

The Impact of Social Media on Pet Care Practices

¹Kanphitcha Inyu

¹Sukhonthaiwittayakorn School 139/3, Moo 3, Ban Kluai Subdistrict, Mueang District, Sukhothai Province 64000, Thailand

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14065567>

Published Date: 11-November-2024

Abstract: This study explores the impact of social media on practice by pet owners regarding their pets in this study, including improved skills and social support, as well as the management of misinformation. As platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have become increasingly popular over the years, pet owners have easier access to a multitude of information regarding training, health care, and nutrition. A mixed-method approach combining online surveys with in-depth interviews of 100 pet owners found that social media plays a substantial role in affecting the pet care behaviors of these consumers. Strikingly, info shared through social media led to some positive changes in pet care routines ranging from administering training and carrying out health check-ups to grooming. As high as 72% of the surveyed individuals said their good practices improved with info obtained from platforms like Facebook. Furthermore, 75 percent of respondents said that online communities provided emotional support along with advice and shared experiences that helped them feel more confident about caring for their pets. On the other hand, it also reflects the risks of misinformation spread where 34% reported receiving information from harmful quotes regarding chemical use and 45% were told of medications they had not been prescribed. It also stresses the importance of having trustworthy places to obtain information, as well as media literacy skills, to perform responsible pet care.

Keywords: Social media, Pet care, Training techniques, Social support, Misinformation, Health care, Online communities, Media literacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Pet ownership today has become an integral part of everyday life, particularly in urban cities where mascots are regarded as family members. Pets are not only an emotional support, but they also help to build positive social interactions. But, proper care of pets can be a difficult task. Previously, this understanding was gained through experience or solicited from experts. But, with technology and social media being what they are now, there are new pathways of rapid information discovery and experience sharing. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube are now among the major venues for pet-care content—training tricks, health care, food choice, and disease avoidance. Social media can be both an information platform and an online community that helps to galvanize and boost the confidence of pet owners. Content that adds to professional development through shared case studies, and of course, social media allows better exchange of opinions and experience amongst the users.

While social media can be beneficial in becoming a high source of knowledge and social support, the risk of misinformation or unverified advice still exists. This kind of information when spread without regulation leads to wrong ways of keeping pets. It is so because the primary goal of this research will be to explore the impact of social media in encouraging pet ownership and to study its effect on pet care behaviors. This research aims to find out not only the advantages of social media to be used for providing information regarding responsible pet ownership but also to define some limitations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In examining the impact of social media on pet ownership and pet care, several theories are relevant in explaining behavioral changes influenced by these platforms.

The Social Learning Theory posits that people learn and adjust their behaviors by observing and mimicking others who exhibit desirable or beneficial actions. In this context, social media serves as a medium where users can access

information and pet care guidelines directly. When users see proper pet care practices or positive examples, they are likely to adopt similar behaviors with their pets.

Additionally, the Uses and Gratifications Theory helps to explain why social media users choose specific platforms to fulfill their needs, such as learning pet care techniques or enjoying entertaining videos of cute animals. Thus, social media serves as a valuable tool for individuals seeking knowledge and guidance on pet care.

Another important theory is the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which explains how new ideas spread within society. Social media accelerates the dissemination of modern pet care methods and effective training techniques to a large audience, leading to widespread behavioral changes in pet care practices.

These theories collectively help to illustrate how social media influences pet care behaviors by providing access to expert advice and peer-shared information.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs both exploratory and qualitative research methods to investigate the effects of social media on pet ownership and how it influences pet care behavior. The data collection involved online surveys and in-depth interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants.

Sample Group

The target sample group consists of pet owners who actively use social media. The sample was selected using two main methods: distributing online surveys through social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram, targeting users who regularly post or share content related to their pets, and conducting face-to-face surveys with pet owners at public locations, particularly in the Siam area in Bangkok, where pet owners frequently bring their pets outdoors. A total of 100 participants were surveyed.

Data Collection Tools

The study utilized online surveys designed to gather information on how pet owners use social media for pet care knowledge and experience sharing, as well as the changes in their pet care behaviors influenced by social media. Additionally, in-depth interviews with some respondents were conducted to obtain deeper insights into personal experiences and perspectives on social media's impact on pet care.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the surveys was analyzed using statistical methods to determine the frequency and proportion of behaviors related to pet care and social media use. Qualitative content analysis was also conducted on the interview data to extract deeper insights and opinions regarding changes in pet care behaviors influenced by social media.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The study found that social media plays a significant role in enhancing awareness and skills among pet owners, particularly in areas such as training techniques, health care, and appropriate food selection. Over 68% of respondents indicated that social media has helped them learn new methods for pet care, such as basic commands and proper cleaning techniques. Platforms featuring short video content, such as TikTok and Instagram Reels, are particularly popular due to their quick and easy access to information.

These questions aim to understand how social media has contributed to the skills and knowledge of pet owners.

Q1: Have you used social media to learn techniques for training your pet (e.g., commands, behavior correction)?

