

The Impact of Pet Videos on Mental Health: A Comprehensive Study

Juntong Xin*

Jinan foreign language school international center, China

*hello20060626@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study suggests a positive association between viewing pet video materials and those affiliated with their mental health indicators, such as mood, stress, and well-being. Through the inclusion of both experimental quantitative analysis and qualitative research, we delve into the key emotional transmission mechanisms, the relevance of empathy, and the mediating effects of viewer motivation. The discovery implies that pet videos can be utilized in psychological therapies as a tool for intervention, and it also provides clues for the development of practical media mental health promotion.

KEYWORDS

Pet Videos; Mental Health; Psyche; Emotional Health; Digital Media.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the popularity of pet videos on social media has raised interest in the potential influence of this content on psychological well-being. There has been some research attempting to comprehensively look at the impacts of social media on psychological well-being, but this is different from that. Research on pet videos, however, is still very limited. Thus, the nature of this paper is to fill such gaps in the study by looking at the mental health effects of pet videos; the paper, further, examines how pet videos affect emotions, stress levels, and well-being. It will provide data, expounding on the connection itself, how empathy is involved, and the usefulness of pet videos in treatment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous work has reported happy thoughts caused by watching pet videos, laughing, and relieving tension[3,4]. However, to date, most studies on this subject have barely mentioned pet videos in the context of Chinese society. It is e.g., reported by Zhang (2020) that watching pet videos results in positive emotions, delivers stress management, and maximum comfort to people with either loneliness or high stress levels[2]. From another point of view, the empirical theory was strengthened by another piece of research, indicating how pets can lift stress, decrease job related pressure hence boost work performance[5].

Taking an international dimension, there has been a string of studies recently. The NIH has recognized the psychological benefits of interactions with animals that could go as far as making virtual interactions available through pet videos[9]. Studies such as Tashjian and Christenson (2019) have shown that interactions with pets through pet videos lift up the participants' spirits as well as lower

their stress levels, similar to the effects of human-to-animal interaction[7]. Kogan et al. (2015) published research on the influence of videos on users, which demonstrated a relationship between users and their pets, leading to a rise in positive emotions and a fall in negative ones[8]. Myrick (2018) was able to verify this evidence by citing decreased hormone levels, showing stress response lessening after a person viewed pet videos.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded in several psychological theories that explain the observed effects of pet videos on mental health. A model underlying the biophilia hypothesis assumes that humans have a built-in preference for nature and familiar living beings, for example, animals. Such a connection can elicit an entirely positive emotion and lessen stress through the implication of pet videos. Another essential tool used in the paper is the emotional contagion theory that explains that people generally respond to others' emotions by giving birth to feelings in the same line. The audience will probably feel joyful and behave skillfully if the actors are seen as playing and happy, which will consequently lead to uplift mood and well-being.

Furthermore, the theory of the parasocial nature of friendships that develop between media figures and viewers focuses on the reasons why some viewers feel connected to the animal in pet videos, might explain the emotional bond. Through these online contacts, they can provide solace and reduce the feeling of loneliness, a situation that is much helpful to people with a limited real-life social support system.

4. RESEARCH METHODS

4.1. Study Design

This research is employing a mixed-methods approach, which is the use of both quantitative and qualitative data types so that the topic of pet videos is dealt with in a thorough manner to give a holistic view of their impact on mental health. The quantitative method is a randomly assigned trial that measures the effects of the content on psychological indicators such as mood, stress levels, and wellbeing. The study, as such, involves a control group, where 50% watched pet videos, and the rest watched neutral content like nature scenes or news. This design can be used to rule out the confounding effects from pet videos that could also be present.

Apart from the RCT approach, qualitative data were also collected through in-depth interviews and focus groups. These methods proved extremely useful in providing insights into the kinds of emotions, as well as the motivation of the participants, which in turn, contributed greatly to the understanding of the psychological effects. The mixed-methods approach integrates the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research to yield more comprehensive, rigorous results.

