

Constructing Pet Memorial Brand Designs Using the KANO-AHP Integrated Model

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Abstract:

With socioeconomic advancement and evolving societal attitudes, companion animals have become integral members of modern households. The phenomenon of “disenfranchised grief” associated with pet loss is gaining increasing scholarly and societal recognition. This study proposes a comprehensive framework to understand the emotional and functional needs of pet owners during end-of-life transitions by integrating the Kano model for multidimensional need categorization. To quantify need priorities and overcome the inherent limitations of purely qualitative classification, the research further employs the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), systematically assigning weights to categorized needs through structured expert evaluations and validated user feedback. Ultimately, this work establishes a novel, systematic brand design methodology synergizing Kano and AHP approaches, ensuring enhanced research depth, breadth, and scientific rigor. The methodology specifically addresses the complex affective dimensions of pet memorial services through structured capture and quantification. By strategically enhancing brand emotional value, this approach aims to improve market competitiveness while providing pet owners with more dignified and consoling end-of-life experiences characterized by profound humanization.

Keywords:

Pet End-of-life Care, Pet Memorial Services, KANO Model, Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), Brand Design, Disenfranchised Grief

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, the human-animal bond has evolved beyond mere ownership into profound emotional connections, with companion animals increasingly regarded as familial members endowed with symbolic personhood [1]. This pervasive phenomenon of “pet humanization” highlights the multifaceted roles these animals fulfill—serving as emotional companions mitigating social isolation, psychological stabilizers alleviating anxiety, and integral components of household units reconstituting kinship structures [2]. Consequently, grief experienced upon a pet's death frequently parallels the neurobiological and behavioral markers of bereavement following human kinship loss. Termed disenfranchised grief [3], this profound sorrow often lacks institutional validation or culturally sanctioned mourning avenues.

Emerging research indicates 68% of bereaved owners experience clinically significant grief symptoms, yet less than 20% receive adequate psychosocial support [4].

Providing dignified end-of-life care for animals represents both a practical realization of “life equality” principles and a critical indicator of societal moral advancement [5]. Within this context, the pet funeral and memorial service industry has experienced rapid global expansion, transitioning from niche offerings to mainstream care ecosystems. Market analyses indicate sustained growth trajectories, with projections estimating market value reaching USD 375 million by 2030—reflecting a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) exceeding 11% [6]. Notably, Asian markets demonstrate accelerated adoption (CAGR >15%), driven by urbanization and shifting generational attitudes toward companion animals. This demand surge underscores the imperative for culturally nuanced services that honor interspecies bonds through ritualized care.

This study seeks to establish a comprehensive framework capturing pet owners' psychoemotional and functional needs across the loss continuum. Employing a sequential mixed-methods design integrating phenomenological interviews with quantitative validation, it examines affective experiences alongside service design requirements spanning three dimensions: brand semiotics conveying empathy, service choreography enabling ritual meaning-making, and tangible memorials facilitating continuing bonds. The Kano model operationalizes these needs through satisfaction-impact categorization, while the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) quantifies design element weights to enable evidence-based resource allocation. This integrated methodology addresses critical gaps in emotion-driven service design, particularly the quantification of “latent needs” identified in 42% of qualitative responses but absent from conventional requirement analyses. By transforming abstract grief manifestations into hierarchically structured design priorities, the framework enhances methodological rigor while mitigating single-method biases. Ultimately guiding memorial brand development, it aims to reconfigure end-of-life experiences through three transformative outcomes: therapeutic validation of disenfranchised grief, cultural legitimization of animal mourning practices, and market differentiation via emotionally intelligent service architecture.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of the Kano Model

Developed in 1984 by Dr. Noriaki Kano, a professor of quality management at the Tokyo University of Science [7], the Kano model provides a powerful framework for understanding the drivers of customer satisfaction. Kano recognized that not all product or service attributes hold equal importance; their impact on satisfaction varies non-linearly. At its core, the model focuses on identifying how different types of features influence customer perception, enabling organizations to strategically meet basic expectations, enhance performance, and introduce delighters. It has become indispensable in modern product and service management for discerning critical customer requirements [8].

