

Dog-Owner Compatibility Index of Activity Preferences

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Findings in human-animal interaction often includes the benefits of the relationship; however, pet relinquishment persists as a core issue within the field. Considering mismatches could be an explanation about relinquishment, this study was performed with the aim to design and to evaluate psychometric properties of the dog-owner compatibility index of activity preferences, in its Spanish and English versions. This is a measurement of dog-owner compatibility through shared behaviors. Surveys of 627 pet dog owners in Mexico and 61 pet dog owners in the United States were utilized. The results demonstrated strong psychometric properties in Spanish version. Factor analysis suggests a two-factor structure; evidence of convergent validity was obtained comparing index scores with Mexican version of Monash dog owner relationship scale and internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha that showed a coefficient of .82 to complete index. Results also showed evidence of reliability in English version with a Cronbach's alpha of .83. Due to its shortness and simple scoring, the index could be used by researchers, rescue associations, and adoptions centers.

Keywords: compatibility, human-animal bond, human-dog interaction

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The human-animal bond has been studied from different perspectives; one of them is the study about human factors that affect dog behavior (Payne, Bennett & McGreevy, 2015) and factors that affect the human-dog relationship. Routine of the owner as well as routine of the dog (Meyer & Forkman, 2014) and some aspects of human behavior could influence the success of relationship between the dog and its owner (Payne et al., 2015).

Similarity could explain the fact that owner satisfaction about human-dog relationship is related with behavioral traits like maintaining an active life style (Payne et al., 2015). Similarity, actual or perceived, has positive effects on relationship functioning and is one of the most important interpersonal variables in social psychology (Turcsán,

Range, Virányi, Miklósi, & Kubinyi, 2012). The similarity/attraction principle affects pet selection. For example, humans make choices considering the breed while guided by some genetic predisposition of the animal to feature some behavior, and also, could judge the behavior of a dog as more suitable or attractive over another (Turcsán et al., 2012).

Payne et al. (2015) indicate accounting for dog and human personalities when matching dogs with humans could reduce behavioral conflicts in the dyad derived from mismatches; this could diminish relinquishment. In their review, Curb, Abramson, Grice, and Kennison (2013) found behavioral issues are frequently reasons that dogs that had already been adopted are returned to shelters; they argued

better human-dog matching procedure could reduce the number of dogs relinquished and added compatibility in personality traits of the dyad would predict owner's satisfaction with their relationship. Nevertheless, even when they designed a match questionnaire to assess human-dog personality compatibility, did not show evidence of its reliability or validity. The evaluation designed by Curb et al. (2013) focuses on shared characteristic; of their list, four were found significantly associated with the satisfaction derived from the human-dog relationship: the tendency to share possessions, the interest in outdoor running, poor interest in destructive behavior, and the ability to get along with others. Lastly, they found that people and dogs with an active lifestyle seem to complement each other. Considering this, behavioral compatibility is an indicator that could be used when matching dogs and potential owners.

Compatibility is the adjustment between the animal and its owner in their physical, behavioral, and psychological dimensions (Budge, Spicer, Jones, & George, 1998). Our study focuses on the behavioral dimension of compatibility, which is primarily concerned to exercise and play (Budge, 1996); and we use activity preferences as its indicator. Activity preference is to share the love for some daily activities like walking, interacting with others, etc.

Worldwide, some programs evaluate compatibility between dogs and potential owners. Programs like *Meet your match canine-ality adoption* from *The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals* -ASPCA- is an example. Nevertheless, this program lacks a scientific evaluation, and some shelters perceive it as a complex procedure and prefer not to use it (Curb et al., 2013). This kind of program could diminish the relinquishment of dogs regarding behavioral problems like being too active if given the proper attention it needs.

Searching the internet with “dog-owner matching” or “ideal dog” as keywords, it is easy to find quizzes available on the web sites of official associations or food brands, although they pretend to guide the *right dog* selection, none of them give information concerning the design or psychometric properties of the quiz. After responding to several quizzes, we found questions that were very different from one to another. We also received different recommendations for breed selection from one quiz to another with few commonalities among them.

Considering the lack of reliable measures to assess compatibility and its possible use for animal adoption services, the study was performed with the aim to design and to evaluate psychometric properties of the dog-owner compatibility index of activity preferences, in its Spanish and English versions.

Study 1: Spanish version with Mexican people

Method

In this study, we evaluated psychometric properties of the Spanish version of the dog-owner compatibility index of activity preferences.

