

Dog ownership as a way of life: urban service needs and owner motivations

Melissza Kíra Merk

Obuda University, Keleti Károly Faculty of Business and Management, Budapest,
Hungary,
melisszatab@gmail.com

Péter Szikora

Obuda University, Keleti Károly Faculty of Business and Management, Budapest,
Hungary,
szikora.peter@kgk.uni-obuda.hu

Abstract: The research focuses not only on animal love, but also on how dog ownership has become an increasingly complex lifestyle and social phenomenon, creating demand for many new types of services. The combined effects of urban lifestyles, busy work schedules, and emotional attachment to animals have led to a dramatic increase in demand for dog-related services such as dog grooming, daycare, boarding, pet transportation, dog fitness and online dog training. The primary objective of the research is to identify what services dog owners would use, how often and how much they would be willing to pay for them. In addition, the study aims to understand the preferences and motivations behind the choice of service provider and to identify promotional tools that could encourage owners to try a new service. The quantitative questionnaire targeted dog owners only, with particular attention paid to ensuring that only relevant respondents, i.e. those who actually own dogs, were included in the sample. The analysis of the data received not only provides useful information for service providers in terms of pricing and service development, but can also contribute to making society more sensitive to issues of responsible pet ownership and animal welfare. The research therefore serves both market and social objectives: it helps to better understand the needs and habits of pet owners, while also strengthening a culture of conscious and caring dog ownership.

Keywords: Dog-related services, consumer behaviour, payment willingness, urbanised lifestyle

1 Theoretical background

Many people who have dogs and are very attached to them may have wondered whether this special relationship has a mutually positive effect on both parties. This topic is addressed by Beetz, A. and colleagues in their 2012 study. They analysed 69 scientific publications to provide a comprehensive picture of the physiological and psychological effects of human-animal interactions. I consider it important to mention the significant social impact that animals have on humans. Several studies have confirmed that the presence of animals has a ‘social catalyst effect’ (McNicholas & Collis, 2000; Wood, Giles-Corti, & Bulsara, 2005; Walsh, 2009). For example, dogs facilitate conversation, increase trust and make people smile. In the case of children with autism, it has been observed that the presence of animals improves language skills. In addition, there is limited but convincing evidence that animals can help reduce aggression and develop empathy. Dogs also have an effect on mood and depression, as evidenced by the fact that individual dog programmes have been more effective in reducing loneliness than group interactions. In addition, animal-assisted therapies are effective in reducing depression, especially in the elderly and psychiatric patients. These results can be achieved through personal contact with animals, for example through physical touch. Human-animal interactions significantly reduce stress hormone levels; for example, cortisol levels decreased in several studies after petting animals, and some studies also support that epinephrine and norepinephrine levels are also reduced (Beetz, Uvnäs-Moberg, Julius, & Kotrschal, 2012; Handlin et al., 2011; Odendaal & Meintjes, 2003). Moving on from stress hormone levels, it is important to mention the anxiety-reducing effect, which is most evident in stressful situations. These positive effects are not only emotional but also physical, such as pain relief. There is little research on pain relief, but existing studies show positive results. There are also few studies on the effect of animals on learning, but existing studies show that the presence of animals increases concentration and motivation, which can facilitate learning. In terms of health, several large-scale surveys show that pet owners take less medication, visit the doctor less often and lead more mentally balanced lives.

Companion animals also have a positive effect on the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular problems. The reduction in heart rate and blood pressure has been proven many times, especially in the presence of one's own animal, and pet ownership is positively associated with heart attack survival rates. The key to these many positive effects is oxytocin, a hormone that reduces stress and promotes social bonding, which is released during petting, eye contact and other loving interactions, but is not solely responsible for them. Human-animal interaction and oxytocin overlap almost completely, as both improve social interactions and health and reduce stress and anxiety. Several studies have shown that even a few minutes of interaction between a dog and a human increases oxytocin levels in both the human and the animal, especially when it comes to one's own dog. The biological, psychological and social effects form a complex system in which human-animal interaction can be an effective tool for physical and mental well-being. (Beetz, Uvnäs-Moberg, Julius, & Kotrschal, 2012.)

