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Designing an Innovative E-commerce Model for Pet Care: A Service Blueprint Approach for Fan Ai Pet

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Abstract

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, people have spent more time indoors, which likely motivated entrepreneurs to adopt e-commerce platforms for their businesses. It also increased the demand for pets as companions. This research aims to develop a comprehensive pet-focused e-commerce platform for Fan Ai Pet. The study employs a heuristic research design and case study approach, incorporating the concepts of service blueprints and customer journey mapping. Data was gathered through secondary sources, on-site observations of the business, and interviews with its owners. Drawing inspiration from successful platforms such as Chewy, Amazon, Alibaba, MOMO, ETMall, playsport.cc, and shop.com, the proposed e-commerce platform for pet owners integrates features for both sellers and buyers, including data analytics, cash flow management, logistics, and tailored consulting services. The findings revealed three key business areas: pet care, end-of-life services for pets, and a foundation for rescuing stray dogs. From the service blueprint perspective, pet-related products and services encompass pet food, medications, insurance, training programs, grooming, as well as cremation and funeral services. Incorporating expert consulting and a virtual community forum would also enhance the platform's value.

Keywords: Pet; e-commerce; service blueprint; consumer journey; App

1.Introduction

In China, on December 8, 2019, several instances of an unidentified pneumonia linked to a Coronavirus variant were reported, raising global concerns about the emergence of a new disease—Covid-19 [1].

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Over the past two years, from 2020 to the present, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly influenced consumer behavior. To contain the virus, governments worldwide enforced strict social distancing measures and suspended non-essential business operations, resulting in more people staying indoors or working remotely. This shift likely contributed to an increased demand for pets as companions [2].

The pandemic has significantly accelerated the expansion of online shopping and e-commerce, encroaching on the traditional retail sector. Covid-19 appears to have acted as a catalyst for the growth of e-commerce, positively impacting the entire industry. Earlier challenges with poor online shopping experiences have prompted the adoption of technologies like AR and smart logistics to improve efficiency and enhance the overall customer experience. This, in turn, has driven the rapid development of e-commerce and serves as the motivation for this study. The primary goal of this research is to employ a heuristic research design and case study method, while utilizing service blueprint and customer journey concepts to build a comprehensive pet-focused e-commerce platform.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Application of Service Blueprint in Pet E-commerce

The service blueprint is a visual tool that maps out touchpoints to analyze the complex interactions between customers and their service experiences [3]. Through this framework, the delivery of pet-related products and services can be streamlined, such as pet food, medications, insurance, training programs, grooming, cremation services, and more. Additionally, the platform can integrate professional pet consultations and virtual community forums.

In recent years, the pet industry has seen growing demand. With the rise of e-commerce, Fan Ai Pet Company has envisioned several operational models for the future of pet-related e-business. This comprehensive online service chain could include features such as mobile apps, a "Pet Life Park," and a Rescue Dog Foundation, offering one-stop services.

Drawing inspiration from successful platforms like Chewy, Amazon, Alibaba, MOMO, ETMall, playsport.cc, and shop.com, the company aims to create a comprehensive e-commerce platform for the pet industry. This platform would connect both sellers and buyers, featuring functions such as data analytics, cash flow management, logistics, and other value-added services. The service blueprint approach outlines the marketing process for pet services, focusing on three key areas: pet care, pet memorial services, and stray dog rescue efforts.

2.2The Concept of the Customer Journey

A customer journey map functions similarly to a consumer strategy, detailing the stages from the initial point of contact with a brand, through demand generation, purchasing, and eventually the after-sales experience and potential repeat purchases [4]. This map offers a multi-faceted view of the customer's actions, thoughts, emotions, and overall experiences. It allows businesses to gain insights into consumer psychology and create an effective framework to better understand customer shopping behaviors.

The customer journey focuses on the holistic consumer experience, breaking down pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase behaviors. Throughout the buying process, relevant brand touchpoints are efficiently connected to meet consumer needs at every stage. Managers who understand the customer journey can communicate more effectively with consumers, helping to drive purchasing behavior.

For instance, a case study of Chewy [5] highlights the growing trend of pet humanization, where services have been enhanced across the entire customer journey. From seamless third-party payment solutions to an integrated one-stop ecosystem and professional consulting, the customer experience is prioritized [6] (see Figure 1).

