

Chapter 16

Animals for Assistance to Humans



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“Service animals are the unsung heroes who make the impossible possible, turning disabilities into abilities.”
– Sarah Johnson

Abstract Animals are integral to service ecosystems, aiding in health care, accessibility, social engagement, and leisure. Despite their significant roles, the specific value outcomes of animal-based services—economic, psychological, societal, and environmental—are under-examined. This chapter investigates therapeutic, personal assistance, social engagement, and recreational services, categorizing them by purpose (health care vs. entertainment) and caretaking arrangements (service provider vs. individual consumer). It highlights the need for stronger policies and self-regulatory business practices to ensure fair treatment of service animals, as current protections are limited. Given their economic contributions, animals should be safeguarded through regulations on training, certification, and welfare, including humane handling and stress monitoring. Legal inconsistencies complicate protections for working animals, who, unlike human workers, do not receive direct compensation, raising welfare concerns. Policymakers could mandate financial provisions for animals’ health care and retirement. Ethical reflection on animal agency and consent is crucial, as service roles may involve non-voluntary participation. Promoting humane training and transparent welfare protocols can enhance trust in animal-based services and encourage responsible practices.

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From Assistance to Industry: The Growing Impact of Animal-Based Services

Whether comforting a patient, guiding a person through a crowd, or drawing tourists into snowy landscapes, animals are at work in today's service economy often without recognition, rights, or rest. The role of animals in assisting humans in different services has received attention in various disciplines, ranging from organizational studies (e.g., Huopainen 2022; Mitchell 2024) and sociology (e.g., Bell 2015) to business (Tallberg et al. 2022), tourism (e.g., Fennell 2024; Mkonon and Hughes 2024), and marketing research (Wunderlich et al. 2021). In this chapter, we use the term animal-based services for structured activities where animals are intentionally integrated into service processes to support or enhance customer experiences.¹ These services typically involve human–animal interactions aimed at promoting outcomes such as well-being (Lin et al. 2024), accessibility (Duncan 2000), and leisure (Lee et al. 2024).

Previous studies have highlighted the emotional and relational roles that animals play in shaping consumer service experiences and enhancing perceived value (Rötmeier-Keuper et al. 2018). The value that animals generate in assisting humans spans many categories, ranging from economic value (i.e., cost-effectiveness, time savings, or service efficiency), psychological value (i.e., the strengthening of psychological and emotional well-being), societal value (i.e., impacts on inclusion, or collective benefit), and environmental value (i.e., ecological sustainability or naturalness of the human–animal encounters). Although a variety of value outcomes for humans are recognized in extant animal-based service research, a systematic analysis and categorization of values is lacking. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the value created in animal-based services for health care (e.g., assistance dogs, therapy animals) and entertainment (e.g., petfluencers, zoos) to capture the diversity of animal-based services. Health and entertainment purposes also represent two domains with high commercial impact. Moreover, the distinct categories of value created through human–animal interactions in these contexts can be further differentiated based on the caretaking arrangements, whether the animal's primary caretaker is the service provider or the individual consumer.

Drawing on a structured literature review, this study examines the specific value categories that emerge through human–animal interactions in four distinct animal-based service contexts—therapeutic services, personal assistance services, social engagement services, and recreational services:

¹ We utilize the term animal-based services to capture a broader range of activities compared to those defined by Animal Assisted Services International (AASI), where services are facilitated by a human service provider working with a specially qualified animal to deliver therapeutic, educational, or supportive interventions (Johnson Binder et al. 2024). The term animal based is established in fields such as tourism (Fennell 2024) and animal welfare assessments (Stygar et al. 2022), supporting its broader applicability beyond therapeutic or clinical settings.

- (a) How can animal-based service types be classified based on the intended purpose (health care vs. entertainment) and the animal's caretaking arrangements (service provider vs. individual consumer)?
- (b) How do value categories manifest across the identified animal-based service types?

