Thus, possessions are used in order to extend the social self. For instance, it could be claimed that owning a horse involves identifying oneself into the social group of certain type of horse owners.

**Extended Self as Symbolic and Functional Construct**

Besides personal and social aspects, the construct of extended self includes also symbolic and functional aspects. Symbolically pets are expressions of consumers’ identities and functionally they are consumers’ appendages (Belk 1996, 128). Objects extend consumers not only symbolically helping them being something desired but also literally by giving possibilities of doing things that they couldn’t otherwise do. These two functions are integrally related to having these possessions that enable us being and doing the desired. (Belk 1988, 145-146.)

First, explaining symbolic nature of the construct, it is found out that in several cultures either owners are named after their pets or pets names reflect owner’s wishes to be identified. For example, aggressive, humorous or literary names communicate pet owners individual or class values. By this way, pet owners indirectly label themselves by naming their pets. (Savishinsky 1983, 119-120; Solomon 1990, 69.)

Second, pets literally aid consumers to do certain things, which gives pets functional roles. There are several supporting examples for this. Before cars, horses were largely used as equipment for transportation and travelling, and horses also helped in hunting and farm activities (Hirschman 1994, 618). Nowadays, animals can still have many functional properties; especially dogs have several functions as such. Dogs are used to protect consumers’ homes, find bombs and drugs, they serve as companion to handicapped or guide for deaf and blind, and they assist in instructing children and are helpful in therapy for elderly and infirm people.

Functional role of pets can be seen in strong emotions that are directed to pets, for example losing a pet has been compared even to loosing an arm or a leg (Belk 1996, 128). Also, symbolic role is highlighted in emotions, for pet owners may feel proud about their dog, cat or horse when it wins in a competition. Similarly, criticism directed to consumer’s pet might cause shame when it is deserved and anger when it isn’t. (Belk 1996, 127; Sanders 1990, 665-666; Solomon 1990, 68.)

**Control and Attachment as Aspects of Extended Self**

Finally, control and attachment are aspects of the extended self construct. First, control over and by objects is seen to result in feelings that relates objects to consumer’s identity (Belk 1988, 140-141; 1989, 130). Control over pets is shown in several ways, for example consumers seem to want dress and groom their pets according to their own wishes, want to train their pets to obey them and show mastery over a pet by birth control or neutering a pet (Belk 1996, 132-133). On the other hand, pets seem to control consumers’ lives too. Pets need never-ending attention and care on a daily basis, they may be messy and may do damage to our homes or even family members, and despite time demands, consumers spend enormous amounts of money to their pets (Belk 1996, 125; Voith 1981).

Second, distinction between an object having just mnemonic value and an object reflecting pet owner’s extended self is be made according the type of attachment. In order to an object to be extended self, consumer should have emotional, not just functional attachment towards it. (Belk 1989, 130.)

Indeed, being closely attached to one’s pets implies seeing animal as a part of self. By this way pet is seen that much part of self that consumers couldn’t imagine living without it. This would be realised especially when pet owners have extreme troubles getting over of the lost of a pet. A test for this non-rational attachment would be when pet owner is not willing to substitute a pet by a functional equivalent. (Belk 1996, 126.)

These three aspect pairs depict the construct of extended self related to pets. How do these aspects appear when consumption is directed toward pets? This is where we put our focus on in the following empirical part.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Data Collection**

As our empirical aim was to explore how consumers’ seeing their pets as extended self can be found to explicate their pet food consumption, quantitative structured interviews were performed to gather the data. Indeed, Belk (1989, 129) states that the construct of extended self can be feasible in both positivist and non-positivist research. The present study lies somewhere between these two extremes.

Structured interviews were conducted with Finnish pet owners in the autumn of 2003. Total sample consisted of 264 respondents (ages 20-86, 34% males and 66% females). Concerning the general representativeness of the sample, women were overrepresented, but otherwise demographic and socio-economic profiles of the respondents were in line with the general characteristics of the population in Finland. Respondents owned wide range of various pets. Structured interviews were performed by students from a course of consumer behaviour as a part of their course requirements. Interviewers were trained before-hand by the authors of this paper and they were assigned to choose respondents representing different demographic and socio-economical backgrounds.

**Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire consisted of items concerning respondents’ relationships to their pets, their own food consumption and their pet food consumption. All the items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type
scale. The analysis of the respondents’ own food consumption is not included in this paper. However, the formulation of these items is discussed briefly here because they gave a base for pet food consumption items.

There has been critique toward an overall measurability of the construct of extended self (cf. Cohen 1989). Despite of this critique, Belk (1989, 130) introduces a way to measure extended self starting by naming important objects, experiences and peoples in a person’s life. He further suggests that straightforward questions about what defines a person and what objects belong to a person’s self are generally sufficient. In our research, we were interested in seeing pets as extended self, so we started asking directly about the respondents’ relationships towards their pets.

The items concerning the respondent’s relationship to his/her pet were developed on the basis of prior literature. Previously, pets have been seen both as objects (avocations, ornaments, toys or status symbols) and as companions (family members, friends, extended self) (Hirschman 1994; Beck and Katcher 1983; Belk 1988; Belk 1996). All these aspects were measured in our questionnaire, however, as the focus in this paper is on pets as extended self only those items are taken under further consideration. In total, four items concerned pets as extended self: 1) “I don’t care what other people say about my pet” (used in a reversed form in analysis: “I do care what other people say about my pet”), 2) “The appearance of my pet is well in accord with my style”, 3) “On the base of a pet one can conclude a lot about its owner” and 4) “My pet is part of me”.

The developed items exemplify the aspect pairs of the construct of extended self presented previously in the theoretical part of this paper. Thus, by formulating these items we offer the first attempt to quantify the aspects of the construct of extended self. Personal aspect of extended self is seen to be highlighted in the second and the fourth item, and social aspect is seen especially in the first, the second and the third item. Symbolic as well as functional role of extended self is reflected in the second item, because seeing pet as a part of personal style could be seen both symbolic and functional. Other roles of functional aspects of extended self were not included, because they would be too relationship- and animal species-specific (e.g. safe would be provided more likely by a Rottweiler than by a cat). Attachment towards a pet could be seen in the items one and four. According to our view, control over a pet is seen in the items two and three.

*Food consumption items* were based on the food-related lifestyle measurement instrument devised by Grunert, Brunso, and Bisp (1993). This measurement instrument is developed to measure consumers’ food consumption rather broadly distinguishing following categories of food-related lifestyle: shopping scripts, meal preparation scripts, desired higher-order product attributes, usage situations and desired consequences. However, we adapted the instrument so that we included only those items to the questionnaire which were previously found to work best in Finland (Laaksonen, Laaksonen, and Leipämaa 2002). This is how we ensured that only relevant items were asked.

*Pet food consumption items* were developed on the basis of food consumption items. The contents of these items were designed to follow food consumption items as straight as possible. For example, when the original item was “I always try to get the best quality for the best price”, the pet food item was formulated as “I always try to get the best quality for the best price when I am buying pet food.” However, in some cases the formulation of the item had to be changed lightly in order to ensure that the item would be logical in the case of pet food consumption.

### Validity Assessment

Validity of the study can be assessed in terms of the extent the measure actually measures what it is intended to measure. Validity can be improved by developing measurement instrument so that it does not allow systematic error, thus ensuring the construct validity. Within construct validity, nomological validity is based on consistency between theoretical concepts and measures of those concepts, which renders it the most important validity type of this research. Other types of construct validity, convergent and discriminant validity are not discussed here, because the correlation between two different measurements is not of interest in this research. Instead, the focus is on testing whether there are differences in consumption behaviour of two different groups of respondents (extended self group and others). (cf. Peter 1981, 136-138; Churchill 1979, 70-71.)

Consequently, in the following discussion we consider only nomological validity. For this Pearson correlation matrix (Table 1.) of the extended self items was generated. On the basis of the correlations Cronbach’s alpha was calculated. As a result Cronbach’s alpha reached the required level (0.74; thus scoring 0.60 and 0.90).