Dogs exhibit social behaviours similar to those of humans, such as attachment, as dogs bond with their owners in a similar way to humans bonding with their parents. Ádám Miklósi and József Topál wrote about this in 2013, noting that dogs can interpret human communication, whether it be gestures or eye contact. (Miklósi & Topál, 2013.) From what has been described, we know that dogs have a lot of positive effects on us, so it is not surprising that there are many dog owners in the world and in Hungary

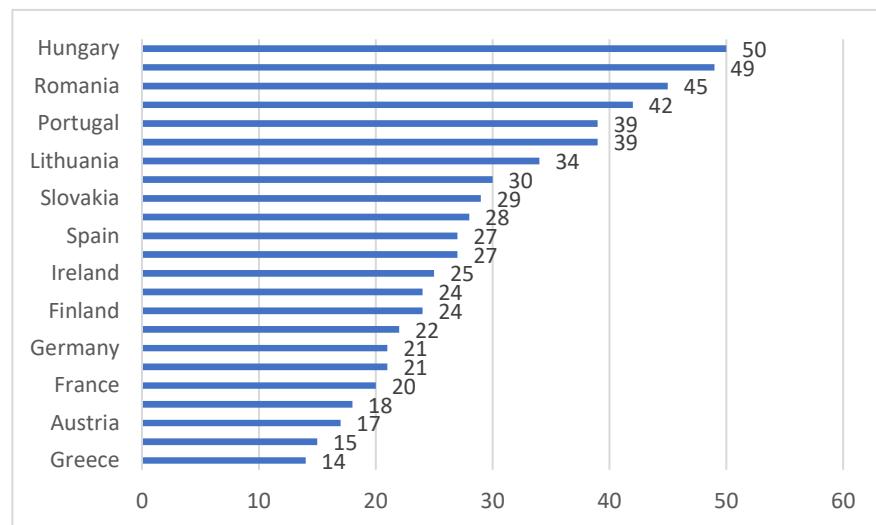


Figure 1
Percentage of households with dogs in Hungary (%) (2023) (Statista, 2023.)

The bar chart on Statista's official website shows the percentage of households with at least one dog in the European Union in 2023. Hungary ranks high on this list. (Statista, 2023.)

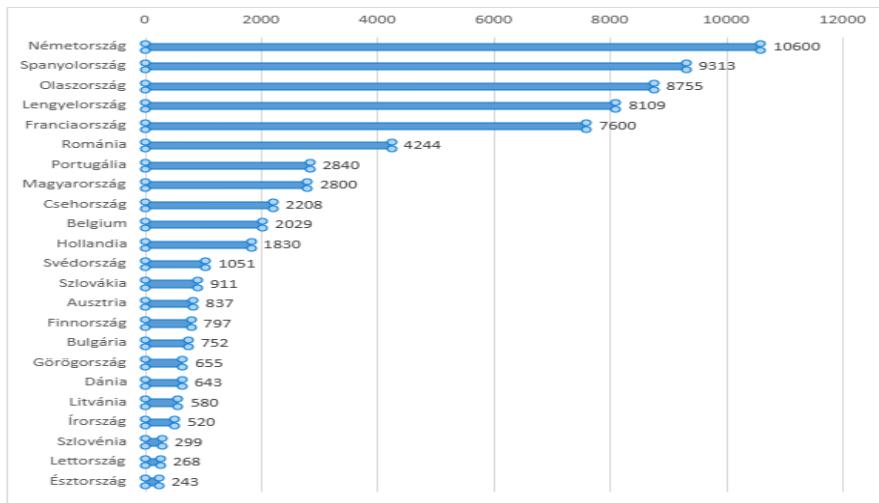


Figure 2
Number of dogs in the EU (thousands) (2023) (Statista, 2023.)