Since existing literature has primarily focused on the value animals provide to humans—while largely overlooking the value, or lack thereof, experienced by the animals themselves—this study adopts a post-anthropocentric perspective (Askegaard et al. 2024) to critically examine the managerial and policy implications of the proposed classification, with particular attention to animal ethics and well-being. This includes acknowledging animals as more than passive tools, recognizing their potential role in shaping service experiences and raising ethical questions about their agency, consent, and welfare (Irvine 2008; Wunderlich et al. 2021).

By focusing on the value outcomes of human–animal interactions in service contexts, this chapter contributes to ongoing debates about the role of non-human actors in animal-based services, ethical consumerism, and the boundaries of value creation in multispecies settings. Understanding these dynamics is relevant for policymakers, service providers, and researchers interested in ethical service design, animal welfare, and consumer experience. Our analysis highlights how different service contexts shape human–animal relationships and calls for continued reflection on the ethical and practical implications of including animals in service ecosystems.

Categorizing Human–Animal Service Interactions

We propose a classification of animal-based services (Fig. 16.1), structured along two dimensions. The vertical axis shows the intended purpose of the service, being either health-related service, where animals support physical or mental well-being, or entertainment-related service, where animals primarily enhance leisure experiences. The horizontal axis reflects the caretaking arrangement; when the service provider is responsible for the animal's welfare, human–animal interactions are typically structured and intermittent, whereas when the consumer is the main caretaker the relationship is more continuous and intimate, as it is not mediated by a third party.

In the upper-left quadrant, we place *therapeutic services*, for example therapy animals assisting in psychological and physical rehabilitation (Quan et al. 2024). In the lower-left quadrant, we place *recreational services*, such as animal cafés, elephant rides, swimming with dolphins, and professional animal performances in tourism or leisure industries (Curtin and Wilkes 2007). In the upper-right quadrant, we place *personal assistance services*, for example emotional support animals and privately owned assistance dogs. In the lower-right quadrant, we place *social engagement services* such as social media influencer pets, and animals used for personal branding or digital content creation (Wei et al. 2025). In the following, we elaborate on these

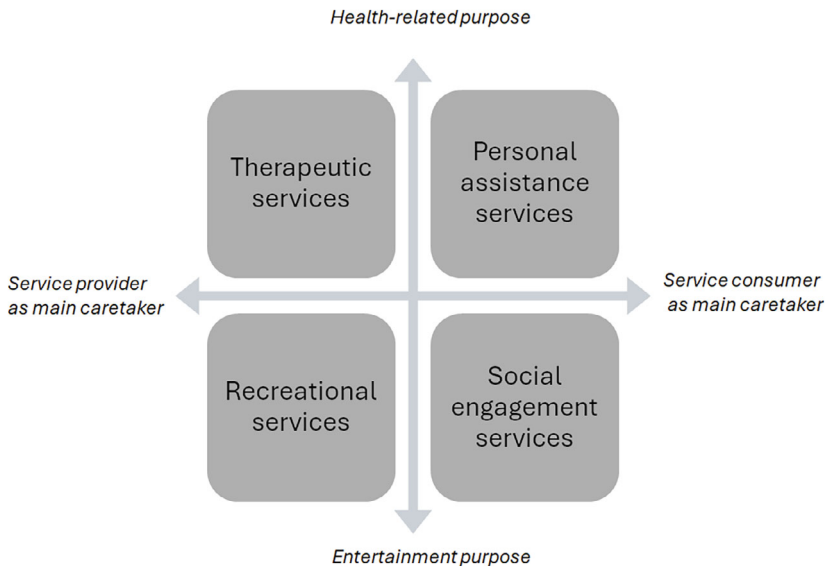


Fig. 16.1 Classification of animal-based services

different types of animal-based services and examine the value categories that animals generate within each type.