Participants

Participants were recruited to answer an on-line survey via SurveyMonkey.com (SurveyMonkey®). Social media invitations to participate were posted with extended invitation using a snowball sampling method. Eligibility included owning at least one dog as a pet and speaking Spanish as their native language. It was distributed solely among Mexican people. Incomplete questionnaires were discarded. If someone owned more than one dog, the instruction was to answer thinking of one of them and if the participant accepted, another questionnaire could be

answered according to another of his/her dogs. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained through the research.

Survey was answered by 627 owners; 82.6% women and 17.4% men. Mean age of participants was 31.7 years (SD 8.9). More than half (50.4%) were single, 34.0% married, 11.5% had a relationship; the rest were separated or divorced. As a result, this first study included matching behavior between 33.5% small dogs (5 to 12 kg.), 25.8% medium dogs (12 to 25 kg.), 16.9% miniature (3 to 5 kg.), and 2.9% giant (40 kg. or more) and their owner.

Measures

Dog-owner compatibility index of activity preferences. The index was designed in Spanish. In developing the measure our first step was to accommodate previous findings of authors like Budge (1996), Budge et al. (1998), Curb et al. (2013), Payne et al. (2015), and Turcsán et al. (2012). For the item generation, informal interviews with dog-owners focused on behavior of the dog were also performed; these questions asked for the perceived preferences of the dog.

Originally, the index included eight situations with 16 items. After reliability and validity analysis, 12 items remained. Divided in two subscales, six items regarding the preferences of the owner and six oriented to the perceived behavior of the dogs. The index is a four point Likert scale, from totally disagree to totally agree. Compatibility regarding this index considers both the dog and the owner scores 0 or 1; or both scores 2 or 3 in items oriented to the same behaviors (e.g. walking). Total coincidences between items are divided by six and multiply by a hundred.

Monash dog owner relationship scale (MDORS). To explore the convergent validity of the scale, dog owners also filled the Monash dog owner relationship scale

(MDORS) of Dwyer, Bennett, and Coleman (2006), in its Spanish version for Mexican people done by authors of this paper (Manuscript in preparation). The MDORS assess the relationship between the owner and the dog, regarding the human point of view. This is a Likert type scale with 28 items. All items are in a multiple-choice format with five forced-choice response options, varying according to the nature of the question, indicating agreement or frequency. The MDORS includes three subscales: dog-owner interaction, perceived emotional closeness, and perceived costs. In terms of scoring, only perceived costs subscale items are negatively scored. Total scores result from summing the three subscales, indicating the strength of the human-dog relationship. Dwyer et al. (2006) reports an internal consistency of the dog-owner interaction subscale at .67 (Cronbach's alpha); and .84 for both, perceived emotional closeness and perceived costs subscales. In the Mexican version (Manuscript in preparation), Cronbach's alpha of the MDORS-M was .88; .82 for the dog-owner interaction subscale; .91 at perceived emotional closeness subscale and .81 at perceived costs.

Statistical Analysis

We used exploratory factor analysis with principal components as our method of extraction and varimax rotation; Cronbach's alpha to calculate the internal consistency and inter-item correlation estimated by Pearson's correlation. These analyses were performed using SPSS software, v.20.

Subsequently, SPSS Amos, v.18.0 was used to perform a confirmatory factor analysis using the maximum likelihood method. We followed the threshold levels recommended by Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen (2008), for chi-square divided by degree freedom (χ^2/df) values less than 3; for goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), and

comparative fit index (CFI) values greater than 0.95; while for root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) values less than 0.07.

To compare the dog-owner compatibility index with the MDORS-M scale, no parametric analysis (Spearman correlation and Man Whitney U) were used, due to the non-normal distribution of the data, evaluated by Kolmogorov-Smirnov test ($p < .001$).

Results

Inter-item correlations were analyzed separately to owner subscale and dog subscale. Regarding the owner subscale, lowest correlations were encounter in the items “to get up late” ($r = .160$) and “watch television/navigate on the Internet all of the day” ($r = .274$); once both items were eliminated inter-item correlations range from .373 to .621. Corresponding items to same situation in dog subscale showed the lowest correlations: (dog enjoy) “to wake up late” ($r = .214$) and “to stay quietly in the same room where I am” ($r = .061$). Again, once deleted, the subscale had an improvement

with inter-item correlations range from .400 to .648.

