

# **Understanding the ‘resourceness’ of wildlife as a commodity – An institutional, service ecosystem perspective of the exotic pet trade.**

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**Purpose:** The continued overharvesting of wild species for the global wildlife trade remains a key cause of global extinction rates, biodiversity loss and social inequity (Esmail et al. 2019). Wildlife trade has also been linked with emerging infectious diseases and the risk of future pandemics (Morcatty et al., 2021). It is therefore of major concern to limit the scale of wildlife trade by reducing demand and discouraging trade behaviours. To do this, it is critical to understand the value of wildlife as a commodity. While recent developments in S-D logic shed light on the institutional nature of the ‘resourceness’ of resources (Koskela-Huotari and Vargo, 2016) and the complexity of ‘value-in-cultural-context’ (Akaka et al., 2013), these insights have yet to be connected with the literature aiming to reduce demand for wildlife products. The purpose of this paper is therefore to use S-D Logic’s institutional, service ecosystem perspective to better understand the attribution of ‘resourceness’ to wildlife in online exotic pet communities.

**Methodology:** We collected data from 9 exotic pet ownership Facebook groups based in the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and Indonesia. All posts uploaded between June -November 2020 were downloaded with their associated comments. For each group, the 30 posts with the most comments were selected for further analysis, giving a final dataset of 270 posts and 15, 855 comments. Critical discourse analysis was conducted using NVivo 12 to examine three dimensions of institutional arrangements – symbols, practices and organising principles - and how these shape the ‘resourceness’ of wildlife as a commodity.

**Findings:** We found key differences between the three cultures in their approach to resourceness of wildlife, the motivations for pet ownership, and the integration of other resources with the animals. Community structure and normalizing practices differed between the three countries. Whereas in the UK and US ownership groups were more likely to be at the national level, Indonesian groups were specific to individual cities and therefore held many more in-person events. Differences in both integrative and representational practices were evident across cultures in their discussions of husbandry and human-animal relationships, such as whether animals are perceived as symbolic family members, pets or objects. Overall, we identified six unique views of ‘resourceness’, representing mammals and reptiles for each group.

**Originality/value:** By synthesising S-D logic with wildlife trade research, and identifying ‘resourceness’ in this novel context, we significantly add to the understanding of the value that exotic pet ownership creates for people and how their perception of wildlife resourceness is shaped by their socio-cultural context. Building on this understanding, we propose that tailoring conservation efforts to reflect these unique community perceptions of exotic wildlife ownership is more likely to result in effective behaviour change strategies and, therefore, positive outcomes for wildlife. Thus, for each of the six ‘resources’ identified, we provide practical guidelines for creating demand reduction campaigns, education programs for animal welfare and policy frameworks.