1. Therapeutic services

Therapeutic services are positioned in the matrix with the health-related purpose of having the service provider as the main caretaker of the animal. This service type emphasizes emotional and physical support, provider delivering service through structured therapy or informal well-being practices for example in mental health care (Quan et al. 2024), tourism (Lin and Li 2024), and yoga (Berbel and Praetorius 2024). Therapeutic services are primarily associated with psychological and societal value, though they also generate economic and environmental value.

Therapeutic services produce significant *economic value* by improving care efficiency and reducing treatment costs by increasing service engagement, trust, and satisfaction (Quan et al. 2024). Animal-based wellness tourism has been described as more cost-effective than traditional therapy, especially with regard to client satisfaction and accessibility (Lin and Li 2024). These economic benefits emerge alongside improvements in service quality, as animals often help therapists assess client responses more accurately and adapt interventions accordingly (Policay and Falconier 2019).

Animals create strong *psychological value* (Berbel and Praetorius 2024; Lin and Li 2024; Quan et al. 2024), as, for example, they help alleviate distress, reduce anxiety, and improve emotional regulation in individuals with depression or PTSD, adolescents in therapy, and elderly people (Berbel and Praetorius 2024; Mitchell 2024). These improvements have been linked to both physiological responses, such

as reduced cortisol and increased oxytocin (Polheber and Matchock 2014), and more subjective experiences of comfort, safety, and joy (Lin and Li 2024). The mere presence of animals can foster a sense of calm and strengthen emotional resilience (Lin et al. 2024). Animals strengthen therapeutic human–human interactions and help individuals feel seen and connected (Quan et al. 2024; Lin et al. 2024). These effects are meaningful in group-based settings, such as goat yoga or equine-assisted therapy, where animals serve as bridges between people and enhance participants’ willingness to engage (Berbel and Praetorius 2024). For individuals who feel alienated by traditional wellness environments or who struggle with communication and social skills, animals provide a non-judgmental presence that opens space for connection. Therapy animals have been shown to increase engagement and retention in mental health programs, especially for those who might otherwise drop out or resist care (Berbel and Praetorius 2024).

Therapeutic services also promote *societal value* by expanding access and inclusion to wellness and mental health support for individuals who may feel excluded or intimidated by conventional care environments (Berbel and Praetorius 2024). For example, for people who may not respond well to pharmacological treatments or who are excluded from traditional healthcare settings due to disability, trauma, or social stigma (Quan et al. 2024; Lin and Li 2024). In tourism, animal-based wellness offerings can be more affordable and less stigmatizing than formal psychiatric care, broadening access to emotional support (Lin and Li 2024).

Although less emphasized in the literature, *environmental value* is emerging in therapeutic services through increasing attention to animal welfare, ethical responsibility, and ecological sustainability. Increasingly, animals are framed not just as tools or passive resources, but as sentient partners whose welfare and agency matter (Quan et al. 2024). This recognition fosters a shift in how services are designed supporting more sustainable and ethically grounded care systems where animals are understood as sentient participants whose emotional and physical well-being is integral to the care process (Danby and Grajfoner 2022).

2. Personal assistance services

Personal assistance services are positioned in the matrix as services with a health-related purpose where the service consumer is also the caretaker. From crossing busy streets to easing anxiety in crowded spaces, animals working in personal assistance services are more than helpers; they are enablers of everyday freedom for the person they serve. These animals, mainly dogs, aid people with physical impairments (e.g., mobility or vision loss), psychiatric disorders (e.g., PTSD), and neurological conditions (e.g., epilepsy or autism) (Duncan 2000; Appleby et al. 2022; Singleton 2023). The dominant value outcomes associated with this service type are economic, psychological, and societal, whereas environmental value is notably absent in existing research.