In examining the factor loading pattern within the exploratory factorial analysis, the same items showed low correlations, thus they were deleted. Even when it was possible to maintain a one factor solution, retention of two factors was based on the theoretical criteria. The bi-factor scale accounted for 47.4% of the variance (with eigenvalues of 4.148 for the first factor and 1.541 for the second).

Factor loading matrix is shown in Table 1; for a better lecture only equal or superior to .35 values are included in the table. Two items showed high factor loadings in both, owner and dogs’ subscales.

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to confirm a two-correlated factor structure (six items per subscale). All the utilized threshold levels were significant and the goodness-of-fit indexes suggested the model could be improved ($X^2/df = 8.592$, GFI = .883, AGFI = .827, CFI = .827, RMSEA = .110). Correlation between factors showed a value of $r = .61$. Allow error covariance between items 1 and 6, 2 and 6, 4 and 10; as suggested in the modification

Table 1: Exploratory factor analysis.

		Dog Subscale	Owner Subscale
1.	To walk or to run in the park.		.603
2.	To visit new places		.614
3.	To spend time with other people and their dogs		.684
4.	To go to pet-friendly restaurants and take my dog with me	.439	.605
5.	To go to pet-friendly places where my dog can be active (ex. Pet shops or dog parks).	.474	.613
6.	Activity, I’m always looking something to do.		.674
7.	Long walks in the park.	.697	
8.	To visit places he/she has never been	.727	
9.	To play with other dogs.	.578	
10.	To be in pet-friendly restaurants although he/she has to sit, just being with you.	.541	
11.	To be in rich stimulation environments where he/she can run, walk or play.	.778	
12.	Activity, it seems he/she will never get tired to play.	.620	

Note: For a better lecture only equal and superior to .35 factor loadings are showed

indices, improving the goodness-of-fit indexes and approaching them to adequate values ($X^2/df=5.428$, $GFI=.931$, $AGFI=.892$, $CFI=.905$, $RMSEA=.084$). Cronbach's alpha was estimated using six items per subscale, showing values of .75 for the owner subscale, .77 for dog subscale, and .82 for complete scale.

MDORS-M was used to evaluate convergent validity. Positive and significant correlation was found ($r_s=.220$; $p=.001$) after contrasting the dog-owner compatibility index with the general punctuation of MDORS-M. Regarding the MDORS-M subscales, the index showed significant correlations: $r_s=.234$, $p=.001$ with the human-dog interaction subscale; $r_s=.146$, $p=.001$ with the perceived emotional closeness subscale; and $r_s=-.132$, $p=.001$ with the perceived costs subscale.

Lastly, the sample was divided according its percentage of dog-owner compatibility and we performed an independent group analysis. Perceived costs subscale shows a bigger percentage of compatibility with activities preferences and human-dog interaction is perceived as more positive in those who shows a compatibility in preferences with their dogs (Table 2).

Study 2: English version

Method

The purpose of this study was to further investigate preliminary psychometrics properties of the dog-owner compatibility index of activity preferences regarding its English version.

Participants

To recruit participants, one of the authors asked dog agility handlers known by her to respond and to ask friends to respond, following snowball sampling method. Participants were all American residents, mainly from Texas. Eligibility included owning at least one dog as a pet and speaking English as their native language. The survey was also distributed online via SurveyMonkey®. As before, all incomplete questionnaires were discarded and the instructions specified thinking about one dog at a time.

The English-speaking sample included 61 owners, 82% women and 18% men; with a mean age of 48.8 ($SD=12.8$). Other demographical data or characteristics regarding their dogs were not asked. Due to the sample size only reliability data was analyzed.

Table 2: MDORS-M scoring and dog-owner compatibility index.

Percentage of dog-owner compatibility according their preferred activities.		MDORS-M	Human-dog Interaction	Perceived emotional closeness	Perceived costs	
From 0% to 50% n=125	Mean	105.9	28.4	41.6	18.2	
	Median	111.0	29.0	44.0	19.0	
	S.D.	15.9	7.7	8.1	5.1	
From 67% to 100% n=502	Mean	111.2	31.3	43.2	17.3	
	Median	113.0	32.5	45.0	16.5	
	S.D.	13.5	6.8	6.9	5.4	
		Mann Whitney' U	Z=-3.066; p=.002	Z=-3.719; p=.001	Z=-1.856; p=.063	Z=-2.151; p=.031

Measures

Dog-owner compatibility index was translated to English through back translation method. Both Spanish and English version of the index are provided in the appendix A.