Statistical validation was reached even if one the items (“I do care what other people say about my pet”) did not correlate significantly with the others. However, it was included in analysis, because as discussed in theoretical section the construct of extended self is divergent. Indeed, this particular item is theoretically related to the construct of extended self emphasising especially social and attachment aspects as discussed above. As a whole, correlation within other relationship items was not tested, because consumers’ relationships with their pets are not expected to be just extended self by its nature, instead it is assumed that consumers have multifaceted relationship with their pets.

### Results

Next, we move on analysing our empirical results. Three empirical questions guide our analysis. First, we characterize those respondents who saw their pets as extended self. Second, we further analyze their pet food consumption in comparison to other respondents. Third, we explore how these results can be connected to the aspects of the construct of extended self.

#### Characteristics of the Extended Self Group

We identified the group of respondents regarding their pets as extended self by selecting a subset of the respondents on the base of extended self -items. In order to become selected to the subset, a respondent should have agreed either partially or totally on a 5-point scale (1=disagree totally, 2=disagree partially, 3=neutral, 4=agree partially, 5=agree totally) with at least three of the four items. According to Belk (1989, 130) the concept of extended self should be seen more like relative than absolute. This is why we wanted to use rather strict condition to our subset. Moreover, by this way we ensured that those respondents who become selected to the extended self group saw strongly their pets as self extensions.

In total, 74 respondents (28% of total sample) were selected to the extended self group. Differences between this group’s and the other respondents’ demographic, socioeconomic and pet related backgrounds were tested with One-Way ANOVA.

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1) “I do care what other people say about my pet”. 2) “The appearance of my pet is well in accord with my style”. 3) “On the base of a pet one can conclude a lot about its owner” and 4) “My pet is part of me”
As a result, none of the demographic and socio-economic variable of these respondents did differ significantly from the other respondents \((p>0.05)\). Instead, the extended self group owned different kinds of pets having significantly more dogs \((p<0.05)\) and significantly less small pets \((p<0.05)\), as hamsters, than the others. Those respondents who did not see their pets as extended self had almost same number of dogs and cats.

Moreover, the breeds of the dogs differed between these two respondent groups. When coding the data dogs were grouped according to FCI’s (Fédération Cynologique Internationale) breed groups. The extended self –group owned significantly more dogs from the breed groups one (Sheepdogs and Cattle Dogs), two (Pinscher, Schnauzer and Molossoid Breeds) and nine (Companion and Toy Dogs), instead the others owned more dogs of Spitz and Primitive Type Breeds \((p<0.01)\). Dogs from group eight ( Retrievers, Flushing Dogs and Water Dogs) were common among the respondents and were owned almost same number in both groups. This may be due to the overall generality of Retrievers and Spaniels in Finland.

Furthermore, the extended self group was significantly more engaged to their pets than the others \((p<0.01)\). Slightly over half of them said that they do have some activities with their pets, as going out together, being together, or taking agility or obedience classes, whereas 66% of the others said that they didn’t have any avocation with their pets.

**Pet Food Consumption of the Extended Self Group**

Our second empirical question was to analyse pet food consumption of the extended self group compared to others. Differences in the pet food consumption were tested using One-Way ANOVA.

Most of the pet food consumption items didn’t reveal significant differences between the two groups. However, the extended self group and the others differed significantly according to some pet food consumption patterns. Significant differences are presented in table 2. First, the extended self group emphasised more quality \((p<0.01)\) and prices \((p<0.01)\) than the other respondents. Second, giving pleasure to their pets by feeding was seen more important \((p<0.05)\) in that group than among others. Third, the extended self group’s self-esteem was added a lot when their pets’ feeding was praised \((p<0.001)\) and they knew better how their pets should be fed \((p<0.01)\). Fourth, these respondents planned their pet feeding ahead more often than the others \((p<0.001)\). In sum, price and quality consciousness, pleasure giving, self-esteem and knowledge concerning pet feeding as well as planning the pet feeding were more important to the extended self group than to the other respondents.

**Connecting Empirical Results and the Aspects of Extended Self**

Next, we analyse the connections between empirical results and the theoretical aspects of extended self (personal, social, symbolic, functional, control and attachment) identified previously in this study. Our analysis is tentative of its nature, and more than precise results, we wish to give building-blocks for future research.