Personal assistance services generate significant *economic value* by reducing long-term care needs and costs by enabling greater independence and workforce participation for individuals with disabilities (Quan et al. 2024). Lundqvist et al. (2019) demonstrated that for someone with a functional impairment, having a trained service

dog can save thousands of dollars compared to having an ordinary pet dog. Beyond general cost-effectiveness there are additional ways service animals reduce expenses; handlers can cut down on medication and personal caregiver hours after getting a service animal (Singleton 2023).

While an animal might perform a task like a piece of medical equipment would, its mere presence also provides comfort and companionship in a way no gadget can (Nieforth et al. 2023), creating *psychological value*. They enhance emotional well-being, foster autonomy, enhance mobility, and boost confidence across daily life for both adults and children (Duncan 2000; Appleby et al. 2022; Lin et al. 2024). Their presence is linked to greater quality of life, reduced stress, and increased participation in social spaces. For example, guide dogs and autism assistance dogs have been shown to increase safety, ease family mobility, and improve emotional regulation, helping users feel more secure and empowered in unfamiliar environments (Lin et al. 2024; Appleby et al. 2022). The presence of animals fosters companionship and emotional resilience, reinforcing users' sense of belonging and reducing isolation (Duncan 2000), for example, strangers might initiate friendly conversation about the animal, thereby increasing the handler's social interactions and sense of acceptance in public (Nieforth et al. 2023).

Service animals offer *societal value* by increasing how assistance animals enable inclusion, dignity, and participation in community life (Duncan 2000; Quan et al. 2024). Policies such as Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandate that individuals with disabilities must be allowed to bring their service animals into public spaces, including restaurants, transportation, schools, and health-care facilities. This legal protection reflects how animals contribute to building more equitable and accessible societies (Duncan 2000). Alongside facilitating inclusiveness, assistance animals help normalize disability in workplaces and public settings by promoting independence and fostering positive interactions with others (Quan et al. 2024). In this context, animals are not only service providers but also participants in advancing social justice and community engagement.

3. Social engagement services

Social engagement services are positioned in the matrix as services with entertainment-oriented purposes where the service consumer is responsible for the animal's well-being. The rise of pet influencers—"petfluencers"—on social media illustrates how animals serve as social engagement service workers by generating mainly economic, psychological, and societal value, while environmental value is largely missing.

For their human caretakers, animal influencers generate substantial *economic value*, having been successfully commercialized as key players in the digital economy (Ngai 2023; Wei et al. 2025). These petfluencers, such as Grumpy Cat, Nala Cat, or Jiffpom pomeranian, often outperform human influencers in visibility, engagement, and audience trust, making them highly sought-after partners for brand collaborations (Ngai 2023; Wei et al. 2025; Di Cioccio et al. 2024; Lavertu et al. 2025). Petfluencers generate more consumer engagement and lead to higher purchase intentions than their human counterparts, largely because they are perceived as more authentic and

credible (Di Cioccio et al. 2024). Petfluencers often charge lower fees, pose less reputational risk, and deliver equal or greater marketing value (Lavertu et al. 2025), and owners may treat this as a business venture, with some even quitting traditional jobs to focus full-time on managing their pet's brand (Lavertu et al. 2025). In tourism sector, petfluencers are increasingly used in marketing campaigns to enhance brand image, attract emotionally engaged consumers, and drive purchase behavior (Wei et al. 2025), for example, a single post by a petfluencer can significantly sway booking intentions and destination preferences (Zhang et al. 2023).

Beyond dollars and cents, animal influencers provide significant *psychological value* as people around the world follow pet accounts for wholesome entertainment, emotional connection, and a sense of shared community. For many owners, creating content with and for their animal influencer improves their own emotional well-being through creative expression, routine, and connection. Especially during emotionally taxing periods (e.g., lockdowns), posting about their pets helped owners cope with stress and gave them a feeling of productivity (Yoo et al. 2024).