Statistical Analysis

Due to Sample 2's smaller size, only reliability analysis was performed, using Cronbach's alpha to calculate the internal consistency and inter-item correlation estimated by Pearson's correlation. These analyses were performed using SPSS software, v.20.

Results

Inter-item correlation showed the weakest correlations in the items "to get up late" ($r = -.134$) and "to watch television/stay on the internet several hours" ($r = .137$), within the owner subscale; as it happened with the Spanish sample. Once both items were eliminated, inter-item correlations range from .301 to .655. Within the subscale concerning the behavior of the dogs, the items "to get up late" showed a weak correlation with a value of $r = .123$; and "to stay laying the same room of its owner for hours" showed a negative correlation of $r = -.304$, this correlation could be explained by sample characteristics, agility dogs are energy dogs. Again, once eliminated these items' inter-item correlation improved to a range of .223 to .678. Cronbach's Alpha reliability were of .72 for the owner subscale and .72 for the dogs. The overall internal consistency estimate was of .83.

Using final version of the Dog-owner compatibility index, we estimated descriptive

statistics to give scores to compare in future researches (see Table 3), this final version includes six situations and twelve items. Total scores can range from 0 to 100.

Discussion

Our objective was appropriately accomplished. We created a psychometric measure to assess human-dog activity level matching for a better lifestyle fit, useful for animal adoption services and for cross-cultural studies. Using it could help to reduce dog relinquishment and increase number of satisfactory relationships between humans and their dogs.

The designed index showed an adequate reliability in both its Spanish and English versions. Regarding its validity, the factorial analysis performed in the Spanish version of the index proved a two-factor solution, although goodness-of-fit indexes suggested the model could be improved. Results of analysis performed comparing the index with the MDORS-M showed evidence of convergent validity.

The index permits to evaluate the compatibility between the dog and the owner, regarding their quotidian activities. This is a quick way to assess matching and could be simpler than other instruments focused on personality characteristics. According to Hoffman, Chen, Serpell, and Jacobson (2013) previous researches focused on the impact of dog characteristics in attachment or satisfaction of the owner tend to concentrate on physical characteristics of the dog, or on adapting human personality questionnaires to evaluate dog personality; even though the concept of personality is commonly rejected

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the owner-dog compatibility index.

	Median	Mean	S.D.
Sample 1 (<i>Spanish language version</i>)	83.3	76.3	21.1
Sample 2 (<i>English language version</i>)	83.3	81.2	19.6

Total scores can range from 0 to 100.

when is used to dogs and temperament is considered as more suitable concept.

Regarding research focused on measure dog characteristics, Gosling, Kwan, and John (2003) implemented a cross-species comparative approach, through evaluation of personality judgments of dogs and their human owners. Nevertheless, they compared dog behavior to a human model, and to use this measure in an adoption center required much more observation than needed to use the index we propose.

Hsu and Serpell (2003) developed Canine Behavioral Assessment and Research Questionnaire (C-BARQ®). This is a valuable measure about observable dog behaviors that provides a wealth of information about dog and non-information about compatibility with owner. Furthermore, the scale includes 14 subscales and about 100 items, thus, is complicated to include complete scale in a research where other variables should be measured.

These type of measurements give no information about compatibility, being somehow difficult to know if problems may arise considering the preference of activities of both dog and owner.

Compatibility is a variable that should be included in human-animal bond researches. According to Budge (1996) and González and Landero (2014) to have a companion animal may not be enough to obtain documented benefits on health and well-being. It could be possible that type of the relationship or strength of the bond between the human and the dog could explain those benefits. Type and strength of relationship could be affected by compatibility and attachment.

To this day, compatibility between dog and owner has been studied mostly in psychological dimension, using the assessment of personality patterns (Kubinyi, Turcsán & Miklósi, 2009; Turcsán, Kubinyi, Virányi, & Range, 2011). Our study

concentrates on the behavioral dimension, a less used dimension to evaluate dog-owner compatibility; but with a clear direction toward it possible uses.

Compatibility has been included in previous hypothesis to explain attachment. Budge (1996) proposed compatibility could influence attachment, while attachment could have positive effects in physical and mental health. His research showed that people who are more compatible with their pets (dogs and cats) had better mental health and well-being; however, he did not find a relationship between the mental health and the attachment.

Budge assessed compatibility by subtracting the actual behavior of the dog to the ideal according to his owner (Budge, 1996; Budge et al., 1998). Even though his way to measure compatibility was different from used in our study, results suggest similarities regarding most of the sample reflects compatibility with their pets.