Concerning consumer characteristics, pet species, breeds and interests with pets of the extended self group naturally indicate most of the aspects rather directly. This is because our subset was selected on the base of extended self-items. This validates our items at some level. We next further analyze some of the most interesting results in order to give examples of different aspects appearing in consumer characteristics.

Related to pet species, those consumers who saw their pets as extended self had more dogs, whereas the others had dogs and cats same amount. Moreover, consumers who did not see their pets as extended self had more small pets than those who did. This makes perfectly sense, because cats and other pets living mostly inside house are not as visible as dogs. Thus, this could be interpreted so that dogs can be related more easily to social and symbolic aspects of extended self.

Moreover, dog breed groups that contained breeds like Rottweiler, Doberman, German Shepherd and so on, were significantly more common among consumers who saw their pets as extended self (cf. Hirschman 1994). In addition, it seemed that also small Companion and Toy Dogs would reflect their owners’ self. On the other hand, consumers who did not see their pets as extended self owned more often Spitz and Primitive Type Dogs. Those are mostly dogs that are used for hunting and traditionally in Finland they seem to possess more of a utilitarian value than that of a companion to whom consumers form deep attachment. Thus, the findings of Hirschman (1994) are both confirmed and added with new and more specified elements concerning pet species and dog breeds.

In addition, the social nature of this phenomenon is confirmed by the finding that consumers who see their pets as extended self do have an avocation with their pets more often than the others. This is also in line with the results concerning pet species and breeds.

When all the three aspect pairs were present in the case of consumer characteristics, also most of the aspects could be found in pet food consumption. A few aspects of the construct of extended self can be highlighted for each item. Table 3 illustrates these

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I do care what other people say about my pet</th>
<th>My pet is part of me</th>
<th>I do care what other people say about my pet</th>
<th>The appearance of my pet is well in accord with my style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( r )</td>
<td>0.043</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.353**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The appearance of my pet is well in accord with my style</td>
<td>( r )</td>
<td>0.324**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the base of a pet one can conclude a lot about its owner</td>
<td>( r )</td>
<td>0.347**</td>
<td>0.027</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson correlation matrix, \((scale \ 1-5)\), \(*<0.1, **<0.05, ***<0.01\)
connections between pet food consumption items and different aspects of the extended self construct.

First, the extended self group emphasised *quality and price* in pet food consumption more than the others. This was an interesting result, because socio-demographic variables, like income or education did not vary between these two groups. So, the differences in price and quality emphasis can’t be explained by background information. Instead, both of these first two items could be interpreted as indicating the personal nature of pets seen as extended self. Moreover, it could be seen that consumers want to show both their attachment and control over pet by saying that it is important to get best quality for the pet. They want, maybe unconsciously, be in charge of their pets feeding. However, when they see that the pet needs food of high-quality, it could be interpreted as a way of showing emotions towards a pet.

Second, the extended self group seemed to emphasise also the pleasure in pets’ eating. This could indicate the role of attachment. When consumers have deep emotional attachment towards pets, it
does matter whether the pet enjoys its meal. Moreover, by definition when pets are seen as extended self, the pleasure in pets eating could refer also to personal pleasure, pleasure for oneself.

Third, the personal nature came up also in items “Being praised for my pet’s feeding adds a lot to my self-esteem” and “I know well how to feed my pet”. The first one, however, very well describes how the construct of extended self is personal and social at the same time; it is about oneself in a social context. To be aware of social context refers also to the possibility that there are symbolic meanings attached to pet feeding.

Fourth, consumers who saw their pets as extended self seem to plan their pets feeding more carefully than those who didn’t see their pets as extended self. This could mean that consumers want to have a control over their pets. Moreover, extended self group scored higher in item “I notice when pet food products I regularly buy change in price”, which could indicate planning as well. However, it could be interpreted that not only control but also attachment plays a role here. In an opposite case, when a consumer would not have emotional attachment towards a pet, probably he/she would not plan its feeding that carefully. These last two items can be connected to the personal aspect of extended self too.