4.2. Data Collection

Quantitative data came from well-established tests that have stood the test of time. For a start, the psychological approach relied heavily on questionnaires that were able to capture people's moods (e.g., Positive and Negative Affect Schedule), level of stress (e.g., Perceived Stress Scale), as well as their overall mental well-being (e.g., General Well-being Schedule). To enrich the data, physiological data were also collected using portable devices that measure, for instance, heart rate and cortisol levels that represent indicators of stress. Thus, objective data were used.

The qualitative section was dominated by focus groups which proceeded with semi-structured interviews with participants and entailed going through their emotional feelings and analysis of the factors that inspired a positive response to the videos. Furthermore, the observation and analyses

yielded an in-depth understanding of the intuitive and emotional processes involved, which complemented the quantitative outcomes.

4.3. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical analysis, in this case, t-tests and ANOVA, were used to compare the effects of the experimental and control groups. The statistical testing aimed at identifying differences within the videos' viewers before and after watching them. The stress level was also analyzed to determine if it corresponded with any of the physiological responses during the study.

The qualitative data underwent thematic analysis for categorization, a technique where the researcher creates codes to designate recurring patterns in text. The study here investigated such things as the role of empathy, types of motivation among the viewers of the pet videos, and how emotionally impactful the videos were to them. In the research, the combination of quantitative statistics and qualitative data opened up a window for a comprehensive evaluation of the magnitude of effect viewership of pet videos may have on human mental health.

5. RESULTS

The results have indicated a unique connection between pet videos and mood improvement and stress reduction. Higher happiness levels and lower stress levels were revealed for the test group subjects when compared with those in the control group. Excited by the other physiological parameters decreasing, the result came from the observations among the people.

The quantitative data revealed that the subjects belonging to the experimental category underwent enhancements in positive mood indices and drops in stress factors. Within a week of video viewing, there was a notable resurgence of positive and a reduction in the number of negative emotions as indicated by average scores on the PANAS scale. Stressors, as shown by the stress indicator, Perceived Stress Scale scores, dropped significantly, allowing one to use pet videos to effectively reduce stress.

The physiological data validated that the experimental test individuals had their cortisol levels return to the average, which is the bio-marker of stress. This biological mechanism lines up well with the self-reported data, which strengthens the evidence that the effects of pets contribute to lowering stress levels.

Qualitative analysis unveiled that the emotional impact of pet videos varies from individual to individual, influenced by the nature of empathy and perceived connection. Many participants showed how the clips provided them with connections to their past, mostly when they were alone or under stressful situations. In the interviews, some prominent themes were "emotional uplift", "temporary escape", and "emotional connection", as the wide range of impacts of pet videos could be seen.

6. DISCUSSION

The research report here indicates valuable and applicable implications for mental health intervention with the help of pet videos. This study claimed that emotional communication and empathy play a key role in transferring benefits brought by watching pet videos. Such observations have implications that can be used to create content that will improve mental health through its design and sharing.

The important mean changes regarding mood and stress reduction seen in this research work are in line with earlier research on the therapeutic potentials of animals, and this one extends these ideas to video animals. This finding implies that the ease of stress and elevation of mood that real contact with animals brings may be fostered in people who watch pet interactions online also.

The relevance of empathy and presumed interspecies emotional bond have been proved to play a major role in the effectiveness of pet videos. What is also interesting is that those who had a strong emotional bond to the pets in the videos demonstrated less depression as well as more significant mood improvements. This is an interesting finding since it tends to prove that pet videos go a long way in providing emotional support to lonely viewers.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

7.1. Mental Health Professionals

Medical specialists treating psychological patients may introduce pet videos as an integral component of the treatment process, particularly for programs intended to alleviate stress and to establish a happy mood. This may prove to be helpful for patients, who for various reasons are excluded from having pets; be they due to allergies, living situations, or other limitations. Additionally, pet videos are an easy substitute that is easy to access and at the same time, provide the emotional support required.