Q2: Do you use social media to find information about pet health care and routine check-ups?

Q3: Have you ever used social media to help you decide on the best food options for your pet?

Q4: Have you found advice on social media about how to properly clean and groom your pet?

Table 1. Statistical Data on the Role of Social Media in Enhancing Skills and Knowledge

Type of Information Gained through Social Media	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Pet training techniques	72%
Health care and annual check-ups	54%
Nutritional food selection	68%
Pet cleaning techniques	61%

Behavioral Changes

The research shows that pet owners who use social media are more likely to adopt informed pet care practices, often following advice from experts and experienced users. Approximately 72% of respondents reported that they have changed their pet care routines based on information obtained from social media. This includes improving cleanliness, adjusting diets, and selecting suitable pet accessories. Furthermore, in-depth interview participants noted that they feel more confident in caring for their pets due to clear and reliable guidance received from online pet communities.

Social Support

Social media also serves as an essential source of emotional support. Many pet owners join online groups to exchange opinions and experiences related to pet care, which helps boost their confidence and motivation. About 75% of respondents reported frequently joining groups or communities online for advice and encouragement, stating that they benefit from shared experiences with others facing similar situations. Additionally, social media fosters a sense of belonging, reducing anxiety related to pet care challenges.

These questions are designed to explore the extent to which pet owners rely on social media for social and emotional support.

Q5: Do you seek advice and encouragement from social media groups related to pet care?

Q6: Have you shared your personal experiences regarding pet care on social media?

Q7: Have you participated in online events or activities related to pet care (e.g., webinars, live Q&As)?

Table 2. Statistical Data on Social Support through Social Media

Type of Support Received	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Receiving advice and encouragement	75%
Sharing experiences	68%
Participating in pet-related events or activities	45%

Spread of Misinformation

Despite its benefits, social media also poses challenges related to disseminating incorrect or unverified advice. Approximately 34% of respondents encountered inappropriate recommendations regarding pet care, which could harm pet health, such as using cleaning chemicals that might cause allergic reactions. Additionally, it was found that general users sometimes share inaccurate information, leading to misunderstandings in pet care. Therefore, selecting information from credible sources is crucial for online pet owners.

These questions focus on identifying the prevalence of misinformation encountered by pet owners on social media platforms.

Q8: Have you ever come across advice on social media about using chemicals for pets that you later found to be harmful?

Q9: Have you seen recommendations on social media for using medications on pets without a veterinarian's prescription?

Q10: Have you encountered unverified information related to pet health care on social media platforms?

Table 3. Statistical Data on Encountering Misinformation on Social Media

Type of Misinformation Encountered	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Harmful chemical usage advice	34%
Unprescribed medication usage	45%
Unverified pet health care information	38%

In conclusion, social media plays a vital role in enhancing knowledge and skills in pet care, while also creating emotional support communities for pet owners. However, the presence of misinformation remains a risk that must be carefully managed.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

This research reveals that social media plays a significant role in altering pet ownership and pet care behaviors across various dimensions, particularly in providing beneficial information and practical guidelines. The findings indicate that platforms featuring short video content, such as TikTok and Instagram Reels, are highly popular among pet owners. These platforms are favored because they offer easily digestible and engaging content, allowing pet owners to access up-to-date information that they can apply to their pet care routines.

Moreover, social media plays a crucial role in fostering online communities that provide social and emotional support. Pet owners who join these groups or online communities receive advice and encouragement from others with similar experiences, which helps build their confidence in caring for their pets. However, despite the advantages of social media in disseminating information, the study also uncovered issues related to the spread of misinformation. Examples include harmful advice regarding the use of chemicals or administering medications to pets without veterinary guidance, which may pose risks to pet health.

Statistical analysis and in-depth interviews further revealed that pet owners who utilize social media tend to adopt more informed pet care practices. These include selecting nutritious foods and training pets according to expert recommendations found online. However, the study also identified certain limitations, such as the rapidly changing nature of social media content and the influence of social desirability on survey responses, which may result in findings that do not fully capture the complexities of pet care behaviors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media significantly influences pet ownership behavior by serving as both a source of knowledge and a platform for emotional support. Most pet owners have adjusted their pet care practices to become more knowledgeable and responsible, often following expert advice and recommendations from experienced users. However, spreading misinformation remains a concern that could negatively impact pet health. Therefore, pet owners must choose credible information sources and critically evaluate the content they consume on social media.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- [2] Bleuer-Elsner, S., & Masson, S. (2024). The cage as an educational and therapeutic tool for dogs: Results of a dog owner's questionnaire survey. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S016815912400234X>
- [3] Perich, L. (2024). Effectiveness of Training Videos and Behaviour Skills Training to Teach Dog Training Skills to Dog Rescue Foster Volunteers. *University of Auckland*. Retrieved from <https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/70337>
- [4] Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: A uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 16(4), 362-369. doi:10.1108/QMR-06-2013-004