The connection to the personal aspect could be explained also by the fact that most of the items were grammatically formulated in the first singular format. Instead, the functional aspect didn’t appear in any of these items. This is at least partly due to the formulation of the items.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we analyzed the group of consumers which regards their pets as extended self. Furthermore, we explored how this close relationship with one’s pet can be seen in one’s consumption behaviour concerning the pet.

According to our results it could be argued that the construct of extended self is indeed relevant in consumer behaviour related to pets. There was actually a distinct group of consumers who regarded their pets as extended self in our data.

We found out that 28% of the respondents in our sample could be interpreted as seeing their pets as self extensions quite strongly. Further, according to our findings seeing pets as extended self did not vary by socio-demographic variables. Instead, it seemed that certain animal species, breeds and avocation with pets made a significant difference between those consumers who saw their pets as extended self and those who didn’t. Further, we were able to take a step forward in the study of extended self by finding certain amount of significant differences in pet food consumption. Consciousness regarding prices and quality, pleasure giving, self-esteem, knowledge and planning pet’s feeding were emphasized among extended self group.

Even though, Belk (1989, 131) says that the research in consumer behaviour and study of extended self should not concentrate on positivist notions of explanation and prediction, the construct seemed to have some explanatory power over consumption behaviour in our research. Thus, our study confirms that the construct of extended self is not just theoretical of its nature. Therefore, the present study gives support to Belk’s work on the contrary to Cohen’s critique (1989). Moreover, the fact that we found a connection between seeing pets as extended self and consumption behaviour in pet food confirms Belk’s (1988, 157) notion that extended self would play a role in vicarious consumption. According to this view, we could for example conclude that buying high quality food for one’s pet, so that the quality could be apparently seen in pet’s coat, would exactly be consuming vicariously through a pet. Thus, the admiration the consumer’s pet possibly gains, is admiration to the consumer. Similarly, the idea that extended self–group seem to want their pets to enjoy their food, would indicate that indeed they want to get the same pleasure themselves.

In this paper we approached our research questions in an explorative way. In the future, more quantitative validation is needed in order to further testing the measure instrument. On the other hand, this phenomenon could be studied qualitatively in order to get a deeper understanding over it. Indeed, the extended self construct is claimed to contribute to consumer behaviour especially by adding our understanding about consumers (Belk 1989, 131). This could also give support to interpretations presented in this paper concerning the different aspects’ connections to consumption items. For example, the functional aspect of the extended self construct could be further analysed qualitatively as our data didn’t show any connections between functional aspects and pet food consumption behaviour. Doesn’t it actually play a role in this construct in this specific context?

On the other hand, the personal aspects did appear simultaneously with the social aspects as well as the attachment aspects and the control aspects were intertwined. These could be thought as juxtapositions which are present at the same time. In today’s post-modern society, it is seen that a consumer is living in a world of contradictions (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Moreover, it is seen that in current time the self is empty and fragmented. This is a self that seeks continually to be fulfilled for example by consuming goods, calories, experiences, politicians, romantic partners and emphatic therapists. (Cushman 1990) Self with its extensions is thus still an essential construct in a post-modern consumer research highlighting fragmented, decentred and opposing views to self.

Moreover, future studies could be more in detail focused on the relationship between consumption directed to oneself and to one’s pet. Food could still be a fruitful context to this kind of study setting. In fact, Belk (1988, 151) states that food is something that is very much related to oneself, so sharing food may be a symbolic way to represent group identity. In these future studies it could be assumed so that consumers represent their extended identity by sharing same food consumption patterns with their pets.

Our study offers some interesting managerial implications. The fact that there is a distinctive and recognizable group of consumers who regards their pets as their self extensions serves a good base for developing marketing activities. The share of these consumers was in our study as high as 28%. This is such a large consumer group that pet food products could be developed on this group’s terms. Indeed, our study suggests that price and quality consciousness, pleasure giving, self-esteem, knowledge and planning are important elements to those consumers concerning pet food consumption. These elements should be emphasized for example in advertising and product development when directing marketing to this group. In sum, these results confirm the idea that today’s marketing cannot be based just on demographic and socio-economic variables, instead we need deeper information about consumers.

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