Animals in social engagement services also contribute to *societal value* by shaping cultural narratives, public understanding, and ethical debates regarding animals. Animals act as cultural intermediaries, promoting empathy, knowledge sharing, and interspecies identity construction (Ngai 2023; Wei et al. 2025). For example, pet accounts serve as platforms for spreading awareness about animal-related products and care practices (Wei et al. 2025). These animals often appeal across cultural and demographic boundaries, making them widely relatable and appreciated in diverse online communities (Lavertu et al. 2025). At the same time, these representations are embedded in gendered, aesthetic, and commercial discourses that shape public attitudes toward animals (Linné 2016). Visual portrayals of farm animals as cheerful, feminine, or nostalgic reinforce idealized narratives that may obscure real welfare concerns highlighting how societal value also emerges through critique and ethical reflection (Linné 2016).

Environmental value is largely absent in social engagement services. While animals such as companion dogs in political or symbolic settings can enhance public empathy (Mitchell 2024), these emotionally resonant roles also raise questions about the sustainability and ethics of involving animals in human-centered services (Linné 2016). The commercialization of animal personas for entertainment purposes may even contribute to unsustainable consumer practices, further distancing social engagement services from broader environmental goals.

4. Recreational services

Recreational services are positioned in the matrix as services with an entertainment-oriented purpose where the service provider is the main caretaker of the animal. These services include a wide variety of activities, from wildlife shows to animal cafés and sled dog tours, where animals play a central role in shaping consumer experiences (Fennell 2024; Lee et al. 2024; Tallberg et al. 2022). All types of value are present in this type of services, while economic and psychological are dominant.

The growing demand for animal-based recreational services has significantly contributed to the *economic value* of tourism and leisure industries, where animals are utilized to maximize financial gains, justify cultural practices, and support profitable business models (Fennell 2024; Lee et al. 2024; Tallberg et al. 2022). As highlighted in Chapter 14 Animals in entertainment and 17 Animals and Tourism of this volume, these services are part of a broader entertainment economy that relies on emotional engagement and experiential value, while also raising concerns about the commodification of animals and the normalization of exploitative practices. These services often operate within an economic logic where animals are positioned as revenue-generating assets whose care, appearance, and performance are optimized for profitability (Tallberg et al. 2022). In husky tourism, the entire lifecycle of the animal from puppyhood to labor is managed to maximize economic returns, with puppies used as tourist attractions and emotional laborers in photo moments (Tallberg et al. 2022). Similarly, animal welfare practices are frequently articulated through economic benefits, where care is justified for enhancing animal performance, ensuring customer satisfaction, and securing long-term business viability, rather than for the intrinsic rights of animals (Tallberg et al. 2022). Sled dogs, pandas, and zoo animals are framed as flagship attractions that sustain revenue streams and institutional legitimacy (Fennell 2022; Guo and Fennell 2024). For example, the celebrity status of pandas transforms their affective appeal into economic value through branding, ticket sales, and public engagement (Guo and Fennell 2024).

Recreational services also generate significant *psychological value* by offering emotional support, human–animal bonding, moments of joy, companionship, and inclusion, particularly for those experiencing urban stress or social isolation (Wunderlich et al. 2021). Animal cafés and zoos have been described as spaces that promote psychological healing, relaxation, offering emotional comfort and helping people feel valued and connected (Lin and Li 2024). These interactions can offer a sense of unconditional acceptance, reduce feelings of loneliness, and reinforce a person's sense of self-worth and belonging (Lin and Li 2024). Participatory activities, such as sled dog tours or elephant-based travel, may also foster self-growth, learning, and accomplishment (Lin and Li 2024).

Recreational services also contribute to *societal value* by shaping cultural attitudes, supporting local communities, and influencing public discourse around animals. Animal-based attractions often serve as economic anchors for rural or culturally significant communities, generating employment and preserving cultural practices (Lee et al. 2024; Guo and Fennell 2024). In this way, animal-based recreational services act as sites of cultural negotiation, ethical reflection, and community development.