The other bar chart shows how many dogs there are in the countries of the European Union. In 2023, there were 2.8 million dogs registered in Hungary. We can see that in terms of the number of dogs, the country is in the upper middle of the European

Union, but in terms of households, it ranks first, followed closely by Poland, which is only 1% behind. From these statistics, we can conclude that there are proportionally many dog owners in Hungary and therefore many people may be affected by the topic of dog services. (Statista, 2023.) Examining the role of dog grooming is particularly important from the point of view of maintaining animal health, as many basic hygiene procedures are related to this service area. These include, for example, regular claw trimming, which is especially important for dogs that don't wear down their claws properly, as well as ear cleaning and sanitary clipping, which involves the hair around the eyes, paw pads, genitals and anus. (McDonald, Silver, Nienstadt, & Dombrowski, 2022.) These treatments not only increase the animal's comfort, but can also prevent inflammatory diseases, infections and skin irritations caused by matted fur. Regular grooming, including brushing and bathing, is especially important for breeds that are prone to matting. However, dog grooming services serve not only a health function but also an aesthetic one, as they allow for the creation of different styles and special procedures such as undercoat removal or trimming, which are essential for breeds with wiry or wire-haired coats. (Szinák, Bauman, Dömötör, & Bíró, 2023.)

2 Practical research

2.1 Presentation of the sample

After cleaning the sample, 568 respondents remained. The questionnaire was primarily completed by respondents from Pest County, Komárom-Esztergom County and Budapest, but there were also respondents from other regions of Hungary. The main target group was dog owners. I considered it important to design the questionnaire in such a way that respondents only answered questions to which they could give relevant answers. For example, respondents with dogs weighing 20+ kilograms were not asked questions about how much they would pay for a full grooming service for a small dog. I consider this kind of differentiation important because, in general, dog groomers determine their prices based on various factors that customers are not necessarily aware of. This means that the price for grooming a 5-kilogram Bichon Bolognese starts at 9,000 forints in many places, but someone who has a 30-kilogram German Shepherd is unlikely to pay six times 9,000 forints.

2.2 Results

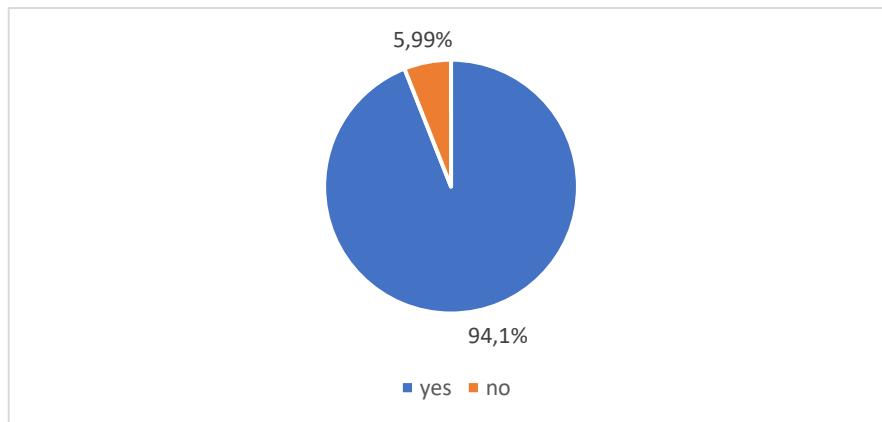


Figure 3
proportion of pet owners (own source)

Of the 568 respondents, 94.01% said they had some kind of pet, which shows that we managed to find the right group of pet owners to get real answers. Of all respondents, 67.96% only have dogs and 12.85% have dogs and some other small animal, such as a turtle. I also asked respondents what breed of dog they had, and surprisingly, most answered that they had a mixed breed, followed by Labrador and Golden Retriever, then Dachshund and Yorkshire Terrier. These are the five most

common dog breeds among respondents. This question was only asked to those who own a dog.

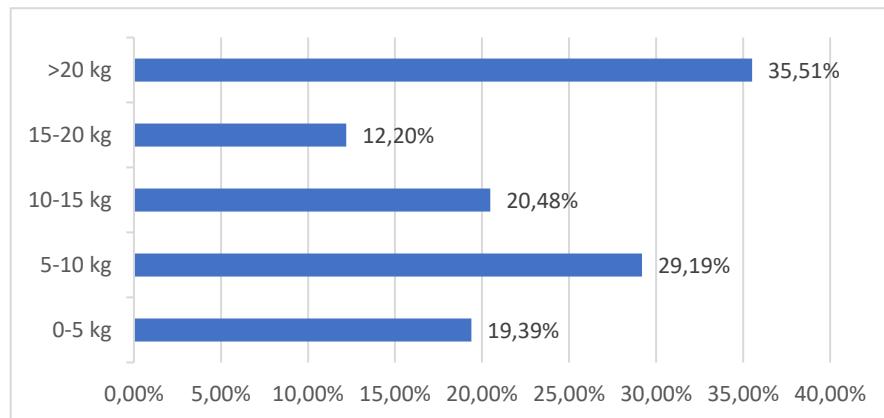


Figure 4
dog size (own source)