Third-party payments simplify transactions, while the one-stop ecosystem offers a wide range of pet-related services, including medicine and insurance. As pets are increasingly viewed as family members, professional consulting services have become essential to fostering strong emotional bonds between pet owners and their pets.

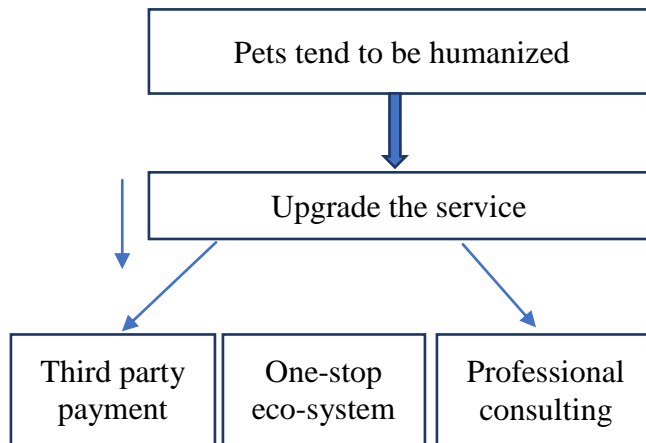


Figure. 1 Chewy’s Pet Services

3. Research Methods

3.1 Heuristic Inquiry Research Design

This study employed a heuristic inquiry research design [7] in combination with a case study approach. One of the authors is the owner of Fan Ai Pet e-commerce, providing the advantage of continuous observation and access to firsthand data. This direct involvement enhances data collection, analysis, and interpretation, offering valuable insights for discussing the findings. Consequently, this approach ensures both the feasibility and credibility of the research.

3.2 Case Study Method

The case study method, grounded in real-world practices, is an effective research approach for addressing "how" and "why" questions [8]. The activities of the case companies were systematically recorded and thoroughly analyzed to develop a comprehensive pet e-commerce model. Empirical data collection included secondary sources, direct observation, and interviews with company owners, offering a detailed understanding of the case.

4. Case Analysis

4.1 The Company of Fan Ai Pet E-Commerce

With changing lifestyles, pet ownership is becoming increasingly common. Globally, the pet care market grew from \$245 billion in 2021 to \$261 billion in 2022 [9]. With a projected compound annual growth rate of 6.1%, the market is expected to reach \$350 billion by 2027. The Covid-19 pandemic has further accelerated the shift towards online shopping for pet products, as many pet owners turned to their pets for companionship during periods of isolation and boredom. Despite the growth of e-commerce in promoting online pet consumption, there is still a lack of a comprehensive platform for pet owners to access information and solutions, presenting a clear opportunity for entrepreneurship.

As the demand in the pet industry continues to expand, the development of a comprehensive online service ecosystem for pet care covers various aspects of a pet’s life and end-of-life services. This includes essentials such as food, apparel, housing, transportation, education, entertainment, healthcare, insurance, and even pet cremation and funeral services. Specific examples of these categories are illustrated in Table 1.

TABLE 1 PetService Ecosystem

Pet food, Healthy food, Functional food, Friendly restaurant	Pet school, Pet training, Guiding training, Fitness training
Pet clothes, Pet grooming, Accessories, Smart equipment, Wearable device, Hygiene products	Entertainment facilities for pet, Pet massage and spa, Pet park, Instructions for walking pet
Pet hotel, PetBacker, Pet house, Pet sitting, Hotel recommendation	Pet medicine and insurance, Pet clinic, Pet sterilization, Online reservation and consulting, Pet nutrition
Pet transportation service, Pet toilet, Pet walking tour app, Stray pet adoption	Pet funeral ceremony, Pet cremation, Souvenir, Pet funeral director and service

With the advancement of mobile technology, app-based services have become the norm, enabling users to quickly download applications and access remote cloud services. In response, Fan Ai Pet e-commerce aims to integrate pet-related needs with this app technology to create innovative business models and unlock new opportunities. Fan Ai Pet strives to evolve into a comprehensive platform, offering not only e-commerce but also professional consulting, a virtual community chat forum, and an initiative to support a foundation dedicated to rescuing stray dogs.