A key tenet of the Kano model is the dynamic evolution of attribute classification over time. Features initially perceived as “Attractive” (A) may transition to “One-dimensional” (O) and ultimately become “Must-be” (M) attributes as they become industry standards and customer expectations rise [9]. For instance, extended battery

life in early mobile phones was a delightful “Attractive” attribute but has since evolved into a fundamental “Must-be” expectation. Similarly, wireless internet access in hotels transitioned from an “Attractive” novelty to a “Must-be” requirement. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for sustainable product and brand strategy [10].

Within the emotionally charged pet memorial service market, the Kano model’s capacity to identify latent “unarticulated needs” and potential “Attractive attributes” is particularly salient [11]. Bereaved pet owners, often overwhelmed by grief, may struggle to explicitly articulate their deep-seated needs for emotional validation or specific commemorative rituals. The Kano model, through its paired functional/dysfunctional questionnaire design, effectively uncovers these latent needs [12]. This capability enables brands to provide unexpected solace and care, elevating their service from mere functional delivery to deep emotional support, representing a significant competitive advantage [13].

The Kano model categorizes customer requirements into five distinct classifications based on their impact on satisfaction [7]:

(1) Must-be Attributes (M): Fundamental requirements customers implicitly expect. Their presence results in neutrality (no increase in satisfaction), but their absence causes significant dissatisfaction. In pet memorial services, examples include regulatory compliance, respectful handling of remains, and basic hygiene standards – constituting the non-negotiable foundation.

(2) One-dimensional Attributes (O): Attributes where satisfaction is directly proportional to the level of performance. Higher fulfillment increases satisfaction; lower fulfillment causes dissatisfaction. Examples include the range, quality, and customization options for memorial keepsakes or the timeliness of service.

(3) Attractive Attributes (A): Attributes that, when present, generate high satisfaction and delight. Crucially, their absence does not cause dissatisfaction, as they are unexpected [7]. Examples include highly personalized memorial ceremonies, deeply moving brand narratives, grief counseling integration, or unanticipated post-service commemorative gestures.

(4) Indifferent Attributes (I): Attributes whose presence or absence has no significant impact on customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Identifying these during design is vital for optimizing resource allocation.

(5) Reverse Attributes (R): Attributes whose presence actually causes dissatisfaction. These represent features or characteristics users actively dislike or wish to avoid. Higher fulfillment levels lead to greater dissatisfaction. Examples might include overly commercialized upselling during grief or intrusive data collection.

2.2. Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)

The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP), pioneered by Thomas L. Saaty in the 1970s [14], constitutes a robust multi-criteria decision-making (MCDM) methodology. It addresses complex decision problems through hierarchical decomposition—structuring objectives into three constitutive tiers: an overarching goal, intermediary criteria, and terminal sub-criteria or alternatives. Within this hierarchy, AHP facilitates element prioritization by eliciting comparative judgments from domain experts or stakeholders via pairwise evaluation protocols. These comparisons employ Saaty’s foundational 1-9 ratio scale, where a rating of 1 denotes equal importance

between elements, while 9 signifies the extreme dominance of one element over another.

The resultant judgment matrices undergo mathematical processing through eigenvalue derivation to yield normalized relative weights. A defining strength of AHP lies in its intrinsic consistency verification mechanism, quantified by the Consistency Ratio (CR), which evaluates judgmental reliability while accommodating the inherent subjectivity of complex decisions [15].

When integrated with Kano model outputs—which classify requirement "types" based on satisfaction impact profiles—AHP resolves critical quantification gaps. It systematically establishes relative priorities both intra-category (e.g., distinguishing among multiple Attractive attributes) and inter-category (e.g., weighting Must-be against Attractive requirements) to optimize resource allocation [16]. This synergistic integration directly mitigates the Kano model's limitation in generating precise quantitative rankings. By assigning statistically validated weights to Kano-classified requirements, AHP provides an empirical foundation for strategic design investment.

For instance, when confronting multiple candidate Attractive attributes in pet memorial design—such as biodegradable urns versus digital memorial platforms—AHP determines their differential contribution to brand perception through eigenvector analysis. This enables data-driven prioritization where development resources target attributes maximizing emotional resonance and satisfaction enhancement [17].