35.51% of respondents keep dogs weighing more than 20 kilograms, 29.19% keep dogs weighing between 5 and 10 kilograms, and almost the same proportion keep dogs weighing between 10 and 15 kilograms and/or between 0 and 5 kilograms. The smallest number of respondents have dogs weighing between 15 and 20 kilograms. Many people work from morning until late afternoon, so they may not necessarily have time to take their pets to service providers. I asked them if they would use an animal transport service, and 36.6% of respondents answered yes, which means that the vast majority would rather take care of transporting their pets themselves, but if such an option were available, more than a third of respondents would use this service.

In the next step, I asked whether the respondent was interested in dog grooming services, so I tried to filter out those respondents who, because they are not interested in this type of service, would probably indicate the lowest price in the price-related questions, which would not have given realistic results due to the irrelevance of the question. The filtered result was 274 respondents, whom I asked if they would be interested in having a dog groomer come to their home. Surprisingly, more than half of the respondents were interested, from which we can conclude that there would be demand for this service as well. There are people who are unable to take their dogs to various treatments for health or behavioural reasons, so home visits would be an excellent alternative in these cases.

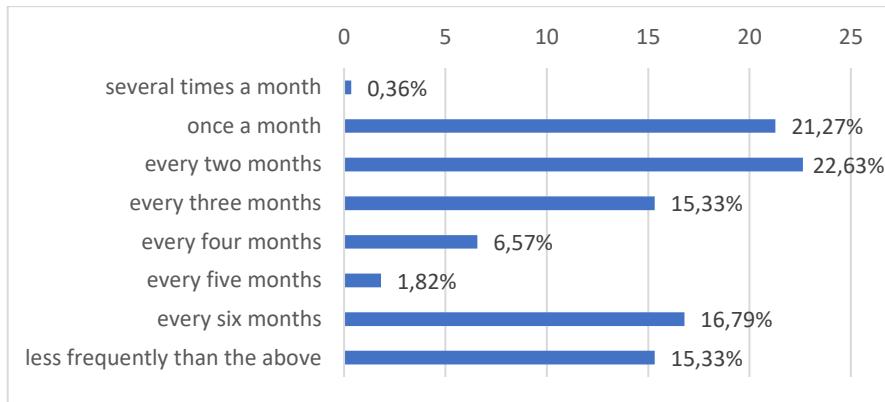


Figure 5
Frequency of using dog grooming services (own source)

I also asked them how often they use dog grooming services. More than half of the respondents take their dogs to the groomer at least once every three months, which is very important because regular customers are the most important source of income. More than three-quarters of respondents consider their dog's grooming to be very important, which is an important factor because it also has a significant influence on the frequency of visits to the dog groomer. This should not be interpreted as directly proportional for all dog breeds, as short-haired animals visit dog groomers less often than long-haired animals, even if grooming is very important to them. In the next step, I asked how much they were willing to pay for a full dog grooming service, taking into account the size of the dogs and the length of their hair. One category is short-haired animals and the other is long-haired animals. Professionally, long, double, curly, wire and wiry coats belong to separate categories, but for the sake of clarity, I classified them all as long-haired in the questionnaire. In the case of small long-haired dogs, most people would pay 8,000-9,000 forints, but there are some who would be willing to pay over 15,000 forints. In the case of short-haired small dogs, most people would pay 5,000-6,000 forints, but there are also respondents who would be willing to pay more than 10,000 forints. In the case of long-haired medium-sized dogs, 5,74% would pay more than 10,000-11,000 forints, while 11-13,000 forints would receive the highest percentage of votes for this criterion. However, less than 2% of respondents would be willing to pay more than 25,000 forints. In the case of short-haired medium-sized dogs, the vast majority of respondents would pay less than 10,000 forints, with the highest amount that still received votes being in the 17,000-20,000 forint category. In the case of long-haired, large dogs, the 10,000-15,000 forint category received the most votes, but there are those who would pay more than 40,000 forints. These results show that there is a huge variation, and it is striking to me that many people are unaware of market prices. I examined the price lists of various dog groomers and, on average, prices in Budapest are higher in this area as well, and based on