Lastly, limitations of the study should be taken in account. Some of them are sample method, imbalance between males and females in the sample, and differences between sample size of study 1 with Mexican people and study 2 with English speaking people.

We had a larger proportion of women in both studies. This should be considered in future research, because our instrument may not apply equally to men as women. Although Herzog (2007) found responses between sexes are more similar than different, there is enormous overlap in the distributions of size effect of differences between men and women responses when it comes to human-animal interactions. He also found that women, on average, show higher levels of positive behaviors and attitudes toward animals in many areas of human-animal interactions.

Considering the limitations of this research, the human-animal compatibility

encounter within the samples could be explained as sample bias due to its method – snowball sampling method (Meltzoff, 2011). But it could be seen as positive due to the likelihood of participation of well-related dyads. However, more research should be done regarding non-compatible cases. This could help to improve goodness-of-fit indexes in confirmatory factor analysis due to variability in scores.

The consideration of measuring compatibility between owners and dogs before adoption, or as a needed documentation when taking them into the shelters, could offer the possibility to assess and match better dyads. Circularity in problems within the dyad tends to lead to relinquishment, a well-known fact that affect dogs and people around the world. The dog-owner compatibility index of activity preferences is a measurement designed to understand from a behavioral perspective, what specific behaviors may be contributing in order to diminish its prevalence.

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Appendix A: Spanish versión*Índice de compatibilidad de preferencias de actividad del perro y su dueño*

Marque en cada pregunta, la opción que mejor se adecue a su rutina actual con su perro

<i>En un día libre, fin de semana o asueto, tú preferirías...</i>	Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo	<i>Tu perro disfruta...</i>	Totalmente en desacuerdo	En desacuerdo	De acuerdo	Totalmente de acuerdo
Caminar o correr en el parque	0	1	2	3	Largas caminatas en el parque	0	1	2	3
Conocer lugares nuevos	0	1	2	3	Ir a lugares a los que nunca ha ido	0	1	2	3
Pasar tiempo con gente y sus perros	0	1	2	3	Jugar con otros perros	0	1	2	3
Ir a restaurantes pet friendly para que mi perro me acompañe	0	1	2	3	Estar en restaurantes pet friendly aunque no haga otra cosa que estar acompañándote	0	1	2	3
Ir a lugares pet friendly donde mi perro pueda tener actividad, como el perrotón, parques para perros, tiendas de artículos para mascotas	0	1	2	3	Estar en lugares ricos en estimulación donde pueda realizar actividades como caminar, correr o jugar	0	1	2	3
La actividad, siempre busco algo que hacer	0	1	2	3	La actividad, los juegos, nunca se cansa de jugar	0	1	2	3

Nota: La revisión del índice se lleva a cabo de la siguiente forma: en primer lugar, se determina si hay compatibilidad en cada una de las 6 situaciones, para lo cual se considera que hay compatibilidad si tanto para el perro como para el dueño la respuesta fue 0 o 1; o bien si la respuesta fue 2 o 3. Posterior a eso se divide el número de coincidencias entre 6 y se multiplica el resultado por 100.

Appendix B: English version

Dog-owner compatibility index of activity preferences

Please respond to the following the option that better represents your actual routine with your dog.

<i>On the weekend or a non-working day, you would like ...</i>	Totally disagree	Disagree	Agree	Totally agree	<i>Your dog enjoy...</i>	Totally disagree	Disagree	Agree	Totally agree
To walk or to run in the park	0	1	2	3	Long walks in the park	0	1	2	3
To visit new places	0	1	2	3	To visit places he/she has never been	0	1	2	3
To spend time with other people and their dogs	0	1	2	3	To play with other dogs	0	1	2	3
To go to pet-friendly restaurants and take my dog with me	0	1	2	3	To be in pet-friendly restaurants although he/she has to sit, just being with you	0	1	2	3
To go to pet-friendly places where my dog can be active (ex. Pet shops or dog parks).	0	1	2	3	To be in rich stimulation environments where he/she can run, walk or play	0	1	2	3
Activity, I'm always looking something to do	0	1	2	3	Activity, it seems he/she will never get tired to play	0	1	2	3

Note: To determine compatibility between an owner and the dog, answers from 0 to 1 or 2 to 3 in both cases (dog and owner) should be counted. Following that, number of matches are divided to 6 and multiple by 100.