Persuaded into Action: Investigating the Most Effective Way to Raise Awareness of Homeless Pets Protection Among Shanghai High School Students

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Abstract. According to the White Paper on China’s Pet Industry 2021, the population of raising cats and dogs in China has reached 68.44 million. However, many acquire these pets without giving it much thought, only to later realize that caring for a pet requires significant effort, time, money, and patience. As a result, pet abandonment has become a serious issue. The World Health Organization predicts that around the world, there are about 200 million stray dogs, with China accounting for 40 million or one-fifth of the total. Rapid modernization and urbanization have turned Shanghai into a hub of homeless pets. To address this issue, this paper focuses on changing the attitudes of Shanghai high school students toward animal protection. The study focuses on this particular group since their attitudes represent the future generation, yet there is a lack of research on this topic. The paper aims to fill this gap by exploring the most effective way to raise awareness among Shanghai high school students about the issue of homeless animal protection. To this end, the researcher has devised three types of persuasion methods in a lab setting to compare and contrast the results among Shanghai high school students.

1. Introduction

Scholars have debated various important factors in creating an effective message. Joan Meyers-Levy and Prashant Malaviya [1] suggest that the message itself is not the only factor to influence the effectiveness of an advertisement, but rather the mental processes that the recipient invokes do. Renee J. Bator et al. [2] explored ways to improve pro-environmental advertisements from the audience's perspective. She suggests that during the preproduction stage, designers should pay attention to the target population; during the stage of concept development, developers should begin the first stage of pretesting; and during the message execution phase, designers should present the final messages, in preliminary form, to a sample audience. However, Michael D. Slater [3] argues that one of the biggest challenges for communication campaign designers is when perceptions of family, peers, and other interpersonal expectations heavily impact behavioral intentions, which is a psychographic way of segmenting and observing the audience.

Among these studies, the self-efficacy theory [4,5] offered the most insight into the design of this study. The theory argues that an individual's belief and confidence in their ability to reproduce a certain behavior is a major factor in determining if they will actually do it. Additionally, self-efficacy appears to be partially responsible for how social influences shape behavior [6].

Studies show that the public is dissatisfied with the current state of astray pets and requires a more compassionate and morally sound approach to the treatment of animals in recreational settings. In Mkono, Mucha; Holder, Afiya's [7] study, they employed a Critical Animal Studies (CAS) approach, a framework that prioritizes morality in the study of human-animal relations. This framework provided an important approach to investigate the effectiveness of persuasion, but the most important factor that this study employs, “morality”, is not operationalized into a measurable value. To overcome this limitation, my research operationalized the questions to have quantitative values to directly show the participants’ attitude towards the status quo and to be able to identify areas where a more morally strong and compassionate approach is needed for the treatment of animals.

Based on the literature above, opportunities have emerged for further study of the persuasion theory on astray pets and human engagement. Most of the current research on this topic focuses on adults while this study focuses solely on teenagers in China, particularly high school students, which renders its uniqueness and significance. The cultivation theory [8] stresses the importance of the young age at that people form their values and beliefs. Therefore, Chinese teenagers are an important group to study their attitudes and awareness in animal protection.

Therefore, this study asks the following research question (RQ):

What is the most effective way to persuade Chinese high school students to take action toward homeless animal protection?

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2. METHOD

To answer the above RQ, the researcher relied on Renee J. Bator et al.’s [2] three-stage method to improve advertising to devise the experiment. The self-efficacy theory argues that the more confident people feel, the more likely they are to take action. The researcher hypothesized that the video of the plights of homeless pets would make students sympathize with them, and successful rescue cases would add to the confidence level of the students. In other words, the higher the self-efficacy, the more likely the students are to take action. The experiment consists of the following steps: sampling, administering the experiment, and collecting questionnaires for the results.

2.1. Sampling

The sample population consisted of three groups of participants and three groups of participants (Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3) were randomly recruited from grades 10-12 from an international high school who live in a dormitory in Pinghe, Shanghai School. The researcher pooled all of the names of the students together and used digital sampling software (Randomizer.org) to randomly select 8 students (4 male, 4 female) into one of the three groups. Since all participants live in the same high school and receive equal-quality education, and the school sent them a questionnaire before their admission to ensure students had no previous animal abuse history. The study assumed that the participant’s attitude towards animal protection was the same as before the experiment.

2.2. Administering the Experiment & Collecting Questionnaires

The experiment was conducted over a period of two weeks. Group 1 was asked to answer a questionnaire of homeless pets engagement without any additional information. Group 2 was shown a video recording of the plight of homeless dogs (See Appendix 1), and then asked to answer the same questionnaire. Group 3 was shown the same video as Group 2, followed by a video recording of a non-profit organization successfully saving these homeless dogs (see Appendix 2), and then asked to answer the same questionnaire.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 3) was designed to measure the participants’ attitudes toward homeless animal welfare, willingness to take action, and awareness of animal welfare issues. The questionnaire was administered in the same environment, and the participants were asked to complete it within a specified time frame of 5 minutes.

The materials used in the research included a laptop computer, video recordings of the plight of homeless dogs, and 24 paper questionnaires. The rationale for choosing this method was that it allowed for the collection of reliable data that could be used to answer the research question. Furthermore, the use of video recordings allowed for the comparison of the participants’ attitudes before and after viewing the recordings.