7.2. Social Media Platforms

Social media channels could emerge at the forefront of mental health promotion via strategic initiatives by scouting for and curating content proven to be positive for moods. Through sophisticated and accurate algorithms that are able to categorize relaxing and mood-lifting clips, those platforms can slowly contribute to the overall mental health of the viewers. Furthermore, these platforms could join forces with psychological support experts to compose music pieces or create specific channels devoted to this positive content.

7.3. Content Creators

Similarly, content creators should identify some of the key elements that pet videos depict which in turn have the impact of positive well-being and derive their strategy accordingly. Encouraging the lighthearted aspect of behavior, the positive interaction between the animal and human, as well as appropriate cultural settings, will make the video more appealing. Creators can also consider diversity in the types of animals featured to cater to different audience preferences and cultural contexts.

8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As this study contributes to our overall understanding, the positive findings are also constrained by the limitations of the study. While this short-term approach brings clarity to the overall picture, it also narrows the understanding of how pet videos have an effect on one's mind in the long run. In the near future, experimental studies should at least take this longitudinal path to assess whether these traits persist.

Additionally, the study used self-reports that may tend to bias them because respondents might intentionally say that they are negative rather than positive or that they are more positive. Physical measurements certainly contain less bias, but future research may need to consider a wider range of data sources, including functional MRI imaging, for instance, to detect the brain mechanisms associated with pet videos viewing. Culture is another factor that comes in as a limitation, as the study was conducted mostly on Chinese individuals. While these findings are relevant to this culture, they might not generalize to other settings where different attitudes toward digital media as well as pets' roles occur. Cross-cultural studies will shed light on these matters on a broader scale.

9. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In the future, the role of which pet videos can differentially influence the well-being of different viewers of such media sources is also a very promising area of study. Specifically, an example of such a line of study: investigating the differential effects of videos featuring pets that are not only domesticated but wild as well could help researchers and practitioners to understand better the mechanisms of such effects.

The second natural focus for future studies is on the individuals' psyche and biographical background, which also influence their response to pet videos. Differences in personal attributes, familiarity with pets, as well as the level of stress, might change the response to pet videos. Their understanding would introduce more effectiveness into the applications of digital resources associated with mental health treatment.

Importantly, the long-term effects of the viewing habits of pet videos on mental health need due attention. These patterns can manifest, which can then be closely monitored over time through longitudinal research, a research design that controls for known factors that are proven to be the most relevant to mental health. Eventually, such studies could point out whether watching pet videos contributes negatively to mental health or if the effects lessen over time due to humans' habituation to it.

10. CONCLUSION

By presenting a relationship between pet videos, emotional well-being improvement, and stress reduction, the study identifies the role of empathy and emotional appeal in moderating these effects, thereby providing vital insights into designing and disseminating digital tools for mental health enhancement. This study shows that integrating pet videos into the everyday practices of individuals, including therapy, social media strategies, or content creation, allows them to enjoy the demonstrated benefits of well-being, thereby overcoming some of the stressors.

REFERENCES

- [1] Zhang, Y. (2020). "Pet Videos and Emotional Well-being: An Empirical Study in China." *Journal of Media Psychology*, 12(2), 89-102.
- [2] Li, H., & Wang, F. (2021). "The Impact of Pet Videos on Work Stress: A Cross-Sectional Study." *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 18(3), 200-212.
- [3] National Institutes of Health. (2021). "The Benefits of Pet Therapy: More Than Just Animal Attraction." Retrieved from <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/benefits-pet-therapy-more-just-animal-attraction>.
- [4] Tashjian, S. M., & Christenson, G. A. (2019). "Pet Videos as a Tool for Reducing Stress: A Laboratory Study." *Stress and Health*, 35(2), 156-165.
- [5] Kogan, L. R., & Schoenfeld-Tacher, R. (2015). "The Use of Pet Videos as a Stress-Relief Tool: A Randomized Controlled Trial." *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*, 10(5), 447-454.
- [6] Myrick, J. G. (2018). "Emotion Regulation, Procrastination, and Watching Pet Videos on Social Media: Results from a Laboratory Experiment." *Computers in Human Behavior*, 93, 293-299.