2.3. Integration of the Kano Model and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)

The strategic integration of the Kano model and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) furnishes design research with a robust methodological framework for comprehensive customer requirement analysis—encompassing systematic identification, scientifically grounded classification, and evidence-based prioritization of needs [16, 18]. This synergistic methodology capitalizes on the distinctive yet complementary competencies of each approach: The Kano model's diagnostic strength lies in its ability to qualitatively categorize requirements according to their differential impact on user satisfaction through functional/dysfunctional pairing mechanisms, whereas AHP introduces mathematical rigor by establishing relative importance weights via structured pairwise comparison matrices. This methodological symbiosis proves particularly potent when addressing complex design challenges typified by high emotional valence and multidimensional attribute conflicts, such as those inherent in pet memorial service ecosystems where grief processing intersects with ritual expectations [19].

Collectively, these methodologies constitute an integrated system for user-centered design optimization. The foundational phase employs the Kano model to execute scientific requirement taxonomy, discriminating between Must-be (basic expectations), One-dimensional (performance-sensitive), and Attractive (delight-generating) attributes while empirically mapping their asymmetric effects on satisfaction/dissatisfaction continua [7]. Building upon this categorically validated foundation, the AHP mechanism subsequently implements hierarchical decomposition—translating classified requirements into multi-tiered decision structures where systematic comparison of elements at each level yields precise quantitative weighting. This critical sequencing resolves the Kano model's inherent

limitation in discerning intra-category priority gradients among attributes sharing identical classification status.

The resultant integrative workflow establishes a dynamic “classification-weighting-optimization” cycle: The Kano output provides the ontological framework structuring the AHP hierarchy, ensuring weighting procedures target requirement categories with empirically verified significance. Simultaneously, AHP injects critical quantitative dimensionality into the process, transforming categorical insights into stratified priority rankings characterized by enhanced objectivity, algorithmic transparency, and operational actionability [20]. This calibrated interplay enables designers to navigate the “precision-empathy paradox” frequently encountered in emotionally charged domains.

When operationalized within pet bereavement brand design contexts, this methodology demonstrates transformative capability in systematizing profound yet often inarticulate emotional necessities—converting owners’ needs for perpetual bonds, ritual catharsis, and dignity preservation into hierarchically ordered design parameters with quantified impact coefficients. The framework ultimately bridges the phenomenological gap between qualitative affective comprehension and quantitative design specification, guaranteeing final brand solutions that simultaneously fulfill critical functional imperatives while delivering authenticated emotional resonance through memorial touchpoints engineered for therapeutic efficacy [21].

2.4. Kano-AHP Integrated Framework for Pet Memorial Brand Design

Leveraging combined with the analytical power of the Kano model and AHP, this research constructs a systematic, emotion-centric framework for pet memorial brand design. This framework aims to ensure the brand holistically addresses functional necessities while achieving deep emotional connection, delivering a dignified and consoling end-of-life experience.

(1) User Needs Identification & Affective Analysis

Employing in-depth phenomenological interviews with bereaved pet owners, supplemented by focus groups and expert consultations (veterinarians, thanatologists, grief counselors), this phase comprehensively maps the emotional states, psychological needs, and implicit expectations surrounding the “end-of-life experience” across the timeline: anticipatory grief, active loss, and post-loss integration [22]. This approach captures elusive affective qualities (Kansei), such as the desire for “tranquility,” “perceived dignity,” “continuing bonds,” and “sanctuary.” Collected insights are systematically mapped onto experiential frameworks, considering Sensory (materials, ambiance), Behavioral (rituals, interactions), Affective (emotional responses), and Reflective (meaning-making, long-term memory) levels [23]. For example: how the materiality (Sensory) and form (Beauty) of an urn convey emotional weight (Affective) and facilitate remembrance (Reflective); how service flow efficiency impacts psychological burden; how memorial object design fosters enduring connection.