4.2 Consumer Journey Map Perspective

A potential consumer journey map for Fan Ai Pet e-commerce encompasses several key elements: (1) customer demographic profile, (2) product attributes, (3) purchasing motivations, and (4) consumption behaviors (see Figure 2) [10]. The demographic profile includes factors such as gender, age, marital status or family lifecycle, education level, and income, all of which can influence pet owners’ purchasing preferences and decisions. Product attributes are categorized into core and augmented features, addressing motivations related to safety, reliability, emotional satisfaction, and aesthetic appeal. Lastly, consumption behavior includes aspects like purchase intentions, actual buying behavior, repeat purchases, and recommendations.

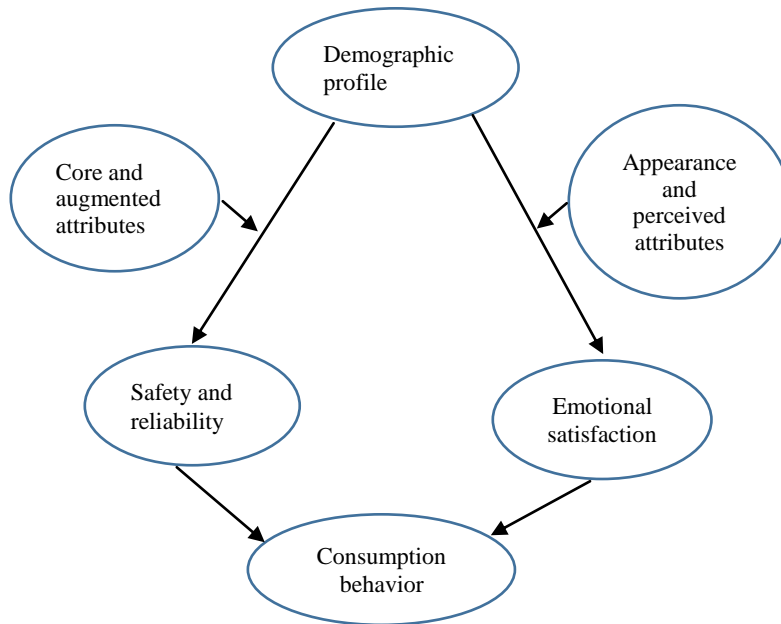


Figure2A Possible Consumer Journey Map Perspective for Fan Ai Pet E-commerce

4.3 Service Blueprint in Fan Ai Pet E-Commerce

Service blueprinting is a method used to model business processes and enhance customer service [11]. Fan Ai Pet e-commerce aims to utilize service blueprinting to elevate service quality and improve the user experience, thereby fostering trust among pet owners and establishing a comprehensive one-stop online ecosystem for pet services. The platform will encompass three primary services: pet care, pet memorial services, and a stray dog rescue foundation (see Figure 3). Offerings will include pet food, medications, insurance, training programs, grooming, and cremation and funeral services, among others. Additionally, incorporating professional consulting and a virtual community chat forum will further enhance the platform's value. The Fan Ai Pet e-commerce platform will facilitate interactions between sellers and buyers, featuring functionalities such as data analytics, cash flow management, logistics, and tailored consulting services.