Although less emphasized than other value types, recreational services claim to deliver *environmental value* through conservation education, species protection, and habitat awareness. Immersive nature-based activities, such as sled dog tours or elephant encounters, can foster emotional connections to animals and landscapes, enhancing ecological appreciation (Lee et al. 2024). Yet, these experiences also risk normalizing exploitative practices when animals are treated as interactive tools rather than autonomous beings (Meng et al. 2024). Similarly, zoos and aquariums

present animals as ambassadors for their species in enclosures that mimic natural settings to promote awareness and empathy (Mkono and Hughes 2024). However, these strategies may obscure the ethical complexities of captivity and offer only limited environmental value (Bell 2015). Despite these tensions, some recreational services do contribute to environmental goals. Charismatic animals such as pandas attract conservation funds and help conserve larger ecosystems (Guo and Fennell 2024), and public pressure has pushed festivals and wildlife attractions to adopt more ethical and sustainable methods (Joo et al. 2023). Thus, while some recreational services make meaningful contributions to biodiversity and ecological awareness, others risk reducing environmental value to a symbolic gesture serving entertainment or branding needs (Bell 2015).

Value Creation in Animal-Based Services: Key Considerations

The literature review of animal-based services shows that animals contribute to value creation across all service types as economic, psychological, and societal value are at least indirectly created, with different categories of value often created simultaneously. However, there are notable differences in the relative emphasis placed on different values across the service types.

While social engagement services, such as petfluencers' social media channels, primarily generate economic value, therapeutic services, by contrast, contribute more substantially to psychological value. Economic values range from cost savings to increased efficiency, typically benefitting the service provider or professional caretaker of the animal, while psychological value varies depending on the individual experiencing it. In therapeutic and recreational services, animals are integrated in the service process to benefit service customers, who experience a range of psychological values, including the alleviation of distress, reduced anxiety, and improved emotional regulation, human–animal bonding, and joy. Interestingly, observing petfluencer channels can also evoke similar psychological responses in their followers. Personal assistance services don't involve external individuals as the human caretaker, often a person with a disability, is the beneficiary of the animal's support. The psychological value generated through the animal's companionship and assistance, once trained by professional handlers, is highly individualized and context specific.

Across all service types we can observe that the strong psychological value also contributes—mostly indirectly—to broader societal value by promoting inclusion, dignity, and participation in community life. Additionally, these services may generate broader economic value by supporting a healthier population and reducing the burden on healthcare systems. Interestingly, the connection between animal-based services and *environmental value* is largely absent in existing research. Only therapeutic and recreational services are associated with the creation of environmental value. Within therapeutic services, human caretakers of animals are increasingly

engaging with the welfare and agency of their “co-workers.” Recreational services are related to environmental value, particularly through their efforts to promote conservation education, species protection, and habitat awareness. This growing attention to the living conditions of animals may also contribute to broader goals of ecological sustainability, as service providers may be more inclined to adopt inclusive and responsible practices that align with ecological well-being (Quan et al. 2024). It is noteworthy that social engagement services, through social media, have the potential to generate multiplier effects in raising awareness of environmental and societal issues related to animals. However, this potential remains largely under-utilized as petfluencers are often instrumentalized primarily for the economic benefit of their human caretakers.

Our analysis shows vividly that previous research has extensively documented how animal-based services create value for humans—benefiting service providers, customers, and society at large, but has overlooked the question of what value, if any, is generated for the animals themselves. This stands in sharp contrast to the reality that so many people extract considerable value from the unpaid labor of animals, often under conditions that fail to meet species-appropriate working conditions. It appears that many practices had an anthropomorphic bias that overlooked animals’ interests, although animal-based services would require strong ethical standards to protect animal partners. Aligned with post-anthropocentric lenses (Askegaard et al. 2024), we argue that it is necessary to recognize animals as sentient beings rather than mere service tools. This recognition entails acknowledging their critical role in creating service value and shaping service experiences, while also raising important ethical questions regarding their agency, consent, and welfare (Irvine 2008; Wunderlich et al. 2021). Protecting animal welfare is not only an ethical responsibility but also a prerequisite for maintaining reliable and effective service quality.