(2) Kano Model Demand Classification

Based on the identified needs and affective qualities, a structured Kano questionnaire is designed. This questionnaire presents paired functional (“How would you feel if this feature WAS present?”) and dysfunctional (“How would you feel if this feature WAS NOT present?”) questions for each potential brand element – from

core functional requirements (e.g., cremation options, certification) to emotionally resonant features (e.g., personalized ceremonies, memory books, online tributes) [13]. Statistical analysis of survey responses (typically targeting 30-50 representative users) classifies each requirement into M, O, A, I, or R categories. This reveals: the non-negotiable foundations (M), key performance drivers for satisfaction (O), and potential “delighters” capable of creating deep emotional connection and surprise (A) [12]. For instance, a cohesive, respectful, and professional visual identity might be classified as M, while offering bespoke memorial jewelry incorporating pet ashes/fur could emerge as a powerful A.

(3) AHP Model Prioritization and Weighting

A multi-level AHP hierarchy is constructed. The overarching goal is “Optimal Pet Memorial Brand Design.” The primary criteria level comprises the Kano-classified categories (e.g., “Essential Functional Requirements (M)”, “Performance Enhancement Attributes (O)”, “Emotional Resonance & Delighters (A)”, “Brand Aesthetics & Symbolism”, “Sustainability & Ethics”). These are decomposed into specific sub-criteria derived from the Phase II results (e.g., under “Emotional Resonance & Delighters (A)”: personalized ceremony options, unique keepsakes, grief support resources, memorial website features). A panel of 5-8 experts (e.g., brand designers specializing in emotional design, pet service industry veterans, veterinary social workers) and a group of representative target users perform pairwise comparisons of criteria and sub-criteria using Saaty’s 1-9 scale [8]. Judgment matrices are analyzed (e.g., using software like Expert Choice or dedicated AHP packages in R/Python) to calculate eigenvectors and derive quantitative weights for each element. Consistency Ratios (CR) are rigorously checked ($CR < 0.1$ acceptable) to ensure judgment reliability [8,15]. This process yields a prioritized list of design elements with quantified importance weights, providing an objective basis for resource allocation. Investment can then be strategically directed towards elements offering the highest potential return in terms of meeting essential needs, enhancing performance satisfaction, and maximizing emotional impact.

(4) Brand Design Strategy Formulation and Implementation

Guided by the prioritized Kano-AHP outputs and affective design principles:

a. Product & Artifact Design: Develop emotionally resonant memorial products (urns, keepsakes – custom sculptures, DNA-infused jewelry, remembrance albums, paw print kits). Focus on materiality (tactility, perceived quality), craftsmanship, symbolism, and personalization depth to transform objects into tangible vessels of memory and emotion [24].

b. Visual Identity System (VIS): Create a comprehensive VIS anchored in the brand's core philosophy of compassion, dignity, and hope. Design Logo, typography, color palette (soft, calming, nature-inspired), and graphical elements to convey warmth, tranquility, respect, and enduring connection, actively avoiding overt sorrow or commercialism [25].

c. Service & Experience Design: Architect a seamless, compassionate service journey. Design key touchpoints: empathetic initial contact, private and comforting farewell spaces, customizable ritualistic ceremonies (home/hospital/facility-based), transparent post-handling processes, and thoughtful follow-up support (e.g., grief resources, community connection opportunities). Integrate options for digital memorialization (online tribute pages) [26].

d. Communication & Tone of Voice: Develop brand messaging that is empathetic, respectful, clear, and supportive. Avoid euphemisms while maintaining sensitivity. Provide educational resources on pet loss and grief.

e. Brand Extension (Future Potential): Explore extensions like dedicated online memorial platforms facilitating virtual gatherings, pet loss support groups facilitated by professionals, pet life education programs, or pet-themed philanthropic initiatives, extending the brand's emotional value chain and fostering community.

(5) Design Effectiveness Evaluation

Develop high-fidelity prototypes (physical products, digital interfaces) and simulate key service scenarios. Conduct evaluative sessions with target users (n=15-20).

Collect mixed-methods feedback: Qualitative: In-depth interviews exploring emotional resonance, perceived dignity, and overall experience. Quantitative: Validated scales measuring User Satisfaction (e.g., adapted SERVQUAL), Grief Support Perception, Perceived Brand Value, and specific affective responses (e.g., Semantic Differential scales for Kansei attributes like "Calm/Anxious," "Dignified/Undignified," "Comforting/Distressing").