experience, customers in Budapest have more respect for professionals. I asked respondents if they would be interested in creative dog grooming, and only 14.86% answered yes. The majority of those who answered yes would pay 11,000-13,000 forints for such a service. After that, I moved on to questions about dog boarding and dog daycare. Of the 568 respondents, 41.9% said they were interested in dog boarding services. Most would pay between 5,000 and 6,000 forints per night, while the second largest group, less than 1% behind the first, would pay less than 5,000 forints. The yes answer also received a value close to 41% when I asked if they would be interested in a service where a qualified carer would visit their home every day to take care of their pet while they were away, including feeding, watering, administering medication if necessary, and walking the pet. This could also be an alternative service for those who prefer their dog to be at home while they are away.

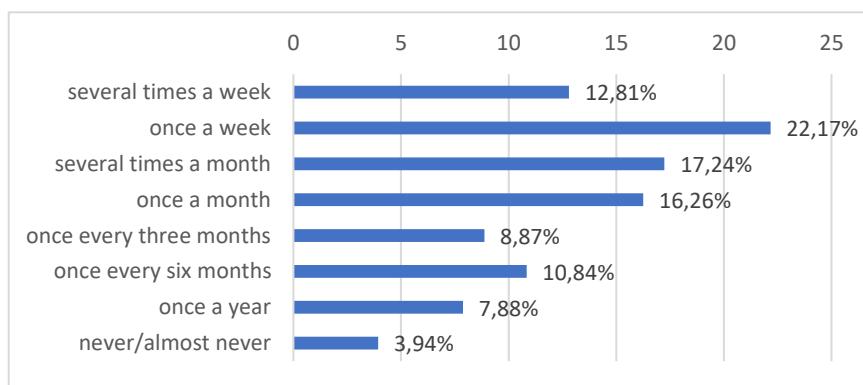


Figure 6
Use of dog daycare (own source)

Dog daycare is of interest to 35.74% of respondents, with more than 50% of the 203 interested respondents saying they would use the service several times a month and 68.48% saying they would use it at least once a month. Most respondents, approximately 34%, would pay a daily fee of between 4,500 and 5,500 forints, followed by those willing to pay less than 4,500 forints, and nearly 3% who would be willing to pay more than 9,500 forints.

The next questions were about dog fitness and dog sparring. From the results, I learned that 105 of the 568 respondents, or 18.49%, would be interested in dog fitness, with most willing to pay between 2,000 and 3,000 forints for such a training session, followed by 3,000-4,000 forints for such a training session, followed by 3,000-4,000 forints in second place. A dog fitness training session primarily refers to treadmill training in this case, or possibly even simpler exercises, i.e. not those that require a physiotherapist. Dog spas are similarly popular, with 18.13% of respondents expressing interest. The majority, 31.07%, would pay less than 6,000 forints, 30.1% would pay 6,000-7,000 forints, and in third place, 16.50%

would pay between 9,000 and 10,000 forints. The lowest percentage, 3.88%, was for the category above 12,000 forints. Next, I looked at online dog training schools. Of the 568 respondents, 29.93% are interested in an online dog training school, 63% of those interested think that videos would be the ideal way to deliver the curriculum, 35% vote for live online classes, and only 1.18% favour PDFs. 50.59% of respondents consider personalised training, 37.06% consider experienced trainers and 12.35% consider flexible scheduling to be the most important aspects of online dog training services.

I also asked a question about whether they would be willing to purchase dog products (food, accessories) at a dog service location, and 62.5% of respondents answered yes. I asked this question because a dog service provider can sell dog-related products to its customers as a supplement, as an owner may only take their dog for a grooming session but then see what good brushes and healthy food are available to buy, so the customer may make an unplanned purchase in addition to using the service. 64.44% of respondents currently use the services of a dog groomer, daycare or boarding kennel, with 63.59% citing reliability, 53.33% quality, 52.8% proximity, 34.36% cited price, and 31.28% cited recommendations as the reason for choosing their current service provider. In addition, I thought it was important to ask whether they would be willing to pay more for premium quality services, with 43.13% answering yes. I asked the respondents what would make a dog service provider attractive to them. Most of them highlighted expertise and the fact that they could be sure their pets were safe. Love for animals and the attitude of the employees are also very important to them, with many writing about their bad experiences, which left a deep impression on them. I believe it is very important for a person working with dogs to have both professional qualifications and an emotional connection to animals, because the goal of a business dealing with animals is not only to make a profit, but also to create and promote animal welfare, which is also an important factor from a business perspective, as it is a way to gain loyal customers who know that their animals are in the best hands.