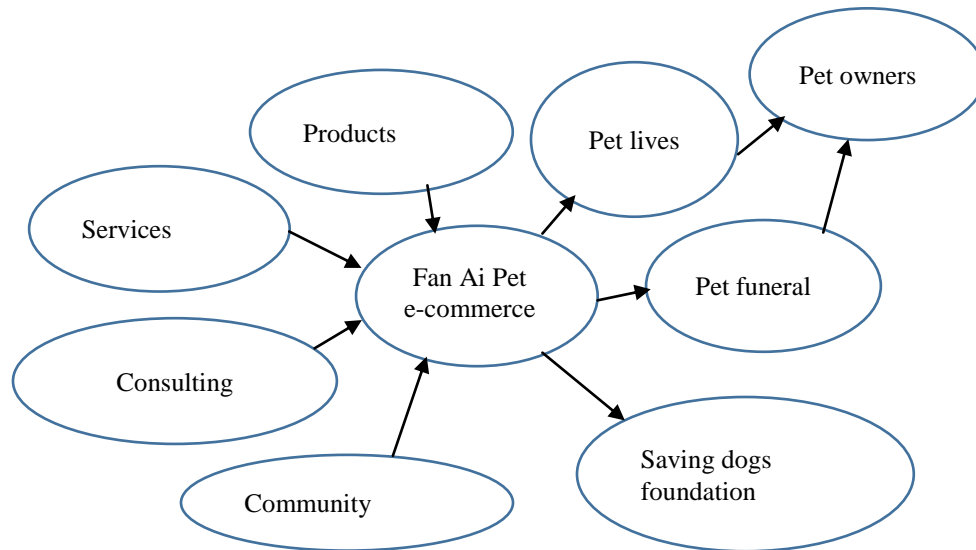


Figure 3 A Macro Service Blueprint for Fan Ai Pet

The pet industry is experiencing significant growth, broadening the scope of pet life service models to include areas such as food, apparel, grooming, housing, training, transportation, healthcare, and end-of-life services. By implementing service blueprinting, Fan Ai Pet enables consumers to gain a clearer understanding of its e-commerce offerings and the diverse range of pet products and services available. This innovative service model paves the way for new business opportunities within the pet sector. A meticulously detailed service blueprint for business process modeling will enhance consumer experiences.

Building on established blueprinting frameworks [3][12], the micro blueprint for Fan Ai Pet encompasses five key categories (see Figure 4): pre-, mid-, and post-consumption behaviors; customer interactions; front desk services or website information; back-office operations; and support systems. Activities within these categories may occur simultaneously. For example, when a customer accesses the website, they may encounter a login registration prompt, accompanied by instructions for completing the registration process. Following this, personal information management will take place, supported by a customer database system.