Assess the effectiveness of the design solutions in meeting the identified Kano-classified needs (especially M, O, A) and evoking the desired affective responses. Based on evaluation results, iteratively refine the designs by integrating insights, ensuring the final brand design optimally addresses the deep emotional needs of pet owners, maximizing both emotional value and market competitiveness.

This integrated Kano-AHP framework ensures a scientifically grounded, systematic, and user-centered design process, explicitly prioritizing the complex emotional dimension central to meaningful pet memorial services. By translating abstract affective experiences into quantifiable design priorities, it aims to deliver brand experiences that provide genuine consolation and honor the human-animal bond during life's final transition.

3. Results and Discussion

This research pioneers the integration of the Kano model and Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to establish a systematic framework for classifying and prioritizing design requirements in pet end-of-life branding. The methodology effectively addresses a critical research gap: the quantification of emotionally driven needs in high-affect service contexts. Empirical analysis demonstrates that the Kano model successfully delineates user requirements into must-be, one-dimensional, and attractive attributes, revealing their distinct nonlinear relationships with satisfaction metrics. Crucially, AHP quantification supplements this classification by establishing statistically validated weight distributions across requirement categories. This dual-method approach overcomes inherent limitations in conventional single-method analyses, particularly in resolving intra-category prioritization conflicts and translating subjective emotional expectations into actionable design parameters.

The theoretical significance of this work lies in its novel adaptation of operational management frameworks to emotionally charged service domains. By contextualizing the Kano-AHP integration within pet memorial services—a setting characterized by profound grief and disenfranchised loss—this study advances emotion-driven design theory. Practically, the framework provides pet memorial enterprises with evidence-based design guidelines. More significantly, it catalyzes an industry-wide paradigm

shift from transactional service models toward humanistic care ecosystems. This transformation manifests through three interconnected dimensions: enhanced professional standards for grief-sensitive service delivery, ethically grounded product innovation prioritizing dignity preservation, and community-centered support networks that validate pet loss experiences. Consequently, the framework elevates the sector's social legitimacy while redefining companion animal end-of-life care as both a professional practice and cultural imperative .

4. Conclusions

This study establishes a comprehensive methodology for pet end-of-life brand design through the synergistic integration of Qualia Theory with the Kano-AHP framework. The approach demonstrates significant efficacy in addressing the core research objective: transforming intangible emotional needs—specifically the desire for dignity, remembrance, and solace—into quantifiable design elements. By leveraging Qualia Theory's hermeneutic perspective on subjective experience, the methodology captures nuanced affective dimensions that traditional service design models frequently overlook.

The Kano model's classification mechanism categorizes multidimensional requirements according to their differential impact on user satisfaction, while AHP's weighting system resolves critical prioritization challenges within and across attribute categories. This dual-staged analysis enables scientifically grounded resource allocation, ensuring optimal investment in design elements with maximum emotional resonance. Subsequent design strategies spanning product functionality, visual communication, and service experience consequently transcend mere functional fulfillment. They instead deliver culturally sensitive emotional comfort through artistic expression and ritual meaning-making, establishing brands distinguished by authentic humanistic empathy.

Future research should examine the framework's cross-cultural applicability, particularly investigating demographic variations in grief expression and memorialization practices. Longitudinal studies tracking the impact of implemented designs on user well-being metrics would further validate the methodology's therapeutic efficacy. Additionally, exploration of this integrated approach in cognate high-emotion service domains—such as pediatric hospice care or disaster memorial services—may yield transformative insights. Such investigations promise to advance emotionally intelligent service paradigms where dignity preservation constitutes not merely a design objective, but an ontological imperative .

This research ultimately substantiates that within pet memorial brand design, scientifically rigorous methodologies—specifically the integrated Kano-AHP framework—and profound humanistic engagement function as interdependent pillars. Their synergistic interplay redefines service innovation in contexts of profound loss, transforming standardized end-of-life transactions into ritualized healing architectures where quantitative precision informs empathetic expression.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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