3. RESULT

The first question in the questionnaire asks “How much money are you willing to donate each month to the cause of helping homeless pets”, and participants are given 4 choices: a. No such consideration for the time being; b. less than 100RMB; c. 100 to 500RMB; d. More than 500 RMB. As shown in figure 1, the blue column is Group 1( who answered the questionnaire without showing any videos); the orange column represents group 2 (who watched a video of homeless dogs living in a garbage dump); the grey column is the polls of students in Group 3 (who watched both a video of homeless dogs living in a garbage dump and a successful case of how a local non-profit organization rescue that dog). 2 people in group 3 choose ‘C (100-500 RMB)’ in the first question while 1 people in group 2 choose ‘C’ and nobody in group 1 choose a ‘C’; 2 people in group 3 choose ‘B(less than 100RMB)’ while 6 students in group 2 and 6 students in group 1 choose ‘B’. At last, 2 people in group 1 chose ‘A(no such consideration for the time frame)’; 1 student in group 2 chose ‘A’; 3 people in group 3 chose ‘A’. Data shows that Participants in Group 3( who both watch a video of homeless dogs living in a garbage dump and a successful case of how a local non-profit organization rescued the dogs) have a higher probability of choosing ‘C’, a higher amount of money to donate. Nevertheless, there is a limitation of this result; there are individual differences among my participants. In other words, every student has different pocket money and this will impact the amounts of money they are willing to donate. But since all sample participants were from international school which has higher tuition fee than others, they had a higher average pocket money than general high school students in Shanghai. Also, the options in question 1 were ensured to be much smaller than they are free to spend in daily life.

![The amount of money participants are willing to donate](https://example.com/figure1.png)

Figure 1: The amount of money participants are willing to donate
Question 2 asks “Whether you are willing to participate in stray animal rescue organizations in your spare time” and participants were given two choices: a. Yes  
   b. No. In figure 2, the blue column represents option A and the orange column is the amount of student choose option B. In this figure, in group A, 4 people choose A and 4 people choose B. Similarly, 4 students in group 2 choose A and 4 students in group 2 choose B. However, all 8 people in group 3 choose answer A and no one chooses B. From these data, 50% of group 1 and group 2 chose to join in the organization and 50% of students in group 1 and group 2 refused to; but 100% of group 3 chose to join in the organization.

![Figure 2: The frequency of participants choose to participate in a non-profit organization or not](image)

Question 3 from the questionnaire asks “If you want to raise a dog in the future, do you want to adopt a stray pet or buy a pet from a store”, and here participants can choose a. Adoption or b. Buying.

In figure 3, the blue column is the frequency of people who choose dog adoptions and the orange column represents people who prefer to buy a dog from a store. In group 1, 2 students choose dog adoption while 6 students choose to buy from shops. In group 2, after seeing the record of a homeless dog, 5 students want to adopt a homeless dog while 3 students want to buy a baby dog from big shops. Finally, 6 students choose to adopt dogs from rescue center and only 2 students choose ‘buy ad dog’ as an answer.

![Figure 3: The frequency of participants choose to adopt a stray pet or but a pet from a store](image)

The results show that videos of the plight of homeless animals encourage participants to take action. The results show that when students watch a video of a homeless dog living in a garbage dump and a successful case of how a local non-profit organization rescued that dog, they are more likely to choose to donate more money, join a non-profit organization, and adopt a pet rather than buy one from a store. However, it is important to note that this study was conducted with small sample size and further research is needed to confirm these findings. Additionally, this study only examined the effects of videos on the plight of animals on Chinese high school students. It is possible that the results may differ for other age groups or in other countries.

4. CONCLUSION

This study conducted a lab experiment with a standardized procedure, finding that the video of the plight of homeless animals, make people empathize with animals situation and encouraged people to reflect and take action as well. The results of this study are encouraging and suggest that reports on the plight of animals can be an effective way to motivate Chinese high school students to take action.

In the study, the researcher found watching videos is an effective method to encourage Chinese high school students to take action. To further study, this result could be applied to social media to encourage teenagers to participate in animal affairs. Longitudinal studies by Wright and Hinson [9] have revealed a rapid rise in social
media usage among public relations stakeholders. Stacks and Bowen [4] define social media as "open source media sites on the internet that accept user-generated content and promote social interaction". Some scholars claim that social media plays an important role in political issues. Maxine Rice et al. [10] argued that the widespread coverage of certain events led to a government response, which was met with a lot of criticism from the industry and sparked a great deal of political discussion. Even if the media coverage of these events does not have a major effect on the public, it can still have considerable political consequences.

Digital reflectivity of social media shows that the students are dissatisfied with the status quo [7] and want to take action: more students choose to donate more money and join the non-profit organization.

Furthermore, with the video of successful cases of rescue campaigns, students' confidence increases therefore they are more likely to be persuaded and take action.

To summarize, this study suggested effective methods to engage Chinese high school students with homeless animal welfare and provided specific content guidance on social media to achieve the goal.

APPENDIX

Appendix 1

In this video, the dirty stray dog was rescued by volunteers, and after a period of care, became active and healthy.

Lin Yuting music Show. (2019, May 14). The dirty stray dog was rescued by volunteers, and after a period of care, became active and healthy. Watch the video. - Easy and rewarding. Retrieved March 5, 2023, from https://haokan.baidu.com/v?pd=wisenatural&vid=15103358539276891478

Appendix 2

From a homeless cat’s internal monologue, this video narrates its poor living environment and its insufficient food resource.


Appendix 3

Questionnaire:

1) How much money are you willing to donate each month to the cause of helping homeless pets?
   a. No such consideration for the time being
   b. 1 to 100 yuan
   c. 100 to 500 yuan
   d. More than 500

2) Whether you are willing to participate in stray animal rescue organizations in your spare time?
   a. Yes
   b. No

3) If you want to raise a dog in the future, do you want to adopt a stray pet or buy a pet from a store?
   a. Adoption
   b. Buying

REFERENCES