Almost half of the respondents would be happy to attend educational lectures, which shows that owners want to improve themselves so that they can give even more to their dogs, and possibly other animals as well. Almost half of respondents would also be happy to join dog-friendly tours, and 41% would be happy to participate in charity events, the latter of which gives me a sense of optimism, as I consider social responsibility to be very important in all areas. A dog service provider could play a perfect role in this. With the consent of customers, a charity event could raise a lot of donations, which could greatly contribute to the work of animal welfare organisations and shelters. In addition, social responsibility includes raising awareness of responsible pet ownership and adoption, as well as building community and serving an educational purpose. Dog professionals could also visit kindergartens and schools, where they could participate in promoting a very important and effective social change, which plays an important role in promoting animal welfare and animal protection.

68.62% of respondents learn about new services/promotions primarily through social media platforms. 18.44% learn about them through recommendations and 10.28% from websites, while the remaining less than 3% learn about them from flyers and posters. I also asked respondents if they would be willing to try out the services of a dog service provider as part of a trial package, and 63.36% answered yes, suggesting that such an offer could be attractive to potential customers. In addition, 57.92% of respondents would be willing to purchase a pass for discounted services, which could also strengthen loyalty, because if someone buys a pass somewhere, they will ideally use it, and if they like this type of option, they will continue to be willing to purchase passes because they receive some kind of discount in exchange for their commitment.

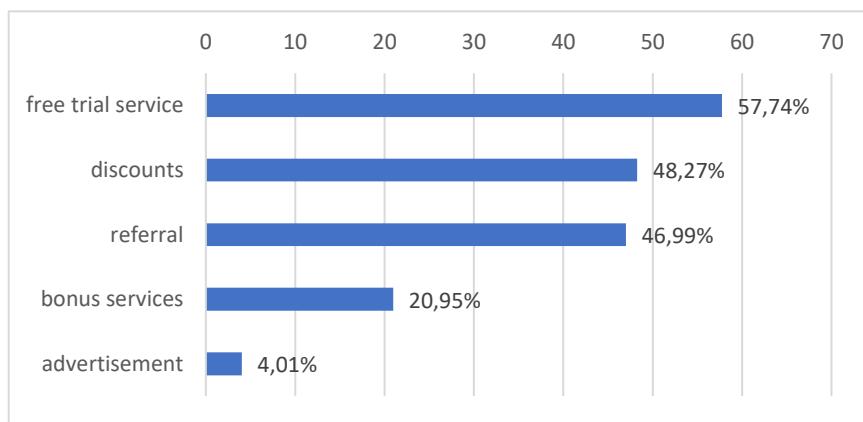


Figure 7
Incentive promotions (own source)

I also asked a question about what kind of promotions would encourage respondents to try a new service provider. Most chose a free trial, followed by discounts, with recommendations coming in a close third. These can be important considerations for a start-up, as it needs to acquire customers in some way. This question allowed us to find out what is most important. To gain a deeper understanding of the data, I performed a Spearman's rank correlation analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to see if there was any correlation between the responses received. Based on the correlation matrix, it can be observed that respondents who own pets are likely to own dogs, as there is a moderately strong positive correlation between these variables. This confirms that the questionnaire was completed by the appropriate target group.