Shaping Public Policy for Responsible Animal-Based Services

Our literature review on animal-based services demonstrates the significant role of animals in value creation not only on individual levels, but on the societal level, too. Therefore, we derive a reverse responsibility on the part of policymakers for the responsible treatment of animals in service ecosystems. While there is a broad societal consensus on ensuring fair working conditions for human laborers, comparable ethical considerations for animals remain underdeveloped. Precisely because animals constitute a valuable resource in generating economic value for service providers, they should be protected against exploitation. Thus, we call on public policymakers to establish robust regulations that balance human benefits with animal welfare.

Policymakers should establish clear standards for training, certification, and oversight of animal-based services. Several commercial contexts (e.g., petting zoos, animal cafés) continue to involve constrained spaces and compelled interactions

that may conflict with species-specific behaviors and compromise animal welfare (Mkono and Hughes 2024). Therefore, animals' daily needs and dignity ought to be prioritized by watching regularly for signs of stress or fatigue and removing animals from situations that compromise their welfare. To make this happen, welfare safeguards should be required to be installed into operations (limit working hours, provide rest and enrichment, and use humane handling and training methods). These guidelines could be based on widely accepted welfare principles, such as the Five Freedoms (Wunderlich et al. 2021). In this way, regulations would enact comprehensive animal-based service standards to uphold animal welfare (e.g., minimum care standards, therapy animal program accreditation) while enabling responsible service delivery. As an example, some industry guidelines (e.g., veterinary associations) currently recommend assigning a "Responsible Person" to each program and involving veterinarians to monitor animal health and behavior. Such measures help institutionalize the best practices across animal-based service contexts.

Furthermore, greater coordination between human and animal-based service policies, such as therapy, tourism, entertainment, and assistance animals, may be beneficial, given the diversity of legal standards that exist across countries, service types, and species. For example, while guide dogs undergo extensive training and legal protections, emotional support animals in many countries lack standardized training (Hoy-Gerlach et al. 2019). Unlike human workers, animals do not receive monetary compensation that directly benefits their own welfare. While some human caretakers may convert the economic value into improved living conditions for the animals, there is no legal obligation to do so outside specific regulatory frameworks (Blattner 2019). Since animals are treated as goods or natural resources (Blattner 2019), animals cannot hold bank accounts or enter into contracts, policymakers could nonetheless require human caretakers to take greater responsibility for animals' welfare. For instance, they could mandate the establishment of designated accounts, contributions to a retirement fund, or enrollment in healthcare plans to ensure long-term care for working animals.

Advancing Research in Animal-Based Services

Our literature review highlights several promising directions for future research into the value of animal-based services. Firstly, our analysis reveals that only a few studies address the environmental value of animal-based services. Future research could focus on dimensions such as animal welfare, ecological impact, and sustainability across four service types. Services with an entertainment purpose, like petfluencers, deserve closer investigation for their potential educational value, such as increasing conservation awareness and audience engagement. The established role of celebrity animals (e.g., pandas) (Guo and Fennell 2024) opens avenues to investigate their symbolic function in shaping public concern for endangered species.

Secondly, given the psychological benefits across all animal-based service types, future studies could explore the potential of these services in addressing mental

healthcare shortages. Animal-based tourism, found to promote mental well-being (Lin and Li 2024), might serve as an alternative mental health intervention such as their contribution to psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and stress reduction. While the positive psychological impact of animal-based services is well documented, future research should also explore the boundaries between therapeutic and personal assistance roles.