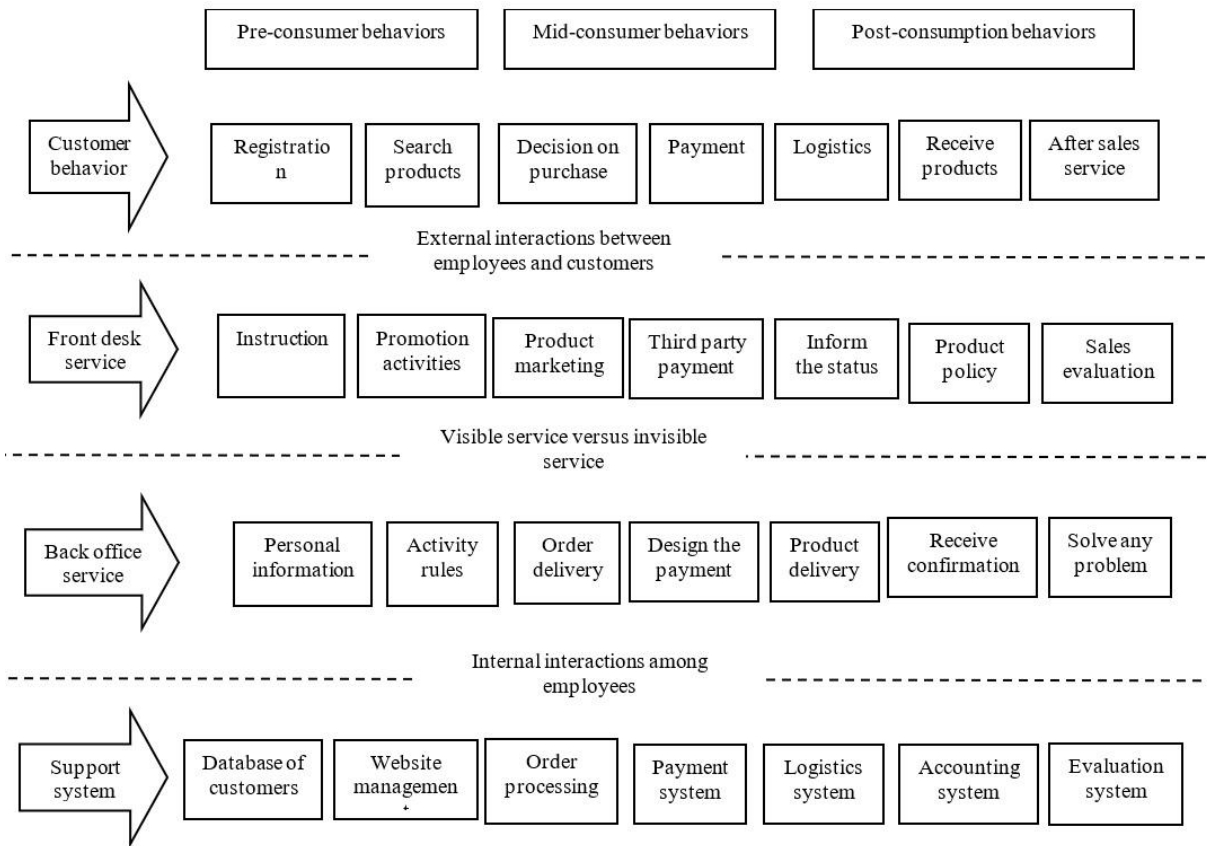


Figure4A MicroBlueprint of Services for Fan Ai Pet

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Pet Lives

As pet ownership becomes increasingly humanized and pet food options diversify, the e-commerce market can offer a wider range of functional and health-focused pet food products. Many pet owners are also willing to invest in pet apparel, aiming to enhance their pets' appearance. In response, Fan Ai Pet e-commerce seeks to deliver comprehensive and professional pet grooming consultation services. Moreover, through the marketing initiatives on the Fan Ai Pet platform, pet owners can connect with pet-friendly hotels that offer massage and spa services for pets.

Additionally, there is a growing demand for new products like pet chips and GPS trackers. The Fan Ai Pet platform integrates with current Google systems to help pet owners find nearby veterinary hospitals, clinics, grooming facilities, and training centers. This integration provides essential information such as consultation hours, available services, appointment schedules, and transportation options. Pet owners can also enjoy live streaming and real-time updates on their pets' activities while at training centers.

5.2 Pets Passing Away

A "Pet Etiquette Life Park" will be developed to address the inevitable reality of pet loss. Given that the average lifespan of a pet is around ten years, pet owners often face the difficult task of managing the funeral arrangements for their beloved companions. In response, Fan Ai Pet E-commerce is considering a specialized "pet funeral business." Understanding pet owners' attitudes toward this service—such as perceived usefulness, comfort, value, and behavioral intention—will be crucial in shaping the design of the "Pet Etiquette Life Park."

5.3 Saving Stray Dogs Foundation

A portion of the profit and customer donations will be directed toward supporting a foundation dedicated to the welfare of stray animals. This foundation will provide medical care, prosthetics, birth control programs, training, and adoption services for stray pets. Funds will be raised through the platform, with contributions from various donors aimed at helping stray dogs and cats. The goal is to address the challenges faced by these animals and improve their quality of life.

6. Conclusion and Suggestion

The advancement of information technology, combined with the Covid-19 pandemic, has compelled entrepreneurs to leverage e-commerce platforms for their businesses and social initiatives. During the pandemic, many pet owners sought companionship to alleviate boredom, highlighting a gap in the market for a comprehensive e-commerce platform that caters to their needs. This study employs a heuristic research design and a case study approach, utilizing service blueprinting and consumer journey concepts to develop a holistic pet e-commerce platform for Fan Ai Pet.

The tools of service blueprints and consumer journey mapping were utilized to envision a future business model for Fan Ai Pet, offering integrated one-stop services online. The macro service blueprint encompasses applications, pet life parks, and a foundation dedicated to saving stray dogs. The platform will provide a variety of products and services for pet care, including food, apparel, housing, transportation, entertainment, medications, insurance, training programs, grooming services, and cremation and funeral arrangements. Additionally, personalized consulting services and a virtual community chat forum will enhance the user experience. Supporting systems will include a customer database, data analytics, cash flow management, logistics, and website administration.

The findings of this research suggest a growing trend in the humanization of pets, with many owners considering them as “fur babies” that provide love and comfort. From the perspective of the consumer journey, it is essential to enhance the quality of services in pet e-commerce, focusing on reliable payment systems, the establishment of a one-stop, diversified service ecosystem, and tailored consulting options. However, there are two limitations that warrant caution. First, Fan Ai Pet is still in its early development stages, meaning that the proposed e-commerce model has yet to be successfully implemented. Second, while the aim is for the e-commerce platform to be comprehensive, the potential high costs associated with this approach have not been evaluated. Future research should continue to monitor this case, gather more data, and incorporate financial outcomes into the research design for subsequent studies.

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