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hosszukis testuar	Correlation	1,000	,663**	,708**	,693**	,612**	0,420	-0,074	,555**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0,000	0,005	0,002	0,009	0,093	0,387	0,007	
rovidkiste stuar	Correlation	,663**	1,000	0,494	,764**	,576**	,661**	-0,116	0,286	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,000		0,072	0,000	0,016	0,004	0,174	0,198	
hosszuko zepesar	Correlation	,708**	0,494	1,000	,670**	,736**	0,649	-0,001	,933**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,005	0,072		0,000	0,024	0,058	0,993	0,001	
rovidkoze pesar	Correlation	,693**	,764**	,670**	1,000	0,355	0,507	-0,166	,933**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,002	0,000	0,000		0,348	0,164	0,160	0,001	
hosszuna gyar	Correlation	,612**	,576**	,736**	0,355	1,000	,737**	-0,025	0,175	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,009	0,016	0,024	0,348		0,000	0,815	0,567	
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	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,093	0,004	0,058	0,164	0,000		0,370	0,181	
erdeklire ativkozmi	Correlation	-0,074	-0,116	-0,001	-0,166	-0,025	-0,094	1,000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,387	0,174	0,993	0,160	0,815	0,370			
kreativar	Correlation	,555**	,286	,933**	,933**	0,175	-0,396		1,000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,007	0,198	0,001	0,001	0,567	0,181			

Table 1
Correlation table – relationship between dog grooming prices (own source)

The strongest significant correlation ($r = 0.933$; $p < 0.01$) is between the amount spent on grooming for long-haired medium-sized dogs and the amount paid for creative dog grooming services. From this, we can conclude that those who are willing to pay more for the grooming of their medium-sized dogs are more open to creative dog grooming, which is considered a premium service. In addition, willingness to pay for creative dog grooming correlates with the price of grooming for small, long-haired dogs ($r = 0.555$; $p < 0.01$), which means that the owners of these dogs may be more open to creative grooming.

There is a strong correlation between willingness to pay for short-haired medium-sized dogs and the price of grooming services for long-haired small dogs ($r = 0.708$; $p < 0.01$), and between short-haired small dogs and long-haired small dogs ($r = 0.663$; $p < 0.01$). This suggests that owners who are willing to pay more for the grooming of their long-haired dogs are also willing to pay more for their short-haired dogs, but those who would pay less for the grooming of a short-haired dog are also willing to pay less for the grooming of a long-haired dog, indicating that

dog owners determine the price they are willing to pay for their pet's grooming based on similar thinking, regardless of breed type.

There is a strong correlation between interest in dog daycare and boarding ($r = 0.543$; $p < 0.01$), which means that if someone is interested in dog daycare, they are also likely to be interested in boarding. There is also a strong correlation between willingness to pay for dog daycare and boarding ($r = 0.644$; $p < 0.01$). It may be advisable to link the two services with some kind of promotion, for example, regular boarding customers receive a 5% discount on the price of daycare, this would motivate customers to make the most of the available services, which could increase their willingness to purchase and strengthen customer retention.

Summary

In my research, I mapped the service needs and willingness to pay of dog owners in relation to various dog-related services, such as dog grooming, daycare, boarding, dog fitness, and dog training. A total of 568 people took part in the survey, the vast majority of whom were active dog owners. When selecting the sample, I took into account certain characteristics of the dogs, such as their size and coat length, as well as any special needs arising from their owners' lifestyles. In the theoretical background of the research, I emphasized that urban lifestyles, fixed working hours, and the strengthening of emotional bonds with pets have significantly increased the demand for personalized, convenient services. At the same time, I pointed out that the psychological and physiological benefits of human-animal relationships—such as stress reduction, social support, and improved overall health—contribute to the growing social value of dog ownership. I thus established a theoretical basis for the idea that the development of dog-related services should take into account not only the needs of animals but also those of their owners. Based on the results of the data collection, I showed that a significant proportion of respondents regularly use dog grooming services, and more than half are interested in services provided in a home environment. I also analyzed price sensitivity for different services and found that there are significant differences in this area. The demand for dog boarding and daycare is particularly high, while interest in dog fitness, dog spas, and online dog training is more limited to a narrower, specialized target group. Using correlation analyses, I was also able to identify consumer segments that are open to higher-priced or more complex, combined service forms. In summary, I found that there is a conscious consumer segment among Hungarian dog owners who are not only open to regular services, but also prefer safe and convenient solutions tailored to their individual needs. Based on the results of the research, I concluded that there is significant business and social potential in the development of a modern, complex dog service center that not only provides basic care functions but also builds community, plays an educational role, and contributes to the development of animal welfare awareness.

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