Thirdly, further exploration at the intersection of economic value and ethics is needed—especially in recreational services, where customer enjoyment may coexist with disregard for animal welfare (Meng et al. 2024). Future studies could examine how expectations, marketing narratives, and cultural backgrounds shape customers' ethical evaluations of animal-based services. Integrating social contract theory (Fennell 2022) and ethical frameworks could provide deeper insight into how consumers assess the moral acceptability of these services. The commodification of animals, particularly in recreational and social engagement services, raises concerns about the exploitation of animal labor (Guo and Fennell 2024). Research should investigate how customers perceive animals as co-creators of economic value, and whether recognizing animal agency and autonomy influences service satisfaction. For instance, in petfluencer marketing, critical analysis is needed regarding acceptable treatment of animals, sponsorship transparency, and perceived authenticity (Wei et al. 2025).

Fourth, societal value is rarely addressed directly in existing research. Future studies could investigate how individual-level values diffuse to collective societal outcomes, particularly in social engagement services. Research should examine how such representations shape or challenge public attitudes toward animal welfare (Linné 2016). Additionally, research could explore how ethical reflection on animal welfare contributes to broader societal value, especially in emerging lifestyle trends like veganism or the “One Health” movement, which promote integrated well-being for humans, animals, and ecosystems (Wunderlich et al. 2021).

Fifth, future research should explore the interactions and tensions between different types of value and between various stakeholders (e.g., providers, customers, animals). Current research remains anthropocentric, and thus, a more balanced understanding of value co-creation requires methodological advancements to better incorporate the animal's perspective (Meng et al. 2024). Furthermore, organizational scholars should investigate how animals' function in the workplaces as co-workers and how human-animal relationships shape organizational structures, leadership, and culture (Huopainen 2022). This includes exploring employee experiences and identifying the benefits and challenges of integrating animals into services (Kelemen et al. 2020).

Finally, while some literature recognizes the caregiving role of customers, more work is needed to understand how customers function as value co-creators (Hendricks and Schmitz 2021)—especially in settings such as therapy, or tourism. Future research could conceptualize how caregiving behaviors contribute to service effectiveness, customer satisfaction, and animal well-being. It is also important to investigate how customers perceive and respond to service providers' animal welfare

practices. A deeper understanding of consumer sensitivity to animal welfare could inform the ethical design and delivery of services.

Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that animals play a crucial and multidimensional role across a range of service contexts. Despite their importance, the specific values of animal-based services—whether economic, psychological, societal, or environmental—are not systematically explored.

Drawing on this analysis, delved into the roles of animals in therapeutic, personal assistance, social engagement, and recreational services, categorizing them based on their purpose (health care vs. entertainment) and the nature of their caretaking (service provider vs. individual consumer). It demonstrated the significant role of assistance animals in value creation not only on individual levels but on the societal level, too. Precisely because animals constitute a valuable resource in generating economic value for service providers, they should be protected against exploitation. Thus, the chapter calls on public policymakers to establish robust regulations that balance human benefits with animal welfare. These cover training, certification, and welfare, including humane handling and stress management. However, the inconsistency in legal protections across different service types and regions complicates the safeguarding of working animals, who, unlike human workers, do not receive direct compensation, raising concerns about their long-term welfare. Key recommendations from this analysis involve the provision of funds for the health care and retirement of these animals. Ethical considerations regarding animal agency and consent are crucial, as these roles often involve non-voluntary participation. Promoting humane training methods and transparent welfare protocols could build trust in animal-based services and encourage ethical practices.

Future research on this topic should address several promising directions to further understand the value of animal-based services. More studies are needed to examine the environmental value of animal-based services in terms of sustainability and welfare, investigate their potential to support mental health care, explore ethical tensions between profit and animal well-being in recreational contexts, and analyze how individual experiences shape broader societal attitudes toward animals. Finally, future research should explore the interactions and tensions between different types of value and stakeholders, incorporating the animal's perspective and understanding the role of animals as co-workers in organizational settings. By addressing these research gaps and policy suggestions, we can enhance our understanding of animal-based services and promote responsible practices that ensure the well-being of both animals and humans.

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